

**STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY GROUP held at THE COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 10.00 am on 6 SEPTEMBER 2005**

Present:- Councillor P A Wilcock – Chairman.

Councillors C A Bayley, C M Dean, M A Gayler, E J Godwin, R T Harris, B M Hughes, S C Jones, A J Ketteridge, R M Lemon, J I Loughlin and A R Thawley.

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

**SDAG33 APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor J F Cheetham.

**SDAG34 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 July 2005 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**SDAG35 ENVIRONMENTAL INDICATORS FOR INCLUSION IN A STRATEGIC VISION FOR UTTLESFORD**

Members were reminded that it had been agreed to consider the identification of environmental indicators at this meeting for inclusion in a strategic document. The Planning Policy and Conservation Manager had prepared a report about the selection of sustainability indicators, based partly on a report by the Audit Commission aimed at developing and recommending one consistent set of indicators for use at a local level that would embrace environmental issues, together with economic and social issues. The report recommended that this should be adopted as a set of core indicators to be developed into the strategic vision. He also referred to the Egan Review, local quality of life indicators, and the local development framework monitoring good practice guide. He suggested that Members would need to decide whether the Audit Commission Report represented an adequate spread of indicators or whether they would need to be supplemented by local indicators.

Members then discussed in some detail the process of deciding which indicators should be identified. It was recognised that a major advantage of adopting the Audit Commission set of indicators was that the Commission proposed to collect and publish information for each of the indicators annually. Councillor Loughlin asked why levels of carbon dioxide emissions were not measured locally. The Policy and Conservation Manager said that locally generated information was more difficult to measure and this was more easily done at a regional level. The Chairman suggested that Members should concentrate on whether information collected would bring any direct benefit to

the process and that regional indicators should be utilised if there was no particular reason to devolve down to a more local level.

A question was also asked about pre-planning advice and the Executive Manager (Development Services) responded that the quality of advice given was a more important factor than the percentage of applications where advice had been sought. It was possible to devise a measure of applications where advice had been given but the notice taken of that advice was an unknown factor.

The Chief Executive generated a discussion about the desirability of securing population settlements of 2,000 or more people as previously identified by Members. This was only important if a particular size of settlement could be identified as the ideal size for the delivery of services including, for example, the provision of schools. Councillor Thawley pointed out that the figures used for those settlements identified in Table A of the report related to entire parishes and did not necessarily represent distinct communities.

The Chief Executive suggested that the Group should concentrate its energies on identifying three blocks of indicators then looking at the targets and actions that would be necessary to produce a strategic vision. The Chairman agreed and said that Members should identify only those indicators that the Council would be able to influence directly and should avoid selecting too many indicators. It was suggested that the nationally used indicators identified by the Audit Commission would provide an ideal starting point. Members suggested a number of additional local factors that could be included in the list. Among these were how best to protect the quality of the built environment, encouraging the use of renewable resources, the reduction of unacceptable light and noise pollution, and the measurement of open space in the district available for public use.

Members were also very aware that the important question of the second runway at Stansted Airport could not be discounted in any consideration of environmental indicators and Councillor Harris was anxious to ensure that limits of light and noise pollution were stated that could not be exceeded without penalty. The Executive Manager (Development Services) said that Members should only be seeking to impose limits on pollution levels that were seen to be reasonable in response to evidence of harm if those limits were to be exceeded. Legal agreements could be made to bring about a reduction in the level of light pollution but this must be balanced against a probable increase in resultant noise. Councillor Harris was concerned about the direct effects on childrens' education caused by excessive noise pollution. The Chief Executive said that the development of planning policy was a matter for the Environment and Development Control Committees to consider and the strategic vision should concentrate on matters of longer-term significance.

Members were also concerned about future difficulties likely to be caused by national and regional shortages of water. Councillor Lemon referred to existing variations in water pressure in the district and Councillor Jones said that farming and industrial requirements must be taken into account. The Policy and Conservation Manager advised the Group that the domestic consumption of water was more significant than industrial use and that it was the responsibility of the Environment Agency to examine the matter of

adequate water availability in the future. This would help to determine how many new residential dwellings could be accommodated at a regional level. Members continued to express concerns about water availability and Councillor Ketteridge pointed out that Government national statistics stated that there would be no additional water supply available for East Anglia. Councillor Thawley was anxious that the Audit Commission indicators should be adopted subject to comments being added about the local use of arterial water collection sources.

It was considered that the optimum size of local settlements needed more thought before a local indicator could be properly developed. The Chief Executive thought that Members should consider seeking public views about such factors as measuring the quality of a local street scene.

The Planning Policy and Conservation Manager referred Members to the supplementary note on local area agreements guidance tabled at the meeting. This referred to the process of building outcomes focussed on the local environment into their local area agreement. The Chief Executive said that the Group would be examining environmental targets at the meeting after next following an examination of social indicators.

Action:- Environmental indicators 22-30 in the Audit Commission Report be adopted, except for the deletion of indicator 25 relating to carbon dioxide emissions, the addition of a reference to business use in indicator 26, and to the amendment of indicator 27 relating to water use to incorporate comments made at the meeting. The local environmental indicators included in Table A of the report would be incorporated where necessary and as amended following this meeting.

The meeting ended at 11.30 am.