

ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 8 JUNE 2010 at 7.30 pm

Present: Councillor S Barker – Chairman.
Councillors K R Artus, H J Asker, C A Cant, R H Chamberlain, J F Cheetham, J E Davey, C D Down, E J Godwin, E J Hicks, S J Howell and C C Smith.

Also present: Councillors A J Ketteridge and D J Perry.

Officers in attendance: R Auty (Head of Community Engagement) M Cox (Democratic Services Officer) and R Harborough (Director of Development).

E1 STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Statement were made on the following items

Item 5 – Claypits Plantation – Councillor Perry
Item 8 – Birchanger Wood – Daphne Wallace -Jarvis and Councillor Sell
Item 9 - Use of LABGI funding – Graham Fletcher

A summary of the statements is attached to these minutes.

E2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C M Dean, A M Wattebot and A C Yarwood.

Councillor Asker declared a personal interest as a member of Saffron Walden Town Council.

E3 CLAYPITS PLANTATION

At the last previous meeting the Committee had considered a report concerning the use of a piece of woodland at the edge of Saffron Walden for a BMX track. The meeting had resolved to seek further information on a number of issues, for members to visit the site and for there to be no BMX use of the site until the matters had been resolved.

The report set out progress since the last meeting. A RoSPA inspection of the site had been commissioned which had set out a number of areas that needed to be addressed to reduce the safety score to an acceptable level for BMX use. These included signage, removal of vegetation and other relatively low cost measures and controls which could be undertaken by the group. It appeared that it would be feasible for the site to operate as a BMX facility provided that the risks were at an acceptable level and adequate

control measures were in place. The Council's insurers were willing to provide cover for the site on the basis of the agreed action plan. The total start up cost for the signage, bins and inspections and would be in the region of £1250. There would be ongoing costs for management and further inspections at approximately £1000 per annum. It was confirmed that the Council would meet these costs but contributions would be sought from the user group.

In answer to a member question, it was confirmed that the area would remain open access for the public and the public right of way would be cleared. Some concern was expressed that this land had been cleared and used without permission, but it was pointed out that this use had continued unchallenged since 2005. Other members were sympathetic to the use as it had been created by the young people themselves, using their own initiative. The use had not created any problems or objections and was a good facility for the young people in the area. Councillor Howell said that he had been impressed by the level of engagement of the young people and the willingness to find a solution; all the necessary action plans could be implemented and at a relatively modest cost.

Members agreed to review the site in 2011 as it would then have been in operation for two summers.

RESOLVED that

- 1 The use of the BMX track created by users in Claypits Plantation be approved, subject to resolution of any obstruction of the public right of way and written confirmation of no objection from Audley End Estates as owners.
- 2 The Director of Development be delegated to seek contributions from the user group and identify savings in the committee budget to balance the associated unbudgeted costs for 2010/11.
- 3 The use be agreed until 1 October 2011 when it would be subject to a review following further consultation including local neighbours and Saffron Walden Town Council.

E4 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2010 were approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

E5 **BUSINESS ARISING**

i) **Minute E50 – Chairman's items (Bridge End Gardens)**

The transfer of Bridge End Gardens to Saffron Walden Town Council had now been completed.

ii) Minute E51 – Chairman’s items – Swan Meadow Pond

The Chairman reported that the funding had not been forthcoming.

iii) Minute E 52 – Saffron Green

It was reported that the pitch had been transferred but the multi use games area did not yet meet the required condition for transfer.

iv) Minute E61 – Greater Anglia Franchise consultation

Member asked to be kept informed of progress with the re-franchising via the Member’s bulletin.

E6

CHAIRMAN’S ITEMS

The Chairman reported that she had attended a conference on flood management and a conference on woodland management.

She then referred to the recent announcement by Eric Pickles MP on the abolition of the Regional Strategies and the decisions on housing supply to be returned to planning authorities without the framework of regional numbers and plans. She said that even though numbers were not prescribed, it was still important for the district to consider appropriate levels of new houses in the future. Officers were currently assessing the responses to the recent consultation. Further guidance was awaited from the Department for Communities and Local Government, which would be assessed by officers and a report would be prepared for the September meeting of the committee.

In respect of the second runway decision Councillor Cheetham asked that the Council remain vigilant to ensure that the promises were maintained. Members said that work should start now on the restoration of the decimated communities surrounding the airport. It was suggested that BAA be asked to put the rented homes back into the community. The recent housing inspection had noted an empty dwelling rate of 5.5% across the district and members said it would be interesting to see the locations of these properties.

E7

LEAD OFFICER’S REPORT

The Director of Development presented his report as Lead Officer, updating the Committee on the Transfer of Bridge End Gardens and the Natural Resources Management Strategy. It was noted that a decision would be required in respect of the use of the earmarked reserve for the second runway at Stansted Airport.

E8

CIVIC PRIDE INITIATIVE

The Head of Community Engagement presented a report outlining details of a proposed initiative around littering and civic pride. This was in line with the corporate plan priorities and concerns of residents arising from recent surveys.

The main thrust of the campaign would be to encourage residents to take pride in their local area and keep it clean and tidy. It was acknowledged that the council did well in clearing litter but the problem was becoming so endemic, particularly with throwing rubbish from cars, that there would come a time when the problem would grow beyond the resources available to clear it up.

A number of possible initiatives were outlined mainly concerned with publicity and events. The work would be undertaken in partnership with parish councils, community and other bodies. It was noted that there were insufficient resources for this work to be undertaken in house and it might be necessary to engage someone to coordinate the activities. There was, as yet, no budget allocated to this initiative and the committee was asked to approve that funds be taken from a reserve, if it was necessary.

Members welcomed this initiative as something that would be supported by the residents. It was important to include parish and town councils and to build on projects that were already underway.

Members asked that thought be given to the branding and logo for this campaign and suggested that these could be placed on council vehicles. There was some discussion about the appropriate wording but this had yet to be decided. Councillor Ketteridge said that the campaign was not just about clearing up litter but about changing the culture and not littering in the first place.

RESOLVED

- 1 that members approve the proposal to undertake a nine month to year long civic pride campaign.
- 2 to approve a budget allocation of a maximum of £15,000 from an appropriate reserve to pay for additional promotional materials and/or temporary staff if required.

E9

BIRCHANGER WOOD

Further to the last meeting, the committee received further details of the request for a financial contribution to the Birchanger Wood Trust toward the cost of the work required to trees bordering the A120, in the interests of highway safety.

Members had received copies of the Trust's accounts and details of the works required. They were also advised of the contributions made by the

other neighbouring parish, town and county councils and the amount of the remaining shortfall. The Council's solicitor had advised that a contribution of this nature would not set a precedent for future payments.

Members asked a number of questions about the management of the wood. Councillor Godwin said that the wood had been bought by the neighbouring councils to be kept in perpetuity for the public to enjoy and it was a huge credit to the trustees and volunteers that it had been maintained so successfully. Members considered this to be an exceptional request and agreed that the Council should make a contribution.

RESOLVED that

- 1 A contribution of £1000 be made to the Birchanger Wood Trust.
- 2 The Director of Development be delegated to identify savings in the committee budget to balance the associated unbudgeted costs in 2010/11.

E10

USE OF LOCAL AUTHORITY BUSINESS GROWTH INITIATIVE FUNDING

The Committee considered a request from the Chair of the Uttlesford Futures Economic Development Skills and Learning Working Group asking for the LABGI funds to be assigned to that group. This would enable the implementation of the action plan which had been devised following to the working group's survey of businesses. The letter from the chairman of the group was circulated with the agenda and set out suggestions for the use of the funds.

Councillor Ketteridge said that the LABGI funds were not ring fenced and as such belonged to the Council and not just the LSP. It was also still not clear whether there would be a LABGI grant award in 2010/11. He was also reluctant to support any commitment, particularly in relation to a new post, which could not be supported with ongoing funds. Councillor Howell questioned the authority's role in promoting local business as he did not feel that councils had the necessary skill base for this activity and it was not the best use of public money.

RESOLVED that authority is delegated to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the appropriate Committee Chairman or the Chairman of the LSP, to use LABGI funds for the benefit of the District's economy and well being.

E11

LOW EMISSION VEHICLE CAR PARKING CHARGE CONCESSION

The committee considered a report concerning a pilot scheme to offer a car parking fee concession for drivers of very low emission vehicles using the

Swan Meadow car park. This initiative had arisen from the air quality action plan which aimed to reduce the levels in 3 air quality management areas in Saffron Walden. This pilot would give concessions only to those vehicles in bands A, B or C for the purpose of excise duty and apply only to the Swan Meadow car park which had sufficient space. The concession would equate to doubling the time period purchased when parking, and the estimated loss in revenue would be around £821 per annum.

Some members said that in the interests of fairness the pilot should be also be trialled in car parks in other parts of the district. Others referred to the disproportionate costs of administration and enforcement for the number of people likely to be affected. The main concern was that this scheme did not form part of a coherent strategy and it was felt that the idea should form part of the review of parking tariffs which was to be undertaken in 2011.

The Chairman mentioned the progress on the ECC study of the transport options that might be available to address the air quality issues in the three management areas in Saffron Walden. The report would be available at the end of June and she suggested that the results be taken to the North Area forum meeting in October.

RESOLVED that the committee does not proceed with this initiative at this time but it be considered as part of the general review of car parking tariffs in 2011.

E12

CAR PARK LIGHTING POLICY – FAIRYCROFT CAR PARK

The Committee was reminded of a revised lighting policy that had been introduced in the Fairycroft car park to switch off the lights on the top deck and the outside area between midnight and 5am. The trial had been successful with no adverse comments received and it was recommended that it be adopted as policy. Councillor Howell spoke on behalf of a resident from Elm Grove who welcomed the trial but still found that the ground floor lights intrusive. The committee asked if there were any other measures that could be put in place to lessen the impact to neighbouring residents and the Director of Development agreed to pursue this.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the lighting arrangements that have operated over the 12 month lighting trial i.e. only the lights on the ground floor remain on all night and the remainder are turned off between midnight until 5 am, are adopted as the lighting policy for the Fairycroft car park.
- 2 the Director of Development to investigate possible options for managing the impact of lighting on nearby residential property.

E13

COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2010/11

The committee noted the proposed items to be considered during the 2010/11 cycle of meetings.

The members of the Waste Management group noted that a meeting would be arranged shortly and would be discussing civic pride, the recycling leaflet and the proposed partnership with Braintree District Council.

The meeting ended at 9.05 pm

STATEMENTS BY MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC

Councillor Perry – item 4 - Claypits Plantation

Councillor Perry said that although he agreed with the principle of the use of the site he could not support the underhand way in which it had been done. The users of the site had done what they wanted and dam the consequences. The use of the JCB was unacceptable; the site had been taken over by the use and was now a monstrosity. He said that the activity was too dangerous. too high risk, a cost on the insurance and it would not be possible to monitor the site for 24hrs. He would like all the points raised by ROSPa to be put in place prior to use and for trained first aid personnel to be on the site, emergency equipment to be available and for there to be access for emergency vehicles. He concluded that the use was a breach of the councils lease, the attitude of the users was unacceptable and the use was unlawful and unjustified.

Daphne Wallace-Jarvis – Item 8 - Birchanger Wood

Daphne Wallace-Jarvis was a volunteer for the Birchanger Wood Trust. She outlined the problem with the trees bordering the A120 and the need to carry out emergency work. The short fall for the cost of the emergency work was £8,500 and so far £5,500 had been obtained from support other organisations. The wood was important ancient woodland.It formed a barrier between urban settlements and was an important environmental corridor that needed to be maintained. The general maintenance of the wood was met from the Trust's own funds and this emergency work was an exceptionalrequest. She hoped that the council would make a donation in line with the other authorities in the area.

Councillor Sell – Item 8 Birchanger Wood

Councillor Sell had recently been appointed as the council's representative on the Trust. He said that local council's had decided to purchase this ancient woodland and it would send the wrong message if the request was not supported by this council. The council's solicitor had confirmed that a grant of this nature would not set a precedent for the granting of any future requests.

Graham Fletcher – item 9 LABSGI grant

Graham Fletcher was a member of the Economic Development Group of the LSP. He said that in other Essex local authorities the LABGI reward funding had been allocated to business development. He asked that his council do the same, particularly as it no longer had an in house Business Development Officer. He asked that the grant be given to the LSP and the group work towards implementing the actions that had been identified in the recent survey of businesses.