

Minutes

Council Meeting



17th December 2007

Present:

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
J E Abbott	Yes	E R Lynch	Yes
M J Banthorpe	Yes	M Lynch	Yes
Miss L Barlow	Yes	D Mann	Yes
J Baugh	Yes	T McArdle	Yes
Mrs J C Beavis	Yes	N G McCrea	Yes
D L Bebb	Yes	J McKee	Yes
K E Bigden	Yes	H J Messenger	Yes
E Bishop	Yes	A M Meyer	Apologies
R J Bolton	Apologies	R G S Mitchell	Yes
G Butland	Yes	Mrs J M Money	Yes
J C Collar	Yes	Lady Newton (Chairman)	Yes
Ms C J Denise	Apologies	J P O'Reilly-Cicconi	Yes
M Dunn	Yes	Mrs R O'Shea	Yes
Mrs E Edey	Yes	Mrs J A Pell	Yes
J G J Elliott	Yes	R Ramage	Yes
Dr R L Evans	Apologies	D M Reid	Yes
A V E Everard	Yes	D E A Rice	Apologies
J H G Finbow	Yes	W Rose	Yes
Ms L B Flint	Apologies	Mrs C Sandbrook	Apologies
T J W Foster	Yes	Mrs W D Scattergood	Yes
Mrs B A Gage	Yes	Mrs J W Schmitt	Yes
M G Gage	Yes	A F Shelton	Yes
Mrs M E Galione (Vice-Chairman)	Yes	Mrs L Shepherd	Yes
J E B Gyford	Yes	Mrs G A Spray	Yes
N R H O Harley	Yes	F Swallow	Yes
Mrs S A Howell	Yes	Miss M Thorogood	Yes
P J Hughes	Yes	S M Walsh	Yes
D L Hume	Yes	R G Walters	Yes
M C M Lager	Yes	R N Wilkins	Yes
S J Lambourne	No	T S Wilkinson	Yes

The Chairman welcomed all Councillors and members of the public and press to the meeting, and drew attention to the evacuation procedure in case of an emergency, and the need for Members to use the microphones as the meeting was being webcast.

The Chairman also referred to Councillor Rice, who she had seen recently, and reported that he was looking very well. She was also please to welcome back Councillor Mrs Howell to the Council meeting, following her period of ill health.

62 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman referred to the lists of engagements carried out by herself and the Vice-Chairman since the last meeting.

Members were advised that Mid Essex Primary Care Trust (PCT) had reopened discussions regarding Braintree Community Hospital, and are keen to consult with representative groups. The PCT had arranged a drop-in session between 10.00am-3.00pm on Wednesday 16th January 2008, and an evening event on Thursday 17th January 2008. As the evening function coincides with a Braintree Local Committee meeting the Council are liaising with the PCT to arrange a presentation for Members.

Post Meeting note:- A Member Seminar has been arranged for Monday 21st January 2008, at 7.15pm, at Causeway House, Braintree.

63 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The following interest was declared:-

- Councillor S M Walsh declared a personal interest in Agenda item 5(c) – District of Tomorrow Debate – ‘A Vision for the Braintree District’ as he is a member of Essex County Council and member/Chairman of Essex Fire Authority in the context of PACT and the Local Area Agreement.

Unless stated otherwise, all Councillors remained in the meeting.

64 **MINUTES**

DECISION: That the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 5th November 2007 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to apologies for Councillor A M Meyer being recorded.

65 **QUESTION TIME**

INFORMATION: There were no questions asked or statements made.

66 **DISTRICT OF TOMORROW DEBATE**

INFORMATION: The Chairman outlined the process that she would be adopting for the debate, as set out on the paper tabled in front of Members. The Chairman invited the Leader of the Council to open up the District of Tomorrow Debate.

The Leader advised that the debate usually links with the budget debate and is earlier this year as the next two years are challenging for Local Government generally and for the District Council, who are coming to the end of their four years of ‘Directions, Ambitions and Priorities’ and, in early 2008, are to agree the new ‘Directions, Ambitions and Priorities’ for 2008 – 2012, and this debate will feed into that process.

In terms of 'Directions and Ambitions' it is proposed to retain the four existing ones and add a further two emphasising on

- (1) The issue of enterprise and encouraging enterprise– and the local authority to become more proactive in this area, and
- (2) The development of Civic Pride, and the involvement of people in their local communities.

Other challenges for the District are linked to the rapid changes throughout Essex with a number of moves, some inspired centrally and some regionally, that will impact significantly on north Essex. The Council will need to address some difficult questions – the balance between growth and the environment; and the challenge to provide more housing, including additional affordable housing with some in rural areas, where the Council will need to look more closely at some village envelopes.

The Leader made reference to external influences – the development of County-wide Local Area Agreements, and the new National Indicator Set for Local Authorities focusing on outcomes achieved through effective partnership working and the provision of higher quality services for residents.

There will also be a challenge for Members and the Leader requested that they read the two documents tabled at the Council meeting on (1)'Strong and prosperous communities – one year on' and (2) a consultation paper on guidance on statutory communities; and the resultant key decisions to be made by the District Council. Members attention was drawn to 'change is essential in every two-tier area to deliver increased efficiency and improved outcomes' (Page 30, Para 46 of the first document) and that the Council cannot continue as it is, although with the joint working already in place with Essex County Council and Colchester Borough Council we are at an advantage.

The Leader also drew attention to Page 31, Para 49 on leadership models and single member wards by the next election in 2011, and an enhanced role for Overview & Scrutiny Committees in reviewing actions of other local public services (Para 51). Parish Council guidance on 'promoting well-being' at Paras 55 & 56 was highlighted, and community assets at Para 58.

Members were referred to the second document on consultation – 'Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities' – and, in particular, Page 68, Item 2.10 and the opportunities and potential structure through the Local Committees for the Council to be 'Leaders' in that duty to involve and ensure community empowerment.

In conclusion, the Leader hoped within the next 12 months that Members look to their 'new role', the different ways of working, support the new guidance and rise to the challenges ahead.

The Chairman invited members to take part in the debate.

Councillor E R Lynch referred to the two consultation documents tabled at the meeting and requested that Councillors may have an opportunity to comment on these at a later stage. With regard to the draft report 'A Vision for the Braintree District' the second objective in Appendix 3 of the report recorded that 'Increase Energy Efficiency' was a top priority, and to relate to this it was proposed that the new Braintree Pool has solar panels fitted to the roof of the pool – to be used (at a minimum) for heating the showers.

The problem of anti social behaviour continues with Ward Councillors regularly receiving reports from constituents. To demonstrate this Councillor Lynch read part of a letter from a resident of Twelve Acres reporting a high number of incidents of vandalism, criminal damage, nuisance behaviour, general intimidation and underage drinking. It was considered that the Council had only 'touched the surface' on this issue and for the Council's Vision for the Future this needs to be carried forward.

Finally, Councillor Lynch looked forward to the provision of affordable housing, following the net receipt from the Housing Transfer to build affordable and social housing as agreed prior to the May elections.

Councillor Gyford raised two issues and referred to Appendix 4 of the 'Vision for the Braintree District' draft report, on the Braintree District Local Strategic Partnership structure, and highlighted that the Essex Partnership was currently under review, and queried by whom and the anticipated timetable of the process. He also stated that within the two consultation documents there was a passing reference to the Councillor Commission document, and requested this be included in any seminar/further discussion on these papers, as it involves the recruitment, retention and retirement of Councillors.

Councillor Swallow stated that the 'NEET' statistics in the Essex Strategic Needs Joint Assessment records that Braintree District has the joint second highest in Essex number of youth not in employment, education or training. This is above the national average and should be addressed immediately by working closely with partners, to improve and exceed national standards. The Assessment also reports that Braintree District is the third lowest on 5 or higher Grades of GCSE's. The Council needs to ensure that it works with partners to establish a prestigious technical college, supplemented by Sixth Form College places, and an adequate transport system to support these functions. In addition, the Council should encourage industry and commerce to supply training places to deliver post entry and on-job training, and ensure personal education in behaviour and character building is not overlooked. Youth should be encouraged to develop skills and recognise the benefits they can gain. Councillor Swallow also proposed that the Council encourage a diversified range of businesses into the area to supply a range of jobs for skilled and unskilled workers. The development of a good infrastructure of leisure facilities would give the youth leisure opportunities and the Council needs to solicit central and private funding for adventure parks and playgrounds, BMX areas, sports fields and purpose-built youth buildings; and encourage youth involvement in the local democracy process and to establish youth councils. Suitable health training was also required on youth obesity, drugs and alcohol abuse and sexual health understanding.

Councillor Mrs Scattergood was concerned on employment opportunities in the District, and stated that with high housing growth continuing, and the 7,000 new homes probably exceeded, to accommodate any additional homes the Government may require all the brownfield sites to be used for the extra homes. The Council should resist the use of vacant employment land for housing and ensure it is not included in the Local Development Framework, and should encourage the development of businesses on employment sites in the area. On enquiring why business does not relocate to Braintree she was informed of skills shortage or poor road/rail infrastructure. If the reason is road infrastructure we should look at Sudbury who are continually building new employment areas, including factories, and attracting small and medium size businesses – with road and rail links worse than our own. Therefore, it was proposed that the Leader meet with Babergh District Council to discuss this success. In conclusion, Councillor Mrs Scattergood advised that in the small hamlet where she lives there are residents who work in Cambridge, Peterborough, Basildon, Southend, Colchester,

Sudbury and London. Therefore, Councillor Mrs Scattergood's Vision for the District was for an area where there are opportunities for local people to have local jobs.

Councillor Harley spoke on enterprise and prosperity in the District and referred to the four-year objectives of the Council to include the regeneration of the three towns of the District, and business development - the BIDS scheme currently being led by Witham, with possibilities for Halstead and Braintree to become involved. The objectives would include business growth, allocation of suitable business sites, and an obligation to promote business opportunities in rural areas. It was reported that there is a possibility of a new Business Park in the District through partnership working, although the main challenge is for the building of the A120 Braintree to Marks Tey, and the Crossing railway loop – with a possibility of a comprehensive study being financed by the new Growth Area funding.

The Council has pledged to oppose the building of a second runway at Stansted and this will remain as an objective.

Councillor Harley agreed with earlier speakers, that skills is a key area and everything should be done to promote skills in the District, including a technical college and Sixth Form places and encourage people to take interest and better themselves. He also advised of plans for the regeneration of the town centres. With regard to Community Transport, the use of concessionary transport, especially in rural areas, is popular although many surveys record that public transport is top of the list. The Council needs to help address how bus schedules seem dysfunctional and to liaise with bus operators.

In conclusion, there is a dichotomy in the District on skills whereas people go to London and other towns to get jobs and, at the same time, the District has a skills deficit. This issue has to be addressed and needs to be the centre of the Council's policies.

Councillor Abbott expressed views on sustainability, including decent public services, the environment, a local hospital, the quality of life of our citizens and whether the economy is being run without permanently degrading resources.

This Council has developed policies and plans to address the wider sustainability agenda, including consultation on the Community Strategy and Local Development Framework, although there are other sustainability issues that the Council with its partners need to address – with major issues on transport, energy and planning. The top two objectives in the 'Visions' report are to improve public transport and to increase energy efficiency but Members have declared at this meeting that expanding road infrastructure is a favourite theme – although it was 12th in the consultation. So it was questioned if the administration was going to re-act on what people want or what they think the people want ?

The proposal for the A120 was mentioned and if the Council support an off-line route it would damage communities and the countryside, or to look for a sustainable locally produced solution. A new A12 is also to be considered with more traffic and would open up the countryside for development and affect climate change.

Our Vision for the Future is to place safety on the roads as a priority and work with partners for major investment in public transport, including the passing loop. With regard to housing to keep developments in existing settlements and try to maximise affordable housing on sites. The least progress has been on energy and an example was given as no renewable energy at Braintree swimming pool and he asked for more joined up thinking between members and officers in all that the Council do.

Councillor Walters stated that ' a clean and green district' is a challenge to us all, as funding on sustainable solutions in this area is a problem. In the four-year plan the Council has proposals to reduce the carbon footprint, and work had already commenced on the green travel plan for members and officers. Under the recycling initiative there is still work to be done to reduce the

amount of non-recyclable materials collected from residents, with the District Council working with Essex County Council and other district partners for an effective and sustainable way of disposing of residual waste. It is proposed to increase our recycling levels, and with the roll-out of high diversion recycling facilities, it is anticipated that the Council will be among the highest recycling districts in Essex. Work is also on-going with planning officers to ensure new developments are environmentally friendly, and the Council will sign-up to the Urban Place Settlement that gives good guidance on sustainability issues and to build properties that use less energy. It was noted that climate change will also be considered, particularly the issue of flooding.

Councillor Collar referred to Appendix 1 of the 'Vision' report with regard to delivery of the Strategic Partnership and advised that Councillors and residents in the rural areas of the District, i.e. Bumpstead Ward, Upper Colne Ward, look to their neighbour in Haverhill, Suffolk that is within St Edmundsbury Borough Council. Residents use their facilities, including library, first response to fire service and police service, bus station, supermarkets and cinema and it should be noted that we look at neighbouring districts as partners.

Councillor Mann stated that there is much to welcome and applaud in the Leaders opening statement, and any emphasis on affordable housing is welcome particularly for families with children, if those children wish to remain in the District. The emphasis on Civic Pride in its many forms is welcome. Much is said on enterprise and it was believed that the District holds the record 'average travel to work distance in the whole of East Anglia' and we desperately need more local jobs. A new Business Park is supported and that employment land is used productively for the creation of local jobs. For those travelling to work outside the District there is a duty for improvement in the A120, encourage urgent action for Galleys Corner (that causes a 'block' on the development of the town), and the inclusion of the Crossing loop.

Councillor Mrs Edey spoke on homelessness and housing and the Council's statutory responsibility following the Housing Stock Transfer to lead on the development of the Homelessness Strategy, with the development and implementation of a new Strategy by July 2008. The Homelessness Officers and the Housing Advisory Team help those who are affected by relationship breakdown, ill health, loss of employment, together with our Benefits Entitlement Service and the Citizen's Advice Bureau. She was pleased to report that the arrangement with Greenfields Community Housing for them to supply temporary accommodation for the homeless is working well, plus assistance from other Housing Associations. Certain factors in the housing market are outside our control and the Council has developed various schemes to encourage landlords in the private rented sector to work with the Council, and provide people with accommodation. Statistics were quoted for 2006/07 when the Council made 441 homelessness decisions, and had a duty to find accommodation for 274 households. With regard to this year there is a small reduction with those approaching the Council - 218 decisions made compared to 249 in the same two quarters last time (a 12% reduction). Councillor Mrs Edey hoped that Members will get involved in the development of the Homelessness Strategy.

Councillor Mrs Schmitt firstly responded to Councillor E Lynch's statement regarding Twelve Acres in Braintree, and advised that the Community Safety Team are aware of the problems, and are collating evidence with support of the Police, Community Wardens and the CCTV vehicle.

The British Crime Survey has reported that Braintree District is in the bottom end of crime and anti social behaviour cases in Essex, within all categories. The Government also links similar

CDRP's together throughout the country and Braintree, in a group with 15 other authorities, is vying for bottom place, i.e. the safest place to be. The Council will continue to work with partners, i.e. the Police, and Braintree had attracted a visit from South Oxfordshire Council in relation to the success of our Community Warden service. The detection rates by Police are some of the highest in the country, and the Council will continue to deploy the CCTV vehicle, with two prosecutions in progress. It was identified at the Conference in November 2007 on Alcohol & Drug Use in Young People that certain agencies do not know what other agencies in the District are doing, and that young people are not aware of what is available, and work will be done to address this. The Council will continue to hold the Reality Roadshow and Crucial Crew, and it was reported that the NACRO Group has obtained funding for a further three years, and we are putting together a Leisure Strategy. The Culture Department continues to hold marvellous functions for young people at the Museum. In conclusion, the Council will continue to work in these areas, particularly the alcohol abuse in our town centres.

Councillor M Gage referred to earlier 'wish-lists' from Members and the financial impact of the proposals. However, the main point is strong local communities and the vision for the future, and this 'strength' has been practised in the District for a long time. The 'revolutionary' idea of talking across District boundaries is not new in the north of the District, and should be encouraged. He urged the Council to talk sensibly about some of the real problems that residents have identified, and advised that he personally supported the building of new roads to relieve some of the traffic congestion. The forecast of 2018 as the building time for the A120 was unbelievably noted, and that the Council should cooperate with Sudbury on traffic congestion through this District and on relieving traffic in our two towns that create rat-runs for the A120 and the A14. With regard to strong local communities, we should talk to the County Council and local Town Councils - especially on local issues such as CCTV. He was grateful for the provision of CCTV in Halstead although the Town Council, the Town Centre Strategy Panel and the Crime Prevention Panel should have been consulted before it was announced in the press.

Councillor Gage was pleased that at Halstead Local Committee talks on the regeneration of Halstead Town Centre has given 'real hope' to changing the face of the town and the surrounding villages. He was conscious of the fact that Halstead serves local villages and more visitors to Halstead would be welcome if the road network was better, and people should note that Halstead has a Cottage Hospital with negotiations underway for a rehab centre, supported by local fund-raising, with any pressure from fellow Councillors to take forward the scheme with the PCT being appreciated.

Councillor Shelton advised that he has responsibility for the ward bordering Suffolk, with the principle town of Sudbury, and residents in the north east of the District do look towards that area and are concerned on the failure in building Sudbury by-pass. It was hoped that District Council representatives could meet with their colleagues at Suffolk County Council/Babergh District Council to bring this possibility 'back to life'. He continued to state that he hoped meetings are set up with providers for health in the Stour Valley Ward, to address issues from his constituents. Councillor Shelton also considered that youngsters in rural areas do not have access to sports and leisure facilities, and it is hoped that the authority develop a sports and leisure programme that targets youth in the rural areas. He also reminded Members of the Gainsborough Line that runs between Marks Tey to Sudbury and stated that there is inadequate parking facilities at their one station, Bures Hamlet, and that the Council should take issue with One railway for improved parking or a stopping point on the route.

Councillor Everard welcomed the Leaders encouraging opening remarks, and wished to 'press' for urgent work at Galleys Corner and the A120 extension being made high priority, and for a passing loop at Cressing. He proposed linking Stansted by rail for the benefit of everybody, and to look carefully at the infrastructure of the towns in relation to the building works. Partnership working is welcome but should also make sure we do not lose contact with the 'grass roots'. The need for a community hospital in Braintree should be stressed, and other initiatives brought forward, i.e. a new bus park, arts centre/theatre. There should be more linking with schools, including Democracy Week; and to improve sports provision and link in with the Olympics. Community assets, i.e. post offices, should be supported in both rural and urban areas, and green issues encouraged, i.e. allotments, green spaces, treeplanting and community involvement in their locality.

Councillor Foster stated that one of the objectives from the consultation was more local autonomy and devolved responsibility and for less government legislation, that leaves local authorities with little control. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 gives the Secretary of State greater control over planning policy, and dictates policy to the unelected regional assemblies, and makes District Councils consult with the public at greater length over small matters. Braintree & Uttlesford District Councils abhor the prospect of a second runway at Stansted – however, when the planning bill is enacted it will be announced that a second runway will be 'good for us', followed by the Infrastructure Planning Commission approving the project. This takes power from locally elected representatives while asking for more people to participate locally.

Many in the District are awaiting improvements to the A120, and while we patiently wait, the government announces it cannot afford the new road, and leaves homes on the existing route blighted and those on the 'preferred' route also blighted.

Councillor McCrea spoke on the Local Development Framework and advised that the preferred options process, including external studies and consultations, will not be finalised until 2008. He had recently attended the Rural Essex Summit, and reported that the aspirations and problems of this Council are shared across rural Essex. Rural Essex accounts for 72% of the total county, and their problems were put in perspective – showing 20% of rural households have no cars, 40% of rural households have no shops, and 40% of them live a mile from a doctors surgery. The general conclusion of the Summit is for more people working and living in rural communities – and that is a challenge for this Council. More affordable housing is needed, greater accessibility to local services and to encourage more local volunteers in those communities, including Parish Councillors, to deliver the requirements of the rural communities. It was noted that villages should be encouraged to look at their village envelopes and see planning strategy, particularly affordable housing, as the biggest single issue to get right, and this will enable strategies on employment, sustainability and accessibility to services to be right.

Councillor Mrs Beavis referred to her role as Cabinet Member, to keep a watching brief on two core areas. Firstly housing, with this featuring strongly in the Council's vision for creating strong and prosperous communities, with a 'sense of being' in ones chosen locality as vital. From liaising with residents it is recognised the first priority is more affordable housing, especially affordable/sustainable housing in villages so people can stay close to their families. 'Green' houses are needed, with no concrete jungles, and estates with green open space. Housing is required for the young, and those in retirement, and schemes for those most in need. Mostly, we need accessibility to housing, and with the commitment of the Council's Housing and Development Team access for Choice Based Lettings, and Sub

Regional Working, and schemes in partnership – creating a housing strategy fit for all residents.

Secondly, to create more sustainable communities where residents have more ownership. There is a vast portfolio of community facilities in the District, with many in private ownership and a strategy should be developed that is fair and well-balanced for all residents, and the community groups that use the facilities deserve the freedom and support for their organisations, as they are often the 'backbone' of the community.

Councillor Bebb focused on ways to keep the County and District moving, and considered that trunk roads impact on the District's towns and villages, particularly the A12 corridor, e.g. Kelvedon, Witham and Hatfield Peverel, and the A120. He reported of traffic build up on the A12, closure of the A12 (for 24 hours recently), plus traffic frequently backed up on the A120. Issues relating to these problems were looked at – both long and short term possibilities - and include the cost of delays, carbon emissions, medical issues (getting people to hospital quickly), and toilet provision for those delayed. He stated that at a recent Essex County Council Transport Summit it was reported that through under-funding, Essex had a heavily congested road network for its' 1.6m people, main routes and expanding ports/airports. Comparisons were made to roads abroad, and an RAC Foundation report was referred to with four main aspects - on the economic need for road building, the economic cost of congestion, public transport and road pricing. At Parish Cluster meetings the frustration of local residents is reported - on going to work, and on the environmental impact to their communities by traffic taking short cuts or being diverted. The need to fight is considered essential, and to involve local pressure groups.

More joined up parochial thinking is required by this Council and its' neighbours, with reference made to Maldon who has had population growth but still only has the B1019 joining the A12 as its main route. We need better public transport (with more incentives), the A12 widening and the A120 dualling, and perhaps to link planning approvals with an enforced contribution to a district/regional infrastructure fund. He concluded with short-term proposals -to minimise hold-ups variable speed limits being introduced; warning signs including accident black-spots; the strategy of clearing roads rapidly when an accident occurs, and more community school buses (USA model), walking buses and cycleways.

Councillor McKee spoke for the residents of his Braintree Central Ward on the regeneration of Braintree Town Centre, and as the heart of the District its health and well-being reflects on the whole area. The areas of High Street and Bank Street especially need regeneration and investment, and had suffered a decline in the retail sector over the years he had lived here. Debates were requested within the Council and Local Committees, and with residents of the District on two issues – firstly on Braintree High Street improvements and secondly, redevelopment of the bus station, library, Town Hall site to become a new centre for the whole of the Braintree District. For the High Street the view was for improvements and plans to increase access and breathe more life and people into the area, including opening it up to one-way traffic between Market Square and the fountain; to open to George Yard in the centre of the High Street; and pedestrian areas including ramps and bollards; allow short-term parking, and resolve the disabled access issue. The major benefits were considered to be increased footfall in the High Street and to attract retailers, and that more people and traffic in the High Street would help crime and anti-social behaviour incidents to decrease. Secondly, the Town Hall redevelopment site to become a landmark centre for the District by preserving the Town Hall, link it with the museum and library, and encourage public and private partnership. The creation of a multi-occupancy and youth centre was proposed and the 'Vision' for this site would create (1) a new Civic Centre, including civic amenities and community spaces, (2) a cultural centre incorporating the museum and a Civic Theatre for

drama, film and live music, and (3) high quality retail attracting premium specialist retailers, and using the upper floors for high quality urban apartments. This scheme would restore the centre of gravity to the market square – that for a market town is where it belongs, and create a whole area to attract visitors and to increase tourism, entertainment, education and shopping. It was also proposed to move the bus centre with the railway station and create a transport hub. This ‘Vision’ will invigorate the centre of Braintree for shoppers and entertainment, and restore the Town Hall site.

Councillor Mitchell requested that when Councillors consider the future of the District, and the imminent Local Development Framework, they fully embrace the principle, spirit and detail of our adopted sustainability statement, including enthusiasm for new forms of renewable energy and financial encouragement to those who wish to install environmental improvements. Non-traditional building designs – that are highly sustainable - may appear before the Planning Committee, and they should be considered with a more sustainable eye than an aesthetic one. It is the responsibility of all of us to ensure finite resources are not wasted, whether local, national or international, through ignorance, apathy or lack of bold leadership for the sake of future generations.

Councillor Lager stated there had been much talk on challenges but less on solutions. The ‘pace of change’ will increase and the ‘driver’ from government sources, like the consultation documents tabled at this meeting, will continue although it was considered the major driver to be technology. Skills need to keep up with the technology, and it was considered that the District and County are failing in this area. There is a deficit in the skills needed to harness the benefits of technology to the service of people today, and the Council needs to take heed of plans by speaking up and out for the electorate. Technology is in many forms and we need to ensure we relate and respond in the correct language. However, we also need to note the loss of data reported recently in the press and ensure our system is of high quality to protect our customer/residents’ data. Systems allow greater efficiency and accuracy and results with less paper - being replaced by disc records, as it provides more accuracy to customers and a speedier response. People are key on this issue and training, development and reward is crucial – and this includes Members, as the Council has to be the ears, the eyes and mouth of the community. We do provide excellent services and, in some cases, these need improvement and a programme of service reviews is underway to judge their value and efficiency. Now the Housing Transfer is complete a further review will be undertaken on the Council’s property portfolio, as the disposal of surplus property had previously supplied funding for the Capital Investment Programme. There are opportunities in joint working for scale savings, for improved services and a greater resilience in the services we offer. Future budgets in the Council can be balanced and will continue to focus on priorities, and the Council aims to deliver best performance in terms of quality and reliability, and to a high standard of service. The Comprehensive Area Assessment regime replaces the Comprehensive Performance Assessment and focuses more on perceptions and ‘what it feel like to live in this District’, and this will be key to the Council’s success. Braintree has a bright future and it’s the District Council’s job to bring it about.

Councillor Finbow advised that as a rural member he had great concern on the employment areas that are being lost to housing, and quoted the Bayer site and Portway site at Halstead. Other possibilities are the Whitlock site at Great Yeldham, and the Premdor site at Sible Hedingham, with the Tanner site being sold to the developer, Barretts. This is a great problem for people in rural areas to get employment and it was considered that these factories and industrial sites should be marketed better instead of just going to housing. The policy on

redundant farm buildings was referred to and that they have to be advertised before coming to planning.

The Leader considered it had been an excellent debate and referred to the 22 speakers who had taken part and their ideas; congratulated those Members who had spoken for the first time, and for the first class contribution from all sides. A number of recurring issues had come forward and during the summary it was noted that with regard to the LSP structure there is a meeting this week on the governance arrangements for the Essex LAA and the formation of the local governance arrangements for Essex, and the Leader will provide all Members with an update. He also referred to the Councillor Commission document and noted Councillor Gyford's request, and anticipated that the role for elected members will change beyond recognition, and that support and training will be required. The Leader linked together two issues - on partnerships and not 'losing touch with the grass roots'; with 'major decisions being taken away from locally elected Members'. These resulted with how the Council keeps the democratic input into what is becoming a very complex way of decision-making. It is for working with partners, and the move to the Regional Development Agency on key issues such as housing, transport and planning will impact on this. The important issue is how the Council position itself as key influencers and lead with the democratic legitimacy we all have. To get the legitimate leadership locally the Leader emphasised the importance of Local Committees, and the involvement and discussion of local communities.

ACTION POINT: Councillor Butland to provide all Members with an update on the LSP structure.

67 REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICT AND POLLING PLACES

INFORMATION: The Leader referred to the requirement of Councils to conduct a full review of polling districts and polling places by 31st December 2007 and every four years thereafter, although it does not prevent amendments being made at any time to the arrangements for polling districts and polling places. A consultation process has been undertaken and the responses are attached to the report. In considering these the Council had to adhere to three legal requirements

- the Council must seek to ensure that all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances
- they must seek to ensure that, as far as possible, Polling places are accessible to those who are disabled, and
- that each parish must be a separate Polling District.

Councillor Gyford raised queries regarding the timescale of the Returning Officers report for the polling place for Polling District CK (Witham South), and on a future issue with the Community Hall at Forest Road, Witham (a current Polling Station) being demolished. The Leader advised that the Returning Officers report will be available in Spring 2008, and that the comments regarding Forest Road are noted and that the Council should be considering a future polling place there if the need arise.

DECISION:

1. That subject to a satisfactory access audit being completed, the polling place for Wethersfield be considered for a change from the United Reform Church School Room to Wethersfield Village Hall.

2. That the Returning Officer carries out a further review of the current polling places for Polling District CK (Witham South) and DE (St Andrews, Halstead) and prepares a report on his findings and recommendations to a future Council meeting.
3. That all other Polling Districts and Polling Places remain unchanged.

68 **APPOINTMENT OF THREE COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES TO DECIDE ON THE ALLOCATION OF THE COMMUNITY FUND**

INFORMATION: The Leader reminded Members of the Community Fund established between the Council and Greenfields Community Housing (GCH) for improvements to estates, open spaces and affordable housing. As it is a strategic partnership between GCH and the Council it was proposed that the representation be Cabinet Members, comprising Councillor Mrs Beavis, Butland and Lager. The Leader had liaised and agreed with the Chairman of GCH a process for Members to comment on draft proposals through Local Committees. However, Councillor E Lynch, on behalf of the Labour Group, considered that Labour members had supported the housing transfer process from inception, and served on various Committees and groups, and was disappointed they were omitted. The Leader reiterated that the process needs to lead to Cabinet and that Cabinet Members should be appointed.

DECISION: That Councillors Mrs Beavis, Butland and Lager be noted as Council representatives to the Allocation of the Community Fund between the Council and Greenfields Community Housing.

69 **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND REFERENCES (PUBLIC SESSION)**

- (a) Cabinet – 3rd December 2007 – Funding for refurbishment of the first floor of Silver End Village Hall

Councillor Lager moved the recommendation regarding the above that was contained within the Supplementary Paper of the Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2008/09/ to 2011/12, at Minute 75 of the Cabinet meeting on 3rd December 2007.

Councillor Abbott reiterated his query made at the Cabinet meeting with regard to the financial arrangements for the Silver Street pavilion and for works to take place during 2008, and the refurbishment of the upper floor of Silver End Village Hall including taking advantage of any sustainable issues. Councillor Lager confirmed both projects are going ahead, and will write to Councillor Abbott on the construction issue.

DECISION: That funding, as detailed in the supplementary paper to the Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy, for the refurbishment of the first floor of Silver End Village Hall be approved.

ACTION POINT: Councillor Lager to provide Councillor Abbott with information on the financial arrangements for the projects specified above, including sustainability initiatives.

- (b) Local Government Reform Cabinet Sub Group – 5th December 2007 – New Procedure on Public Question Time

Councillor Butland moved the recommendation on amendments to Public Question Time as specified at Minute 19 of the Local Government Reform Cabinet Sub Group on 5th December 2007.

Councillor Gyford referred to Appendix 2, Participation at Public Meetings, that was part of the report received under Agenda Item 4 of the Sub Group meeting. The following sentence under 'Conduct and Exclusions' required clarification – 'From time to time debates will be lively as they raise issues that Members will feel strongly about' as it was considered that it could apply to Council Members and Members of the public. The Leader advised this would be clarified, re-drafted and forwarded to Members.

DECISION: That recommendations (1) and (2), regarding Public Question Time, of Minute 19 of the Local Government Reform Cabinet Sub Group of 5th December 2007 be approved.

ACTION POINT:- Councillor Butland to provide Members with a re-draft of Appendix 2 as defined above.

(c) Licensing Committee – 12th December 2007 – Re-Publication of Braintree District Council's Revised Licensing Act 2003 Statement of Licensing Policy

Councillor Banthorpe, Chairman of the Licensing Committee, moved the recommendation on the Re-Publication of the Statement of Licensing Policy as specified at Minute 26 of the Licensing Committee held on 12th December 2007.

DECISION: That the Statement of Licensing Policy be adopted for re-publication.

70 **STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS (PUBLIC SESSION)**

INFORMATION: No statements were made.

71 **QUESTION TIME (PUBLIC SESSION)**

(i) **Statements by the Leader/Cabinet Members and Deputy Cabinet Members**

INFORMATION: The following statements were made: -

Gypsy & Traveller Provision. Councillor Butland reported that the Braintree Area currently had 25 authorised pitches for gypsy and travellers, and it has been recommended to the Regional Assembly on 25th January 2008 that Braintree have 16 additional pitches by 2011, bringing the District total to 41. For comparative purposes it was noted that Chelmsford had to find 46 additional pitches (35 existing pitches), Epping Forest an additional 49, Basildon an additional 81 and Fenland an additional 89 pitches.

Growth Area Funding. Councillor Harley was pleased to announce that a joint bid between Braintree District Council and Chelmsford Borough Council, for Growth Area Funding had been successful. The prioritisation for Braintree will be for a water cycle study, a rail improvement study, town centre regeneration, the acquisition of employment land, green space improvements and cycle networks.

Enterprise Promotion Award. Councillor Harley stated that the Council had been successful in an Enterprise Promotion Award in Essex, where Braintree District Council had received 85% of the vote.

Closure of Post Offices. Councillor Mrs Beavis advised that, following representation by the Council and local residents, the Post Office Ltd had decided to close post offices at Bocking Church Street; Panfield Lane, Braintree, and at White Notley. The post office at Black Notley will be upgraded for disabled access prior to the post office at White Notley being closed. Councillor Mrs Beavis thanked Members, officers and residents for all their efforts in the campaign to stop these closures.

Social Clauses Project. Councillor Walters stated that the Council had been nominated to take part in the Social Clauses Project, where Councils work with partners in a social enterprise initiative on chosen waste, i.e. cookers, fridges and settees, refurbish them and provide them to the needy at a lower price.

Provisional Finance Settlement. Councillor Lager advised that the government had announced the Provisional Finance Settlement with a 1% increase in Council Tax for 2008/09. There are various uncertainties and inadequacies in the grant including the duty to deal with stray dogs, the nationwide concessionary fares scheme to start in April 2008, and migrant workers. The biggest impact will be on the formula on the minimum-funding guarantee where £400,000 will be taken away from the Council. The budget process for year end is 'on track', with a proposed tax increase below the capping level, and these issues will be considered by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 23rd January 2008, and Cabinet on 4th February 2008. The Essex County Council precept is to be announced on 12th February, enabling Braintree District Council to set ours on 18th February 2008.

Lottery Funding for Children's Play Project. Councillor Mrs Schmitt was pleased to announce that the Council had been successful in a bid to the Big Lottery in the Children's Play Project. A grant of £270,848 will be provided over a three-year period to expand play provision for children, included those disabled or isolated. This will be in four projects (i) focus on the 10-13 year age group, (ii) will fund a skilled worker within the PARC project, (iii) provide a playworker and a play bus for children, and (iv) supply play equipment at the Women's Refuge. The delivery will be between April and June 2008.

(ii) **Oral Questions**

INFORMATION: Members were invited to ask any questions of the Leader on non-operational matters and the following questions were asked: -

Councillor Ms Barlow queried if there were any opportunities for the organisers of **youth groups and youth charities to take part in Health & Safety training** (and whether they are aware of their obligations) and if not, could the Council provide or advise of such an initiative.

The Leader advised he would look into this issue for organisers of voluntary organisations, and will provide feedback to Councillor Ms Barlow.

ACTION POINT: Councillor Butland to provide details to Councillor Ms Barlow (and all Members) on Health & Safety training for organisers of youth groups/charities.

Councillor Hughes referred to the **refurbishment of household appliances and furniture** and preferences to ensure the minimisation in the waste stream, instead of mass burn.

Councillor Walters advised there is no mass burn in Essex, and that large appliances such as fridges, freezers and cookers are reused, and is preferable to sending them into landfill.

Councillor Rose highlighted the issue on the lack of **local medical support facilities in Witham and surrounding villages**, and stated that the Primary Care Trust (PCT) had advised that Witham is not a priority area. He requested that the Council write to the PCT to question how this conclusion had been arrived at, and what criteria was used to come to that decision.

Councillor Butland advised this was an issue for Witham Local Committee to take forward, and invite representative(s) of the PCT to attend.

POST MEETING NOTE:- This issue was discussed at the Witham Local Committee on 10th January 2008.

Councillor E Lynch referred to Minute 57(ii), Page 47 of the Council meeting on 5th November 2007 and requested that the information relating to the **Braintree District Rural Policy and Action Statement (2005)** on the extent the scheme is used, be provided to all Members. He also requested that the response to Councillor Barlow's earlier query regarding **youth groups and training on Health & Safety** be provided to all Councillors.

Councillor Butland stated that in future all written information/answers would be made available to all Councillors.

*ACTION POINT:- Councillor Butland and officers to ensure that **all Councillors** receive answers/information requested at the Council meeting.*

Councillor E Lynch had recently proposed that the Council install a Members Portal containing details of officer's job titles, their departments and email addresses. This recommendation had been forwarded to the IT department and a response is awaited. He asked if the Leader supports this aim, as it would increase the accessibility of officers to Members.

Councillor Butland advised the provision of such a facility would be looked into.

ACTION POINT: Officers in the IT department to liaise with Cllr E Lynch and respond.

Councillor Collar asked if the Leader was aware of the benefits being afforded to approximately 2,000 residents in the Bumpstead Ward (the only Ward in Braintree) that fall into the Addenbrookes Hospital NHS Foundation Trust. A notable event had occurred at Addenbrookes last October when the first kidney paired transplant took place and it was noted that the foundation of the new children's hospital had been laid. Councillor Butland stated he was aware of this.

(iii) **Chairmen's Statements**

INFORMATION: No statements were made.

(iv) **Minutes of Meetings in Public Session**

INFORMATION: Members were invited to raise any matters arising from the minutes of meetings held in public session that had been published since the Council Meeting on 5th November 2007.

Councillor Gyford stated that, in the decision of Minute 75 Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2008/09 to 2011/12 of the Cabinet meeting of 3rd December 2007, that item 5 & 6 referred to studies. He queried the difference between an Options Appraisal Study and a Feasibility Study, and whether it was related to Bramston School (and Rickstones School), Bramston Sports Centre, or Witham Town centre.

The Leader advised that Essex County Council had made an original study on Bramston Sports Centre and that discussions had been held to deliver John Bramston School as academy status, and an appraisal is ongoing between the Council and its partners on future of the school and the sports centre. With regard to Item 5 this is a feasibility study on the regeneration of the town centres, and will look at potential sites in all three town centres involving partners (some private sector), with the District Council taking the lead.

Councillor Abbott referred to Witham Local Committee 6th November 2007 meeting and Minute 39, Parking in the Witham Area. A public meeting had been held in July 2007 on this topic, including on-street parking/damage to grass verges, between Essex County Council, Braintree District Council, Witham Town Council and Parish Councils, and a progress report was requested.

In response, Councillor Butland, stated he would confirm the details with Councillor Abbott and pursue an update.

ACTION POINT: Councillor Butland to provide a progress report as indicated above.

Councillor E Lynch drew attention to Minute 83 in Private Session of the Cabinet meeting of 3rd December 2007, in relation to the proposed disposal of the redevelopment site at Riverside/St Johns Avenue, Braintree, and his request that the right of way/right of thoroughfare remains open between Notley Road and the station during and after development of the site. It was considered that this stipulation be included in the condition of sale.

Councillor Lager responded that he was unclear on the way this project is being dealt with, and officers would provide feedback on the legal conditions of the sale of the site.

ACTION POINT: Officers to take legal advice regarding the condition of sale to clarify the situation regarding use of thoroughfare, and respond to Councillors.

72 **BUSINESS OF EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS**

INFORMATION: There were no items raised.

There being no items in private session the Chairman closed the meeting by wishing everyone a happy and peaceful Christmas.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 9.48pm.

Lady Newton

(Chairman)

