

ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 7 SEPTEMBER 2010 at 7.30 pm

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

Also present: Councillors A J Ketteridge, D J Morson and A Dean.

Officers in attendance: J Mitchell (Chief Executive) M Cox (Democratic Services Officer) M Jones (Principal Planning Officer) R Harborough (Director of Development) and S Joyce (Assistant Chief Executive (Finance)).

E14 STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Prior to the meeting a statement was made by Mr Nick Baker, Chairman of the joint parishes committee in relation to item 8 (report of LDF consultation and review of LDF programme). A summary of the statement is attached to these minutes.

E15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

An apology for absence was received from Councillor H Asker.

Councillor Yarwood declared a personal interest as Chairman of Newport Parish Council.

Councillor Cant declared a personal interest as Chairman of the Save Boxted Wood committee.

E16 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 June 2010 were approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

E17 BUSINESS ARISING

i) Minute E5 (iii) Saffron Green

It had been advised that it was necessary to replace the surface of the multi games area before it could be transferred. The matter was being pursued.

ii) Minute E6 – Chairman's items – Empty dwelling rate

The list of selected long term empty dwelling across the district had been prepared and would be circulated to all members for information. On initial

inspection it appeared that the properties were fairly evenly spread across the district.

iii) Minute E13 – Committee work programme

Councillor C Dean had understood that the civic pride initiative was to be considered by the Waste Strategy Project Team. It was agreed that this matter would be included on the agenda for the next meeting.

iv) Minute E10 – Use of local authority business growth initiative funding

The Chief Executive said that the Economic Development group of the LSP had requested £5,000 from the LABGI funds towards a feasibility study of the wood pellet project. He would take this up with the Leader and the Chairman of Uttlesford Futures.

v) Minute E12 – car park lighting policy – Fairycroft Car Park

It was noted that a technical solution had been identified to manage the impact of the lighting and estimates were being sought.

vi) Minute E11 – low emission vehicle car parking charge concession

In answer to a question from Councillor C Dean it was reported that the ECC study of transport options to address emissions associated with congestion had not yet been completed. She asked that it be brought to the north forum meeting in October if it was available by then.

She added that it would be useful for the south and north forums to be circulated the questions and answers arising from each of the forum meetings.

E18 CHAIRMAN'S ITEMS

The Chairman reported that a private public partnership bid for a Local Enterprise Partnership had been submitted to the government to cover Kent and Essex. A bid had also been made for a Partnership covering Greater Cambridge and Peterborough. Some of the functions of regional development agencies would be transferred to the successful partnerships. The outcome was awaited.

E19 REPORT OF LDF CONSULTATION AND REVIEW OF LDF PROGRAMME

The Director of Development introduced this item and explained the implications of the recent policies set by the new coalition Government in relation to planning and housing. The regional spatial strategy had been abolished and the RSS housing target figures had been removed from the development plan. The Council now had the responsibility for the level of

housing in the area and identifying a long term supply of housing land. As a result the Council's LDF working group had met to discuss how to move forward with the LDF programme.

It had considered reports on the emerging position and concluded that for Uttlesford that it was important to justify the scale of growth before firm proposals were drawn up. The group had reviewed the factors that should be considered in drawing up the numbers and reviewed the current performance against the RSS targets. On average 375 homes a year had been built over the past 10 years and it was acknowledged that there was still a substantial bank of planning permissions. Members had stressed the importance of the provision of affordable homes and for consulting with town and parish councils about the potential levels of growth in their areas. The working group had agreed 4 key points to be put to the Environment Committee as follows:-

- The working group welcomes the abandonment of the RSS housing targets.
- In the light of the Government announcement, officers be asked to carry out a review of the housing growth figures with a view to reducing the number. It was likely that with fewer numbers the pressure for concentrating development on a single strategic site would be reduced.
- The Council should not progress its core strategy until it has carried out the review of the housing growth numbers.
- The working group recognises the need to provide affordable houses in the district and asks the Council to build on the work already underway and to explore further opportunities.

The Director of Development then referred to the report before the committee. It advised of the responses to the core strategy consultation. The key messages were that option 4 had attracted substantial opposition in terms of its deliverability and the majority would prefer a wider distribution over more settlements. There was underlying concern about the proposed scale of growth in the district and the protection of the countryside and green field sites. Comments had also been made about planned development in Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow, mixed use employment, gypsy traveller sites and the effect of Stansted airport on the need for development.

The Government had asked each Council to signal an early intention of whether it wished to review the housing target. The report set out the planning factors that would need to be considered and also the vision for the district which would need to be borne in mind. The Council had a substantial evidence base of studies which would help with this work. This additional work would require a revised programme and the proposed timetable was set out. It was unlikely that the Council would be in a position to consult on the revised figures and spatial strategy until autumn 2011.

Councillor Ketteridge said that the policy of the council had been to oppose the RSS housing targets and there been cross party lobbying to that effect. The new Government had now made a commitment to abolish these, and although guidelines would not be published until after the localism bill had

been passed in November, there was sufficient confidence to fend off planning applications in the meantime, particularly as the council had a five year supply of houses. The LDF working group had considered the implications of the Government announcement and had asked officers to include the 2500 houses that were already committed in the review of the figures. He said that the Council wanted to review the numbers downwards but pointed out that the guidance still required the Council to plan for 15 years ahead and to justify its proposal with a sound and robust plan.

He then moved and it was duly seconded that “a review of the scale of growth appropriate for Uttlesford be undertaken and subsequently the location of that growth”.

Councillor C Dean supported much of what was proposed, particularly the review of the housing targets and the priority for affordable housing. However she mentioned that the 40% affordable housing still came at the expense of 60% market housing and requested that a member workshop be held on alternative ways of achieving affordable housing.

Her major concern was that there would be no further consultation on the proposed housing figures until this time next year. She felt that as there was no appetite for a single settlement anywhere in the district and with the constraints apparent with the Elsenham site, it was unfair for the residents to have to wait a year for it to be acknowledged that this was no longer the preferred option. She said there was a good argument for distribution around the district. She then moved an amendment to the motion which was duly seconded “That a review of the scale of growth appropriate for Uttlesford be undertaken and that at the same time a review to consider alternative locations to Option 4 be undertaken by a detailed evaluation of the sites which were identified in the SHLAA”

Councillor Yarwood supported the amendment and considered that all preferred options should be abandoned at this stage.

A number of members spoke against the amendment. There was a view that there was a considerable amount of detail to be assessed and the number of houses required should be established before individual locations were considered. Other members added that it was important to establish real housing need in the district and for the discussions to take place with the towns and parishes. There was a view that once the level of growth had been established, the decision on precise locations should not be developer led.

Councillor Morson then spoke to the committee as the representative of Henham and Elsenham and Deputy Leader of the opposition. He welcomed a great deal of the work proposed but argued that the SHLAA document could be used as a basis for considering growth locations. At this stage he asked that the Elsenham site be formally revoked. There had now been 3 consultations, all of which had not supported this option, and to leave it in place for another year would not erase the suspicion of local residents that this proposal could return. He would like to see a new start with all parties

working together for the best option for the district. Councillor A Dean agreed with this statement and questioned some of the figures in the report.

Councillor Ketteridge referred the meeting to the statements made at the LDF working group which said that there was a presumption away from the single site option. The Director of Development said that testing different scales of growth would inevitably lead to the testing of various scenarios of where growth could take place.

The amendment was then put to the vote and was lost. A vote was then taken on the existing motion and with no votes against it was

RESOLVED that a review of the scale of growth appropriate for Uttlesford be undertaken and subsequently the location of that growth.

E20

WASTE STRATEGY PROJECT TEAM

The committee received the minutes of the Waste Strategy Project Team on 2 September. The meeting had discussed options for reducing residual waste and had recommended a trial of a textile doorstep collection. Members asked for more information about the destination of the material as there was concern that it should be disposed of in an ethical way. There were also fears about the possible effect on charity shops and it was agreed that this would be monitored during the trial period.

Councillor Howell declared a personal interest as an employee of May Gurney who carried out textile recycling. He commented on the recycling performance figures and said he was impressed with Uttlesford's standing in the national figures. However, he would like to know the cost per household compared across the county and the impact on these costs if further recycling projects were undertaken. Officers commented that it might be difficult to produce a cross county comparison as each district tended to build in different overheads.

In answer to a member's question it was explained that officers would be monitoring the tonnage of household waste at random properties in the Dunmow area. This aimed to identify further waste reduction possibilities and if any re education should be employed in any particular area.

RESOLVED that the recommendations in minutes WS7 Textile collection and WS9 zero waste modelling be approved.

E21

LEAD OFFICER'S REPORT – CONSULTATION ON COUNCIL PRIORITIES

The committee received a summary of the key finding of the consultation on the Council's corporate priorities and budget which was had been conducted via the Uttlesford Voices citizens panel and through Uttlesford Life and on-line.

E22

2010/11 BUDGET MONITORING

The Assistant Chief Executive (Finance) presented a report which set out the financial position for the period April to July 2010. It was noted that the arrangement with Braintree District Council for the sharing of the Head of Street Services post had now ceased and this had reduced the projected under spend by £17,000.

A question was asked about the value of providing services, for example solid waste management, when the council was competing with private organisations. Members understood that many services were statutory and asked for further information on the services that the council was obliged to provide and an indication of the cost.

During the course of the discussion Councillor Cheetham declared a personal interest as having a septic tank which was emptied by the council.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and approved.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT RESERVE

The committee received a report which recommended an approach to the use of the planning and development reserve. The earmarked reserve currently totalled £769,600 from the balances carried forward at the beginning of the financial year 2010/11. It was proposed to draw down £416,690 and make budget provision for unbudgeted expenditure in 2010/11. This would enable investment in information systems and equipment that would support delivery of services to the customer, maintain service standards and continue delivery of key services. Members were advised of the services relating to the Environment Committee.

RESOLVED that the Finance and Administration Committee be recommended to

- 1 make provision in the revised 2010/11 budgets for unbudgeted expenditure of £416,690 as set out in the report.
- 2 Reserve the sums indicated in the report for the specific purposes identified.
- 3 Transfer £123,000 from the planning and development earmarked reserve to the change management reserve.

The meeting ended at 9.40pm.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC

Mr Nick Baker – Chairman of the joint parishes committee

Mr Baker said that for 3 years now option 4 (the site at Elsenham and Henham) had been the council's preferred option but he had still not uncovered the origins of this proposal. The 3 consultations had shown the weakness of this option. An ecotown had then been proposed for the site but this had failed due to the community's response.

The council was now in a different position as the coalition Government had abolished the regulations in relation to housing numbers. The recent consultation had again showed an opposition to option 4 and the Government was now saying that a single site option would not be considered if there was no public support.

He was concerned that option 4 was now being parked until after the assessment of housing numbers. Henham and Elsenham had already been blighted for 3 years and now had to wait another year. In the meantime the council still had to deal with new planning applications and he feared a queue of developers and the danger of any resulting appeals. He suggested that the SHLAA could form the basis of a development strategy towards smaller groups of housing throughout the district. He hoped that all parties would now work together to find the best solution for the District. In summary he would like to see the following

- 1) scrap the current LDF
- 2) complete the housing number appraisal as soon as possible.
- 3) the district and parish councils to work together to build a solution for the district.