

COUNCIL held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on TUESDAY, 18 JULY 2023 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor G Driscoll (Chair)
Councillors M Ahmed, A Armstrong, H Asker, S Barker, N Church, M Coletta, A Coote, C Criscione, A Dean, J Emanuel, J Evans, C Fiddy, M Foley, R Gooding, N Gregory, N Hargreaves, R Haynes, P Lees, M Lemon, J Loughlin, T Loveday, S Luck, C Martin, D McBirnie, J Moran, E Oliver, R Pavitt, A Reeve, N Reeve, B Regan, G Sell, R Silcock, M Sutton and M Tayler

Officers in attendance: P Holt (Chief Executive), N Coombe (Interim Legal Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer) and B Ferguson (Democratic Services Manager)

Also present: V Thompson, V Isham and G King (Public Speakers)

C22 ALDERPERSON PRESENTATION

The Chair welcomed former Councillors Cant, Godwin and Morson and congratulated them on their appointments as Honorary Alderman and Alderwomen of Uttlesford District Council. He presented each with a certificate of office for their distinguished service to the public and the Council.

Council showed its appreciation with a standing ovation.

C23 PUBLIC SPEAKING

Vincent Thompson, Vere Isham and Graham King addressed Council.

Councillor Coletta spoke as a member of the public on Item 13, the member motion relating to Railway Ticket Office Closures. He had given notice of an other registrable interest as a member of the Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) Union.

A summary of their statements has been appended to these minutes.

C24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bagnall, Davey, Donald and Freeman.

Councillor Coletta declared an other registrable interest in relation to Item 13 – Railway Ticket Office Closures as a member of the RMT. He said he would

recuse himself from the item and leave the meeting at the relevant time. He had already exercised his right to speak on the matter as a member of the public.

Councillor Evans, in respect of Item 6 and the rivers and water questions, said he owned part of Stebbing Brook.

C25 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 May 2023 were approved as a correct record.

C26 **CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Councillor Asker entered the meeting at 7.20pm.

The Chair listed the ten civic engagements he had attended since the previous meeting in May. He announced his charities for the year, the Uttlesford Dementia Action Alliance and Accuro Stride. He also said he would be fundraising by visiting every ward in the district and invited councillors to join him.

C27 **REPORTS FROM THE LEADER AND MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE**

The Leader provided an update on the Local Government Association conference she had attended and said she had spoken to a number of leaders with airports in their authorities with a view of a more joined up approach to issues such as welcoming incoming refugees. She said volunteers and officers at Stansted Airport had handled the Ukraine and Sudan evacuations magnificently. On planning matters, she said the Council would receive feedback regarding the Planning designation on Friday. Furthermore, she noted the written rivers and waters questions relating to planning policy and said there would be more time to deal with these properly at a session of Local Plan Leadership Group. She also asked members to complete the training survey feedback forms.

Councillor Reeve provided an update on waste services and said there had been a number of glitches of late with waste collections, attributed to past vacancies, getting new staff members up to speed and structural changes relating to where the waste was processed. He said all vacancies, bar one, had now been filled and he was confident that problems with collections would now be resolved going forward.

Councillor Coote provided an update on Reynolds Court and fire safety measures. He said in recent weeks officers had met with the contractor to ascertain how the issues would be fixed. He said the contractor would now trial safety measures on one flat which would be tested by independent experts. The contractor had agreed to complete the works as quickly as possible and a new tester would be onsite by next week. A meeting was also held on Monday to update residents. Once the work had been complete, the fire service would be

notified and the waking watch would be stopped and the contractor would be asked to compensate residents.

Councillor Dean asked to meet with Councillor Reeve regarding the disruptions to the waste collection service. Councillor Reeve said he was always available.

Councillor Sell requested that each Cabinet member produce a written report for Council.

In response to questions from Councillor Barker, Councillor Evans said he was optimistic about the Council moving out of designation following discussions with the peer review panel and further news would be issued on Friday. He said the major application appeal statistics had gone down below the 10% mark and the council was no longer on the "naughty step". In regards to the fee for the Stansted Airport expansion application, he said the fees which would have been incurred had the Council not been in designation was £43,590.

Councillor Gooding requested that the Council inform the Fire Service of the issues with compartmentation at Reynolds Court if they had not already done so.

In response to a question from Councillor Criscione regarding the waking watch at Reynolds Court, Councillor Coote agreed that the contractor should be paying the costs in full.

Councillor Gregory thanked Councilor Coote for his honesty; he said he was disappointed with the written responses to his questions from Councillor Evans

Councillor Emanuel said she was reassured by the independent safety assessments at Reynolds Court but felt the contractor should be held accountable and the council reimbursed for associated costs.

C28

QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER, MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS (UP TO 30 MINUTES)

In response to Councillor Barker's questions of clarification which related to the list of executive responsibilities and the members' bulletin, the Leader said she had discussed the issue with the Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer and the Leader would be responsible for any unlisted functions. She said further information on Cabinet member profiles and listed responsibilities had been issued on social media and the members' bulletin by the Communication team.

Councillor Barker said she had not received the Members' Bulletin.

In response to a question regarding the new evidence base documentation for the emerging Local Plan from Councillor Criscione, Councillor Evans said the Local Plan team would publish the relevant background documentation as soon as possible. He said a Local Plan Leadership Group meeting would take place next week.

In response to a question from Councillor Haynes regarding the commissioning of a landscape sensitivity study and heritage assessment, and whether this was newly commissioned, Councillor Evans confirmed it was and did include details on key views and heritage settings.

In response to Councillor Lemon's question regarding the Youth Council, Councillor Sutton said schools were stretched and circumstances had changed since the pandemic, which in turn required a fresh approach. Meetings were ongoing with schools and she was working hard to support young people in the district.

Councillor Pavitt questioned whether officers asked water companies if the water supply was sustainable when processing major planning applications for new developments. He said the statistics demonstrated that they could not. He asked Councillor Evans to elaborate on what details were available to Planning Officers in this respect. In regards to question eight, Councillor Pavitt said the response given did not answer his question and seemed to demonstrate that nothing had been done since the motion in question was passed in 2021.

In response, Councillor Evans said the Local Plan Leadership Group would be best placed to deal with the water supply details. In regards to planning applications, he said the Environment Agency had intervened in three applications in South Cambridgeshire in relation to allocated sites. He said the Planning Committee Working Group could also look at this issue.

Councillor Gregory said the responses provided did not address his questions; he said the answers were deeply evasive and did not provide the level of detail written questions warranted.

In response, Councillor Evans said he was not being evasive as the matter relied on the readiness of the evidence arising from ongoing water studies. That was the reason for a lack of specificity and as soon as the evidence was available a report would be considered by the Local Plan Leadership Group.

In response to question ten regarding the date of the meeting with the Environment Agency and when members could expect a report, Councillor Evans said the meeting was being arranged by officers and made a commitment to bring a report to members following said meeting.

In response to Councillor Criscione's clarification question regarding further expert advice in order to protect and improve water supply and environmental conditions, Councillor Evans said the advice had been commissioned and a presentation had been given last week at which point the question was asked in respect of a "showstopper" that would impact on the preparation of the emerging Local Plan.

C29

MATTERS RECEIVED ABOUT JOINT ARRANGEMENTS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

No matters were received regarding Joint Arrangements.

C30

PROTOCOL FOR SELECTION OF PANEL MEMBERSHIP

Councillor Oliver presented the report regarding the Protocol for selection of Panel Membership, on the recommendation of the Audit and Standards Committee. He said it would cover three panels; Licensing and Environmental Health Panels, Standards Panels and Appointment Panels. In the event that a Panel was required, officers would establish a pool of eligible and available members and, by default, defer the selection of members to the majority group and main opposition group leaders. There was enough flexibility built into the process to allow either group leader to offer their entitlement to the next largest opposition group. He proposed approval of the protocol.

Councillor Fiddy seconded the proposal.

Councillor Barker supported the proposal but asked to add a line to clarify the position regarding the election of a Chair for each Panel. The Chief Executive confirmed that this could be done.

Councillor Sell supported the proposal and asked that smaller groups be given an opportunity to be involved, as per the recent Appointments Panel meeting.

RESOLVED to adopt the protocol for appointing members to panels.

C31

APPOINTMENT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

Councillor Evans presented the report regarding the appointment of the Monitoring Officer and Head of Legal. He said it had been a competitive interview process and proposed approval of the appointment.

This was seconded by Councillor Barker. She commended the appointment.

RESOLVED to appoint Nurainatta Katevu to the post of Head of Legal and Monitoring Officer effective from a date to be determined by the Chief Executive in consultation with the HR Manager.

C32

APPOINTMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT PERSON

Councillor Lees presented the report regarding the appointment of an Independent Person to act in the matter of a complaint at Standards Hearings. She proposed approval of the appointment.

Councillor Reeve seconded the appointment.

RESOLVED That the council appoints Gillian Holmes to the position of Independent Person under s28(7) of the Localism Act 2011 to act in the matter of a complaint at a Standards Hearing.

MOTION: HGVS AND SATELLITE NAVIGATION

Councillor Barker presented her motion regarding Heavy Good Vehicles (HGVs) and satellite navigation. She said the Government needed to do something in order to prevent HGVs being stuck on byroads and under bridges in rural areas, causing great disruption.

Councillor Gooding seconded the motion.

Councillor Hargreaves had provided notice of an amendment and said the motion could be improved by requiring all HGVs to use specialist satnavs by law. He proposed an amendment as follows:

To remove the following wording:

“This Council therefore instructs the Chief Executive to write to the Government and call on them to work with Satellite Navigation companies and others providing road information to remove By Ways, By Roads and other similar roads from their systems.”

And replace with:

“This Council therefore requests the Chief Executive to write to the Government in support of the Local Government Association call to take urgent action to require all HGV drivers by law to use specialist satnav devices rather than currently only advising that they do. These are widely available devices which include bridge heights, narrow roads, and roads unsuitable for trucks, so that vehicles are only guided along suitable roads.”

Councillor Alex Reeve seconded the amendment.

Councillor Asker spoke in support of the amendment. She said driver error was also a factor in HGVs getting stuck and it was a wider issue than just satellite navigation.

Councillor Pavitt spoke in support of the amendment and said byways should not be removed from all satnavs, as they were used by cyclists, and it would be better to move towards bespoke satnavs for HGVs to resolve the issue.

Councillor Neil Reeve said he supported the sentiment behind Councillor Barker’s motion and something needed to be done.

The Chair looked to take the amendment to the vote.

Councillor Barker raised a point of clarification; she said Councillor Gooding wished to speak on the amendment and should be able to do so.

The Chief Executive said Councillor Gooding could speak on the substantive motion following a vote on the amendment.

The Chair took the amendment to a vote.

The amendment was carried.

Councillor Gooding said he no longer had anything to say since the amendment had been carried. He asked for the Constitution to be reviewed in respect of this matter.

The Chair took the substantive motion to a vote. It was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED:

This Council believes that HGVs using standard car Sat Navs collide with local infrastructure, such as railway bridges, or become stuck on narrow roads, causing major disruption and is costly to local communities. They often take significant amounts of time and resources to free, causing major congestion across the Essex road network generating more emissions and disrupting local rail services.

This Council therefore requests the Chief Executive to write to the Government in support of the Local Government Association call to take urgent action to require all HGV drivers by law to use specialist satnav devices rather than currently only advising that they do. These are widely available devices which include bridge heights, narrow roads, and roads unsuitable for trucks, so that vehicles are only guided along suitable roads.

C34

MOTION: RAILWAY TICKET OFFICE CLOSURES

Councillor Coletta recused himself at 8.27pm and took no further part in the meeting.

The Chair asked members to note the altered motion as tabled by Councillor Sell and asked whether there was any objections to altering the motion. The meeting consented to proceed with the altered motion.

Councillor Sell presented his motion regarding Railway Ticket Office Closures. He said it was important for a human presence to be available at railway stations and cutting jobs would create an environment of “digital exclusion” which would disproportionately affect vulnerable people. He cited a resident who struggled with arthritis and digital screens and who called out such closures as ageist. He urged members to support the motion.

Councillor Dean seconded the motion and said ticket clerks were also vital in ensuring passengers got the best deal.

Councillor Moran spoke in support of the motion and commended Councillor Coletta's speech in the public session. He said the need for a "trained human" was evident in his experience as a police officer who had attended life and death situations at stations. He added that staff were also helpful in directing tourists to the area to Uttlesford's attractions.

Councillor Hargreaves said modernisation was needed and the motion could have gone further, although he supported the sentiment. He said analysis was required to identify customer practices and where staff should be deployed.

Councillor Coote said he would support the motion and the issue was between the workers, the unions and their employers, and consultation should have been undertaken on a station by station basis.

In response to Councillor Asker's comments regarding the need to address the situation in all stations, the Chair said the broader themes raised would be captured in the letter and consultation response.

The Chair moved to a vote. The motion was carried.

RESOLVED:

This Council notes the plans by Greater Anglia to close the ticket offices at Stansted Mountfitchet, Elsenham, Newport and Audley End Railway stations. Therefore, the Council resolves to:

- i. Respond to the consultation expressing our opposition to such closures, and;
- ii. Call on the Chief Executive to write to the Secretary State of Transport, copying in Kemi Badenoch MP, to express opposition to such closures.

The meeting was closed at 8.45pm.

Public Speaking

V Thompson

Mr Thompson spoke on behalf of Stop Easton Park.

He thanked Councillors for their time and effort in regards to the development of the new Local Plan. He said the council had to get it right this time. He welcomed the two questions submitted by Cllrs Haynes and Criscione on process and the resultant clarifications. And he looked forward to clarification on the Council's approach to the 1939 Agreement, as requested by my colleague Andy Dodsley at the Scrutiny Meeting on 22 June.

Key decisions on the draft Local Plan were imminent. He said he wanted to highlight the underlying mission of Stop Easton Park since its formation in April 2017, namely the imperative of preserving large open spaces for the physical and mental wellbeing of future generations, The 2019 assessment of Open Space highlighted the shortage of Open Space in the District as too the heavy reliance on Hatfield Forest. He was pleased to learn that Hatfield Forest was to be excluded from further assessments. But this rendered the shortage of Open Space more acute.

He said that not only was Easton Park a key part of the district's heritage but it also had an important environmental role to play, both through its restoration and as a link to form a Nature Recovery Network connecting Hatfield Forest to Thaxted via Tilty and the Chelmer valley.

He said he understood that houses needed to be built and that UDC was required to build houses. However, this should be achieved without prejudicing a vital asset for future generations. He said UDC inherited responsibility for Easton Park through the 1939 Agreement and confirmed that responsibility in a variation of 2001. Strengthening communities to support the infrastructure needed in small towns and villages, as advocated in The Community Stakeholder Forum, was surely better than destroying a key asset for future generations.

V Isham

Mr Isham urged members to fully support the preservation of the Swift. He said the actions of others had highlighted how a very simple, low cost, special nest box brick could aid Swifts to breed, which was vital as the Swift had been added to the UK's 'Birds of Conservation Concern Red List' and had declined 57% between 1995 and 2017. He said assisting with the provision of nest sites would aid the Swifts recovery. He referenced a number of Swift facts

and said the Government had welcomed the idea but had passed on the responsibility to Local Authorities. He asked members to include the requirement of Swift Bricks in the emerging Local Plan.

G King

Mr King said he had accepted a job at Saffron Hall and moved to Uttlesford because of the rich cultural offer of Saffron Hall and the many other arts organisations in the area. He said he was concerned that the cultural landscape could easily disappear due to a lack of funding, recognition and support. He said there was strong evidence that culture was a key contributor to the health and well-being of the population whilst also contributing significantly to economic stability.

He said it was clear that interaction with arts and culture offered wide-ranging benefits to individuals, communities, and society as a whole. Investing in culture yielded significant returns, not just in terms of economic growth, but also in fostering creativity, cultural enrichment, and social well-being.

He said the council will have received letters in support of Saffron Hall and culture more generally in Uttlesford, which would have highlighted the financial challenges Saffron Hall and other organisations faced.

He asked whether the council believed that local authority investment in culture could have a positive impact on tourism, health and wellbeing and the local economy and that investment in culture could therefore be a solution to many of the challenges faced across the district, whether economic or health related.

Furthermore, he asked whether the Councillors were willing to meet with the authors of the Uttlesford Cultural Strategy to discuss culture in Uttlesford and the future sustainability of cultural organisations in the area.

M Coletta

Councillor Coletta spoke as a member of the public and said he would recuse himself for item 13 – the motion regarding the closure of railway ticket offices, as he had declared a conflict of interest.

He said railway station staff were the custodians of the station, which included taking responsibility for health and safety, revenue collection and customer service. It was an important and dynamic role and they were incident trained to deal with extremely challenging scenarios, such as dealing with fatalities and anti-social behaviour. The railway environment was not straight forward and was open to the elements; it was extremely difficult to prepare for all outcomes and a trained human was required on site to ensure the safety of passengers and the efficient running of the railways. Booking Office Clerks were trained to deal with horrific circumstances, such as deaths on the tracks, and could not be replaced with a machine. He said a human interface was required to deal with the myriad of problems that could arise in such a dynamic and challenging environment.