

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2 – RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 5 FEBRUARY 2003

Present:- Councillor R J Copping – Chairman
Councillors Mrs C A Bayley, Mrs D Cornell, R C Dean,
Mrs S Flack, A J Ketteridge, Mrs C M Little, Mrs J E Menell,
A R Row and G Sell.

Also present at the invitation of the Chairman:- Councillors
Mrs J F Cheetham, A Dean and Mrs C M Dean, and
Lady S Walker and Mrs G Williamson – CPRE representatives.

Officers in attendance:- Miss E Anderson, Miss K Chapman, J B Dickson,
A Forrow, J Mitchell and B D Perkins.

Also in attendance:- G Gardner – Head of Planning, Essex County
Council.

S2.32 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M A Hibbs and R W L Stone.

S2.33 TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING SYSTEM – THE WIDER PERSPECTIVE

Mr Geoff Gardner, the Head of Planning from Essex County Council made a presentation giving an overview of major development and planning pressures currently being experienced by the County of Essex. The Committee was informed of major planning projects and schemes which were proposed for this area. Amongst the proposals were two new ports; one at Thurrock and one at Harwich, various new rail links, road schemes, affordable housing within the M11 corridor and the growth of Harlow. The Committee was then informed of regional planning guidance and its implications. The key issues were to provide for economic growth, housing needs, transport infrastructure, quality of life and the environment.

In answer to a question, Mr Gardner said that Essex County Council also felt that it had less control and power on planning issues than in the past and expressed his concern over how decisions were made by the small, unelected Regional Planning Panel which could affect the whole region.

Lady Walker from the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) asked how the structural and regional planning guidance fitted into the spatial strategy. Mr Gardner said that, once the strategy was in place, it would deal with environmental, housing and economic issues. In the future, local plans would take their lead from Regional Planning guidance.

In answer to a member's question, Mr Gardner said that other counties were under planning pressures but he felt that Essex had many more pressures ahead of it than any other county within the country.

Members expressed concern over the recent statement made by the Deputy Prime Minister stating that 200,000 houses would be built within the M11 corridor. There had previously been a study issued, which stated that a quarter to half a million houses would be built, and members queried the difference in figures. Mr Gardner pointed out that the study showed an estimate of the number of houses required to meet various levels of potential demand arising from the growth of the Cambridge and Stansted areas. However, these figures had not been proposed and were only projections from the study.

Councillor Copping expressed his thanks to the Head of Planning of Essex County Council for making the presentation and hoped that a strategic partnership would be built in future between Essex County Council and Uttlesford District Council to deal with planning issues.

S2.34 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 4 December 2002 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

S2.35 **BUSINESS ARISING**

(i) S2.23 (i) – Flood Defence at Bridge End

The Head of Planning and Building Surveying informed the Committee of the progress to date. The meeting of residents and authorities had been a success and a working party had now been set up. A full report would be made to a future meeting of the Environment and Transport Committee.

(ii) S2.23(ii) – Home Office proposals for a removals centre

The Assistant Chief Executive informed the Committee that the Home Office was still liaising with BAA on a possible airport site for a removals centre.

(iii) S2.23(iii) – Office Accommodation

The Head of Planning and Building Surveying reported that negotiations were still taking place with regard to the use of the Council Offices in Great Dunmow. A prospective tenant had been to view the offices for the fifth time, which seemed promising.

(iv) S2.23(iv) – Audley End Station, Saffron Walden – proposed cycleway

Councillor Mrs Menell asked whether the Road Safety Officer had been present at the latest Environment and Transport meeting and the Assistant Chief Executive said that he would investigate this matter.

(v) S2.29(i) – Proposed waiting restrictions – Harvey Way, Saffron Walden

Councillor R C Dean reported that the overgrown trees in this area had not been cut back to enable better visibility at this junction and Officers agreed to pursue this issue.

S2.36

BENEFACTOR CONTRIBUTION – STANSTED MOUNTFITCHET LEISURE CENTRE

Councillors R J Copping, Mrs C M Little, G W Powers and G Sell had requested the call in of the decision taken by the Resources Committee on 23 January 2003 on item 4(i) of its agenda to recommend the Council at its meeting on 11 February 2003 not to provide additional funding of £100,000 for the PFI project and to accept the name of 'Stansted Romeera Centre'.

The Leisure (PFI) Project Manager gave the committee a brief history of the Stansted (PFI) Leisure Project. A benefactor had for some years wished to make a contribution to the community and was prepared to contribute £100,000 to this project on condition that certain criteria would be met. One of the conditions was that the benefactor would be able to name the centre and once the project had met financial close the name 'The Romeera Sports and Leisure Centre' had been chosen. After consultation, however, it had been found that both Stansted Parish Council and the Stansted Mountfitchet High School had said that this name was unacceptable. It had then been suggested that the Leisure Centre should be named the 'Stansted Romeera Centre', but after further consultation with the parish council and the school it had been found that they would not accept this name. The Leisure (PFI) Project Manager said that officers felt that the Council could not approach the benefactor again with more suggested names and it was a requirement for him to agree the name of the centre in order for the Council to receive the £100,000 donation.

Robert Wingard, Deputy Chairman of the Governors of Stansted Mountfitchet High School presented the views of the governors to the Committee. They were surprised at the decision to accept the benefactor's choice of name without the consent of the parish council and the school. They felt that Uttlesford District Council was over-riding their views. The school had only become aware of the condition in August. He gave the following reasons why the school had rejected the names proposed by the benefactor. The school felt that the name 'Stansted Romeera Centre' sounded like a private company and had no cultural link to Stansted Mountfitchet, which could cause confusion over the identity of the centre. The project was being funded largely by public money. The school felt that there had to be a clear distinction between Stansted Mountfitchet and Stansted, taking into consideration the possible expansion of the Stansted Airport area. It also felt that the centre needed to be a success as a community establishment and a non-community related name could damage the reputation of the school. The issue of the size of the contribution in the context of the total cost was also relevant. The governors of the High School had no objections to a small part of the centre being named by the benefactor.

In answer to a question from Councillor Mrs Flack, the Leisure (PFI) Project Manager stated that the school was leasing the land to the Council at a cost to the Council of £20,000 per year for the Leisure Centre.

Councillor Mrs Dean expressed the views of Stansted Parish Council, which had also only learned in August of the condition about naming the centre. They felt that the benefactor's offer was a very generous one, but, by a small majority, did not agree with the name as it had no connections with the village. The vote taken at the parish Council meeting in December was 5 against and 4 for accepting the name of 'Stansted Romeera Centre'. The Parish Council also would not object to part of the building being named by the benefactor.

Councillor Mrs Cornell said that, judging by the experience of the Lord Butler Fitness and Leisure Centre in Saffron Walden, the name of the centre in Stansted would not affect its usage.

Councillor Row would not like the naming of the Leisure Centre to cause bad feeling between the Council and the School, but felt that after turning down the two suggested names that the situation could go no further. He felt that places were used no matter what they were called and that it was the facilities that were important. He also felt that accepting the name chosen by the benefactor would send a signal that Uttlesford District Council believes in seeking sponsorship and creating partnerships. Councillor Ketteridge also believed that it was naive to suggest the benefactor would suggest another name and was concerned that the contribution could be lost over this situation. He drew attention to the fact that the health suite would be run by Harpers, who were a commercial company, so it would already have a commercial theme. He also felt that £100,000 was a lot to use by the Council.

The Leisure (PFI) Project Manager informed the Committee that several negotiations had taken place with the benefactor to name just part of the centre, but an agreement could not be reached. The Director of Resources reminded the Committee that, when businesses were first approached for help with funding four or five years ago, it was to save taxpayers' money, and that each sponsorship was an individual case and was looked at on its own merits.

RECOMMENDED that Full Council at its meeting on 11 February 2003 does not provide additional funding of £100,000 for the PFI Project and accepts the name of 'Stansted Romeera Centre'.

S2.37

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MEETING OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE HELD ON 14 JANUARY 2003

(i) Car Park Charges

Councillor Mrs Bayley said that it was with regret that the Town Council had noted the increase in car park charges. It felt that it had not been properly consulted and suggested that the Council should consult town councils where its car parks were situated.

(ii) Budgets and Service Plans 2003/04

Councillor Mrs Menell was disappointed that the Residents' Parking Scheme was not paying for itself and Councillor Ketteridge felt that it was not fair for council tax payers to be funding people to park outside their house.

(iii) Golds Nurseries, Elsenham

Councillor Copping reported that not one Member, other than himself, had read the full Management report relating to this item. He felt that this needed to be looked at by the Scrutiny Committee to prevent problems from occurring in the future and it was

RESOLVED that

- 1 a copy of the full Management report on Golds Nurseries, Elsenham be sent to all Members of the Scrutiny Committee 2.
- 2 The report be looked at in depth at the next meeting of the Committee.

S2.38

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MEETING OF THE RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON 23 JANUARY 2003**(i) Review of polling districts and polling places**

Councillor Mrs Flack asked why no other changes to the revised scheme were detailed in this decision and the Director of Resources explained that the majority of polling places had been approved at a previous Resources meeting and these were the remaining venues which needed approval in order to complete the revised scheme.

(ii) Corporate Staffing

Councillor Sell asked for clarity over whether the position not approved had been for a Publications Assistant or a Communications Assistant to which the Assistant Chief Executive replied that it was for a part-time Publications Assistant.

S2.39

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON 5 FEBRUARY 2003

The Director of Resources informed the Committee of decisions made at the meeting of the Extraordinary Resources Committee held earlier in the evening. He said that the capital programme would be recommended to Council. The Planning Restructuring proposals had been approved as set out in Appendix 3 of the report and would be introduced on a phased basis. The Council would be recommended to increase Council Tax by 7.5%. He informed members that there had been some discussion about the £50,000 for the Community Safety Police Warden scheme.

Councillor Row thought that it was unfair to have to pay £50,000 when the police should be upping their expenditure for this area. Councillor Sell

commented that if the Council put forward this money and the Community Safety Police Warden Scheme went ahead, there would still be less policing of the district and therefore the Council would be paying more to receive a worse service.

S2.40 REVIEW OF THE PROCESS FOLLOWED BY DETERMINING THE STANSTED AIRPORT 25MPPA PLANNING APPLICATION

Councillor A Dean presented the Committee with a report suggesting that the process of dealing with the recent 25mppa planning application by Stansted Airport be reviewed in order to see if lessons could be learned for handling any future proposals for expansion. He felt that Councillors owed it to local citizens to demonstrate what, if anything, had gone wrong and what could be done to prepare for a future application. He thought that an independent person should be involved in the process.

The Committee felt that a workshop could usefully be held to discuss the situation and this should take place in the next two months before the new Council came into being. Many of the public were puzzled by the process and the outcome and Councillor Sell felt that the Council owed them an explanation. Councillor A Dean suggested that the independent person could be somebody from the LGA. Some members felt that an application of this magnitude should be decided by Full Council and that the procedure was wrong.

RESOLVED that a Member Workshop be held before the next meeting of this Committee, following which the Committee would decide whether the matter should be pursued further.

The Chairman requested the Committee to consider the following items on the grounds of urgency, as decisions were needed to enable action to be taken quickly.

S2.41 WORK PROGRAMME

The Chief Executive had asked members to consider appointing Member Reference Groups for next year's Best Value Reviews. The proposed terms of reference of the reviews would be considered during the next cycle of meetings. The Committee considered that the appointment of Member Reference Groups should be deferred until the new Committee meets.

RESOLVED accordingly.

S2.42 IDeA FINAL REPORT

The IDeA final report and improvement plan had been received, but no committee had formally considered it. Councillor Copping suggested that this Committee needed to look at the report and it was RESOLVED that a copy of the IDeA final report be sent to each Member of the Committee for consideration at its next meeting.