

MEETING OF UTTLESFORD FOCUS GROUP-SOUTHERN AREA held at the COUNCIL OFFICES GREAT DUNMOW AT 7.00pm on 14 JANUARY 1999

Present:- Lillian Adams, Richard Eccles, Michael Foster, Craig Hirons, Julia Hirons, Nick Ray, Norman Roads, Barbara Stopher.

Officers In Attendance:- Brian Perkins, Mick Purkiss.

I. **INTRODUCTIONS**

The members of the Focus Group introduced themselves and spoke briefly on why they had put their name forward and what issues were of particular interest to them. The main issues mentioned at this time were the Environment, Recycling, Infrastructure, Aircraft Noise, Public Transport, Schools, Hospitals and Health issues. The group felt that it was important that the work they did would be meaningful and would be taken seriously by the Council. The Group was advised that it was being asked to prepare a report and that it would be presented to Councillors. Some members referred to the work of the Planning Focus Group which had involved different customers of the Planning Service and asked that copies of their Report be circulated to them. The group felt that it was not necessary to appoint a Chairman/Spokesperson at this stage and stressed the importance of team working.

The group then referred to the two principal points raised in the briefing note:

- * What are the important matters that affect your lives?
- * What do you think should be done over the next few years?

I. **ENVIRONMENT**

The term Environment encompassed a wide range of subjects and was of particular concern to the Focus Group. The group considered that it was important to maintain the character of the villages and towns in the district and concern was expressed at the number of homes planned. It was felt that care was needed over the location of new development and the views of the group should be taken into account in the preparation of the District Plan. The group considered that development must be led by plans and not by pressure put on by developers and land owners. Some concern was expressed that currently development takes place and the provision of the necessary infrastructure then follows and forward planning was particularly important. It was recognised that the construction of the new A120 would lead to more sites being built for housing in the district. The group considered that there was a real need to ensure that affordable housing was provided for local people. It was explained that on large developments up to 25% low cost housing could be provided based on the District Plan, but this was subject to negotiation with the developer. In the villages some housing could be allocated for low cost housing for local people on land outside development limits.

I. **RECYCLING**

The group was concerned that the level of recycling in the UK was comparatively poor. Many countries had made recycling economically viable. It was also considered that cardboard should be collected for recycling. The group considered that recycling needed to be made easy and the lead must come from the Council. It was suggested that there could be some financial incentive for taking recycling materials to Civic Amenity sites. It was particularly important that a Civic Amenity site was provided in the Dunmow area. The group noted that land fill sites were reaching capacity and Essex County Council was looking at options, including incineration.

I. **HOUSING**

It was noted that work on the new A120 was due to start in 2001/2. This could increase the pressure for more housing in the District but the Group was advised that, in the short to medium term, sufficient sites had been identified to cope with demand. The group felt that there should be a structure in place to ensure that developers provided/funded infrastructure when starting new developments. Some members of the group considered that parts of Dunmow High Street were in a poor state of repair. It was felt that there should be more control over landlords to encourage them to address the appearance and the upkeep of these buildings.

I. **TRANSPORT**

The group considered that there was a lack of public transport within the District and also a lack of information on public transport timetables and routes. Concern was also expressed at the cost of using public transport. In relation to pedestrians it was mentioned that some of the pavements were in a poor state of repair and often cars were parked indiscriminately causing obstructions. Concern was also expressed at the flouting of car parking restrictions in the town centre and the use of the High Street by large heavy vehicles.

Concern was expressed at the number of road accidents within the district and it was considered that more speed controls and greater enforcement were required. It was suggested that publicity should be given concerning the number of road casualties within Uttlesford.

The issue of car parking was also discussed and it was felt that possible free parking between the hours of 10.00am - 4.00pm could be considered.

I. **EMPLOYMENT**

The group were aware that the unemployment rate in Uttlesford is very low and it was an issue over which the Council had very little influence. It was suggested that details of the age breakdown of those unemployed and the number of school leavers over the next few years should be provided at the next meeting.

I. **LEISURE**

The group were of the opinion that more information was needed for tourists in the Dunmow area. The Dunmow Town Trail needed greater publicity and the signage of tourist attractions needed to be reviewed. Whilst more shops/services were needed to attract tourists, a balance needed to be struck between the needs of tourists and local people. It was considered that there was a need for realistically priced bed & breakfast accommodation, particularly in the Southern part of the District.

In relation to Sport/Leisure facilities it was generally felt that the dual use of the Dunmow Leisure Centre meant that members of the public could not use the facilities during the day. Some members of the group considered that Stansted Airport should be encouraged to provide a Leisure Centre. However, it was recognised that this would be some distance from the main centres of population.

The group considered that it was important to provide facilities for teenagers and the provision of a Drop-in Centre in Dunmow should be supported. It was agreed that details of the arrangements for the Saffron Walden Drop-in Centre would be provided at the next meeting.

I. **COMMUNITY SAFETY**

It was agreed that details of the level of crime and drug abuse in the District would be presented to the next meeting. It was felt that it was important to look at a Community Safety Policy for the future as Uttlesford expands. Crime prevention also needed to be addressed through improved street lighting, CCTV cameras and the improved design of new developments.

I. **OTHER ISSUES**

Time did not permit discussion on the issues of Health, Education and involving the local community. These would be discussed at the next meeting.

I. **GENERALLY**

Members of the Focus Group considered that the meeting had been worthwhile and stressed the importance that the discussions led to constructive action being taken. It was agreed that the next meeting should take

place at 7.30pm on one of the following dates 27 January, 3 or 4 February 1999. Details would be circulated as soon as possible.

The meeting ended at 10.00pm