

SOUTH WEST AREA PANEL held at the VILLAGE HALL HATFIELD HEATH at 7.00 pm on 28 FEBRUARY 2008

Present:- Councillor D M Jones – Chairman
Councillors K R Artus, A Dean, C Dean, E J Godwin,
J E Hudson, R M Lemon, J I Loughlin, D J Morson, J
Salmon and G Sell

Parish Council and
public representatives:- as noted on a separate attendance list.

Representatives
of outside bodies:- David Forkin, Area Highways Manager
Officers in attendance:- G Bradley, J Dear, S Hayden and R Procter

SWAP41 **PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

Ray Woodcock, a resident of Stansted Mountfitchet, made a statement. He was concerned about current traffic levels in Stansted Mountfitchet, which he said frequently resulted in significant congestion, and were a potential danger, particularly to school children walking to the Mountfitchet College. He expressed concern that the new Rochfords housing development in Stansted would exacerbate the existing traffic problems. He was also very concerned that if the expansion sought by BAA for Stansted Airport were to go ahead, that there would be further potential for unsustainable increases in road use through the village. In addition, he said that the proliferation of unofficial signs detracted from the appearance of the village.

The Chairman thanked Mr Woodcock and invited Mr Forkin to respond.

In reply, Mr Forkin said that issues about dangerous driving, such as speeding and parking on footways, were matters for the police. Regarding traffic associated with new development, he said the Highways Authority were working with the Planning Service on section 106 schemes, and that representations made to the Parish and District Councils would be taken into account. Regarding commercial signs, he advised that unofficial signs were illegal, and he would arrange for an inspection and clearing up exercise to take place in the next few weeks. In reply to a question from Mr Woodcock, he said that whilst it was not illegal for members of the public to remove such signs, it was not something he would recommend, for safety reasons.

Peter Johnson of Elsenham Parish Council referred to the Uttlesford website, which announced that a report on the Local Development Framework was unlikely to be issued in 2008. He asked for clarification of this, in view of indications John Mitchell had previously given that a report would be made to Full Council in April.

The Chairman replied that the Director of Development was not present, but had supplied the Panel with a statement on the Local Development Framework strategy, which he took this opportunity to read out. The statement indicated that it was likely that the programme for adoption of the Core Strategy would slip considerably, with a draft anticipated in early 2009 and adoption in 2010. The volume of representations to the preferred option, together with the many alternative proposals and the representations these had generated, far exceeded expectations. Further work was needed, particularly on a comparative assessment of the alternative proposals, and on sustainability and infrastructure.

Peter Johnson said that the information was helpful. He asked about the deployment of resources for this work in view of the anticipated application from BAA regarding

G2. Councillor Cheetham replied that the Airport application had no bearing on the LDF consultation timetable.

Councillor Lemon said the statement indicated how public opposition through meetings, events and publicity could succeed in securing a different outcome. He hoped the Council had taken note of public feeling, and congratulated all who had taken part in opposing the plans.

Councillor Cheetham said that the statement had made clear the reason for the deferred report, which was the enormous flood of alternative suggestions, which the Council was obliged to assess. More time was needed to consider representations and to test all the alternative proposals, and the matter would be considered further at the meeting of the Environment Committee on 11 March.

Councillor A Dean said that the Panel had at its last meeting been informed that there had been a March deadline for the consultation process.

A question was put regarding the alternative development proposals being put forward, and in reply Councillor Cheetham said that many other sites were also now being suggested. The Chairman said that there were a host of other options, some submitted by developers, and some by other groups and that the whole exercise had become infinitely more complex.

Jonathan Millen of Hatfield Heath asked about affordable housing to be built in and around Hatfield Heath. The Chairman said that for any sizeable scheme, the Council had to provide a proportion of affordable housing. Councillor Lemon said that in Hatfield Heath the only such houses were those on the Scout Hut site in Broomfields, but that unfortunately these were for rent only.

Councillor Cheetham referred to the Priors Green site in Takeley, where 25% of the new houses would be affordable homes, representing about fifty units. Councillor Lemon said that he had repeatedly questioned the price of such units, because usually they were at the level of £250K plus, which many people could not in fact afford.

Councillor Cheetham said that in Takeley there had been helpful co-operation with the RCCE (Rural Community Council of England), which had resulted in a scheme which would benefit Takeley residents. She recommended establishing an early joint approach between Parish Councils and developers.

Richard Cheetham, of Takeley Parish Council, said that the development encompassed a combination of private and rental homes. He asked about the responses the Council had received on new planning procedure arrangements. Councillor Cheetham said that a workshop on this subject had just taken place, but that the consultation period had taken place some time ago. The Government was to synchronise all planning application forms across the country. Councillor Godwin said that the new forms were available on the Uttlesford website (www.uttlesford.gov.uk/planning).

Derek Millen, a resident of Hatfield Heath, asked a question about recycling bins which he said were left in the middle of the footpaths at Cocks Lane and Broomfield by the recycling team. He asked who would be responsible if there were to be an accident as a result. Councillor Lemon replied that the bins should be returned to where they came from. He advised Mr Millen to speak to the District Council's Environmental Services, but if the matter remained unresolved, he would take it up.

Councillor Lemon referred to the issue of the kerbstones in Broomfield and said he would like to commend the Council for completing this work, which he said had taken approximately five years. He was critical of the previous administration for having the kerbstones taken up, and wished to record his view that money had been wasted in doing so. David Forkin said that the work had been carried out by the Highways Authority.

Ray Woodcock referred to the issue of affordable housing, and said that there were not many affordable houses in the area. Of those, he asked whether local people who had been residents for a long time would get priority. Councillor Cheetham said that Takeley had had a pilot Housing Needs Survey to see if any units could be allocated to long-term residents. Allocation was usually determined on a points system. She recommended becoming involved in residents' schemes, and suggested obtaining the advice of the Rural Community Council of England. Residents could also approach their own Parish Councils and District Councillors. Councillor C Dean said that at present it was the exception that developments included houses designated for local people, but hoped that the situation would change.

Councillor Lemon said that in Hatfield Heath the houses built by a developer working closely with the Parish Council were intended to be just for the village. Whilst this scheme had worked well, most units were single bed apartments. Councillor Godwin agreed that there was a lack of two- or three-bedroom houses designed for families.

Councillor Sell said that Uttlesford was an expensive place to live and that it was difficult to get on the housing ladder.

Councillor A Dean said that housing need was a difficult issue, and that in his view there was not enough background information given by the Council. He wished to request that in the new phase of consultation such information be made available.

SWAP42

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E C Abrahams, J Hudson and J Loughlin.

Councillor J Cheetham declared a personal interest as a member of SSE.

Councillor A Dean declared a personal interest as a member of SSE.

Councillor C M Dean declared a personal interest as a member of SSE.

Councillor Godwin declared a personal interest as a member of SSE.

Councillor R M Lemon declared a personal interest as a member of Hatfield Heath Parish Council and as a member of the National Trust.

SWAP43

MINUTES

The Minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 2 October 2007 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7 January 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendment at SWAP37, page 467, to read:

“Councillor Howard Rolfe . . . referred to the obligation to provide 4200 houses imposed by government, the continuing consultation process and the lack of an adequate alternative.”

BUSINESS ARISING**(i) Minute SWAP28 – Local Development Framework**

Councillor A Dean asked when the Panel would be advised what form the next stage of the consultation would take, and whether there would be more public exhibitions to ensure a more thorough approach. Councillor Cheetham said the Environment Committee would be considering a report on the Local Development Framework on 11 March, and suggested that Councillor A Dean should raise this point then. Councillor Sell agreed with Councillor A Dean, and said that the timetable had previously been rushed, and that there was now an opportunity to go through fuller consultation. The Lead Officer referred to the number of responses received, and said that this was the reason for the revised timetable. Councillor A Dean asked when the Limehouse system would be up to date. The Chairman replied that the process was ongoing and that September would be the earliest date.

(ii) Minute SWAP40 – Post Office Closures

Councillor C Dean thanked the Panel for sending a letter to the Post Office regarding the possible closure of Henham Post Office. The outcome of the consultation was not yet known. The Chairman said that he would pass to the Lead Officer two letters which Sir Alan Haselhurst had forwarded to him.

(iii) Minute SWAP38 – Stansted Airport

The Chairman read out the statement supplied by the Director of Development. The statement referred to the possibility that the G1 decision might be delayed following further submission of air quality evidence by BAA. The G2 applications were expected soon, which would comprise a major project, and a meeting was to take place with BAA next week. Uttlesford would work in partnership with Essex and Hertfordshire County Councils and East Hertfordshire District Council regarding the applications. It was anticipated that the applications would be called in by the Secretary of State after two or three months, with an inquiry to commence in 2009.

HIGHWAYS ISSUES IN THE SOUTH WEST AREA

The Chairman welcomed Mr Forkin, Area Highways Manager for the South West Area of the County. He proceeded to outline the maintenance programmes he had overseen during the past months in the area. He said that due to current budget setting requirements, it was not possible to give details for all planned works, but that he would be able to do so later this year. He said he understood that the road quality in Essex was not of the standard that he would wish, and that there had been a problem with lack of investment over the last ten years. There had been an additional £45m invested in classified roads, that is B and C roads, during the last three years, but this programme was now coming to an end. Maintenance of footways was now a priority. He referred to the Highways Maintenance Improvement Programme, which he said had been successful. He hoped that further investment for roads could be achieved. He said he was concerned about reported poor quality of road repairs, and encouraged people to report any problems. He was keen to forge good relationships with Parish Councils via their local Highways Inspectors.

The Chairman thanked Mr Forkin, and invited questions.

Councillor C Dean asked about progress on access to pedestrian refuges in Elsenham, and Mr Forkin provided an update. It was also noted that one of the flashing speed limit signs in Elsenham was to be relocated to the other end of the village.

Regarding Stansted Mountfitchet, Cllr A Dean asked for a site visit to be arranged to consider the proposed pedestrian crossing near the Post Office. He asked for the

right-hand turning lane near Pesterford Bridge to be reinstated. He asked for the Stansted area to be cleared of old sign posts which had been left on site when new signs had been erected. He referred to the footpath along the railway towards the airport which was covered in litter, and suggested a co-ordinated approach between the District Council and Highways agency. Mr Forkin agreed, and said that pilot schemes to engage with District Councils were planned.

Cllr Godwin asked for clarification of the definition of an estate road, and said that in Birchanger and the surrounding area the roads were deteriorating. She said that there were several very dangerous potholes on bends, which caused motorists to swerve out. She was disappointed with the rate and quality of repairs, which had not been made permanent, and with the response rate to queries. She supported Councillor A Dean's point regarding the junction at Pesterford Bridge, and questioned why further works were shortly due to take place. Mr Forkin replied that this was work conducted by EDF.

Councillor Cheetham said that Bambers Green was still lacking signs despite the poles being there for nearly three years. She asked for an update on the fly parking situation in Takeley, as she had received complaints that some residents could not park outside their houses.

Councillor Lemon said that the road surfaces in Hatfield Heath had improved, but that there were two main problems, road signs and potholes. He was in particular concerned about the leeway afforded to repairs teams to address nearby potholes.

Councillor Sell asked about staffing problems at Highways. Regarding the proposed pedestrian crossing for Stansted's Post Office, he said this would improve accessibility for customers with disabilities. He said residents in Lower Street and Grove Hill had asked for residents' parking schemes, but that discussions did not seem to have progressed.

Richard Cheetham of Takeley Parish Council said that the parking scheme in Takeley would be improved by confining it to one side of the road. Councillor Cheetham replied that this option had been available at consultation, but that as the scheme was a pilot, feedback on this aspect would be possible.

In reply to questions, Mr Forkin said that contractors responsible for cutting back vegetation were monitored. Regarding repairs to ruts at the side of country roads, he said that it was not intended to widen these roads with repairs, but that in the absence of a structured drainage system, a fixed verge could not be put in place. A question was put regarding the road between Hatfield Broad Oak and Takeley, where the edges of the road were not visible when it had rained. Mr Forkin asked for serious defects to be reported.

The Chairman thanked Mr Forkin.

SWAP46

EMERGENCY PLANNING IN UTTLESFORD

The Emergency Planning Officer gave a presentation on plans to be put in place for the County, District, and Parish Councils to respond to major incidents and disasters. It was important that parish councils produce emergency plans, to link in with the District's Emergency Plan, and he referred to his recent letter to parish councils which enclosed a template to help them in producing such plans. Regarding flooding, he emphasised the importance of self-help in taking precautions where properties were liable to flooding. He said that in emergencies, the District Council could be contacted on the usual number, 01799 510510, in office hours, or 01223 257 455 outside office hours. In reply to a question, he said that it was possible to

see which areas were liable to flooding by entering the postcode on the Environment Agency website.

Councillor Salmon said that Stansted Parish Council had adopted the template Emergency Plan used by Elsenham, which he recommended.

The Chairman thanked the Emergency Planning Officer.

SWAP47

FUTURE AREA PANEL ARRANGEMENTS

The Lead Officer said that Area Panels had been operating for two years, and that they were to be reviewed to see how they could be improved. She said that the input from Highways had been welcome at tonight's meeting, and that an increased multi-agency approach would be useful. She said that a review group had been looking at this aspect, and would publicise new arrangements in May once meeting dates had been set. She wished to encourage people to attend the Area Panels in the future.

Councillor Cheetham said that the Constitution Task Group would put forward its recommendations to the Council. She invited comments on what people would like to see in terms of the future of Area Panels. In reply to a question from Councillor A Dean, she said that initial discussions had been held by a small review group. She said that any issues which Members wished to put forward should be addressed as soon as possible to the Lead Officer. Councillor Lemon asked whether Parish Councils had been invited to contribute. Councillor C Dean was disappointed that there had not been a written report for the Panel's meeting tonight, to allow prior consideration by Parish Councils. Councillor Cheetham said that time constraints had not permitted this to be done due to the meeting taking place earlier in the week.

A question was asked regarding whether the police could be invited to address Area Panels. Councillor Cheetham said that this point had been taken back from all three Panels, and that extensive talks had taken place with the police. In reply to further questions, she said that there were differences in the approach taken by the North Area Panel, which tended to have a theme to each meeting.

Sue Mayer of Little Hallingbury Parish Council said that the police now operated a Neighbourhood Action Panel, which worked well.

Councillor Sell said that as first Chairman of this Panel in 2006, his vision was that it would provide an opportunity for joined-up government, and that it had always been multi-agency to some extent. He agreed that the Panels should evolve, and that it was not necessarily the case that all three Panels would be the same as each other.

SWAP48

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT REPORT

The Panel heard the Lead Officer's report on community development activities and schemes, which was noted.

The meeting ended at 9.15 pm.