

Committee: Environment and Transport
Date: 11 June 2002
Agenda Item No: 4
Title: EASTERN SECTOR REDEVELOPMENT, GT DUNMOW
Author: John Mitchell (01799) 510450

Summary

- 1 At its meeting of 23 April the Council referred a motion to this Committee for determination. The motion states:

“(1) Council’s agreement in principle to the sale of land at White Street Car Park, Great Dunmow, to enable development of the ‘Eastern Sector’ be rescinded.

(2) Negotiations be commenced with Essex County Council for the transfer of land at White Street Car Park to the County Council as a site for the building of a new library for Dunmow, in exchange for land at Haslers Lane which should then be earmarked for the provision of affordable rented housing.

(3) Provision be made in the Capital Programme for the reprovision of car parking spaces should any be lost as a consequence of (2) above.”
- 2 Members are advised that Great Dunmow Town Council has written in support of the motion.
- 3 This report updates Members on progress since the matter was last discussed over two years ago by the then Planning and Development Committee. It sets out the position on a current planning application to develop a substantial part of the Eastern Sector, and more recent developments on the inclusion of the “Dunmow Inn” into the proposal, which Officers consider are encouraging. It then looks at the implications of the motion referred from Council and concludes that consideration should be deferred until the Development Control and Licensing Committee has determined the anticipated planning application.

Background

- 4 (a) It has been a long-standing policy of this Council to secure the regeneration of the Eastern Sector in Great Dunmow. Members may recall that about 10 years ago the Council agreed to assist the regeneration of this part of the town centre and help achieve the pedestrianisation of the White Street junction with the High Street, by allocating £177,200 from general fund revenue balances which was to be put with £82,800 from Section 106 funds, totalling £260K. This was to be used to construct the new access road from the High Street close

- to The Dunmow Inn to White Street. The monies are still available, having been rolled forward with Members' agreement.
- (b) Members may also recall that a report was made to the former Planning & Development Committee on 9 September 1999. It was decided to invite the former Community Services and Policy & Resources Committees to determine their view as to the sale of part of the car park land. Both Committees agreed (CS on 14 December 1999 and P&R on 11 January 2000) that the Council should be recommended in principle to sell the land. Full Council confirmed the decision, again in principle, on 18 January 2000.
 - (c) Members may be aware that the Development Control and Licensing Committee has been considering an application for development at the Eastern Sector over the past 6 months. There is also a current planning application from the County Council for residential development of the Haslers Lane site.

The current application for the Eastern Sector

- 5 A planning application (UTT/1654/00/FUL) was submitted in December 2000 by Wilcon Homes Anglia for 58 dwellings, partly on part of the White Street Car Park. It also proposed a new road access to the public car park, extension to the car park onto land allocated for future car parking in the District Plan, pedestrianisation of the existing access from High Street into White Street, the provision of 10 affordable housing units, and erection of a new public library. There would have been a net gain of three parking spaces, and the scheme proposed a one-way access system entering the site from a point adjacent to the Dunmow Inn and leaving at the existing access into Market Place, which would be traffic-light controlled. The Development Control and Licensing Committee considered a report on this application on 26 November 2001 and deferred a decision pending further negotiations relating primarily to car parking and access.
- 6 The applicants revised their proposal, to include a smaller area of land to be taken from the existing car park and the erection of 56 rather than 58 dwellings. There would have been a net gain of forty parking spaces. All the other details remained the same. Members reconsidered the proposal at the Development Control and Licensing Committee on 18 March and again deferred a decision pending further discussions, this time arising from a new issue of the access road running through the residential development and its effect on amenity, together with the possibility of introducing an element of commercial development into the scheme. A further concern was the effect of the proposed one way system on traffic in the Market Place, and the effect of traffic control systems on the appearance of the Conservation Area.
- 7 Since then, The Dunmow Inn, which lies between the application site and the High Street, has changed hands. The new owners, Shire Hall Developments, have agreed to cooperate with Wilcon Homes to submit a revised comprehensive joint layout for both parts of the Eastern Sector. This scheme is likely to incorporate shops, offices and residential development, including a proportion of affordable flats and a new public library. Moreover it could enable a two-way junction with the High Street, addressing concerns about the implications of the one-way system. A new application is anticipated very shortly, coupled with the withdrawal of the existing one.

The current planning application for Haslers Lane

- 8 There is currently a planning application for residential development of the Haslers Lane site, submitted by the County Council (ref UTT/1707/01/OP). This is in outline with an unspecified number of dwellings, but an element of affordable housing could reasonably be sought here through the application procedure, should the total number of dwellings exceed 24. This is the minimum number above which Government policy suggests affordable housing must be provided, but the scope exists to press for provision on the basis of a lower threshold.

The Motion from Council

- 9 This states:

“(1) Council’s agreement in principle to the sale of land at White Street Car Park, Great Dunmow, to enable development of the ‘Eastern Sector’ be rescinded.

(2) Negotiations be commenced with Essex County Council for the transfer of land at White Street Car Park to the County Council as a site for the building of a new library for Dunmow, in exchange for land at Haslers Lane which should then be earmarked for the provision of affordable rented housing.

(3) Provision be made in the Capital Programme for the reprovision of car parking spaces should any be lost as a consequence of (2) above.”

- 10 Essentially it requires that land currently allocated for further car parking under Policy GD3 should be made available to Essex County Council for the construction of its new Library. In exchange the County Council would ensure that its land at Haslers Lane, which is currently the subject of a planning application for residential development, should be developed solely for affordable housing. The Council would then rescind its agreement to sell any part of the White Street car park, and would budget for the replacement of car parking spaces that might be lost.

Considerations

- 11 The issue is whether the development as proposed in the motion referred from Council would better meet the present and future needs of the Town Centre (and whether it is achievable) than to pursue the long standing proposals of the District Plan and the deposit Local Plan.
- 12 Turning first to the motion, this suggests the provision of a new public library closer to the town centre than the current library, and the provision of an unspecified number of affordable houses – the District Plan considers the site suitable for 17 dwellings, but application of PPG3 requirements would allow for a higher number, depending on design and layout, which would be matters reserved for future determination. Achievement of this goal is dependent on a number of factors, not least the willingness of the County Council to participate in such a “deal” and the extent to which it is possible, under the Local Government Acts, for the County Council to dispose of land for affordable housing (a matter for which it is not responsible) rather than

seeking the best possible price in the public interest. Similar considerations would apply to this Council's land.

- 13 There is a number of factors to be taken into account. Firstly with regard to **car parking** the library would be located on land allocated for public car parking to meet the future needs of the town – this has an estimated capacity of approximately 65 spaces. It is considered that the loss of land allocated for further car parking could not be easily replaced in the town centre as there are no obviously available sites. The site is formally allocated in the Local Plan and attracted no representations as a result of the recent public consultation. Moreover there could also be a loss of existing public car parking in order to create an access for the library. The need for further car parking is vital, and will become all the more so as further residential development takes place around the town, if the viability and vitality of the town centre is to be maintained. Indeed, the Head of Community and Leisure Services advises that there has been a 40% increase in usage of the White Street car park since 1997. It is normally full to capacity on market days and Friday and Saturday mornings. It is considered that usage is likely to increase still further as the development at Woodlands Park proceeds. There is a minimum requirement for at least 40 additional car parking spaces.
- 14 Secondly, the **poor access** adjoining the Boars Head into the White Street car park would remain, with no obvious prospect of securing an improvement. This is because such an arrangement would leave the existing access arrangements untouched. If this access is to be eliminated for vehicles and pedestrianised it requires a new vehicular access point, and this can only be achieved from a new access by the Dunmow Inn via the Council's car park. To eliminate the Council's land from inclusion in the Eastern Sector strategy would sterilise the possibility of improved access.
- 15 Thirdly, the possibility of securing **regeneration** of the Town Centre would be eliminated in the short term, and rendered considerably more uncertain in the longer term. This is because the inclusion of some the Council's land is essential to ensure that the scheme is economically viable.
- 16 Finally, there is scope to achieve an element of **affordable housing** on the Haslers Lane site in any event through the planning application process.
- 17 Turning now to the continuance of seeking to implement the long standing local plan policy this issue of whether to continue to support this redevelopment with funding and the sale of land should be considered against the following factors:
- (i) the Council is committed to the regeneration of Gt Dunmow town centre in the adopted District Plan and the deposit Local Plan.
 - (ii) the Council, through the local plan, recognises the contribution the redevelopment would make to the visual character of this semi-derelict part of the town centre Conservation Area,
 - (iii) the Council is supportive of the County Council's need to relocate and modernise their library provision in the town centre and appreciates that the funding towards this will not continue indefinitely,

- (iv) the Council agreed many years ago to a financial grant and allocation totalling £260K towards this redevelopment scheme in order to achieve benefits for the town centre, especially regarding the pedestrianisation of the dangerous White Street entrance, and this has remained unused for 10 years,
- (v) the Council has already agreed in principle to sell part of the existing car park in order to help make the scheme viable, and that the area of car park “take” originally agreed has since substantially been reduced from 48 to 18 spaces,
- (vi) the Council has allocated the ex Gas Board land for additional car parking to help meet future needs of the town and
- (vii) this may represent the last chance for some time to achieve a scheme which would help revitalise the town centre.

18 In relation to these factors, and having regard to the content of the Motion, the current planning application for the Eastern Sector would achieve the following:

- The provision of a public library
- The surfacing and laying out of the area reserved for car parking in Policy GD3 (the “Gas Board” land), with a net gain of 40 parking spaces
- The provision of 10 affordable dwellings
- The pedestrianisation of the White Street car park entrance

19 On the negative side, the DC&L Committee has concerns about the implications of extra traffic in Mill Lane and Market Place, the access arrangements generally and the possible residential amenity of occupiers of the new dwellings, together with the lack of a commercial element of the scheme.

20 However, the current proposal being discussed by Officers with the Applicants is to include the Dunmow Inn into the scheme, as explained in para 7 above. This could address the DC&L Committee’s concerns while retaining the advantages of the proposal listed above. It is stressed that adherence to the motion, if achievable, would effectively prevent the implementation of either the current or proposed planning applications, were they to be approved.

Conclusion

21 It is considered that the implications of adherence to the Motion referred from Council would undermine the long standing aims of the Council for the Town Centre as expressed in the adopted District Plan and carried through into the deposit Local Plan. It would also have adverse consequences for the provision of future car parking to meet the needs of the town; the possibility of pedestrianising the car park access; and regeneration of the Eastern Sector. The current proposal under discussion with Officers would, if approved by the DC&L Committee on submission of a planning application, achieve all the requirements of the aims of the Eastern Sector policy, and introduce a new public library with 10 units of affordable housing, while increasing the amount of public car parking and ensuring pedestrianisation of the White Street car

park access. Additional affordable housing could be made available on the Haslers Lane site through consideration of the planning application. Thus the aims of the motion of providing a new public library and affordable housing could be achieved through the Development Control process.

- 22 Officers consider therefore that no action should be taken until the anticipated application has been determined. If it is refused then the Committee should take a view on the Council's commitment to the Eastern Sector. Clearly if no new application is submitted the matter will be referred back quickly to this Committee.

RECOMMENDED that no action is taken over the Motion until an anticipated revised planning application including the Dunmow Inn has been submitted and determined by the DC&L Committee, and that the matter be the subject of a further report consequent upon the decision of that Committee, or sooner if no application is submitted.

Background Papers:

Application file no. UTT/1654/00/FUL
Report to Planning & Development Committee 9 September 1999
Report to Policy & Resources Committee 11 January 2000
Reports to Development Control & Licensing Committee meetings on 26 November 2001, 18 March 2002 and 11 June 2002.
Letter from Great Dunmow Town Council
Motion to Council 23 April 2002

Agenda Item No: 5
Title: Uttlesford Local Plan Deposit Draft
Author: Roger Harborough (01799) 510457

Summary

- 1 This report recommends that Members approve proposed changes to the Deposit Draft Plan in respect of the policies deferred at the Special meeting of the Environment and Transport Committee in April for further consideration.
- 2 Members are also asked to note the addendums to the Report of Representations, Comments and Recommendation. They ensure a complete record of the representations and do not effect previous officer recommendations or raise new issues not previously discussed by Members.

Background

- 3 Members will recall that at the Special Environment and Transport Committee meeting of 10 April they considered the representations received on the Deposit Plan and approved a number of changes for the Revised Deposit Plan.
- 4 Two items were however deferred for further consideration.

- Policy H1 in relation to the distribution of housing, proposed new policy H# relating to a housing reserve site at Ashdon Road, Saffron Walden and other local policies relating to, or affecting, the distribution of housing.
 - Policies GD 3 relating to the White Street Car Park Extension Great Dunmow and proposed Policy GD# relating to the former Newton Works.
- 5 The accompanying document sets out the suggested wording for the policies and an explanatory text.
- 6 Upon Member's agreement of the changes to be made, a revised Plan will be produced. This will clearly indicate the changes that have been made from the initially deposited Plan. This Revised Deposit Plan will be the subject of a six-week period of consultation which is anticipated to take place in late summer/autumn. The scope for objections or representations of support at the revised deposit stage will be limited to those proposals which the Council have changed between the deposit and revised deposit stage.
- 7 An inspector at a Public Local Inquiry will consider all outstanding objections. It is anticipated that this will be held in the Spring 2003.

RECOMMENDED that the Local Plan Deposit Draft October 2001 be amended as agreed at the Special Environment and Transport Committee in April and as set out in the attached schedule and put on deposit as a Revised Deposit Plan.

Background Papers: Summary of Policy Changes 11 June 2002
Addendum to Report of Representations, Comment and Recommendations.

Committee: Environment and Transport
Date: 11 June 2002
Agenda Item No: 6
Title: Best Value Review of Planning Services
Author: John Mitchell (01799) 510450

Summary

- 1 The terms of reference of the Best Value Review of Planning Services was agreed by Scrutiny 2 Committee at its meeting of 27 March, as endorsed by this Committee at its last meeting. The Review Team has met twice. The Review is taking place in a year in which the Planning Service is progressing, the Local Plan Review, the Stansted Airport planning application, the possible move to Saffron Walden, the applications for major housing sites, the Bridge End Gardens project and the normally high workload of planning applications. It is, however, significant and unforeseen staffing difficulties which have recently occurred, combined with the high workload, which suggests to Officers that current work needs to be prioritised. Officers consider that efforts need to be concentrated on core service delivery matters if customer demands are to be met.
- 2 Of the main issues affecting the Service the only one where there is any flexibility of choice over timing is the formal Best Value Review. All the other work areas listed above are dictated by imperatives which are for the most part outside the control of the Council or Planning staff. The Council does however have a choice over the timing of the Best Value Review. While Officers consider it important that the review takes place, it will have a significant impact on staff time and resources at a time when these are stretched. Officers and Members of the Planning Best Value Review Team have discussed this and agreed that postponement of the Review should take place in these exceptional circumstances.
- 3 The Review team will continue to meet every two months and no opportunities will be missed to continue with improvements. Essentially the formal Review will be on hold while the staffing situation in Planning is resolved, or at least eased, and this is anticipated to be for a minimum of 6 months. In the meantime it is considered that the best use of staff resources would be to concentrate on the delivery of our core service business.

RECOMMENDED that the completion date of the formal Best Value Review of Planning Services be extended from December 2002 to July 2003, and that the Scrutiny 2 and Development Control and Licensing Committees be advised accordingly.

Background Papers: Best Value Review terms of Reference, E&T Committee, 19 March 2002.

Agenda Item No: 7
Title: FLOOD DEFENCE
Author: Phil Hunt – 01799 510521

Summary

- 1 This report advises Members of progress made following the floods of 21 October 2002.
- 2 It recommends that the progress made to date is noted and that a further report is presented to the next Environment and Transport Committee meeting on 10 June. It also recommends that Members note that the nominal land drainage budget is likely to be exceeded during the current financial year.

Background

- 3 At the Full Council meeting on 11 December 2001 a motion was passed resolving:
 1. To request the Community and Leisure Committee to examine the Council's emergency response capability and, in taking decisions on the recommendations of the Community Safety Best Value Review, to take full account of the experience of the flooding in the District on 21 October 2001.
 2. That officers produce an early report on the threat from flooding in the District, covering the following points;
 - (a) Identification of all those areas in the district affected by flooding in the last ten years, and the nature and extent of the damage caused.
 - (b) Identification of the reasons for the build-up of water in each location.
 - (c) Listing of the various authorities which have responsibility for dealing with floods and the emergency measures arising from flooding, and their respective roles.
 - (d) Listing of the measures required to reduce the threat from flooding in the future and to handle any further emergency.
 - (e) Identification of those measures which the District Council itself ought to undertake as well as Town and Parish Councils.
 - (f) Recommended priorities and targets for appropriate action by the District Council and proposals which might be put to the other relevant authorities and agencies.
- 4 To request the Environment and Transport Committee to consider in its recommendations for the 2002/03 budget what provision should be made for dealing with the potential threat from flooding in the District.
- 5 The Environment and Transport Committee subsequently resolved on 22 January 2002 that any land drainage works to minimise flood risk for

which the District Council has direct responsibility be funded out of reserves. This report concentrates on part 2 of the motion.

Emergency Response

- 5 Following the floods last year all town and parish councils were invited to meetings with officers to discuss ways of improving the response. Subsequently questionnaires were sent out to determine the extent of flooding in each parish, the willingness of the parish to take responsibility for the storage, distribution and management of sandbags and to distribute information to residents. 21 of these questionnaires were returned and as a result sandbags have been supplied to 11 parishes and supplies of leaflets, etc., sent to all.
- 6 Arrangements have also now been agreed with the Police and Essex County Highways allowing town and parish councils to erect 'Road Closed' signs in specific locations in the event of flooding.
- 7 The new Community and Emergency Planning Officer is now in post and one of her first tasks is to review the District and Parish Emergency Plans.

The Flood Report

- 8 The compilation of the flood report requested by Members is a substantial administrative task, particularly with available resources. The following paragraphs give an outline of what has been undertaken since the October 2001 event on which efforts have inevitably been concentrated.

(i) Identification of areas affected

- 9 Data has been gathered from several sources:
 - a) The responses of town and parish councils to the questionnaire.
 - b) The Environment Agency Central Area, covering the River Cam catchment, has conducted door-to-door surveys in affected areas and has made the data collected available to the Council. Unfortunately the other two Agency areas within the District have not carried out similar surveys and have been unable to supply such detailed information.
 - c) Calls made to the Emergency Centre during the event.
 - d) Correspondence with the Engineering and Community Safety sections since the event.
- 10 These sources indicate that over 150 properties in the District suffered internal flooding following the storm of 21 October. The map in Appendix 1 gives an indication of the spread of the affected properties across the District. Many more experienced flooding to gardens and outbuildings as well as the disruption caused by flooded roads.

(ii) Reasons for flooding

- 11 For the purposes of the report the sources of flooding have been categorised as follows;

- a) Main river
- b) Ordinary watercourse
- c) Highway drainage
- d) Surcharged sewers
- e) Field runoff
- f) Rising groundwater

12 Of the reports received approximately 30% related to flooding from main rivers with the vast majority of the remainder resulting from ordinary watercourses, highway drainage or a combination of these two.

(iii) Responsibilities

13 The division of responsibility for flood defence is a complex one and the cause of much confusion to the public. The Council stressed in its response to the Flood and Coastal Defence Funding Review consultation that there must be absolute clarity as to these responsibilities.

- a) Environment Agency – has overall responsibility for land drainage and flood defence, the ‘operating authority’ for main rivers. Main rivers in the district are listed in Appendix II. The Agency is funded to undertake maintenance work and construct flood defences associated with main rivers. It is also responsible for the flood warning function.
- b) District Council – operating authority for all ordinary watercourses, has permissive powers to enforce maintenance by riparian owners but no duty to carry out flood defence works. An ordinary watercourse is defined in the Land Drainage Act as including “all rivers and streams and all ditches, drains, cuts, culverts, dikes, sluices, sewers (other than public sewers) and passages, through which water flows” but excluding any main river. An additional category of ‘critical ordinary watercourse’ was introduced by DEFRA following the Easter floods of 1999. These are agreed by the Council and Agency as watercourses with the potential to cause flooding to a significant number of properties and are jointly inspected, currently on an annual basis. Critical ordinary watercourses are listed in Appendix II. In its response to the funding review consultation the Council made the point that the Environment Agency should take on responsibility for critical ordinary watercourses. The Council is responsible for the maintenance of any watercourse of which it is the riparian owner.
- c) Essex County Council – as highway authority, responsible for the safety of the highway and for this purpose has the same permissive powers as the District. Also responsible for the piped highway drainage system and any pipes passing beneath the highway. No direct responsibility for most roadside ditches.
- d) Water Companies (Thames and Anglian) – responsible for the operation of the adopted public sewer systems, both foul and surface water.
- e) Town and Parish Councils – no direct responsibilities under land drainage legislation other than as a riparian owner.
- f) Riparian owners – duty to maintain the watercourse on their land to allow free flow but no duty to make improvements.

(iv) Measures taken

- 14 Investigation into the measures required to reduce the risk of future flooding has taken various forms. In the case of locations where significant numbers of properties were affected officers of the Council have attended public meetings with colleagues from other authorities and agencies. Elsewhere many individual meetings have taken place with residents.
- 15 In the case of the Bridge Street/Freshwell Gardens area of Saffron Walden the Council has commissioned consultants to carry out a study on the Madgate Slade down to its confluence with the Cam at Audley End. Unfortunately the final report has been delayed and will not now be available until late June but an interim report is available. It suggests that the three potentially critical points on the system are the culverts beneath Bridge End Gardens and Bridge Street and the confluence of the two tributaries of the Slade at the sewage treatment works. The final report will identify what measures, if any, may be available to reduce future risk. In relation to the flooding event at Bridge Street the Environment Agency recently confirmed that Linton, which is just outside the Madgate Slade catchment, experienced 117mm of rain over the 18 hour duration of the storm, equivalent to a 1 in 333 year event.
- 16 A contract has been let for the removal of silt and other debris from the culvert under Bridge End Gardens and the Army are to carry out some repair works under a joint scheme. Some of the properties in Bridge Street were flooded initially due to the highway drainage system being overwhelmed and this has occurred during lesser flood events than last October. The County Council has stepped up its gully clearance in the area and undertaken to investigate improvements to the outfall into the Slade. The length of the Slade between through Bridge End Gardens as far as the sewage treatment works outfall has been given critical ordinary watercourse status, as has the River Bourn through Ashdon.
- 17 Also in Saffron Walden a survey of the Slade culvert beneath the town has confirmed that it is free from obstructions and any build up of debris or silt liable to affect the flow of water. It has however also highlighted the need for some maintenance works to the structure and the Council is seeking specialist advice on how this may best be achieved.
- 18 In Great Dunmow a series of public meetings has resulted in the Environment Agency and Anglian Water undertaking to carry out works to reduce the risk of flooding in Riverside. The Agency is now at the design stage for a protective bund which, subject to certain legal details, should be in place by the autumn. Unfortunately no solution has yet been identified for the flooding at Church End.
- 19 The Environment Agency is carrying out a Standards of Protection Study on the Cam, due to report in June 2002, which will look at main river flooding in Newport, Littlebury and Great Chesterford, while the River Stort Flood Management Strategy, which includes Clavering, Manuden and the Ugley Brook in Stansted, is programmed for completion in 2003. The Council will be consulted on both these studies which will identify shortcomings in the flood defences and recommend improvements to be further investigated.

- 20 The Council has worked with Essex County Highways and town and parish councils to investigate flooding in a several locations. The County's consultants are carrying out a number of studies which will provide information on both highway drainage and the local drainage network in general when completed. Locations include Anso Road, Hempstead, Butt Lane and The Street, Manuden, Monks Corner in Great Sampford and Smiths Green/Jacks Lane, Takeley. These surveys will identify areas where improvements are needed and the results will be shared.
- 21 In Great Chesterford the District Council has liaised with the Parish to assist them in obtaining advice and carrying out works to reduce the risk of future flooding in the village and agreed to make a financial contribution in view of the benefit to Council property. Improvements have been made to the Council owned ditch on the frontage of Walden Road which was a factor in the flooding and further long term improvements are now being investigated.
- 22 In a few other locations, notably Roseacres in Takeley and Rowntree Way in Saffron Walden, flooding has occurred from watercourses of which the Council is the riparian owner. At Takeley work has been carried out to cleanse clogged pipework and in Rowntree Way a contract has been let to restore a length of ditch within Council ownership to its original capacity.
- 23 In other locations where a smaller number or isolated properties are affected officers continue to visit householders to identify causes and determine what measures can to be taken. If there is no other solution to the problems advice is given as to how the property may be best protected by the householder.

(v) Priorities and targets for action by the District Council

- 24 The District Council is the riparian owner of a number of watercourses across the district, generally adjacent to housing sites. In the past there has been no formal proactive management of these. A database of all such locations is being created and a schedule of inspection and maintenance is being set up as the sites are identified. It is important that the District Council takes a lead in its responsibilities as a riparian owner. The maintenance of all watercourses that fall into this category must be a priority particularly in locations where flooding has occurred in the past. These include among others the various branches of the Slade in Bridge End and around Swan Meadow Car Park, the sites at Takeley and Rowntree Way referred to above and Ash Grove/Lower Millfield in Dunmow.
- 25 As part of the DEFRA High Level Targets the District Council inspects all critical ordinary watercourses jointly with the Environment Agency, currently on an annual basis. In addition the Council is required this year under the same DEFRA targets to commence inspections of flood defence assets on all ordinary watercourses across the district and report on their condition to the Agency. The definition of a flood defence is any structure standing above bank top level.
- 26 The Council has a policy of securing the co-operation of riparian owners in ensuring appropriate maintenance takes place, drawing on enforcement powers if necessary. It is not possible for the Council to monitor the entire district and the town and parish councils are being encouraged to report

problems within their boundaries if they cannot be resolved locally. Local knowledge and local involvement are vital. Where problems occur on ordinary watercourses outside the Council's direct responsibility we need to be in a position to investigate fully. At times this may require outside assistance, as in the case of Bridge End.

- 27 A number of the surveys and studies referred to in this report are ongoing and it is important that the Council is in a position to assist and to have an input. In some instances it may be appropriate for the Council to assist financially in the procurement of such studies or in the implementation of their recommendations. Several of the investigations being undertaken by County, such as at Smiths Green/Jacks Lane, Takeley, may well identify works which cannot be justified purely on the grounds of highway drainage. In such cases a contribution from the Council might secure a scheme that would protect property.

Conclusion

- 28 The most important aspect of the Council's role in reducing the risk of flooding is to ensure that those watercourses for which it is responsible are maintained to a high level. Secondly, it must encourage, and where appropriate use its permissive powers, to ensure, in conjunction with other relevant authorities and agencies, that others carry out their duties to maintain assets under their control.
- 29 Considerable progress has been made since the October event and the completion of a number of ongoing studies will enable further preventative measures to be investigated.

RECOMMENDED that –

- progress to date be noted
- a further report be presented to the next meeting of the Environment and Transport Committee
- Members note that current indications are that the existing nominal land drainage budget will be exceeded during this financial year

Background Papers: Madgate Slade Catchment Study – Interim Report
Internal records

Agenda Item No: 8

Title: SPEED POLICY REVIEW

**Authors: John Mitchell (01799) 510450
Sarah McLagan (01799) 510560**

Summary

- 1 This report provides Members with questions being posed by Essex County Council in relation to its Speed Management Policy. Officers have suggested responses to the questions and made comments. It is recommended that these are confirmed and that they, and any further comments, are forwarded to Essex County Council.

Background

- 2 One of the Council's priorities for the current financial year is to seek a reduction in speed limits. The County Council frequently receives requests to lower speed limits, as speed is perceived as one of the key issues of concern amongst the people of Essex.
- 3 The County Council made a commitment to taking action to reduce speeds on all roads in the county and to this end the Speed Reduction Policy was developed and approved by Members in 1995. It was reviewed and amended in 1997 but has since remained unchanged.
- 4 Since the development of this document national policy has changed and a different emphasis on the issue of speeding is now becoming apparent.
- 5 A questionnaire forms part of this report through which Members' views are sought on the review of the Essex policy. The views of Uttlesford Members are sought to consider the priority and commitment that the County Council should place on tackling the issue of speed, both in the urban and rural environment, and the level of flexibility that such a policy should provide to target local issues.
- 6 Members are asked to bear in mind, if suggesting additional speed reduction measures, the cost, and more importantly, they would need the support of the Police for enforcement.
- 7 The policy, once drafted, will be subject to a programme of consultation with both county Members and the Members and officers of all districts and partnering organisations, where a further opportunity will be provided for comment on the detailed recommendations of officers. The questionnaire, with supporting information and Officers' suggested responses, follows.

Hierarchy

- 8 In March 2000 the Department of the Environment Transport, and The Regions (DETR) published a document "New Directions in Speed management". The DETR recognised that speed is a complex issue and that action taken to reduce speed may have resultant effects on other areas such

as congestion, journey times, noise and environmental effects. Any speed policy will have to address difficult decisions, balancing benefits and disadvantages.

- 9 Through the document the DETR sets the strategy and focus for activities directed towards the reduction of speeds in both the urban and rural environments. Key issues are that all speed limits should be appropriate for the environment, this means a consistent and rational approach must be taken. In addition, speed limits are proven to have greater effect when imposed with other measures.
- 10 Requests for the Highway authority to lower the speed limit in a location are frequently received. However, unless limits appear appropriate and are understandable, compliance will not follow automatically. The result of this will be a requirement for enforcement, either by safety cameras or by the police.
- 11 The agreed criteria for safety cameras are that they can only be used in locations where there is an accident problem. The criteria are dictated by National Policy and not set by the County.
- 12 The Chief Constable has set clear force objectives based on the priorities for action in all areas of his responsibility. Force priorities state that enforcement of speed limits must be clearly targeted at locations where killed and seriously injured casualties can be reduced. In addition, it would be unrealistic to expect enforcement to a similar level across the whole county, especially in remote or more rural areas.
- 13 More recently, the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) has focused on the reduction of speed in rural areas with the introduction of "Quiet Lanes" and research into the development of a Speed Management Hierarchy.
- 14 Essex County Council was involved in the research of such a hierarchy (Select committee report ET/08/02 refers). This involved working with consultants appointed by the DTLR on a desk top study through which all roads in the county were allocated to one of 3 or 4 different tiers based on the current function or intended function of the road. The consultants are currently developing a final report for the DTLR, the results of which are awaited. This issue is subject to national debate as it is currently uncertain as to whether a hierarchy would simplify the current system of speed limits and make it easier for drivers to understand. There is also considerable debate as to the level at which any new limits should be set. Finally, the cost of signing such a new hierarchy needs to be addressed, as does the concern over the number of signs that may be required in the rural environment.
- 15 'New Directions in Speed Management' stated... in the longer term the goal should be to develop a method of defining a road hierarchy for speed management purposes. If undertaken this would provide a framework for managing speeds across the County. It is anticipated that there would be 3 speed management tiers.
- 16 If adopted in Essex, the focus on tier one routes would be for moving traffic through the County. Those routes identified as tier two would move local

traffic within Essex. Tier three routes would comprise those local roads where speed would be managed to encourage use by non-motorised users.

- 17 This would provide a consistent approach, may improve compliance with speed limits and encourage traffic onto the more appropriate routes. This should support the aim to get 'Essex Moving'

NUMBER	QUESTION	YES/NO	COMMENTS
Q.1.1	Would you like to see the development of such a hierarchy for speed management in Essex?	In principle, YES	Difficult to comment without a better understanding of the proposed scheme
Q.1.2	On tier one routes should the speed limit through villages remain at 40 mph?	As Q.1.1	Speed restrictions must be appropriate to local circumstances and environments
Q.1.3	Would you wish to introduce a fourth tier to facilitate 'Home Zones', 'Quiet Lanes' and leisure use in association with public rights of way?	As Q.1.1	There would be merit in considering this matter further

Village

- 18 There is wide acceptance of the current speed management strategy in urban areas but opinion is divided on the management of speed on rural routes and in villages. The current policy clearly defines 'village' as "the extent of continuous development on both sides of the road which appears obvious to the driver as being a built-up/residential area where they might expect some movement of vulnerable road users such as pedestrians/cyclists/ equestrians" This was determined to ensure that drivers could see the reason for the limit and would therefore comply. This has led to genuine reductions in speed where they have been most needed.

NUMBER	QUESTION	YES/NO	COMMENTS
Q.2.1	Would you wish to see the definition of 'Village' changed?	YES	
	If YES what definition of village would you suggest to determine the boundary of the speed limit?		The requirement to have "continuous development on both sides of the road..." is not appropriate in many "villages". Where there is a need for a lower speed limit, particularly where there are schools, there should be flexibility to introduce appropriate speed reduction measures.

- 19 If the village envelope were extended the gateways would be located at the speed limit boundary. This would move the speed reducing effect away from the centre of the village and further engineering measures might be required.
- 20 Traffic calming measures have a high cost and are generally designed for the urban environment.

NUMBER	QUESTION	YES/NO	COMMENTS
Q.2.2	Should such measures be implemented in rural villages?	NO	Flexibility and common sense must be used. A blanket cover of such measures would not be appropriate in many villages.
	If YES (please TICK your chosen option) a) throughout the limit b) in the village centre	Not Applicable	

Gateways

- 21 Village limits should be identifiable. Current policy states that "...where a speed limit starts at or near the boundary of a village/town development, boundary signing will be incorporated with the speed limit sign wherever possible to form a 'gateway' into the area where drivers are expected to reduce their speed..."
- 22 Where a village with a 30/40 mph limit wishes to use a gateway they are required to adopt the style as detailed in the current policy.

NUMBER	QUESTION	YES/NO	COMMENTS
Q.3.1	Should policy allow local distinctiveness and a variety of styles in keeping with the rural environment?	YES	Local circumstances should also be accounted for.
Q.3.2	Would you endorse the use of continental style signing i.e. the village name struck through at the end of the village limits (These signs would require special authorisation from DTLR who may not consider them appropriate)?	NO	The money spent on providing such signage could be better spent on improving roads and speed management measures.

Physical Measures

- 23 Measures to reduce speed and raise driver awareness are effective in supporting speed limits. The current policy suggests that such measures will be considered to achieve compliance in villages where the minimum measures (i.e. a speed limit sign and village nameplate) have failed to reduce speeds significantly.

NUMBER	QUESTION	YES/NO	COMMENTS
Q.4	Are you supportive of this incremental approach starting with the minimum necessary to achieve the desired effect?	YES	It is important that there is a gradual/stepped process to introduce engineering measures, with each step being monitored to ensure cost/speed management effectiveness. If it is not necessary to move to the next incremental step, the reasons for not doing so must be justified.

Yellow Backing Boards

- 24 The existing policy is very clear on the use of yellow backing boards, however these boards are being used in increasing numbers across Essex. In the rural environment there may be a conflict between their use and the environmental impact they may have.

(N.B. the existing policy allows for the discretionary introduction of yellow backing boards)

NUMBER	QUESTION	YES/NO	COMMENTS
Q.5.1	Do you support the limited use of yellow backing boards as detailed in the existing policy?	NO	The yellow backing boards should be used consistently to highlight the need to reduce speed in School Zones only.
Q.5.2	Should we be considering replacing inappropriate yellow backing boards with something more in keeping with the environment?	YES	If the use of yellow backing boards is "limited", to School Zones, see Q.5.1 above, then all signs with yellow backing board outside of School Zones would need to be replaced to ensure they have the impact in School Zones

Coloured Road Surfaces

- 25 Coloured road surfaces are frequently associated with gateway treatments. They have both environmental and maintenance implications.

NUMBER	QUESTION	YES/NO	COMMENTS
Q.6.1	Are you supportive of the continued use of coloured surfacing for speed reduction?	YES	They are effective and do have an impact on the driver. It is important that they are provided as part of the Gateway package ensuring a consistent approach.

Q.6.2	Do you have any views on the colours used?	YES	RED – to ensure consistency and understanding as to what they mean
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Roundels and Speed Limit Count-down Markers

- 26 The current policy details where roundels and count-down markers may be used. As these road markings are not used independently of other measures it is difficult to judge their effectiveness. They are very visually intrusive in a rural environment and incur heavy maintenance costs. The DTLR is intending to include them in the Regulations therefore individual authorisation will no longer be required for every site.

NUMBER	QUESTION	YES/NO	COMMENTS
Q.7.1	Would you wish to see their continued use in accordance with the existing policy?	YES	The roundels and count-down markers are effective reminders to drivers.

Schools

- 27 There is currently no specific policy dealing with speed limits outside schools. Drivers are unlikely to comply with short lengths of lower limits for 24 hours a day when they may only be of value to address concerns focused on school start and finish times. The option of variable speed limits has been available for some time but they are expensive to implement and there are difficulties with realistic enforcement.
- 28 Funding is already directed to this area via Safer Journeys to School, the School Crossing Patrol Service and Road Safety education.

NUMBER	QUESTION	YES/NO	COMMENTS
Q.8.1	Does the current policy allow sufficient scope for the treatment of individual sites/locations?	NO	There needs to be a specific policy as Safer Journeys to School and School Crossing Patrol Services are not awarded to all schools. Therefore, there are many schools that need to have speed limits outside their premises, but have no policy to which they can refer.
Q.8.2	Would you wish to see a variable speed limit for 20 mph applied to all Essex schools regardless of the speed management tier allocated?	YES	This would ensure that there is a consistent message given to drivers.

Education

- 29 The speed commitment campaign has been running for the last six years and has refocused this year on young drivers. There has also been considerable publicity and information on safety cameras.

NUMBER	QUESTION	YES/NO	COMMENTS
Q.9.1	Are you satisfied with the level of educational publicity campaigns directed at the speeding issue?	NO	Uttlesford supports various campaigns that need to be publicised.
	If NO what other messages or media should we use (please comment below)		There should be more use of local media – radio and newspapers – and TV .
Q.9.2	Should more local publicity accompany the introduction of individual measures?	YES	It is important that residents understand what and why measures have been put in place.

- 30 In order to increase driver awareness a “speed kills” poster was designed to be erected in accordance with current policy guidelines and moved from site to site within the county, spending around 3 months at each location.

NUMBER	QUESTION	YES/NO	COMMENTS
Q.9.4	Do you wish to continue with the “Speed Kills” campaign.	YES	Most County/National campaign are of use in getting the road safety message across

Road Humps

- 31 Current policy makes several recommendations on the use of humps (this includes cushions) on bus routes but since the policy was approved experience of implemented schemes has shown that in practice these measures are still unsuitable for buses. There is discomfort for passengers and drivers and as a result bus companies are withdrawing services on treated routes and will not promote new routes on roads with humps. This will have an effect on other County policies particularly passenger transport policies.

NUMBER	QUESTION	YES/NO	COMMENTS
Q.10.1	If we wish to protect our existing bus routes should we consider the modification or removal of existing humps?	YES	The humps should be modified to allow buses/emergency vehicles to travel the routes.

- 32 Without significant investment road humps are the only effective way of enforcing 20 mph zones. With all humps there are disbenefits to residents, from noise and air pollution, and they can result in back injury to vehicle occupants.

NUMBER	QUESTION	YES/NO	COMMENTS
Q.10.2	Should we continue to use road humps in Essex?	YES	Their benefits outweigh the discomfort, especially if modified.

RECOMMENDED that the responses to the consultation are confirmed and that these and any further comments are forwarded to Essex County Council.

Background Papers: Letter dated April 2002 from County Cllr R M Williams CBE DL, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Highways and Transportation

Agenda Item No: 9

Title: Business Forums

Author: Brian Perkins (01799) 510500

- 1 The previous Chairman of the Council initiated open meetings between the business community and Group Leaders to enhance understanding between businesses and the Council. Meetings were held in Great Dunmow, Saffron Walden, Stansted Mountfitchet and Thaxted. Attendance was limited.
- 2 Explanation and better understanding were perhaps the key outcomes. There was nevertheless agreement that there was a need to improve communication between businesses and the Council.
- 3 There are probably two options. One would be to repeat the open meeting approach and hope for greater involvement. This could occur if businesses knew they were to become more formal and that they would achieve real outcomes. It would Issues discussed ranged from the individual and localised to the more general. involve additional meetings for all parties and there would be a small resource implication.
- 4 The alternative would be to take advantage of established business clubs and chambers of trade and ensure that they know that Members, and indeed officers, would welcome an opportunity to attend their meetings to discuss issues of mutual interest or concern. It would take advantage of existing arrangements and ensure involvement of a reasonable cross section of the business community, although it would potentially exclude those who were not members of such organisations.

RECOMMENDED that Members determine how they wish to better engage with the local business community

Background papers: Notes of meetings with local businesses, March 2002