

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD  
SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 8 MAY 2012**

Present: Councillor E Godwin – Chairman.  
Councillors G Barker, P Davies, I Evans, S Favell, D  
Morson, E Oliver, J Rich and D Watson.

Also present: Councillors J Ketteridge – Leader, S Barker – Executive  
Member for Environment and K Mackman.

Officers: R Auty (Assistant Director Corporate Services),  
R Dobson (Democratic Services Officer), A Taylor  
(Assistant Director Planning and Building Control) and A  
Webb (Director of Corporate Services).

SC62 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor S Howell.

*Members declared the following personal interests:*

*Councillor Godwin as a member of the Local Development Framework  
Working Group and Birchanger Parish Council;*

*Councillor Ketteridge as chairman of the LDF Working Group and as a  
member of Saffron Walden Town Council;*

*Councillor S Barker as a member of Essex County Council, the Essex Fire  
Authority and the LDF Working Group;*

*Councillor G Barker as the husband of Councillor S Barker;*

*Councillor D Morson as the Member for Elsenham and Henham, in relation to  
the item on the distribution strategy for the local plan;*

*Councillor J Rich as a member of Stansted Parish Council;*

*Councillor D Watson as a member of the LDF Working Group and Saffron  
Walden Town Council.*

SC63 **JUBILEE FUND**

The Leader presented a report on a one-off “Jubilee Fund” of £500,000 which had been agreed by the Council at its meeting on 23 February 2012. The report, which would go to Cabinet on 10 May, sought endorsement on the way in which the scheme was to be administered. It was proposed to allocate

£250,000 for bids from town and parish councils, and £250,000 for bids from voluntary bodies and community groups.

Members asked a number of questions, summarised as follows:

- whether the timescale was viable for publicising the fund and for groups to submit bids;
- whether spending could be rolled over;
- what type of voluntary organisations would qualify;
- what would be done to ensure those groups which tended to be difficult to contact would be made aware of the Fund;
- whether applicants should be asked whether the funding was for all or part of a project, and whether funding from other sources was being sought;
- what the criteria would be for the Council to inspect projects funded;
- and whether there was the risk that some groups would confuse the community grants with the Jubilee Fund.

The Leader gave responses to the above questions as follows:

- The scheme would be launched during the week commencing 14 May, and organisations would have until 16 July to submit their applications;
- whilst it was not anticipated that funding would be rolled over, a flexible approach would be taken regarding projects which might require more time to be completed;
- applications from small voluntary organisations which were not registered charities could be accepted;
- subject to the approval of the report by Cabinet, the Fund would be publicised by means of emails to town and parish clerks, village magazines, voluntary organisations and a community distribution list, and posters would be displayed on parish notice boards. Members noted that spending on publicising the fund should be kept in proportion.
- Officers had experience of monitoring of grants, and the current allocation would be administered in much the same way as existing grants.
- Regarding the possibility of confusion between the Community Fund and the Jubilee Fund, the Leader had recently attended a meeting with the Uttlesford Council for Voluntary Service at which both funds had been discussed.

The Committee unanimously

RESOLVED to endorse

- i) the introduction of the one year only Jubilee Fund 2012/13

- ii) the Fund should be allocated as follows:
  - £250,000 for bids from town and parish councils
  - £250,000 for bids from voluntary bodies & community groups
- iii) the criteria for allocation of the funding as at Appendix 1
- iv) the composition of the assessment panel:
  - Leader and the two Portfolio Holders Finance and Community Partnerships = 3
  - One independent partner from the Local Strategic Partnership = 1
  - One from each of the opposition parties = 2
  - Total Panel Membership = 6

SC64

## **DISTRIBUTION STRATEGY FOR LOCAL PLAN**

Councillor S Barker presented a report on the Distribution Strategy for the Local Plan, which would go before Cabinet on 10 May.

She explained that due to time constraints she would not be taking into account this evening representations from David Locke Associates received at 5.30pm today, but that these submissions would be considered prior to the Cabinet meeting.

Councillor S Barker referred Members to the summary of the benefits of the different options. She said in her view the primary issue was deliverability of the Council's housing plans over the long term; that this was an opportunity for the Council to set its own local targets, and she believed Option 4 with the revised remit would not give the Council the opportunity to deliver appropriate housing to meet the needs of the district's elderly people and those on low incomes. She said the option for significant development at Saffron Walden would give rise to issues of water and waste. Therefore she would be recommending to Cabinet the emergent option.

The Chairman said the Council needed to be sure that the recommendation was evidence-based, and that the soundness of the new strategy was thoroughly examined against the alternatives. She therefore suggested the Committee look at the evidence relevant to each of the three options.

Members considered the following points:

**Green Belt** – Members felt it was of prime importance to prevent coalescence with settlements such as Bishop's Stortford and to preserve green space, as this was intrinsic to the character of the district. The Chairman emphasised

the importance of sending a message to neighbouring counties that the green belt around Uttlesford was not up for grabs.

**Employment land** – Members acknowledged that no one option entirely met the district's employment land requirements. The Assistant Director of Planning and Building Control explained that the information had been broken down into different sectors. The forecasting model would be updated by July and the figures would then be adjusted. The emergent option would entail a similar level of employment land as in the other options.

Councillor Watson questioned the inclusion of Saffron Walden in the employment land review, as he felt there was ample employment land available already at Shire Hill. He questioned the viability of encouraging more business use when in his view there were inadequate transport links from Saffron Walden.

Councillor Rich said that in Stansted Mountfitchet people were concerned at the concept of establishing a business park at the Airport, as it was important to maintain the principle that such land should be used only for Airport-related employment.

The Assistant Director Planning and Building Control explained that the road junctions gave this area an advantage, and therefore regeneration possibilities were being investigated. If this space could be used, demand for employment land would be reduced elsewhere. It was not the intention to detract from the existing policy regarding the use of the Terminal and airside areas, and in fact BAA was opposed to any such measure as it would impact on its core business. Another area near Stansted which could potentially be utilised for business use was land at Alsa Street, around the auction house.

Members discussed potential employment land at the Airport, the importance of the employment aspect as a factor in considering housing need, and the outdated condition of existing industrial estates in Great Dunmow.

The Assistant Director Planning and Building Control said employment land at Dunmow was being looked into, but that he wished to clarify that the existing policies regarding the Airport would not be relaxed. This approach was reinforced by BAA because if the Airport reached its full potential and the number of passengers per year increased, facilities for businesses associated with the Airport would not then need to be re-provided.

**Air quality** – Members noted that a report on a revised air quality management area for Saffron Walden would go to Cabinet this week. The purpose of enlarging the AQMA was to emphasise that effective measures to achieve improvement needed to be deployed on a broader basis as well as site specific intervention.

Members commented on the fact that of only six air quality monitoring areas in Essex, four were in Uttlesford.

Councillor Watson spoke about the issue of air quality in Saffron Walden. He considered the main problems with air quality were caused by traffic being managed in a 'stop start' fashion by traffic light junctions. He stated his concern about the impact of extra commuter traffic arising from any significant new development which might arise from the distribution strategy, and from the link road proposed in the emergent option, between Radwinter Road and Thaxted Road. He was concerned this road would be used by people visiting the Tesco store, with the result that Saffron Walden would become an urban conurbation.

Councillor Rich raised the issue of the air quality management area at Burton End, which monitored emissions and particulates and which he considered potentially a very important issue for the health of those living in that area.

The Chairman said more work was required on air quality monitoring in connection with the emergent option.

The Assistant Director Planning and Building Control said the identification of a distribution strategy from the three options being considered would enable appropriate action to be taken on air quality. The focus should not be solely on Saffron Walden at the expense of other areas. Regarding the impact of a link road between Radwinter Road and Thaxted Road, he said the link road would have the potential to change traffic patterns such as enabling heavy goods vehicles to avoid the town centre. It was necessary to accept that this district had a high commuting rate. The benefit of the emergent option was that additional funding would be provided to fund improvements in transport.

The Chairman said whilst the Committee accepted the assessments of the options regarding air quality, it wished to flag up the need for more work to be done to improve air quality generally.

Further comments were made on the monitoring of air quality in Uttlesford. The Leader responded that from a county-wide perspective this district had set up AQMAs and had monitored air quality for a significant period of time, but he suspected there were likely to be areas in the county which had more serious air quality issues than Uttlesford but which were not measured.

Councillor Morson offered to provide officers with details of research carried out into air quality and health by one of his ward constituents.

**Retail Capacity Study** – Councillor Watson asked a number of questions regarding a reference in the report to a requirement for a small main food supermarket or discount store in Saffron Walden. He questioned the reasons for such a requirement and expressed concern at the impact on the town centre.

The Assistant Director Planning and Building Control replied that if the Sainsbury's decision expected on 25 May allowed the application, then this capacity would be filled; otherwise the alternative of a discount operator would be considered. Saffron Walden had lost out to competing centres for comparison goods and Uttlesford had slipped in terms of trade leakage out of the district during the previous 10 years. It was important to maintain the level of investment, which required quite a significant amount of work, to ensure spending stayed in the district.

In reply to a question regarding a new retail site at Stansted Mountfitchet, the Assistant Director Planning and Building Control said it was not envisaged that a site on the outside of the settlement would be allocated to retail provision, but that there were areas within the settlement which could be redeveloped.

Councillor Oliver said the greatest retail growth sector was online and that by comparison to the problems in Bishop's Stortford the retail base in Saffron Walden seemed to be holding its own.

### **Water Cycle Study**

Members noted there were significant issues regarding water supply in this district and commented on the new sewerage capacity and piping that would be required. Councillor Watson considered that much work would be needed to bring the water supply in Saffron Walden to the south eastern corner of the town.

The Assistant Director Planning and Building Control said the main issue was waste capacity rather than water supply, and that all issues including whether the area was in a flood zone, would need to be considered. All options would require extensive upgraded sewers, so it would be necessary to ensure that those allocations were sufficiently viable to deliver the infrastructure that would be required. He said officers had met with the water companies in the previous week and plans would be co-ordinated. In reply to a question from the Chairman he confirmed that he was confident that water capacity would be addressed through investment by the water companies and that this would be co-ordinated with the development plan taken forward by this authority.

**Transport** – Councillor Rich reported that car parking near the station in Stansted Mountfitchet was an issue, not only for commuters but also for residents. There had been occasions when the car park on Lower Street was full.

The Assistant Director Planning and Building Control explained that costs had increased in the Council-owned car park on Lower Street, but that this was still cheaper than the cost of using the Network Rail car park. He had asked the North Essex Parking Partnership to look at the issue. The introduction of

a parking restriction order would take some time. He appreciated there was an impact on retailers in Lower Street but it was not possible to address this matter with a short term fix.

Councillor Evans said people were parking in the Lower Street car park for up to three days at a time, and this also had an impact on retail business.

The Assistant Director Planning and Building Control accepted this and confirmed that this issue would be considered in more detail.

**Education** – Councillor Evans said she welcomed the relocation of St Mary's primary school in Stansted to Forest Hall Park but was concerned there were parking issues for residents.

In reply to a question about schools' capacity in Saffron Walden, officers confirmed that educational facilities were scaled to growth plans, and that it was important to ensure a balance in phasing increased educational provision.

**SHLAA** – Councillor Morson said the Housing Board had discussed this important issue. Affordable housing should be available throughout the district, and this aim would be supported by a more dispersed option.

The Assistant Director Planning and Building Control said additional viability work had been done on the affordable housing policy. The consultants had endorsed the approach being formulated by officers and the LDF Working Group. In addition, officers were working to update the Housing Strategy by September to be launched in October, to coincide with the Local Development Plan.

Members briefly considered the comparison of the development options under the remaining evidence bases set out in the report. Councillor Rich commented on the exhibitions held as part of the consultation process, in that attendance numbers at the event in Stansted were likely to have been reduced due to winter weather. He asked that further promotional activities be arranged to ensure all residents had an opportunity to engage with the next stage of the consultation.

The Assistant Director Planning and Building Control described the publicity which would take place for the next consultation, which would include further exhibitions, information in Uttlesford Life and a two-week newspaper advertisement. The intention was to try to reach as many people as possible.

In reply to a question he said there was no target figure for community engagement, but any specific audience which had not been previously addressed would be consulted, for example the school parent demographic was being targeted with a mailshot to schools. The Local Plan consultation

exceeded the requirements set out in the Council's Statement of Community Engagement.

Regarding sustainability appraisal and strategy environmental assessment, the Chairman asked for an update on provision of cycling lanes.

The Assistant Director Planning and Building Control said work was now being done by Essex County Council on cycling provision, partly due to public pressure. The main issues were funding and land availability, and the only way to achieve provision would be through the Local Plan as a requirement. This was not just about infrastructure but also increased provision of cycle stands in appropriate settings.

Councillor Barker said the formation of the new Highways Panels would enable the council to take responsibility for the issues it considered should have priority, although costs relating to bigger projects would be a factor, and there were a number of projects outstanding.

Councillor Watson said he wished to make a statement. He said Saffron Walden Town Council was opposed to the development option for Saffron Walden. He referred to work done by the Neighbourhood Planning Groups which were set up to address housing and transport matters. He considered these proposals were ignoring the option of using brownfield sites. He spoke about the limited development capacity of Saffron Walden as a small country town, and expressed concern that significant incoming numbers of residents would exacerbate existing transport problems. He considered the south east corner of the town to be the least satisfactory place to build, due to transport issues and the fact that agricultural land would be lost. He urged Members to reconsider the Local Plan and said the need for finalising the figures was not as urgent as had been stated. The concept of localism meant Saffron Walden Town Council should be listened to.

The Chairman asked officers to comment on whether brownfield sites could be considered as an alternative to the proposed development options, specifically with regard to Saffron Walden.

The Assistant Director Planning and Building Control said he had to look at Uttlesford as a whole. There were insufficient brownfield sites in Uttlesford to meet the level of development required. Whilst there were sites in Saffron Walden all had been allocated for employment sites. There was a question of balance to be assessed, which meant if all brownfield sites were allocated for building houses then greenfield sites would need to be given over to employment use. It was important to have a coherent approach and to look across the board to ensure this was a robust plan.

Councillor Morson proposed accepting the recommendation in the report. He said he appreciated the comments made by Councillor Watson, and felt there would not be anyone who was entirely happy with the proposed option, but

the Local Plan had now benefitted from two good discussions, and the dispersal option did allow all areas to be considered for housing and also for affordable housing. There was no dispute that the emergent option was supported by expert reports which all suggested this option was the most viable in terms of empirical evidence.

Councillor Favell seconded the proposal, which was put to the vote, and carried by 8 votes to 1.

AGREED to approve a strategy of dispersed development reflecting the existing hierarchy of settlements for the preparation of a local plan.

The meeting ended at 9.15pm.