

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at ZOOM on TUESDAY, 19 JANUARY 2021 at 7.00 pm**

Present: Councillor N Gregory (Chair)  
Councillors A Coote, C Criscione, A Dean, G Driscoll, P Lavelle, G LeCount, G Sell and J De Vries

Officers in attendance: R Auty (Assistant Director - Corporate Services), C Edwards (Democratic Services Officer), G Glenday (Assistant Director - Planning), J Pine (Planning Policy/Development Management Liaison Officer), A Webb (Director - Finance and Corporate Services) and M Wilson (Energy & Climate Change Manager)

Also present: Councillors L Pepper (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Green Issues), N Reeves (Portfolio Holder for the Economy and Investment), J Evans (Portfolio Holder for Planning and the Local Plan)

**SC47 PUBLIC SPEAKERS**

Ms Tealby-Watson, a resident from Great Chesterford, said she was concerned with the problems at the Planning Committee meeting to consider the Stansted Airport application. The recording at the meeting had failed and approval of the minutes had been delayed, which highlighted a breakdown of procedures and meant the decision notice was issued before the minutes were finally agreed.

Her key questions were as follows:-

- Clarification on the steps that were taken once it was realised that the recording had not worked.
- Why there was such a long delay to agree and publish the minutes.
- An understanding of the steps taken to rectify the problem, especially due to the reliance on technology caused by the pandemic situation.

Ms Tealby-Watson said how important it was that record keeping was pristine and the minutes were taken and circulated quickly to avoid misunderstandings and disputes. She said this was critical to the smooth running of the Council.

Councillor Merifield said the Planning Committee meeting in question was on the 24<sup>th</sup> January 2020 and that notes were taken by a Democratic Services Officer and a Legal Officer. She wanted it to be clear that there was no dispute within the Planning Committee about what was said on the day or regarding the decision taken. Members had wanted more detailed minutes because of the sensitivity of the subject and the lack of a recording. She said that Scrutiny should look in more detail at the queries that had been raised. She also wanted it to be understood that no one knew until after the meeting that it had not recorded.

Councillor LeCount explained that the technology had failed on the day with both the broadcast and the recording. He said that a new system had been implemented and was working well. He said he had worked with the Manager of Democratic Services to resolve the problem and to ensure that this would not happen again.

Ms Tealby-Watson asked for a report to be written to explain what had gone wrong. She said that pen and paper notes should be taken as a further back up to the new system.

The Assistant Director, Corporate Services said that notes were taken.

The Chair summarised:-

- The system had failed in a way that had not been anticipated.
- The Covid situation caused an extended delay to Planning Committee meetings and therefore had delayed the approval of the minutes.
- Assurances had been made that this would not happen again.
- Detailed handwritten notes were taken at each meeting.
- There was an evidence trail which showed the minutes were an accurate record of what took place.

The Chair, Councillor LeCount and Councillor Merifield agreed to undertake a report.

The Chair thanked Ms Tealby-Watson for her contribution.

#### SC48 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies were received from Councillor Jones.

#### SC49 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2020 were approved and would be signed by the Chair as a correct record at the next opportunity.

The Chair explained that at the last meeting he had thanked Officers for transforming the financial situation but had forgotten to include Assistant Director – Corporate Services, he asked for this to be reflected in the minutes. There was general consent from members.

#### SC50 **RESPONSES OF THE EXECUTIVE TO REPORTS OF THE COMMITTEE**

Councillor Reeve set out the details of the Economic Development Recovery Plan which he said would be integrated into the Climate Change agenda and reflected in the emerging Local Plan. The report was supported by Cabinet on the 24<sup>th</sup> November 2020 and approved by Full Council on the 8<sup>th</sup> December 2020 but had been impacted by the pandemic.

He had been asked to come up with performance indicators and measurable goals which were included in a framework for activities aimed at businesses and residents. There was a £1m budget over 3 years.

He explained that there were four main work themes and that each of these would have a breakdown of current, planned and additional activities as well as the resources required.

The themes were:-

1. Business engagement and support
2. Information and advice guidance
3. Skills and training
4. Creating jobs and inward investment

In the short term two Officers had worked on allocating the Covid 19 Essex Business Adaptation Grant and the Social Media Training which included the 'Click Local Uttlesford' initiative. The team had also set up their own Service Plan and evidence of performance indicators to monitor the progress of the Economy Recovery Action Plan. This document will be used to prepare the Recovery Plan media update.

He also mentioned that there were two proposals with the Cambridge University Judge Business School which related to economic development. The proposals related to new businesses for Uttlesford and the green economy in Uttlesford. Teams of students had worked on a project for a month to produce practical results. Councillor Pavitt had also submitted a proposal regarding Uttlesford's water issues and Councillor Reeve hoped that one or more of these would proceed.

Councillor Reeve asked the committee to join with him to thank everyone who had taken part in the development of the Recovery Plan.

Councillor Sell offered his help, and asked what the status of the group was in terms of finance and resources he said it was important to make an impact on businesses. He was impressed that the team were proactively contacting businesses to offer help.

Councillor Reeve said that help for businesses was critical. The outcome of the grant applications had highlighted that the full range of businesses in Uttlesford were not known. These unknown businesses which were not on the Business Rates register were being recorded and contacted with the offer of help and resources. The team was made up of 2 people. There was also recruitment underway.

Councillor Sell asked that future meetings were updated with further progress to help raise the understanding and profile of the team and to be passed onto the wider community through members.

Councillor Dean asked whether the Council could employ some people who had lost their jobs from the airport and elsewhere. He had noticed that the district was untidy, with litter and leaves as well as street furniture that looked very tired. He thought the Street Services team would benefit from additional resources to help tidy up the district ready for the summer and easing of restrictions and to provide employment.

The Assistant Director – Corporate Services said he would pass this on to the Environmental Services team.

Councillor Lavelle praised the Economic Development Recovery Team for proactively contacting businesses to advice on what support was available and said he recognised the effectiveness of the department.

The Chair and the Committee commended and thanked Councillor Reeve and the team for their outstanding work with limited resources; they had set clear objectives that were reported on and achieved.

## SC51 **CABINET FORWARD PLAN**

Councillor Dean wanted assurances that the annual refresh of the Corporate Plan would be more up-to-date than this time last year.

The Assistant Director – Corporate Services said this would be included at the Scrutiny meeting on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2021 along with the budget and would then go to Cabinet on the 9<sup>th</sup> February 2021.

Councillor Criscione said the Delivery Plan was more important and fundamental to the role of this committee. The Chair agreed and said the Corporate Plan Delivery Plan was very important and asked if a draft could be seen before the April meeting.

The Assistant Director – Corporate Services said that this was an initial top level Corporate Plan and the Delivery Plan would be brought to a future meeting.

In response to a question from Councillor Criscione, the Assistant Director – Corporate Services said he would feed back that the Corporate plan item on the Cabinet Forward Plan did not have a Portfolio Holder's name with it.

Councillor Sell said it was the Scrutiny Committee's role to support, to help and inform. He said there had been big issues with the Corporate Plan Delivery Plan and asked that it be circulated in good time before the start of the financial year.

Councillor Pepper said the Corporate Plan Delivery Plan was being refreshed and worked on through the Cabinet working groups. It would then go to Officers for comments. She would pass on the comments made at this meeting.

Councillor Coote said that the administration understood that before any decision was made, it needed to be considered by the Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Reeve said that he was the responsible person as the Portfolio Holder for the Corporate Plan and Delivery Plan. He thought the Corporate Plan would be a month ahead of the Delivery Plan; and that there was a great deal of work to prepare for both.

## SC52 **UPDATE ON PLANNING RELATED STUDIES**

The Chair said there were 3 studies that had been temporarily stopped due to Covid related issues and to reduce the burden on Officers.

Councillor Criscione as the Chair for Planning Obligations Task and Finish Group said he was very keen to progress this report. The report was due at the March Scrutiny meeting.

Councillor LeCount as the Chair of the Major Planning Applications Task and Finish Group said the group needed 2 new members as Councillor Loughlin had stood down. Councillor Criscione said that Councillor Lemon would be interested and said he would speak to him.

Councillor Dean questioned whether it caused a problem for there to be a representative from the Planning Committee on the task and finish group as they would be scrutinising their own work. He thought there should be some representatives that were not from Planning.

The Chair said this had been discussed at the time of setting up the task and finish group, and as the group looked at the earlier processes of applications and their progression before they went to the Planning committee this had not posed a problem. The Assistant Director – Corporate Services agreed with the Chair's summary.

Councillor LeCount said the PAS report would be signed off by the end of January and brought to the next scrutiny meeting.

In response to a question from Councillor Dean, the Assistant Director – Corporate Services explained that the task and finish group had been formed earlier than necessary. The Scrutiny Committee would receive the report first, decide what actions needed to be taken and these would then be passed to the task and finish group.

The Chair thought the Airport related parking task and finish group would be busy once the pandemic restrictions were eased.

Councillor Driscoll said they had not been as busy due to much lower levels of unauthorised parking. He said the Manchester Airport Group (MAG) had agreed with the Council to provide funds for zoning and resident permits. The local equivalent of North Essex Parking would remove cars and would take the proceeds as their part of the deal.

Councillor Driscoll said they were working on preventing pavement parking and the relevant legislation required. It is only an offence in London to be parked on the pavement, although if a vehicle had caused an obstruction this could be treated differently.

Councillor Dean said he thought there should be an interim report by now to plan ahead for problems. The air traffic will increase once Covid restrictions were relaxed and this would drive up parking costs in the airport and mean that even more cars could be parked in the district.

Councillor Sell said he had met with the Operations Manager of the North Essex Parking Partnership who was awaiting legislation from government to prevent pavement parking.

Councillor Driscoll agreed that the plans were with the Transport Select Committee, he said it would be countrywide but thought that villages could apply to be exempt.

Councillor Coote said the driving force behind people parking in the district was the airport and the high parking charges. He thought that the airport needed to take responsibility.

Councillor Driscoll said he would take this up with the airport at their next meeting.

## SC53 **UTTLESFORD CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY**

*The meeting was adjourned at 8:12pm and reconvened at 8:22pm.*

Councillor Pepper introduced the item; she responded to Councillor Dean's point about litter in the district. There were staff shortages at the Waste Depots due to the pandemic but she had set up initiatives and encouraged green champions in the local community to pick up litter and address this issue.

She introduced both reports and thanked all those who helped getting the documents ready. The Climate Change Action plan had set out a clear robust carbon reducing time frame with key objectives and actions. This report was the first of 2 reports, and the key objective was to make a complex subject easy to follow for all residents of any age so the wider community could support the net zero carbon target.

The second part would have all 5 key objectives:-

- Air Quality
- Transport
- Biodiversity
- Energy/Waste
- Planning and Development

It would also include lobbying in a tabled 5 to 10 year plan with measurable targets and actions which were being worked on. It would need to be proof read and checked by Officers before going to Cabinet on the 9<sup>th</sup> February 2021.

She explained that the pandemic had helped with some key climate objectives e.g. working from home, more cycling, walking and support for the local shops. She hoped this would be a long term behavioural change. The Climate Change interim policy document would indicate to developers the Council's commitment to reaching the net zero carbon target. She said Uttlesford District Council would be more likely to approve planning applications from developers who were serious about mitigating the impact of climate change.

In response to a question from Councillor LeCount, Councillor Pepper said the amendments would be made by the Cabinet meeting on the 9<sup>th</sup> February 2021.

Councillor Pepper said it would be published in two parts with milestones and time frames. She was unable to give an exact date as it would need to be sent to Officers, she wanted it to be a democratic process and therefore it would also need to go back to the community and working groups.

Councillor Dean said that the first document was an attractive leaflet but wanted more details on what the Council planned to do. He said otherwise it gave the impression that it was all down to the public to make the changes. He proposed that the second document was launched at the same time so that there was more detail of the Council's intentions.

The Climate Change Manager said he also wanted to get the document out as soon as possible and build on existing actions. One of the key partners to take into consideration was Essex County Council (ECC) they had produced their interim report but he was waiting for their action plans as these would feed into the Council's plans.

He said the other factor for consideration was the Environmental bill which was due in late spring and would also feed into Uttlesford's strategy; with key elements related to Planning and Waste. He said there were actions and schemes that were on going and would also form part of the new strategy.

Councillor Dean said he thought there could be an interim action plan published that set out what the Council was committed to do. It would send a strong message that the Council was not just waiting for others before action was taken. It could then be updated when ECC and the Government had produced their reports.

The Chair agreed and said there was not much being implemented in the next few months that would produce results.

Councillor Pepper explained the difficulties as it was an evolving and constantly changing document. She said there had been no funding until September and the ECC interim document had also been published and needed to be taken into account. Other factors related to the pandemic which had stopped the take up of some grants and caused uncertainty about companies being allowed into houses and whether work could be carried out.

Councillor Sell said it was now 2 years into this administration and he was not clear who set the objectives and how the funding was being monitored. He suggested that there was a role for someone to be going into schools to educate students.

Councillor Pepper said that they would have a dedicated climate expert to look at how the funds were spent and unfortunately at the moment schools were shut so it was more difficult to complete all the objectives. She said it would be promoted through the Youth Council with video clips and she had already forwarded details of the Green Champions to Parish and Town councils. She also hoped to secure a monthly feature with Broadcast. The intention was for another part time member of staff to be recruited to work only on Climate Change.

Councillor Coote said he was concerned about the term 'key partners' in relation to ECC and Central Government he felt it was not accurate as they were not collaborative partners. He thought care was needed to ensure the Council was pushing these 'partners' rather than waiting for them to act.

He explained that the Committee was not criticising but scrutinising; it was important to make these points that may otherwise be missed.

He picked up on Councillor Sell's point and said the new administration had followed the previously set budget in the first year and had only now been able to set a new budget with £3m for the green issues. He said the conversations in the meeting needed to be fair and balanced.

Councillor Pepper said she had good communication and meetings with ECC especially in relation to cycling, reduction of speed limits, street lighting and pavement.

She said she had also been in touch with Councillor Gooding to ask Essex College to provide different courses to fill skill shortages e.g. plumbing, installation of heat pumps and solar panels and to ask the hotels in the area to offer accommodation and food for these courses to encourage sustainable employment.

In response to a question from Councillor LeCount who suggested sending the brochure to Uttlesford residents, Councillor Pepper said that the objective was to save paper.

The Assistant Director – Planning explained that it was not a brochure but the actual strategy, which would be backed up by a more detailed action plan. He said they would be working towards an interim document and reiterated that it was a live document which would be available for scrutiny every 4 months.

The Chair said it needed to show deliverables and specifics and asked when this would happen.

The Assistant Director – Planning said the draft action plan had been providing measurable outcomes, but then funding had been allocated and there were new elements of the action plan that needed to be considered. He said there was not the technical knowledge in house and external help would be required to get the best results.

The Chair suggested and it was agreed that this action plan was brought back to Scrutiny in 3 months' time.

Councillor Driscoll suggested publishing in the newspapers in the letters section. Councillor Pepper said they could advertise and would consider this as it would save paper.

The Chair asked for permission for the meeting to continue at 9:00pm. The Committee agreed.

Councillor Criscione said he was part of the working group and could think of little to argue with in terms of objectives. He reserved the right to speak later on the detailed action plan and asked for it to be bold and innovative.

Councillor Pepper said it would deliver on many targets, but it was an investment and would take time.

The Chair said he was looking forward to this item coming back to the Committee in the future with deliverables, performance indicators and measurable achievements.

SC54

## **INTERIM CLIMATE CHANGE PLANNING POLICIES**

The Assistant Director - Planning said this was an interim policy and a means of influencing developers to ensure that they understood the Council was serious about the measures it wanted to take in terms of climate change.

In response to a question from Councillor Criscione, the Assistant Director - Planning said it was effective and would form Council policy. He said it showed how serious the Council was in terms of climate change and it was a real opportunity for members to be involved in large developments at the pre-application stage. He thought the document was a very valuable way to raise these points with developers earlier on in the process.

Councillor LeCount said it was a fabulous document and asked when the Planning Committee would be able to start implementation of the principles. The Assistant Director - Planning said it would be formally agreed by Cabinet on the 9<sup>th</sup> February 2021 and endorsed as Council policy. He said that in fairness to developers it should not be used for a few months but some of the points could be raised in future planning meetings.

Councillor Dean said it was an effective document. He thought the plan for every new house to have 5 trees would be difficult to implement and dependent on the size of garden. He asked if a policy could be adopted whereby every tree which was taken down could be replaced by 3 or 4 others. The Assistant Director – Planning said it was difficult to work out a formula for this and thought that if 5 trees were not possible then a contribution to trees in other areas could be requested. This was difficult however because account had to be taken of the on-going maintenance.

Councillor Pepper added that the trees also needed to have protection.

In response to a request by Councillor LeCount the Assistant Director – Planning agreed to circulate to all members, as well as the Developer Forum and Planning Agents. He also said that ECC had endorsed the document.

## SC55 **WORK PLANNING INITIAL DISCUSSION**

The Assistant Director – Corporate Services said due to the pandemic this had not been carried out with the usual amount of detail last year. He had received a document from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny with a methodology for work planning which had worked well in other authorities. He suggested that members think about what the priorities would be for this year; to list and then score them and the top priorities would then be taken forward. He said this would need to be worked on outside formal committee time and he would send out more information.

*Meeting ended at 9:25pm*