

ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 18 JANUARY 2011 at 7.30 pm

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

Also present: Councillor K L Eden.

Officers in attendance: M Cox (Democratic Services Officer), R Harborough (Director of Public Services), S Joyce (Assistant Chief Executive – Finance) and J Pine (Planning Policy/ DC Liaison Officer).

E31 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R H Chamberlain, S J Howell, C C Smith and A C Yarwood.

Councillor Barker declared a personal interest as a member of Essex County Council.

Councillor Yarwood declared a personal interest in item 12, consultation on National Express East Anglia timetables as a commuter using the National Express train service.

E32 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2010 were approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

E33 BUSINESS ARISING

i) Minute E26 (i) Saffron Green

A revised specification for the works to the games area had been received and technical advice on the proposal was being sought.

ii) Minute E26 (ii) car park lighting policy – Fairycroft Car Park

An order for the works to the lights had been placed with the contractors and the work was expected to commence shortly. In answer to a member question, the works were still considered to be necessary despite the likely planning application by Waitrose which might affect the car park. The Development Control Committee was asked to bear the lighting issue in mind when considering any future application at this site.

iii) Minute E27 – East Herts Local framework core strategy – issues and options consultation.

A response from East Herts to the Council's representations was awaited. The Chairman suggested that the affected parishes should be consultees to ensure they were kept informed of any developments.

E34 CHAIRMAN'S ITEMS

The Chairman was aware of a proposal from a small company to roll out fast broadband access across the district. She suggested that this should be pursued further and asked officers to investigate possible providers and whether the Council could assist with the use of LABGI money to pump prime the initiative and bring forward the potential implementation date.

E35 LEAD OFFICER'S REPORT

The Director of Public Services presented his report as Lead Officer, updating the Committee on the Local Development Framework Core Strategy, Section 106 obligations, response to the new Homes Bonus consultation, virement of capital spend from waste and recycling to street cleansing, the grounds maintenance contract, Parking Partnership arrangements and the joint waste and recycling service with Braintree.

E36 2010/11 BUDGET MONITORING

The Committee received a report which set out the financial performance for the period April - November 2010 and a forecast outturn to the end of the financial year. It was noted that there was a projected underspend of £105,000. The Assistant Chief Executive – Finance updated the report; the work at White Street, Great Dunmow would now be included in this financial year as would a safety trailer for litter picking to be funded from the refuse vehicle budget. There were no other significant variances to report.

Members asked a number of questions about the proposed changes to the Parking Partnership. The County Council was proposing changes to the partnership arrangements for enforcement of on street parking controls. It would commission services from two host consortia, one for the northern part of the county (hosted by Colchester) and one for the south. The current partnership would be dissolved and the new arrangements were planned to come into operation on 1 April, and would include Tendring, Harlow and Epping districts in addition to Colchester, Braintree and Uttlesford.

Members questioned whether the current arrangements had achieved cost savings and the Assistant Chief Executive - Finance replied that savings had been made when the Parking Partnership had been set up and were around £40,000 per year. It was intended that the new arrangements would run on a break even basis and any surplus or deficit would be spread proportionally

between the partners. A report on the new arrangements would be presented either to the Council meeting in February or the Environment Committee in March.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and approved.

E37 **2011/12 CAPITAL PROGRAMME**

The Committee received the capital programme for 2011/12 and was advised of the adjustments to the figures with the deletion and restoration of schemes. There would be more significant expenditure required in 2012/13, in particular an alternative depot provision and a new refuse collection fleet, and the Committee noted an indicative programme and that reports would be brought to members during the year.

Members commented on the increased expenditure on replacement wheelie bins and discussed the suggestion that developers or householders should be charged for the cost of new bins. The Director of Public Services said that an audit was also planned of the number of existing refuse and recycling bins concentrating on recent development sites.

RESOLVED to

- 1 approve the 2011/12 capital programme as set out in the appendix for recommendation to the Finance and Administration Committee on 8 February 2011.
- 2 note the indicative capital programme for 2012/13 to 2015/16 as set out in the appendix to the report.

E38 **2011/12 FEES AND CHARGES**

The Assistant Chief Executive – Finance presented a report which set out the proposed fees and charges for 2011/12. The amounts were based on the Council's new policy which aimed, where possible, to be in pace with inflation, consistent in pricing and concessions, ensure a 25% discount for those in receipt of council benefits and for the cost of discretionary fees to be met by the user.

The Committee was advised of the recently announced headline inflation figure which had been greater than anticipated at 3.7% as the proposed charges were not pegged directly to inflation assumptions there were no plans to amend the proposed figures. No change had been proposed to car parking fees but it was noted that there would be a cost incurred due the increase in VAT which would be absorbed by the council. Fees had been increased for both building control and street naming and numbering which both aimed to cover the cost of the service.

It was proposed to withdraw the septic tank emptying service as there was a viable private sector alternative. Members asked officers to ensure that private contactors had the ability to provide the same level of service to individual properties, including suitable vehicles, before the residents were advised of this change.

The committee also asked officers to investigate whether free parking for disabled vehicles was standard practice in other districts and if street naming and numbering could be dealt with at parish level.

RESOLVED that the committee approve the 2011/12 fees and charges as set out in the appendix to the report.

E39

2011/12 BUDGET

The committee received the draft 2011/12 revenue budget which would be approved by the Council on 24 February. The Assistant Chief Executive – Finance explained the significant issues and the various budget increases and decreases.

The Committee questioned where economic development fitted into the budget. Currently it was part of the LSP, but the LAA funding was expected to be withdrawn and with it the funding for the officer support and the ability to progress initiatives. It was confirmed that the budget did include provision for the post that supported the relevant Uttlesford Futures Working Group. The Chairman asked that this be clarified with the Chief Executive and reported to the next meeting.

In answer to a question from Councillor Godwin it was confirmed that at this stage there had no provision made for further grants to the Birchanger Wood Trust.

Members questioned the reduction in the Street Cleansing budget particularly as this area was a key concern for residents. It was explained that the £20,000 comprised a budget for overtime that had not been used. Members asked that this amount be reinstated in the budget and also requested details of the current street cleansing operation in the district.

RESOLVED that the Committee approve the 2011/12 revenue budget for recommendation to the Finance and Administration Committee on 8 February 2011, subject to an increase in the Street Cleansing budget for 2011/12 to £264,000.

E40

MINERAL DEVELOPMENT DOCUMENT: PREFERRED APPROACH

Councillor Wattebot declared a personal interest in this item as one of the objectors was her next door neighbour.

The Committee was advised of the content of the Minerals Development Document: preferred approach which was currently out for consultation. It

would cover the period from 2009 to 2028 and once adopted it would be the policy basis for determining planning applications for mineral extraction in the county. The report set out a preferred approach and this contained a list of preferred sites. The sites had been assessed and scored against a range of criteria. It was noted that additional weighting had been given to sites in west Essex due to a perceived shortage of sites in that area. The highest scoring sites had been reviewed for any unacceptable impacts and a final list prepared. Of the seven sites in Uttlesford 3 had been included on the list of preferred sites. These were Little Bullocks Farm, Great and little Canfield Area A (A22) and B (A23) and East Park Great Dunmow (A24). In neighbouring districts the site to the west of Rayne (A9) and Newland Hall Farm Roxwell (A40) had also been identified.

Councillor Yarwood questioned the rationale behind the extra 6 points for sites in the west of the county. He said that the availability of sites was a matter of geology and there was no factual reason for it to be weighted in this way. Other members agreed, particularly as 25% of the gravel extracted would go out of the county. It was confirmed that sites A22, A23 and A24 would drop below the current preferred sites threshold if the extra 6 points had not been added.

A number of members made representations about the sites on the preferred list. An objection was reported from the parish council relating to the development of the site at little Bullocks Farm where there was particular concern about the scale of the operation and the effect of the increased number of very large lorries on the rural roads near to the site. In relation to Easton Park, the parish council was concerned at the likely impact of the proposal on the water supply and the effect on the springs and ponds at Little Easton. The site at Rayne was prone to flooding, it also had no direct access to the A120 and would have a detrimental effect on the local roads. There was little confidence amongst members that the proposed mitigation measures would be sufficient.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the council notes the preferred approach to minerals planning as set out in the consultation document.
- 2 the council strongly objects to the weighting of sites in West Essex by an additional 6 points as it perceives this to be inequitable and, as a consequence, to the inclusion of sites A22, A23 and A24 in the preferred list.
- 3 the council asks that the concerns of local communities about site specific impacts of the above sites and sites A9 and A40, and the limitations on the ability to mitigate those impacts, be taken fully into account. Such impacts include heavy commercial vehicle trips generated, hydrological effects, water quality in water courses, residual water bodies after deep excavation, noise and dust.

E41

ESSEX TRANSPORT PLAN CONSULTATION

The Committee received a report which sought views on Essex County Council's new Local Transport Plan consultation. The plan would set out how the County Council would invest in transport in the next 15 years. The LTP would be structured around 4 areas each centred on a main town and included 3 different options for investment. As there was limited funding for local transport, particularly for major improvements, the short terms focus was on what could be achieved with available funding. Officers had welcomed some of the proposals in terms of improving public transport links to major centres but it was clear that funds would be less and there would be greater emphasis on working in partnership with other parties.

Members were encouraged to respond to the online consultation but made a number of comments particularly concerning buses in rural areas and the difficulty of travelling around the district; the influence of Stansted Airport on service patterns.

Councillor Eden addressed the committee as Chairman of the Uttlesford Transport Forum. The group was pursuing a scheme to provide cycling and walking routes from Audley End Station to Saffron Walden. This would be on a smaller scale than previous schemes and would involve safety measures to Wendens Road at an estimated cost of around £200k and it was hoped that funding could be achieved from the Local Sustainable Transport Fund administered by DfT. Initially a feasibility study would be required and the group was seeking funding for this as an application to the Highway Authority had been unsuccessful.

Members were supportive of this scheme although they were realistic about the difficulties of implementing this proposal as it had been under discussion for many years. Some members question the need for this route but this aspect could be included in the feasibility study. The Chairman suggested seeking funds from the new Highway Panel and also gave details of other grant funding that might be available.

Members also expressed concerns about capacity on the London – Cambridge railway, the use of large buses on rural routes with low levels of patronage and the need to maintain gullies and drains.

RESOLVED that the comments made by members be included in the Council's response to the consultation

E42

FORMAL CONSULTATION ON MAY AND DECEMBER 2011 NATIONAL EXPRESS EAST ANGLIA TIMETABLES

The committee received details of proposed changes being put forward by National Express East Anglia to the West Anglia timetable from either May or December 2011. The changes to both the West Anglia and Stansted Express services would be possible following the introduction of the new

Class 379 units in 2011. The report set out the proposed changes and the officer's comments.

Members commented on a number of the proposals which they felt would not assist Uttlesford residents. The faster off-peak service from Cambridge to Liverpool Street would not stop at any additional stations in Uttlesford, so would be of limited benefit. The termination of the off-peak Stratford to Stansted Airport service at Bishop's Stortford would have a detrimental effect on rail users at Stansted Mountfitchet, who also used the service to get to the airport because the Arriva 510 bus does not go into the village. It was hoped that some of the new Class 379 trains could operate local services using selective door opening at stations where there is currently no funding for platform extensions to 12-cars. Members also commented that the time of the last train from Cambridge/London was impractical and asked that the last departure be after midnight.

Officers agreed to update members on any matters that came out of the West Anglia Routes Group meeting on Friday 21st January.

RESOLVED that the Committee endorse the officers comments and the issues made by members be included in the Council's response to the consultation.

The meeting ended at 10.15pm.