

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 4.00 pm on 26 JANUARY 2005

Present:- Councillors J F Cheetham, A Dean, C M Dean, S Flack, R T Harris, M A Hibbs, B M Hughes, A J Ketteridge, R M Lemon and A R Thawley.

Also present:- Councillor S C Jones.

Officers in attendance:- A Bovaird, R Chamberlain, R Harborough, J Mitchell, P O'Dell and P Snow.

SDAG8 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors K J Clarke and V J T Lelliott.

SDAG9 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN FOR THIS MEETING

In the absence of Councillor Clarke, it was agreed that Councillor Harris be appointed to chair this meeting.

SDAG10 NOTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The notes of the meeting held on 24 November 2004 were approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

SDAG11 REVISED PROCESS NOTE

The Chief Executive presented a revised process note, following discussion at the previous meeting, for the Advisory Group's consideration. He said that the note was an attempt to capture the position the Group had now reached taking into account comments previously made by Members.

Members agreed that the note set out the process that might be adopted in relation to particular discussion items quite succinctly and should be adopted for future reference.

SDAG12 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

At its last meeting, the Advisory Group had considered a paper about ways in which priorities for a draft work plan might be set. Officers had been asked to report to this meeting on three themes identified including that of sustainable development.

The Executive Manager (Development Services) had prepared a report summarising advice contained in draft Government Guidance (Planning Policy

Statement 1) about the principle of sustainable development. The advice was biased towards how town planning might ensure sustainability but many of the principles included were considered relevant to the deliberations of SDAG.

At the heart of sustainable development was the simple idea of ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, both now and in the future. The Government had set out four aims for sustainable development in its strategy "A Better Quality of Life, a Strategy for Sustainable Development in the UK". These were:

- Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.
- Social progress which recognises the needs of everyone.
- Effective protection of the environment.
- The prudent use of natural resources.

Planning for sustainable development should ensure that these four aims were tackled in an integrated way, in line with the principles set out in the strategy. The report went on to summarise the matters contained in the Draft Government Guidance about ways in which sustainable development could be achieved.

It prompted a wide-ranging debate about the relevance of these matters to the aim of achieving a better quality of life in Uttlesford. Councillor Flack referred to a recent meeting with the Chief Executive of Countryside Properties which appeared to highlight the different attitude being adopted towards the principle of sustainable development by major development companies. She said that a major challenge within the district would be to enable advice to be interpreted in such a way that new developments could recreate the character of existing settlements and not just produce soulless deserts of new housing.

Councillor Thawley said there were many potential conflicts with perceived national interest in applying government guidance and it was necessary to bear in mind the character and nature of the sort of area Uttlesford was. Councillor Ketteridge was concerned about the danger of repeating past mistakes in guiding future development principles. Councillor Hibbs agreed that some terrible planning mistakes had been made in the past and that these were not just concerned with higher density developments. What was required was a more holistic look at the whole planning process including the adoption of sensible design codes.

Councillor Cheetham thought that it was important to make a distinction between urban and rural areas and, within urban areas, a further distinction between large built up areas and smaller urban areas. She felt that the Government did not sufficiently appreciate this distinction.

Councillor A Dean thought that more reliable socio economic data was needed to help assess the needs of the district. This might help to determine, for example, how much development land needed to be made available.

Councillor Flack said that it was important to avoid the mistake of trying to make each community fully sustainable. This was not a realistic aim as many people enjoyed visiting other places on a regular basis and did not necessarily

wish to stay in one place indefinitely. Councillor Jones said it was important to recognise that the need for a particular type of environment was often driven, on an individual basis, by the stage of life that people had reached.

Councillor Ketteridge agreed that it was primarily diversity that made particular places special and he was worried at the growing trend towards selling back garden space for development. He referred to this as speculative development and thought that it was important for rural communities in particular to maintain sufficient space to present a pleasant environment. Councillor Cheetham said that at least one local planning authority in Devon did not allow the development of large gardens as a matter of planning principle.

The Chief Executive said that Members had made enough interesting comments to build on in seeking to define a suitable sustainable development policy. He referred to the pending appointment of a research officer, jointly with the PCT, and felt that this would help to identify and produce some of the socio economic data referred to earlier. In the meantime, he had asked the newly appointed Strategy and Performance Manager to progress leads with helpful LGA contacts. It was proposed that a lunchtime presentation on this subject would be made shortly. He stressed that this was a huge agenda and would have enormous consequences across the whole area of the Council's responsibilities.

Members recognised that, as a result of adopting this kind of approach, it might become necessary to identify some locations for development whilst maintaining robust policies designed to protect other parts of the district. It was understood that the proposed Local Development Framework would address this issue.

The Chairman summed up the discussion and invited officers to consider all of the matters discussed and come back to the Group with some positive suggestions for ways in which a policy of sustainable development might be progressed.

Action: Officers to prepare appropriate reports for consideration at a future meeting.

SDAG13

ECONOMIC STRATEGY

Economic Strategy was another of the three themes identified for further consideration at this meeting. The Planning Policy and Conservation Manager reported on the need to integrate economic strategy with the Uttlesford 2021 Vision. He referred to the three strategies of the LDF, the District Housing Strategy and its Economic Strategy as probably the most significant of the numerous policy documents to be produced by the Council. They were all considered to be closely interrelated in the sense that jobs, homes, transport and environment were key elements of quality of life and underpinned the crosscutting themes of health and social inclusion.

Some of the key issues were considered to be the provision of housing for workers essential to local economic activity; uncoupling economic growth from

growing demands for transport infrastructure; and the continuing presence of deprivation in generally prosperous areas. The report suggested a number of matters that could feature in an externally focused economic strategy such as an emphasis on Uttlesford as a place to live and commute out to sub regional centres, the district's role in supporting economic dynamism in external centres as well as maximising the potential of the proximity to London, and addressing the opportunities offered by the location of Stansted Airport.

Councillor Hibbs said that, in considering economic strategy, the District Council should adopt a proactive role. He highlighted the example of high tech sites in South Cambridgeshire and the development at Chesterford Park. However, before actively promoting the availability of land for high tech uses, the Council should seek to identify those areas of economic activity it wished to promote.

Councillor A Dean said that the Council had to decide the direction in which the local economy should develop and that it should not be allowed to be dominated by the airport and by commuting activity. Outside agencies should be invited to contribute to this exercise. Councillor C Dean felt it was important to try to match available skills to employers' needs in the area. The Council should not duplicate work already being undertaken and officers should try to discover what work was being carried out in this area already. She referred to a recent survey which had highlighted that more than 20% of the adult population in Uttlesford had difficulties with literacy and numeracy skills.

Councillor Lemon urged that BAA should be incorporated as a partner in any discussion about local employers' needs. Councillor Cheetham said that BAA was already helping to promote businesses important to activity at the airport and all of the work being carried out should be harnessed to achieve a positive outcome.

Councillor Thawley referred to the recent launch of Essex Development and Regeneration Agency (ExDRA) at Audley End and urged the Council to stay engaged with the activities of this organisation. Promotion of the arts and tourism provided another opportunity for the district to generate further economic activity and he referred also to the opportunity provided by the presence of a strong intellectual community in Uttlesford to find a way of utilising available knowledge particularly in the scientific field.

Councillor Flack said it was important to realise that many people, such as herself, who were technically not employed were still engaged in important areas of work. The Council should seek to identify what the local economy needed in order to sustain itself. It might well be that an influx of unskilled jobs was just as necessary as the promotion of highly skilled economic activity. Councillor C Dean agreed and said that, in some ways, the area could be said to suffer from the effects of low unemployment. The Chairman felt there was currently an imbalance of employment opportunities in Uttlesford that needed to be redressed. Councillor Ketteridge said that many local people were reluctant to take low paid jobs because of the impact of the benefit system and as a result cheap labour was imported into the area from Eastern Europe and South Africa. Councillor Flack agreed but said that the

working tax credit system could be used to the benefit of people in lower paid employment.

The Chief Executive confirmed that channels were presently open to ExTRA and the various other agencies operating in the area and the Council should seek to maximise these contacts. The Council needed to examine how it could exploit its location on the doorstep of a world-branded city at Cambridge by taking advantage of some of the high value economic activity taking place there. He felt that the Council should be relatively relaxed about the need to both import and export labour as long as this was contributing to strong economic activity.

The Planning Policy and Conservation Manager urged Members to express what the Council's priority should be so that the officers would be in a position to approach the appropriate agencies for assistance. In summary, the Chairman said that the Advisory Group should now seek to identify ideas by focusing more tightly on what the officers should be asked to do to achieve this aim.

Action: Officers to give further consideration to establishing channels of communication to promote areas of economic activity to be identified in due course by the Advisory Group.

SDAG14

FORWARD PLANNING

Members received a detailed report prepared by the Planning Policy and Conservation Manager about the process of forward planning. At the last meeting, officers had been asked to prepare reports for consideration about how supplementary planning documents could contribute to the development of an overall vision for the district. It was noted that the Environment Committee had now decided to establish two Member/officer working groups, one to steer and monitor the preparation of development plan documents, the second to look at different approaches to preparing site specific guidance.

The Chief Executive said that SDAG was not the appropriate forum for site-by-site debate and should confine itself to looking at wider strategic issues. Members agreed with this suggestion and asked to be kept informed of the Environment Committee's deliberations.

It was noted that Councillor Clarke, who was unable to be present at this meeting, had submitted a detailed response to the officers' Forward Planning paper and this had been circulated to all Members of the Advisory Group. It was felt more appropriate that Councillor Clarke's comments should be referred to the relevant working group. Members agreed that his comments referred to the overall process for arriving at the 2021 Vision and not to the formulation of the vision itself. It was noted that Councillor Clarke had been nominated as one of the three Liberal Democrat representatives on this group.

Action: Officers to refer the report on Forward Planning to the Member/officer working group established by the Environment Committee to consider different approaches to site specific guidance.

SDAG15 **TOWARDS A VISION FOR 2021**

The Advisory Group received a report from the Executive Manager (Development Services) which sought to define a means of achieving a vision for the future of Uttlesford that could be owned by the whole of the district and would underpin and guide all the Council's work. Members recognised that a group already existed in Uttlesford Futures with a remit in this area and that a way needed to be found of providing positive input into this group to foster greater co-ordination of this process.

Councillor C Dean, Chairman of Uttlesford Futures, accepted that it was necessary for the Group to adapt to changing circumstances by adopting a different organisational structure that would incorporate a number of key players in this area.

The Chief Executive referred to the Responsible Authorities Group (RAG) which was made up of a number of different agencies and was proving successful in steering the Community Safety Partnership. He said that Uttlesford Futures could look to follow this model. It was just as necessary to continue to meet the Council's statutory responsibilities as it was to identify a future vision and the organisational structure adopted must reflect this balance. The Council had the opportunity to adopt a joint approach with the PCT that would help towards this process.

Members also referred to the conclusions identified by the Gershon report and said it must be widely recognised that the principles involved applied across the whole of the public sector.

The Executive Manager (Development Services) said that he would prepare some draft thoughts based on the discussion at this meeting for consideration at a future meeting.

Action: Officers to prepare some preliminary ideas for inclusion in a vision plan for 2021.

Councillor Harris was congratulated by Members for the way in which he had chaired this meeting.

SDAG16 **SCHEDULE OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

Members received the following schedule of suggested future meetings:

Wednesday, 16 February 2005 (4.30 pm)
Tuesday 22 March 2005
Wednesday 20 April 2005
Wednesday 25 May 2005
Tuesday 28 June 2005
Wednesday 27 July 2005

All at 4.00 pm unless otherwise stated.

Members noted that the meeting on 20 April coincided with half-term week and that there were potential clashes with other meetings on 25 May and 27 July. The officers undertook to look at the future schedule of meetings with a view to making changes where appropriate.

The meeting ended at 5.50 pm.