

EXTRAORDINARY ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 24 NOVEMBER 2009 at 7.30 pm

Present: Councillor S Barker – Chairman.
Councillors K R Artus, C A Cant, R Chamberlain, J F Cheetham, C M Dean, C D Down, E J Godwin, E J Hicks, S J Howell, H J Mason, R D Sherer and A M Wattebot.

Also present: Councillors J E Davey, A Dean, A J Ketteridge, D J Morson, A D Walters and P A Wilcock.

Officers in attendance: M Cox (Democratic Services Officer), R Harborough (Director of Development) and M Jones (Principal Planning Officer).

E31 STATEMENT BY MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC

Prior to the meeting a statement was made by Linda White from Stebbing Parish Council. A copy of the statement is attached to these minutes.

E32 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C C Smith and A C Yarwood.

Members declared the following personal interests:-

Councillor Cant – Chairman of Save Boxted Wood Working Committee and Chairman of Stebbing Parish Council.

Councillor Godwin – a member of SSE.

Councillor C Dean – a member of SSE.

Councillor Barker – a member of Essex County Council and EERA Housing Panel.

E33 CORE STRATEGY CONSULTATION

The Director of Development presented a report on the progress of the Core Strategy. He explained that the Preferred Options consultation had ended at the end of January 2008 and since then officers had been considering the representations and carrying out additional studies. A number of issues had been raised in response to the consultation, which needed to be resolved and further study work had been commissioned. The next stage in the LDF process should have been consultation on the submission document but it was felt that before proceeding to submission members of the public should have the opportunity to make further comments on the additional work that

had been carried out. A further consultation stage was now proposed for early 2010 and Members were asked to agree the basis of the consultation.

The 3 key areas of the consultation were

1. Options for Stansted airport and scenarios for growth (the assumption had been made that the G1 delivery represented the most appropriate assumption for the LDF).
2. Options for distributing the balance of the housing requirement for option 4 to decide the allocation of the 1000 homes over and above the new settlement.
(The report contained a supporting document that set out the housing requirement for the district, how many houses had been delivered to date and various scenarios for the distribution of the 4000 houses.)
3. Review of the core strategy policies –these had been reviewed in the light of the comments received and were included in the consultation to obtain further views of the consultees and the public.

The consultation would also address the soundness of the distribution of the 4000 homes and enable people to compare option 4 with other new settlement proposals and a general dispersal scenario. The committee was advised that work on some of the technical reports was ongoing and a further report would be brought to the committee if any of the findings required an adjustment to the preferred option.

The Director of Development clarified the process for the consultation. It was hoped to commence early in the new year and would run for 8 weeks. There was a range of material to be considered that would need to be communicated in different ways. Some of the consultation would be web based and other elements by communication with residents through Uttlesford Life or direct mailing. The LDF Working Group would agree the form of the consultation before it was launched.

Councillor Howell said that today's decision had resulted from housing allocations prescribed by the Government in the light of population growth and an increased concentration in the south east. The homes would not necessarily be for local people and the character of the south east would inevitably change and he thought that Stansted Airport was a driving force for development in the district. None of the preferred options were welcomed and all of the affected areas had put forward strong arguments for resisting development. However he still thought that there were benefits in concentrating development in one area and he considered the site north east of Elsenham to be the least unpalatable choice. In terms of where to spread the balance of 1000 houses he felt that it was right for Saffron Walden to take a proportion of the allocation.

He then moved the recommendation in the officer's report with an amendment to recommendation 2) II to read

“that option 4 comprise 3000 homes to the northeast of Esenham; 500 homes at Great Dunmow, 250 at Saffron Walden, 30 at Great Chesterford; 50 at Newport; 20 at Stansted Mountfitchet; 30 at Takeley and 90 distributed across other villages.”

Councillor C Dean was concerned at the reference from Councillor Howell to the proposed settlement at Esenham and the airport related housing as this was contrary to previous statements made. She hoped that the consultation would make it clear that all options were now on the table and she thought that dispersal would be shown to be the most appropriate way forward for the district. She understood that after the technical studies had been completed there might be a need for a further report to committee but she would like this committee to see the details of the consultation in any event.

Councillor Godwin commented that the Council was consulting on a very complicated issue which needed to be clearly set out and she questioned whether it would be ready for January. She said that the district had grown in a rural way and had doubled its size many times but people wanted to live locally and not in conurbations. She questioned whether the district could support a new settlement and had concerns about the viability of option 4.

Councillor Cheetham had seconded the proposal and agreed with the proposed split of houses between Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow. She said that whilst the additional houses were not welcomed, the Council had to progress the LDF process and the proposed consultation was the most sensible way forward. She hoped that a date for the consultation could be agreed by the date of the next Environment Committee on 19 January.

Councillor Cant raised concerns about access to the consultation, particularly for the elderly and those that did not have access to the internet. She asked officers to give thought to the distribution of the 90 houses within the smaller villages. She pointed out that many rural villages were not sustainable and relied on commuting so it was very important to maintain cohesion and a sense of community. Larger development tended to be more inward looking whilst smaller developments of a few houses could be accommodated within village community.

Councillor Morson then spoke to the Committee. He said that prior to the meeting he had been happy with the recommendation as he was confident that the Henham and Esenham proposal would not stand up to scrutiny through the consultation and it and would be revealed as an inappropriate site. He was therefore concerned with the comments made about the merits of the Esenham site and the reference to Stansted Airport. He said that these comments had put unfair emphasis on the Esenham proposal when this should be a fair and open process.

In reply, Councillor Howell said that he had been putting forward his own personal view to explain his reasoning for proposing the motion. He still considered Stansted Airport to be the most important factor in planning in the district and that figures suggested that employment would increase at

the site. Councillor Morson accepted this explanation but said that he had not expected the committee to debate the merits of the various options at this stage.

Councillor A Dean agreed that the consultation should be a matter of process and the committee should not be stating preferences. He recalled that there had been issues with the previous consultation and that the public now needed confidence in the system. As Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee he offered for that committee to examine how the consultation would be conducted. He also asked for the public to be told why the extra homes were needed and for the consultation not to lose sight of the other planning issues such as employment and economic development.

The motion was then put to the vote. The committee voted on recommendations (1), (2) I, III and (3) and this was carried unanimously. The vote on recommendation (2) II was carried by 8 votes to 0 with 4 abstentions.

RESOLVED that

- 1) further consultation be carried out and the Preferred Options be reviewed in the light of the responses in mid 2010 before proceeding to submission.
- 2) the consultation be on the basis
 - I. that the Core Strategy assumes the Stansted Airport G1 development will be implemented
 - II. that Option 4 comprise 3000 homes to the north east of Elsenham; 500 homes at Great Dunmow; 250 at Saffron Walden, 30 at Great Chesterford; 50 at Newport; 20 at Stansted Mountfitchet; 30 at Takeley; 30 at Thaxted and 90 distributed across other villages.
 - III. that the Preferred Options for Core Strategy Policies address the issues and include the proposed changes identified in the table in paragraph 20 of the report
- 3) officers review the findings of the ongoing technical studies and bring a further report to the committee before consultation is launched should the findings indicate that an adjustment to the preferred option might be required.

STATEMENT BY MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC

Linda White, Clerk to SPC and Secretary of the Save Boxted Wood Working Committee which comprises representatives from the parish councils of Felsted, Little Dunmow, Bardfield Saling, Great Bardfield Rayne, Shalford, Great Saling and Stebbing. A mix of both Uttlesford and Braintree.

Galliard's proposal in the SHLAA is 3000 within Uttlesford, 1500 in Braintree, potentially rising to 10,000 overall.

The Government rejected this site in the first round when it was considering its e.co town proposals stating that "The location is remote". It was described as close to the A120 and that Braintree has an existing rail link. Braintree Station is a branch line in the middle of the town and totally inaccessible from a commuter point of view. It has a staggering 28 car parking spaces. Chelmsford main line railway station is 17 miles, Bishops Stortford 14 miles and Witham 14. 4,500 houses would generate at least 9,000 cars. Congestion just trying to get onto the A120 would be horrendous without the subsequent impact on the A120. Commuter traffic into Chelmsford via the A130 and the Essex Regiment Way is gridlocked every morning as is the "Macdonald's" roundabout on the A120 travelling towards Colchester.

A recent review of Stebbing's Conservation Area highlighted the importance of the historic settlement of Stebbing. We reject development on this scale in Stebbing. The parish feels that if development within the parish is necessary it should not be in the form of large estates but small group of houses which are easily integrated into village life and support the many local community activities. I am sure Elsenham will support Stebbing in this view.

Rhetorical question – How many of the Environment Committee have ever driven along Stebbing Green and around the narrow lanes surrounding the proposed site. Does UDC really want to commit Environmental Vandalism? Look at the photograph in front of you – can you honestly say this would look better as a modern concreted/tarmaced housing estate?

I have a brother who is 57 years old with Alzheimer's. He used to fly at Andrews Airfield. One of the greatest mental stimulations for him is to be driven around the familiar country lanes of Stebbing, the Salings and Great Bardfield to Andrews Airfield and stop and have a coffee. Last Friday as we were driving out along the access road two deer peacefully wandered across the grass and as we drove along the lanes pheasant were popping in and out of the hedgerows on either side. Adults with children and grandchildren wonder along the lanes throughout the year picking sloes and blackberries or just out for a recreational stroll. I have been told that there are backers for this project willing to put up millions of pounds to ensure it goes ahead and destroys are countryside. I hope they find they have, like the cuckoo, laid their egg in the wrong nest.