

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 10.00 am on 19 APRIL 2006

Present:- Councillor P A Wilcock – Chairman.
Councillors C A Bayley, J F Cheetham, E J Godwin, 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, P Snow and T Turner.

SDAG49 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P Boland, C M Dean, S Flack, M A Gayler, R T Harris, B M Hughes and from P O'Dell.

SDAG50 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2006 were received, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

Councillor Cheetham commented that the reference in the second paragraph to Minute SDAG48 "Developing a Challenging Vision" was meant to convey the contradiction around different methods of providing large numbers of houses in the district and that this would be a continuing problem in years to come.

SDAG51 UTTLESFORD 2021 – THE VISION

The Chief Executive tabled two papers for consideration. The first, entitled "Uttlesford 2021 – The Vision", attempted to capture and develop the main headings agreed by Members at the previous meeting under the themes of "Transport and Accessibility", "Housing", and "Economics and Employment". He asked Members to agree that this paper reflected the wishes of the Advisory Group in developing a final district vision for adoption.

The second paper entitled "Developing the Vision – Where are we? What's next?" highlighted the gaps identified in the draft vision document and attempted to come to terms with the two dilemmas set out in the report relating to the approach to new housing growth and finding a constructive way of meeting the challenge presented by Stansted Airport. The paper went on to explore what further processes could be used to enable the vision document to be presented to Members, adopted and then shared with the whole community.

During the general discussion that followed, Members attempted to identify gaps that appeared in the draft vision and comment upon particular aspects with which they either agreed or disagreed.

Councillor Cheetham referred to alternative energy sources from the use of biomass and naturally grown materials. However, she was not keen on the spread of wind turbines into rural areas. Councillor Loughlin said it was essential to include some provision for the best utilisation of water conservation given the existing pessimistic predictions about drought conditions in the south-east of England.

Councillor Godwin thought there should be some reference to the general health of the population, particularly in the light of the proposed fragmentation of local health services. The Chief Executive commented that the health status of the population should perhaps be detached from the structural changes taking place in primary care trust boundaries.

Councillor Thawley felt it was important to have a clear vision for the natural environment, especially in the context of maintaining the quality of local woodland and countryside.

The Chairman felt that most of the required elements were already incorporated into the draft vision but what was perhaps lacking was a punchy heading or strap line. He suggested something on the lines of a sustainable yet prosperous community.

Councillor Loughlin pointed out that there was little reference in the paper to community safety or to education and training. She conceded that there was a great deal of dependency in this area upon Government policy. The Chief Executive said that the Council clearly did not control the agenda in this area but should continue to try to influence the future direction of education and training provision in Uttlesford.

Councillor Ketteridge was concerned by the reference to the countryside being accessible to all and he felt it should be made clear this did not include the general right to roam beyond the new statutory provisions. He said there was good reason why the public should not have total access to certain parts of the countryside because of the danger of damage to farmland and the threat, for example, to ground nesting birds. The Chairman agreed that the reference should perhaps be tempered by caveats about necessary restrictions to access. However, the Chief Executive strongly took the view that the vision statement should incorporate bold statements of intent although inevitably these would need to be fleshed out with further clarification and detail.

There was general agreement that the document should not imply that there should be totally unrestricted access to the countryside and that this should be flagged up for inclusion within the finished document.

Returning to the subject of education and training, the Advisory Group agreed that a general statement should be included to the effect that education opportunities should be available for everyone and should be tailored towards meeting the specific needs of the district. This could, perhaps, include a reference to lifelong learning.

In concluding this part of the discussion, the Chief Executive said that he would find a form of wording to incorporate references to the health of the population, community safety and education and training.

He asked Members next to turn their attention to the two dilemmas identified in the paper, namely the Council's approach to housing growth in the district and the general role of Stansted Airport within the community. He felt that it would be necessary to hold one further meeting of this Advisory Group to finalise the Council's suggested approach to these two issues before the final vision document could be submitted to the Annual Meeting of the Council on 16 May.

He invited Members first to give consideration to how the Council should tackle the major question of accommodating housing growth within Uttlesford. He said that a serious and well informed discussion was needed, concentrating on the alternative approaches of approving large scale developments in the district or approving a policy that would allow for "pepperpotting" within existing settlements. He said that the paper should focus upon the advantages, rather than the disadvantages, of both of these potential approaches. In this context, it was noted that in the region of 8,000 new houses would have to be accommodated within the district before a new secondary school would become a viable proposition.

It was recognised that the process of finalising the Council's vision document needed to integrate with the process of finalising the Local Development Framework (LDF). The Planning Policy and Conservation Manager outlined the process that the Council would develop in formulating the LDF. This would first involve identifying issues and scoping options and then collating ideas into alternative spatial strategies for the district before identifying the Council's preferred strategy by September for consultation in October this year. The Council would then consult on a range of strategies before identifying a core strategy for final submission.

The Chief Executive acknowledged that there was a genuine dilemma around the accommodation of housing growth in the district and there was an urgent need for the Council to resolve its attitude towards this question. It was likely that a number of other policies would flow from the Council's decisions on the LDF.

In this context, Members referred to the imminence of BAA's announcement of the final masterplan relating to the provision of a second runway. The Chairman acknowledged that not all members of the public in Uttlesford were necessarily opposed to further development at Stansted and the Council's policies would need to focus on what benefits could be derived from the existence of a major international airport within the district.

The Planning Policy and Conservation Manager stated that it was important to submit a sound strategy in the first place as the outcome of the LDF public examination would be binding on the Council. The Chief Executive agreed that a number of consequences would flow from the policy approach to housing growth. Members agreed that it was a key component of the vision statement to agree the Council's approach to the LDF.

The Chief Executive stressed that the Council's approach to growth and future development at Stansted Airport must be credible. The reality was that some growth at the airport was practically inevitable and it was in the Council's interest to plan on the basis of full utilisation of the existing runway. Of course, if permission were to be granted for a second runway then the nature and character of the future policy direction of the Council would alter fundamentally. He said that the worst case scenario for Uttlesford was for permission to be given to the construction of a second runway but that this would not then be built for economic reasons.

The Chairman referred to the effects of housing and planning blight in the district resulting from the Government's policy that a second runway would be constructed by 2014.

The Chief Executive referred to the most recent Member meeting with representatives from BAA and said that a further meeting of the SERAS/Airport Policy Group would be taking place next week. He suggested that statements by BAA about further opportunities for bus and coach travel to and from the airport site could be incorporated into Uttlesford transport policy as a way of obtaining a more effective hub for the development of public transport in the district. However, BAA representatives had indicated that airport related transport would have little direct impact upon the local road network.

The basic dilemma presented to the Council was explained in terms that while the presence and success of Stansted Airport was likely to provide benefits to the district generally, it was equally important to aim for a thriving and diverse local economy that was not wholly dominated by BAA as a single employer. These two points were seen as the key components of the Council's vision statement.

Members next considered the process towards explaining the thinking behind the vision statement and arranging for it to be adopted by the Council. The Chief Executive suggested, and Members agreed, that the process should be as follows:

- A final report submitted to this Group incorporating the comments made at this meeting.
- Submission of the final vision statement to Annual Council on 16 May.
- A Member Workshop in June or July.
- Involve Uttlesford LSP in agreeing and publicising the document and to obtain further feedback.
- Finally, a process of public consultation timed, if possible, to tie in with the Local Development Plan process.

It was acknowledged that, although it was essential to obtain their co-operation, the Uttlesford LSP was not the appropriate body to deliver outcomes arising from the vision policy and that this was largely in the hands of other bodies such as the PCT as well as the District Council. It was agreed that parishes should also be included in the consultation process and that Uttlesford Life would be an appropriate mechanism to consult directly with the public.

It was noted that the concentration of local groups in SSE activities was tending to affect the vitality of other community groups and that urgent efforts would need to be made to identify appropriate local bodies with whom consultation could be carried out.

ACTION: Chief Executive to refine the Uttlesford 2021 vision document for consideration and agreement at one further meeting of this Group to take place on Friday 5 May at 2.00 pm.

The meeting ended at 11.30 am.