

ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE held at the COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN on 19 JUNE 2007 at 7.30 pm

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

Officers in attendance: - D Burridge, J Mitchell, E O'Malley and R Pridham

Also present: - Councillor J E Menell

E1 PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

Councillor Jan Menell thanked Members for allowing her to attend the meeting. She explained her frustration with the progress of Littlebury's application for a natural calming scheme and asked when a resolution would be made.

Members recommended that Councillor Menell contacts Davina Millership, the West Essex Highways Manager who might know of funding for those types of schemes. The Chairman and the Director of Development, John Mitchell suggested they pressed forward with this and would respond to Councillor Menell as to whether the scheme could be taken to the Transport Forum.

E2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S Anjum, K Artus and A Dean.

Councillor J F Cheetham declared a non prejudicial interest as a Member of NWEHPA, The National Trust, SSE and The Hatfield Forest Management Board.

Councillor C Dean declared a non prejudicial interest as a Member of SSE and The National Trust.

Councillor J Menell declared an interest as member of the Littlebury Parish Council.

E3 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2007 were agreed and signed by the Chairman subject to the amendment of minute E55 to read 'on the Stansted Caravan Park'.

E4 MATTERS ARISING

(i) **Minute E55 – Business Arising**

Councillor C Dean questioned why the meeting to discuss with Essex County Council the funding of the waste programme had still not occurred since the last one was cancelled. The Head of Street Services explained that minor discussions had taken place, and he would report back after he had taken this matter further.

(ii) Minute E58 – Climate Change

Members requested an update on the progress of the scrutiny climate change investigation and requested a draft progress report. John Mitchell explained that the Energy Efficiency Surveyor, Jake Roos had recently produced a draft.

E5 LEAD OFFICER'S REPORT

John Mitchell asked Members to note the report and briefly explained the functions of the Environment Committee for the recently elected Members.

Members asked whether a list could be drawn up to outline areas that the Committee was responsible for. John Mitchell would look into this.

E6 THE PLANNING WHITE PAPER

John Mitchell summarised the Government's proposals and explained that the latest date they would like to receive comments was 17 August 2007.

Members expressed concern that the decision process would be handed to an independent commission and wondered what training they would have and who would be involved. John Mitchell explained that the independent commission would uphold national policy statements, and that the commission would become a national government body. He explained that the proposed reforms concerning development control issues would be taken to the Development Control Committee in July.

Members were concerned that serious decisions would be taken away from Local Government and large applications such as supermarkets would no longer have to pass impact tests. Members would start lobbying to alert local MP's and Lords on the matter.

Members discussed the situation Thurrock Council had with the Thames Gateway, where all decisions were completely overthrown by an independent body. They commented that the new policy could however; prove to be a far more honest approach to dealing with matters such as public inquiries, where in the past the Government have apparently ignored the issues raised during months of inquiry and granted permission anyway. John Mitchell agreed that many of the processes needed to be changed, however the planning process must stay locally determined.

RESOLVED that the committee are against the proposals for a major infrastructure commission set out in the Government White Paper, these views would be forwarded to the DCLG following the views of the DC Committee.

E7 PLANNING FOR GYPSY AND TRAVELLER ACCOMODATION IN THE EAST OF ENGLAND

John Mitchell explained the plans for gypsy and traveller accommodation in the East of England, following a public consultation launched by the EERA on 8 May 2007. Between 12 and 15 pitches were proposed for Uttlesford.

Members asked when the figures from the EPOA survey would be received, and commented that it would be uneconomical to provide pitches in areas where the gypsy and traveller community would not require them. They suggested that more surveys and research is carried out within the community to ensure that this did not occur. John Mitchell explained that EPOA had commissioned a survey two years previously from the same consultants used by EERA, which had found much lower levels of need.

Members questioned the allocation of the sites in the report and asked how the figures were established. John Mitchell replied that the figures arose from needs surveys conducted by consultants on behalf of EERA. Uttlesford was a large rural district and could accommodate the allocated number. The difficulty would be finding appropriate locations. He said that the allocation of the sites would be a future decision for the council. It was not axiomatic that the solution lay in a local authority provided site, and it had been a suggestion that the gypsy and traveller community could buy their own site or sites which would lower costs. Most of the existing provision in the district was on privately-owned sites.

Members commented that the plans could result in the situation at Felsted, where the Council struggled to fill the site. It would be an embarrassment if Uttlesford had to advertise to fill the newly allocated sites.

RESOLVED that the committee would wish to see a 2021 end date and that it postpones its decision until the relationship with the EPOA survey had been resolved. A draft should then be agreed at Council or with the chairman and vice chairman.

E8 OVERVIEW OF WASTE COLLECTION AND RECYCLING

The Director of Operations, Diane Burrige asked Members to note the report that summarised the Recycling project and its performance

Members questioned the 10% fall in waste to landfill and some suggested that this could be due to the amount of water found in kitchen waste or because Uttlesford's Recycling Project had made the public far more aware of what they were purchasing and recycling.

Members asked whether glass and batteries could be added to the recyclable items. The Head of Street Services replied that in the next 12 months batteries should be collected separately. In regards to glass, Councillor Cheetham explained that it was far more cost efficient if separated and collected at the bottle banks. She commented that the District was used to recycling glass in this fashion.

Members asked Officers why green waste was not collected. The Head of Street Services explained that the Council did not have a statutory duty to collect green waste. If green waste was collected it would go against the hierarchy of waste as the volume of waste collected would rise and that cost of the service would increase as additional vehicles would be required.

E9 AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT

Members noted the report produced by the Principal Environmental Health Officer, Will Cockerell which gave details of the consultation and recommended no change to the boundaries from the original report.

RESOLVED that the boundaries of the Air Quality Management Areas be finalised as shown in the detailed assessment.

E10 UTTLESFORD LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

Members noted the report produced by Melanie Jones, Principal Planning Officer that suggested that the LDF should be discussed at the July round of Area Panel meetings.

Members questioned whether this item had already been decided upon as they thought it was going to be the main item of the next Area Panel meetings, which would allow both the public and the parish councils to give their views. They suggested that the item be managed and allow everyone there to express their concerns before decisions need to be made.

Councillor Cant asked for all the Area Panel adverts to be understandable to the public and should express how important it was to acquire their opinions on the development framework.

RESOLVED that the Local Development Framework is recommended as a major item on the July Area Panel meetings Advertising should focus on this item and invitations to Parish Councils should be sent out as soon as possible

E11 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Members noted the report produced by John Mitchell and Diane Burrige which tabulated the future work programme of the Committee for the next year.

E12 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(i) Memorandum of Understanding

Ron Pridham gave an explanation of the Memorandum of Understanding and gave an update on the current situation.

The meeting ended at 9.45 pm.