

**Councillor Richard Freeman,**

**Portfolio Holder for Council and Public Services**

**Full Council report - 19 July 2022**

## **COMMUNITY HUBS:**

All four UDC Day Centres were closed in 2020 because of the Covid pandemic. Three of these have now re-opened, as “Community Hubs” providing a range of facilities and services for their local population. They operate on a different business model to the former Day Centres, which were dependent upon a supporting staff from UDC. The new Community Hubs are run largely by volunteers, but with occasional financial support from UDC in the form of one-off grants.

The Stansted Community Hub is run by Stansted Mountfitchet Parish Council and located in a building which it owns. UDC has very recently made a grant to upgrade some of the facilities (mainly kitchen and toilets) when the day centre was recommissioned as a community hub.

Thaxted Community Hub is run by a newly formed Community Interest Organisation. Again, there are no staff paid for by UDC but we own and maintain the building.

The Community Hub in Great Dunmow is the least changed compared to its pre-Covid identity as a day centre. Like Thaxted, the building is owned and maintained by UDC, but it is run exclusively by volunteers. It continues to provide a similar range of services to locals as the former day centre.

The one Day Centre which has not been re-imagined or reopened is Saffron Walden. There are no premises available for a Community Hub – although there are several which are potentially suitable, particularly the Garden Rooms in Jubilee Gardens, where the former Day Centre was located. It is owned by UDC; currently empty and unused and has been since it was closed at the start of the Covid pandemic. In its current darkened state it is something of an eyesore, and projects a negative image of council-owned public property. The Jubilee Gardens in which it is located are heavily used by townsfolk and are owned and carefully maintained by Saffron Walden Town Council (SWTC).

SWTC has submitted a detailed proposal to run a re-imagined Community Hub in the centre of Saffron Walden. This would be very similar to the Thaxted, Great Dunmow and Stansted models. Run by volunteers and SWTC staff it would draw upon the model which works very well at Cornell Court (a commercial “assisted living” complex on the outskirts of the town).

SWTC has repeatedly requested permission to use the Garden Rooms to provide these services to the community, as have the local MenCap, Alzheimer’s Society and the Parkinson’s Society amongst others. Thus far these requests have always been refused, quoting the need for alternative uses. However, the rooms remain empty and unused, something of a blight on Jubilee Gardens and a poor reflection on UDC.

The SWTC proposal will be considered by Cabinet and Council in the near future, so hopefully the Garden Rooms will soon be usefully employed again, to the benefit of the community. Saffron Walden is the largest town in Uttlesford, with an estimated population of around 19,000 inhabitants, so a functional Community Hub in the town centre should be an immediate success

I append a more detailed report of the three functioning Community Hubs from the officer, David Toombs, who with Fiona Gardiner has been closely involved in their re-imagining and reopening post-Covid.

## **CAR PARKING**

An in-depth review of our car parks and how they are run is being carried out by a specialist firm ("Parking Matters"). It is funded by NEPP and will report in August.

## **TICKET MACHINES:**

Towards the end of 2021 we replaced most of the Cala coin-operated ticket machines with card-only machines made by IPS (a USA-based company). This choice was based on the advice and experience of the North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP) with whom we partner for on-street parking and to which we sub-contract the management of our off-street parking.

The original Cala coin-operated machines date from 2003 and were past the end of their useful life.

The ticket machines in the Fairycroft Car Park in Saffron Walden are the only ones in the district which now accept coins (in addition to cards).

This adoption of card-only machines was brought about by the repeated break-ins to our cash machines. Breaking into a Cala ticket machine requires specialist knowledge, and the criminal must "go equipped" for the crime. The machines contain an armoured vault and gaining entry to this requires specialised knowledge and custom-made equipment. At least £7,500 in cash was lost, and each damaged machine costs around £1000 to repair. We suffered break-ins to nineteen of our Cala machines, at which point we elected to replace them with card-only units on a trial basis.

The transition to card-only machines was initially smooth but ran into difficulties a few months ago. The IPS machines started to refuse card payments. The manufacturers blamed this on the banks changing their security systems; the banks denied all responsibility. Up to one in five transactions were being refused, which is very frustrating for the customers.

An *impasse* formed between the manufacturer (IPS), the NEPP and the banks. Neither the officers responsible for parking in UDC nor I could make any headway towards a solution, and we have handed the matter over to our Chief Executive for resolution. The Chief Executive has established that this problem is not unique to

Uttlesford; the random non-acceptance of bank or credit cards is extant across Essex and beyond.

After much persuasion, the manufacturers, IPS, have accepted they have a problem. They have a deadline to fix it, which expires on the 8<sup>th</sup> of July.

## **AIRPORT AND FLY PARKING**

We are working with NEPP and several householders near the airport to reduce the incidence of inconsiderate or illegal parking in residential areas. There are essentially two – and only two – options available through the NEPP for controlling unauthorised parking; one is to apply time restrictions (for example, half-hour in the middle of the day). The other is to introduce Residents Parking, which requires *bona fide* residents to purchase yearly permits.

Neither is completely satisfactory, but no system is. The problem is exacerbated by the very high cost of airport parking; it makes the fine for a parking offence an attractive alternative to paying the high cost of on-airport parking. I am exploring options for “uplifting” offending vehicles, but I do not expect NEPP to support this fairly draconian measure.

With the NEPP, we are improving “junction protection” where inconsiderate parking is a safety issue. This is especially the case in the estates around Takeley.

In collaboration with the National Trust, we have also greatly improved the protection of the soft verges around Hatfield Forest. During the Covid epidemic these were suffering from damage from vehicles left by dog-walkers using the Forest.

This exercise has been a success. One of the NEPP officers stated:

“We have not received any other negative feedback, including our own enforcement teams.

I believe that the scheme has had exactly the desired effect, controlling the sporadic, and often obstructive parking which used to occur, maintaining the access required to the area and specified points such as the gateways onto Forest land.

We have had to arrange small repairs to some of the lines, however this was expected given the time of the year that we had to introduce the scheme.

I think it’s an excellent example of the collaborative work that we have engaged in.

The “other negative feedback” refers to that from an individual who used to park across the emergency access points to the Forest. It no longer happens, because to do so now incurs an automatic and significant fine.

## **WASTE MANAGEMENT**

The move to Little Canfield of our waste collection teams has gone well, and the staff appear satisfied with their new facilities and location. Weekly domestic waste collections are working as normal, but I am working with the lead officer to make “exception” collections easier to arrange and manage. This is “work in progress”, to be reported to Council if we can make worthwhile improvements to how we manage “one off” collections and removals (for example, of fly-tipped materials).

**Cllr Richard Freeman**  
**Portfolio Holder for Council and Public Services**  
**7<sup>th</sup> July 2022**

## **APPENDIX**

### **Day centre highlight report. 6/7/22**

**Author: David Toombs**

Three of the district's former day centres are currently open and delivering services to residents and supporting partner organisations. Stansted is currently the only one offering the provision of food but there are plans for both Thaxted and Great Dunmow to offer the services in the future.

#### **Stansted Day Centre**

The centre is managed by Stansted Parish Council with "Touch Point" (a volunteer organisation) being the lead provider delivering the services and programmes.

Stansted originally request in excess of £40K grant support which included knocking through a wall and the refurbishment of toilets. The budget available for grants 21/22 could not exceed 45K in total so we agreed to part-fund the initial request to the sum of £22k.

The budget available in 22/23 will allow for further grants applications if deemed applicable. This will be communicated to all centres in September.

Touch Point deliver a number of essential and beneficial services at the Community Hub including the provision of food every (Thursday and Friday), bereavement cafes, free food distribution, strength and balance services and mental health support.

Stansted Community Hub has now received £22,000 of funding from UDC. This is most of a £26,060 sum agreed for the current financial year. It is being spent on capital items of kitchen equipment, refurbishment of the kitchen area, an upgrade of the ventilation system, and a new floor.

#### **Rowena Davey Community Hub**

The Great Dunmow Community Hub is based in the Rowena Davey Centre and delivers in excess of 15 activities each week which includes a weekly dementia café. Funding has been ring-fenced for the Rowena Davey Centre to support the provision of food and any improvements that need to be made to the current centre. Unlike our other two community hubs, the Rowena Davey Centre remained open with regular activity and has retained many of the functions prior to the pandemic (apart from the provision for food).

## **Thaxted Community Hub: “Pam’s Place”**

“Pam’s Place” is managed by a new Community Interest Organisation. (CIO). This consists of a largely volunteer team, including some of those involved in the Thaxted Day Centre pre-Covid.

Thaxted Community Hub has received £22000 funding to support initial set up and running costs. The centre is now open and delivering activities including a “Dementia Café” and Ukrainian support group. They are planning to provide food on a Wednesday & Thursday and are just waiting for relevant food hygiene inspections etc.

The funding has been used to re-upholster chairs, provide hygiene and safety equipment for staff and volunteers, and upgrades to kitchen equipment. A significantly improved floor has been installed, and much-needed decoration carried out. There has also been investment in training and systems for cash handling.

**Report Author: David Toombs**  
**5<sup>th</sup> July 2022**