

**STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 4.00pm on 22 MARCH 2005**

Present:- Councillor K J Clarke – Chairman.  
Councillors J F Cheetham, A Dean, C M Dean, S Flack,  
R T Harris, B M Hughes, S C Jones, A J Ketteridge and  
R M Lemon.

Officers in attendance:- A Bovaird, R Chamberlain, S Clarke,  
R Harborough, J Mitchell, P O'Dell, P Snow and T Turner.

**SDAG 17 APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor A R Thawley.

**SDAG 18 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

The Planning Policy and Conservation Manager reviewed some of the techniques that had been used in achieving more effective engagement with the public as a stimulus to further discussion. He accepted that obtaining more community engagement would be a considerable challenge. The probable key to success was to concentrate on specific issues and to make sure that feedback was available throughout the process. The report included a list of those consultation methods that had been proven to work well.

The Environment Committee had agreed to work towards producing a statement of community involvement. The intention was to help the general public, including hard to reach groups, to play a greater role in the development of key Council policies. There was a need to give greater emphasis to the community role of district and parish councillors and to make provision for more feedback to be built into the further consultation exercises that would be devised. It was generally recognised that more resources would be needed.

A number of Members agreed that there was a need to involve young people in the development of policy, particularly sixth formers. There was also a need to reach out to places where people went, such as supermarkets and post offices.

More effort should be made to communicate the roles and responsibilities of Uttlesford as there was a widespread lack of understanding of what the Council does. There was a general lack of trust in the political system. Different methods would need to be attempted to overcome this deficit of trust and understanding. According to the Local Government Association, the minimum need for public relations was two members of staff per authority. Consideration could perhaps be given to a repeat of the MORI survey to identify public needs and to help in devising a new strategy for communication.

The Chief Executive said that it was important to continue to strive towards the best available future for Uttlesford and this may involve accepting some unpalatable truths. The Council must work on behalf of the community to achieve the best possible outcome and should not delude itself by sticking to unrealistic expectations. For example, this might involve an acceptance of some areas of major development. There would be a continuing need for external stimulus through a process of continuous dialogue.

Members agreed generally that Uttlesford must not be perceived as a one issue Council by concentrating solely on the disadvantages of Airport development. On the other hand, it was important to continue to explain the consequences for people living in all parts of the District of Airport expansion. However, it was clear that the Council's role in dealing with matters such as the scoping report was restricted by the legal planning process.

It was also accepted that there were severe limitations to the effectiveness of paper-based consultations. Very low levels of response had been received when these types of consultation had been attempted previously.

There was a brief discussion about the distribution and effectiveness of Uttlesford Life. The Chairman said that this had never been seen in Birchanger. Discussions had already taken place about how this could be improved and the Executive Manager (Strategy and Performance) had been asked to explore distribution arrangements.

The Chief Executive summarised as follows how community engagement could be moved forward:

- There must be a properly managed and timetabled process.
- This should be underpinned by regular communication.
- The Council must go to where people are.
- Consultations must be issue based and properly targeted.
- Regular feedback must be provided.
- It must be properly resourced.

Action: Officers to move forward on the lines suggested and to report back, both to this group and to the Environment Committee.

SDAG19

## **TOWARDS A VISION FOR 2021**

The Executive Manager (Development Services) invited Members to contribute ideas towards the development of a vision for the future direction of Uttlesford. These ideas would be fed into the Uttlesford Futures group (LSP).

Councillor C Dean, the Chairman of Uttlesford Futures, said that she felt the LSP had agreed topics and aims but she was not sure that the group had any firm ideas about vision.

The Chief Executive suggested that Members should think about what they wanted for the District in strategic terms. The Leader felt that there was insufficient knowledge about demographic data in Uttlesford. He thought the

gathering of this data should be an essential prerequisite to the development of a strategic vision. It was not possible to measure needs without proper access to this data.

A number of matters were then discussed in detail. These included the need to identify areas of the District for regeneration, the preservation of the best parts of the District, and the importance of securing the economic well-being of the area, including the sustainability of villages and the needs of younger people who were not considered to be well catered for in terms of leisure based activities. Consideration should be given to the development of science-based businesses in the Cambridge sub-region and how that activity could be harnessed to the benefit of Uttlesford.

The Chief Executive thought that the list of suggestions gave the impression of being undisciplined and should therefore be grouped into a series of related themes.

The Executive Manager (Development Services) compiled a list based on the following themes for future consideration and eventual development into an agreed strategic vision:

- Economic
- Social
- Environmental

Action: Officers to develop the above themes into a suggested strategic vision for future discussion.

SDAG20

## **LOCAL FUTURES**

The Executive Manager (Strategy and Performance) spoke about the recent IT presentation about a system that allowed for the mapping of demographic data under a range of different indicators.

The Chief Executive suggested that the Council should negotiate with Local Futures to obtain access to the system for a specified period. The system could then be evaluated with a view to extending the availability of the system if considered to be worthwhile. The use of demographic data would be considered in conjunction with the possible sharing of a researcher with the PCT. This possibility was presently being evaluated.

Action: Officers to pursue the possible use of demographic data mapping as outlined above.

The meeting ended at 6.00pm.