

Minutes

Council Meeting

15th February 2010



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
E Bishop	Yes	H J Messenger	Yes
R J Bolton	Apologies	A M Meyer	Yes (until 9.50pm)
G Butland	Yes	R G S Mitchell	Yes
G Cohen	Yes	Mrs J M Money	Yes
J C Collar	Yes	Lady Newton	Apologies
M Dunn	Yes	J P O'Reilly-Cicconi	Apologies
Mrs E Edey	Apologies	Mrs J A Pell	Yes
J G J Elliott	Yes	R Ramage	Yes
R Elliston	Apologies	D M Reid	Yes
Dr R L Evans	Apologies	D E A Rice	Apologies
A V E Everard	Apologies	Mrs C Sandbrook	Yes
J H G Finbow	Yes	Mrs W D Scattergood	Yes
Ms L B Flint	Yes	Mrs J W Schmitt	Yes
T J W Foster	Apologies	A F Shelton (Vice Chairman)	Yes
Mrs B A Gage	Apologies	Mrs L Shepherd	Yes
M G Gage	Yes	C Siddall	Yes
Mrs M E Galione (Chairman)	Yes	Mrs J A Smith	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	Apologies
P J Hughes	Yes	S M Walsh	Yes
D L Hume	Yes	R G Walters	Yes
M C M Lager	Yes	R N Wilkins	Apologies
S J Lambourne	Yes	T S Wilkinson	Yes

The Chairman welcomed all Councillors to the meeting and extended a warm welcome to public and press present at the meeting, and those viewing the meeting on the webcast.

63 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman presented one announcement, regarding the Chairman's Civic Service at St Peter's in the Fields church on Sunday 11th April 2010 at 3.00pm, followed by light refreshments at Causeway House.

Councillor Mrs Galione welcomed Councillor Bishop to the meeting. Councillor Bishop broke his leg in late December 2009, and had spent Christmas in Broomfield Hospital,

Chelmsford. Councillor Bishop thanked Councillors for their cards and best wishes during this period.

On behalf of Full Council, the Chairman sent best wishes for a speedy recovery to Councillor Mrs Edey who had recently been in hospital; and to Lord Newton who had also been unwell. Flowers had been sent to Councillor Mrs Edey, and a thank-you card was read to Council.

The engagements attended by herself and the Vice Chairman were also circulated.

64 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: The following interests were declared:-

- Councillor J E Abbott declared a personal interest as Chairman of Rivenhall Parish Council, who had made representation to Agenda Item 9 – Local Development Framework Core Strategy.
- Councillors E Bishop, Ms L B Flint and Mrs J A Pell all declared a personal interest as a Museum Director, in Agenda Item 7 – Council Budget, as the Braintree Museum is referred to in reports. All three Councillors advised they would not speak or vote on this item.
- Councillor J E B Gyford declared a personal interest as Treasurer of the Witham Constituency Labour Party who operates a car park in Witham with references in Agenda Item 7 – Council Budget, and Agenda Item 8 – Policy Recommendations and References – Council Budget.
- Councillor R G Walters declared a personal interest as a Braintree Museum Trustee, appointed by the Council, in Agenda Item 7 – Council Budget.
- Councillor C Siddall declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 7 – Council Budget as his wife works for the Council. In accordance with the Constitution, Councillor Siddall left the meeting whilst this item was discussed by Council, and the vote taken thereon.
- Councillor J Baugh declared a personal and prejudicial interest as a planning consultant in Agenda Item 9 – Local Development Framework Core Strategy. In accordance with the Constitution, Councillor Baugh left the meeting whilst this item was discussed by Council, and the vote taken thereon.
- Councillor Butland declared a personal interest in the recycling issues raised in the District of Tomorrow debate, as he is connected to a charity that encourages all types of recycling
- Councillor E R Lynch declared a personal interest as
 - (i) Vice Chair of the Landscape Committee of Braintree Local Committee, whilst discussing green initiatives in the District of Tomorrow debate
 - (ii) A Governor of Beckers Green School in Agenda Item 11(i) Questions to Cabinet Members, when discussing the gritting of school roads.

In accordance with the Code of Conduct all Members remained in the meeting for these items, unless stated otherwise, and took part in the debate and decision thereon.

65 **MINUTES**

DECISION: That the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 14th December 2009 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

66 **QUESTION TIME**

INFORMATION: There were five statements made, a summary of which is contained in the Appendix to these minutes. The Chairman advised that, with regard to the Tourist Information Centre, a petition had also been received, and that the Portfolio Holder would provide a response to the three speakers during Question Time.

67 **DISTRICT OF TOMORROW DEBATE**

INFORMATION: The Chairman invited the Leader of the Council to open up the District of Tomorrow debate.

Councillor Butland stated that 2010 was an important year, in the advent of the General Election and will produce new challenges. In the recent budget consultation process the issue of a 'clean and green district' had featured highly with residents, and Councillor Butland announced a proposed new policy to take forward over the next 2 -3 years to make the Braintree District one of the cleanest in the country. Further details will be provided to Cabinet on 29th March 2010, and the framework of the initiative will comprise of

- a 'see it – report it' service for incidents of litter, fly tipping and graffiti, with response times published and monitored
- the installation of more litter bins and smoking bins, in liaison with Town and Parish Councils. The cost of these bins will be reduced by the District Council utilising their procurement service and bulk buying
- to extend cleaning times during the summer period of longer daylight hours, and rearrange the cleaning schedules to allow cleaning earlier in the morning
- to initiate a voluntary Code of Practice for supermarkets and fast food outlets to maintain their sites and make litter free
- if the voluntary Code of Practice is not taken by supermarkets and fast food outlets there is a proposal to 'name and shame' the grubbier car park area
- Councillors are encouraged to monitor these type of premises, and see the manager of the supermarket/fast food outlet to rectify the situation
- These initiatives will be linked with the Council introducing extra enforcement resources, including planning enforcement and the use of the Clean Team, together with use of the Council's mobile CCTV cameras
- Councillors will be requested to nominate 'hot spots' for the enforcement service to monitor
- There will be promotion for the public to take their litter home
- The emphasis will also be on 'green' issues, including the Halstead in Bloom and Witham in Bloom events, and by working with Town and Parish Councils to expand the 'living landscapes' theme
- The three Local Committees at Braintree, Halstead and Witham will be involved in the 'clean and green' policy, and utilise their funding resources, where appropriate
- Ways will be sought to enhance the appearance of the district and local neighbourhoods, and the Council will liaise with the 'Keep Britain Tidy' group to work with them and monitor initiatives. The support of the local press would also be beneficial
- Discussion will be held with the Highways Authority and Essex County Council to promote the 'clean and green' policy in the Braintree District, including the scheduling of litter picking and grass cutting beside the A12 and A120 trunk roads

Councillor Butland stated that the public had clearly identified their 'clean and green' preference, and the Council policy will address the clearance of litter, graffiti and other anti social activities from communities.

Councillor Walters commended the initiatives and stated that people's attitude on this issue will need to change. A marketing campaign will be implemented to help the public recognise that throwing litter is an anti social activity. The District Council will need the support of its partners on this initiative to coordinate litter picking of roadside verges, promote mothers and children walking to and from school not to drop litter, and encourage parents to set appropriate standards in their children.

Councillor Eric Lynch fully supported the measures, and endorsed that schools should be included on this, with many Councillors already aware of their local school governors. The use of the Local Committee budget on appropriate schemes, the Beckers Green area of Braintree, will be part of the community cohesion to improve neighbourhoods. Councillor Dr Evans had also requested Councillor Lynch to raise the promotion of landscaping across the district, through tree, shrub and bulb planting; and express appreciation of the Landscape Officer post – that supports many of these schemes – on being reprieved. Councillor Lynch extended thanks to Councillors, on behalf of Councillor Dr Evans, for best wishes received on his current health issue.

Councillor Ms Flint queried if the 'clean and green' policy will include dog fouling, and continued to express concern to the untidy condition of the District roundabouts – as 'gateways' into the district – and the commitment of sponsors.

Councillor Gyford requested further clarification to the areas covered under the new project and whether it included abandoned vehicles and anti social behaviour. Some of the proposals would have been reported via the Community Wardens activity report, and budget measures had reduced this service.

Councillor Ramage continued on the 'resources' theme and queried if there are sufficient enforcement officers to monitor the whole district. Other issues raised were the standard of land privately owned considered under the 'clean and green' project, and to advertise the project in the press and other media, with relevant contact points. Councillor Ramage endorsed the earlier comment regarding the poor condition of the District's roundabouts.

Councillor Mrs Beavis stated that in her District of Tomorrow there is greater investment in people, with more local jobs for local people. Over the next few years many houses are to be built and the District has to retain the safe and clean image, and provide it in a rural setting. When development is considered in the north of the district, prosperity also has to be taken into account as this area has suffered from the depletion of employers through the current recession. The District Council has to invest money in 'our District' and seek ways to improve Galleys Corner, and support local youth who will become 'our future' and encourage them to stay as the District develops and grows.

Councillor Mitchell spoke on climate change, carbon reduction and the effects humans have had on the environment. In the District of Tomorrow the Council has to support efforts to reduce dependence on fossil fuels and their impact on the environment, and encourage sustainable development of housing, business and renewable energy sources. The Council should continue to enhance the bio diversity of the area and support the living landscape. New initiatives are to be supported and the environmental responsibility recognised.

Councillor Abbott welcomed the 'clean and green' initiative and the supply of additional litter bins and dog bins in the District. However, there is the problem of the roadside verges between towns and villages that accrue litter and other rubbish. South of Braintree in the Rivenhall and Silver End areas there is a high proportion of litter from fast

food outlets, i.e. KFC and McDonald's, and these establishments should recognise their corporate responsibility and provide funding to clear the litter left by their customers. It is acknowledged that the District needs development and, in rural areas, only specific development and provision of roadside footways, with third sector volunteering. With proposals underway for mineral extraction and waste sites in open countryside, the problem of heavy vehicles and increased traffic on rural roads will be exacerbated.

Councillor Lager advised that Essex County Council has the aim of the 'Best quality of life in Britain', and the town of Witham has the identical ambition. Perception of an area is an important factor and to be safe, welcoming, a pleasant area with good jobs and schools links with this aim. In Witham, two new Academies are being built, Chipping Hill school upgraded, the Riverview site replaced, and a facelift for Newland Street is planned and Guithavon Street has been resurfaced. The paths on the Templars estate need repair and funding is being sought. Investment is also required for the Town Park. The parking problem around the railway station area continues, and traffic flows increase, impacting on access and exit to the town. The extension of CCTV provision in Witham, and proposals to extend CCTV on the industrial estates are both ongoing. The need to improve accessibility to health services in the town and surrounding area is required, as there are inadequate G.P surgeries. It would be beneficial to move outpatient facilities to clinics in the town, instead of residents travelling to larger towns. Many of these areas need 'top down planning' and for the Council to devolve power and property to the local people will support this.

Councillor Bebb supported the proposals by the Leader and considered that households should be encouraged to keep their houses and gardens tidy to enhance their local area. The District Council should build upon its recycling records and provide further opportunities for the recycling of household goods and encourage shops to dispose of customers old goods. With many items being purchased on the internet, residents store their old item in a garage whereas a 'reuse' function should be adopted - through donations to charity shops, using advertisements or by introducing reuse schemes at civic amenity centres. It was proposed that the District Council could facilitate such a provision and become a broker, sponsor or advisor to residents on the reuse of unwanted goods. This would also benefit the Council with fewer items to landfill and fly tipping incidents.

Councillor Elliott endorsed the previous speakers' comments and focused on development in the district without improvements to the infrastructure. Without investment in roads and pedestrian schemes, traffic will increase and roads/pathways will deteriorate – as seen in the recent cold spell when ice and frost has caused damage. It is important to say to government that development is acceptable, but without improvements to infrastructure it will be 'out of balance'.

Councillor Michael Gage 'applauded' the proposals and looked forward to the results of initiatives. Appreciation was extended to Council officers for the standards achieved by the Halstead street scene team and the partnership working on the Green Flag award at Halstead Public Gardens.

Councillor Gage raised issues for a 'zero tolerance' to fly posting, and to recognise the importance of Conservation Areas in the District by keeping standards at the same level. There are proposals in Halstead to enhance their Conservation Area by offering each shop limited funding to ensure their premises are kept in good decorative standard, with any funding from the District Council being welcome. It was requested that ambitious targets are set to the proposals to ensure a high standard.

Councillor Siddall endorsed the 'no housing without jobs' statement, and encouraged a low tax and 'light' touch approach. Residents could be taxed out of their cars without

appropriate infrastructure, and better train services and systems are needed for people to use. Councillor Siddall quoted that if we stop using coal completely in this country, within a year China will have absorbed that saving, as they are increasing their use year on year. We should be looking at manufactured goods and the importation of goods and how that affects our manufacturers – and do not tax them, and allow them a 'level playing field'.

The Leader thanked the 13 speakers for their positive contributions and support for the initiative. During the summary it was advised that

- the report to Cabinet in March will provide further details, including schools and for resource issues
- young people will be included in the proposals
- dog fouling will be included in the proposals
- the condition of roundabouts in the District will be addressed by Councillor Walters liaising with Essex County Council
- the Council will continue to address cases of abandoned vehicles and anti social behaviour
- with regard to litter etc on private land contact will be made with railway authorities
- the comments regarding rural areas was endorsed, and there will be closer working with Parish Councils
- households will be encouraged to keep their gardens tidy, and suitable legislation can be used if required
- recycling will continue to be encouraged
- it was endorsed that infrastructure is important in any development
- fly posting is also an important issue, and ambitious public targets will be set on the initiatives, and
- to ensure an appropriate balance of development, and the provision of local jobs.

68 **COUNCIL BUDGET, COUNCIL TAX & RENTS 2010/11 – RECOMMENDATIONS AND REFERENCES – CABINET 1ST FEBRUARY 2010**

Councillor Lager, Cabinet Member for Efficiency and Resources, presented proposals for the Council's budget and Council Tax for 2010/11. Reference was made to the economic challenges for the Council with cuts in government spending and grants being reduced, and the need to find savings of £1.5m in running costs. Every aspect of business had been explored to achieve savings and a range of possible service changes had been proposed, although some had been revisited, i.e. Parish Support Grant, Community Halls and the Community Warden Service. The new style provision of the Tourism Service was detailed in the report, and ways to share services with other authorities, e.g. Uttlesford on parking, or the Museum Service with Colchester and Ipswich.

Councillor Lager advised that the Council's Revenue budget had been balanced for 2010/11. He drew attention to a proposed transfer of £654,000 from earmarked reserves back into General Fund balances as the funds were no longer required for their original purpose.

Councillor Lager also advised that the Government had refused the Council's application to capitalise potential losses on sums invested with the Icelandic banks. The Council's response is currently being considered and members will be kept informed of any proposed action.

The Cabinet has recommended that the Council remains at Causeway House and that capital provision of £3.8m be made available for refurbishment of the building.

Councillor Lager advised that at a meeting of the Police Authority earlier in the day, it had been agreed to increase their precept and consequently an updated Council Tax Resolution report had been circulated to Council.

Councillor Gyford stated that with the Council withdrawing £6,000 from SEAMS, it will result in the collapse of the mediation service, and queried if an assessment had been made on the costs relating to arbitration in neighbour disputes. With regard to the cessation of the Welfare Rights service from March 2011 it was also queried if alternative arrangements had been made, and whether there is special criteria employed by the Council in identifying acceptable new arrangements. Furthermore, when these arrangements are agreed would a Service Level Agreement be supplied to any providers to ensure the specific detail had been met.

Councillor Lager advised that neighbour disputes would be an area for the Citizens' Advice Bureau to provide guidance and assistance, and that information on any special criteria for the provision of Welfare Rights will be provided in writing to all Councillors.

Councillor E R Lynch questioned the consultation process on community halls and whether all organisations had been contacted, including the Braintree Community Association with regard to use of The Institute. With respect to the introduction of fees and charges for the car park at Causeway House at weekends, it was queried if the rear part of the car park (owned by the Cricket Club) is included.

Councillor Lager stated that consultation to the future of community halls is ongoing, with some meetings already organised and full consultation at a later stage.

Councillor Walters advised he was not aware of any problems in the introduction of charges at Causeway House car park at weekends.

DECISION:

Revenue

- (1) The changes to service provision as detailed in Appendix E to the Cabinet report together with a budget of £10,250, funded from the LABGI reserve, for the development of the tourism website be approved.
- (2) The budget variations to the current base budget as summarised in Appendix G to the Cabinet report be approved.
- (3) The Service Demands detailed in Appendix C of the Cabinet report be approved.
- (4) That a provision of £50,000 be set aside in 2010/11 for the Braintree Museum Trust. To be funded from the General Fund balance and payments to be released with agreement of the responsible Cabinet Portfolio Holder.
- (5) The increases to existing Fees and Charges for 2010/11 as detailed in Appendix D to the Cabinet report, and as amended at Cabinet regarding Charity Market Stalls and parking at White Horse Lane car park, Witham, be approved.
- (6) A single concessionary rate of 25% applicable to fees and charges as appropriate be agreed
- (7) Concessions to be available for the following persons:
 - in receipt of means tested benefit
 - under 16 years of age, or
 - in full time educationOr to organisations making block or regular bookings.

- (8) The additional Housing Benefit Administration Subsidy for 2010/11, of £315,880, be applied to maintain/improve the service, with an immediate allocation of the funds of £56,000, to extend the contracts by one year of two temporary Benefit Assessor posts.
- (9) The provision set aside to meet the cost of redundancies be increased by £500,000 to £1million, by transfer from the General Fund balance, be agreed.
- (10) The transfer of £654,000 to the General Fund balance from the Earmarked Reserves, as detailed in Appendix K to the Cabinet report be approved.

Housing Revenue Account

- (11) No increase is applied to housing rents for 2010/11.
- (12) No increase is applied to housing service charges for 2010/11
- (13) The proposed Housing Revenue Account budget for 2010/11, as detailed in Appendix I to the Cabinet report, be approved.

Capital

- (14) The General Fund Capital bids for 2010/11 as listed in Appendix L to the Cabinet report together with an allocation of provision of £800,000 for a community centre in Halstead, be approved.

Treasury Management

- (15) The revised CIPFA Code of Practice in Treasury Management in the Public Services be adopted.
- (16) The Prudential Indicators and limits set out in Appendix N to the Cabinet report be approved.
- (17) The Policy on Minimum Revenue Provision as recommended in Appendix N of the Cabinet report be approved.
- (18) The Treasury Management Strategy, including annual investment strategy, for 2010/11 be approved.

Council Tax

- (19) The proposed estimates detailed in Appendix P to the Cabinet report and the Council Tax increase of 2.5% be approved, having taking into consideration
 - the consultation feedback received, and
 - the Section 151 Officer's report on the robustness of the estimates and the adequacy of the balances (Appendix O of the Cabinet report)

Future Efficiencies

- (20) Given the anticipated budget gap, coupled with the possibilities of the Government Grant reducing and the pension costs increasing by more than that currently provided over the next three years, that an overall strategic approach to efficiency and service delivery options be brought forward to a future meeting.
- (21) The Medium Term Financial Strategy is updated to take account of the information detailed in the report and the decisions made.

Councillor Lager, Cabinet Member for Efficiency and Resources, presented the Council Tax Resolution 2010-11 and moved the recommendations.

DECISION:

1. That the Council's General Fund budget of £18,900,900 and the total Budget Requirement (inclusive of the aggregate amount local precepts) of £20,580,693 for 2010/11 be approved.
2. That the level of Council Tax for 2010/11 is set, in accordance with the following resolution.
 - 1) Under delegated powers the Corporate Director agreed the amount of Council Tax Base for the whole district for 2010/11 as 53,164 Band D equivalents. He also agreed that the amounts calculated and set out in Column 2 of Schedule A, should be the Council Tax Base for dwellings in those parts of the District listed in Column 1 of that schedule.
 - 2) The Council agrees a budget for 2010/11 of £18,900,900, which after taking account of Government Formula Grant and the Council's share of the estimated Collection Fund balance, results in a charge on council taxpayers of £8,655,627. This equates to a Band D tax rate of £162.81, which is an increase of 2.5% over the current year.
 - 3) The following amounts are calculated by the Council for the year 2010/11, in accordance with Sections 32 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992:-
 - a) £76,194,753 being the expenditure the Council estimates it will incur in the year in performing its functions and which will be charged to a revenue account. This amount includes contingencies, estimated transfers to financial reserves, and local precepts issued to the Council.
 - b) £55,614,060, being receipts estimated by the Council which will be credited to a revenue account. This amount includes specific government grants and estimated transfers from financial reserves, but excludes Formula Grant and the Council's share of the estimated Collection Fund balance.
 - c) £20,580,693, being the budget requirement for the year calculated as the difference between gross expenditure and income as set out at (a) and (b) above, and includes the total of local precepts received.
 - d) £10,231,363, being the amount which is payable for Formula Grant into the General Fund in respect of revenue support grant and redistributed business rates.
 - e) £13,910, being the amount that has been calculated as at 15th January 2010 as the Council's share of the estimated Collection Fund balance at 31st March 2010, and which will be transferred to the General Fund revenue account in 2010/11.

- f) £10,335,420, being the Council Tax requirement for the Council including the amount to be raised on behalf of town and parish councils.
- g) £194.41, being the basic amount of council tax for the year including the average local precept tax rate, calculated by dividing (f) by the district tax base.
- h) £1,679,793, being the total of all local precepts received from town and parish councils and taken into account in making the calculation of the budget requirement at (c) above, and shown in Column 3 of Schedule A.
- i) £162.81, being the basic amount of council tax for dwellings in those parts of the District where there are no town and parish council precepts, i.e. this is the District Council's share of the total council tax rate and is charged across property bands as follows:

Property Band	Band as proportion of Band D	Council Tax Rate
A	6/9	108.54
B	7/9	126.63
C	8/9	144.72
D	9/9	162.81
E	11/9	198.99
F	13/9	235.17
G	15/9	271.35
H	18/9	325.62

- j) The amounts shown in Column 5 of Schedule A, calculated by adding to the amount at (i) above, the precept amount relating to each parish or town council area, divided by the tax base for that area. This represents the basic amount of council tax for each parish or town council area. The charge for each property band is also shown in Schedule A.
- 4) That it be noted that the following precepts will be issued to the Council for 2010/11:

• Essex County Council	£57,775,977
• Essex Police	£ 7,024,028
• Essex Fire & Rescue	£ 3,531,153

Expressed as a tax rate for dwellings in the following property bands:

Property Band	Essex County Council	Essex Police	Essex Fire & Rescue
A	724.50	88.08	44.28
B	845.25	102.76	51.66
C	966.00	117.44	59.04
D	1086.75	132.12	66.42
E	1328.25	161.48	81.18
F	1569.75	190.84	95.94
G	1811.25	220.20	110.70
H	2173.50	264.24	132.84

- 5) That having calculated the aggregate of the amounts stated under (i), (j), and 4 above for each area within the District, the Council hereby sets the amounts shown in Schedule B as the total amount of Council Tax for each of the property bands.
- 6) The Council resolves that any expenses incurred by it in performing in part of its area a function that is performed elsewhere in its area by a parish or town council, or a Chairman of a parish meeting, shall not be treated as Special Expenses for the purposes of Section 35 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

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

Cabinet – 1st February 2010

(i) Accommodation Options Review

Councillor Lager, Cabinet Member for Efficiency and Resources, referred to the minutes of the Cabinet meeting and moved the recommendations. It was noted that £3.3m capital provision would be required in 2010/11, and that the Sub Group - for the refurbishment project for Causeway House – had already met to reassess the works required.

Councillor E R Lynch referred to the difference in refurbishments costs, and understood that now Greenfields Community Housing had moved from Causeway House there is opportunity for staff to decant to other parts of the building whilst the refurbishment is undertaken. It was considered that only part of the DTZ report had been used in the initial refurbishment costs, and it was suggested that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may wish to look at these figures.

Councillor Abbott agreed that the right decision had now been made for staff and residents with the Council staying at Causeway House in Braintree; and there is opportunity to strengthen the Council's area offices in Witham and Halstead by working with partners.

DECISION:

- (1) That Braintree District Council retains and continues to occupy Causeway House, Braintree.
- (2) That capital provision of £3.8m be made available in the Capital Programme, for the refurbishment of Causeway House.
- (3) That specifications of refurbishment works be drawn up prior to going out to tender.
- (4) That a Sub Group (for the refurbishment project) be established consisting of Councillors Butland, Dr Evans, M Gage, Lager and Mitchell before going out to tender.
- (5) That the footprint required by the Council for office space be reduced, and allows for modern, flexible ways of staff working.
- (6) To explore with Essex County Council the opportunity of the County Council purchasing or leasing Mayland House, Witham.

- (7) If (6) above does not prove possible, to sell or rent Mayland House on the open market.
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(ii) Housing and Planning Delivery Grant 2009/10

Councillor Harley, Cabinet Member for Enterprise and Culture, referred to the minutes of the Cabinet meeting and moved the recommendation.

DECISION: That the expenditure of Housing and Planning Delivery Grant 2009/10, as set out in the report, be approved.

Local Development Framework Panel – 3rd February 2010

(i) Local Development Framework Core Strategy

Councillor McCrea, Chairman of the Local Development Framework (LDF) Panel, presented the draft Core Strategy and commended the work of the LDF. The Strategy will set the provision of development in the district up to 2026, and was initially driven by the East of England Plan to identify housing allocation and recognise the key service villages of Coggeshall, Earls Colne, Hatfield Peverel, and Kelvedon; and the regeneration areas of Sible Hedingham and Silver End.

The Strategy proposes urban extensions to accommodate 1,400 homes with 500 north west of Braintree, 600 at Lodge Farm, Witham and 300 at Forest Road, Rivenhall; and an 18.5 hectare Business Park east of Great Notley. Plans on town centre regeneration will move forward, with key facilities and infrastructure to support all growth in the District as identified in Appendix 4 of the Strategy. The Strategy introduces 14 additional policies including affordable housing and sustainability, and Council were requested to approve the draft Core Strategy, with the final evidence to be agreed by the LDF at their meeting on 14th April 2010.

A further period of consultation will commence by July 2010, with submission of the Strategy in August and a Hearing during November/December 2010. A final decision will be announced by May 2011.

Councillor Abbott moved an amendment to the Core Strategy as follows:-

'In Policy CS1 delete Growth Location north-east of Witham (in Rivenhall) for 300 dwellings and make consequent changes elsewhere in the document, including to the map on page 30.

Replace with the identified "amber" site at Conrad Road, Witham as a Growth Location or as an allocations site, with any further rebalancing to ensure the same capacity as already stated in the Core Strategy, to be provided at Lodge Farm, Witham.'

On speaking to the amendment Councillor Abbott stated that the original proposal is entirely within Rivenhall Parish, and the amendment proposes an alternative 'amber' site at Conrad Road that is close to schools, bus routes, the railway station, has better accessibility, is closer to the town centre, and is entirely within Witham Parish.

Further reference was made to the industrial areas, the Motts Lane crossing, breaches to Policy and other inaccuracies.

Councillor Gyford referred to previous discussions on the proposed Forest Road development, including traffic impact, road junctions, and the narrow, residential roads with on-street parking and commuter parking.

Councillor Hughes provided a brief history of the Forest Road site, referring to 'Green Wedge' designation and open countryside policies, and the need to protect the countryside.

Councillor Lager stated that various assessments have been made of the Forest Road site, and further assessments would delay the LDF process. The Conrad Road site has space for 150 dwellings and any further re-balancing – by adding to the Lodge Farm allocation – would require further traffic assessment and would impact on Lodge Farm. The LDF policies are there to protect villages, but are not there to protect the Parish boundary

Councillor McCrea stated that the Conrad Road site has capacity for 100 houses, and no consultation has been undertaken to extend the development boundary or a sustainability assessment to the suitability of the Conrad Road site. The Forest Road location would 'round off' the edge of Witham, has good pedestrian accessibility to Witham town centre, housing already in Rickstones Road, an existing golf course, and a new cycle bridge proposed at Motts Lane.

Councillor Butland provided the example of village and Parish, with the Great Notley Garden Village once being part of the village of Great Notley.

Councillor Abbott requested that the vote on the amendment be recorded.

The results of the recorded vote were as follows:-

For the Motion

Councillors: Abbott, Ms Barlow, Bishop, Gyford, Hughes, E Lynch, M Lynch and Mann
(8)

Against the Motion

Councillors: Banthorpe, Mrs Beavis, Bebb, Butland, Cohen, Collar, Dunn, Elliott, Finbow, Ms Flint, M Gage, Harley, Mrs Howell, Hume, Lager, Lambourne, McArdle, McCrea, McKee, Messenger, Meyer, Mitchell, Mrs Money, Mrs Pell, Ramage, Reid, Mrs Sandbrook, Mrs Scattergood, Mrs Schmitt, Shelton, Mrs Shepherd, Siddall, Mrs Smith, Mrs Spray, Swallow, Walsh, Walters and Wilkinson (38)

Abstained

Councillor Mrs Galione (1)

Absent

Councillors: Baugh, Bolton, Mrs Edey, Elliston, Dr Evans, Everard, Foster, Mrs Gage, Lady Newton, O'Reilly-Cicconi, Rice, Ms Thorogood and Wilkins(13)

The amendment motion was declared **LOST**

Councillor Mrs Pell requested if the Core Strategy has any allowance in protecting the line of a by pass for Halstead, and whether it is secure in the Strategy.

Councillor McCrea advised there is no provision in any plan for a Halstead by-pass, and Essex County Council (ECC) is organising consultation during the summer.

Councillor M Gage stated that ECC already have a designated line for the Halstead by-pass and wished it clarified that there is nothing in the Local Development Framework to say that line does not exist, or anything in the Core Strategy that will cancel this line.

Councillor McCrea confirmed there is nothing in the LDF proposals to encroach on any line.

DECISION: That the Core Strategy Submission Draft be approved for pre-Submission Consultation, subject to final changes by the Local Development Framework Panel on 14th April 2010.

(ii) Growth Area Funding Priorities for Expenditure

Councillor Harley moved the recommendation from the Local Development Framework Panel.

DECISION:

- (1) That the priorities for the expenditure of Growth Area Funding, as set out in paragraph 4 of the report, be approved.
- (2) That any remaining Growth Area Funding be used to support the delivery of growth and regeneration areas identified in the Draft Core Strategy and the delivery of affordable housing, and that the following schemes be identified as specific priorities:-

Purchase of property, Braintree Town Centre - £350,000
Freeport foot/cycle bridge, Braintree - £250,000
Braintree branch line rail study - £40,000

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

INFORMATION: No statements were made.

72 **QUESTION TIME (PUBLIC SESSION)**

(i) **Statements from the Leader and Cabinet Members**

INFORMATION: A further update was received from Councillor Walters.

Cold Weather Conditions

Councillor Walters formally paid tribute to the Council's Street Scene Teams who were clearing snow and gritting footpaths and roads across the District, and supporting the Highways Authority. The Braintree District was one of the best served in the cold weather with High Streets, stations, some schools and dangerous road junctions receiving treatment. The refuse collection teams are also to be commended for their work during this period.

New Civic Amenity Site at Springwood.

Councillor Walters reported that a new Civic Amenity Site will be opening on Springwood Industrial Estate in Braintree, during May 2010. This will provide the public with opportunities to recycle, together with local charity shops and car boot sales. The Council's current recycling rate (for December 2009) is 53%, and on target for a year to date figure of 50.7%.

Councillor E R Lynch declared an interest as a Governor of Beckers Green School in Braintree, and raised an issue regarding the **gritting of roads to schools**. It was queried why the Highways Authority did not treat schools as a priority during the recent spell of snow and icy weather, as the Beckers Green School was closed for two days. Councillor Lynch also spoke with regard to **people being bitten by dogs**. It was questioned how many people have to be attacked by a dog before the dog is destroyed. Councillor Walters advised that gritting to school premises is currently under review with Essex County Council (ECC) liaising with Braintree District Council. The Highways Authority has a priority to keep main roads flowing and there is a limit of what can be gritted, and the District Council did support ECC during the cold weather.

In respect of dogs biting members of the public, the Council can just present the case and prosecute owners.

Councillor Abbott also referred to the **gritting of roads** and stated that many places were dangerously icy during the recent cold weather, and Rivenhall had acquired additional salt bins so residents can help treat local roads. It was queried if schools/school governors should be approached to acquire salt bins for their local school, before next winter. In response, Councillor Walters advised that any Parish can have additional gritting bins, and ECC will maintain the grit supplies.

(ii) **Chairmen's Reports**

INFORMATION: No reports were made.

(iii) **Meetings in Public Session**

INFORMATION: Members were invited to raise any matters arising from meetings that had been held in public session since the last Council meeting on 14th December 2009. No issues were raised.

73 **BUSINESS OF EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS**

INFORMATION: There were no reports received from Council representatives on external organisations.

As there were no items in private session, the Chairman closed the meeting.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 10.03pm.

Mrs M E Galione
(Chairman)

APPENDIX

COUNCIL MEETING

15TH FEBRUARY 2010

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Summary of Questions Asked / Statements Made During Question Time

1. Statement by Alexander Stanford-Eyre
Agenda Item 7 – Budget Recommendations – Tourist Information Centre

Mr Stanford-Eyre advised that as a student he frequently used the Tourist Information Centre to purchase bus passes, and for information in and around the Braintree area. It was considered that the proposed cut-backs would impact on tourism in the district, and result in redundancies for current Tourist Office staff. Mr Stanford-Eyre also stated that £10,000 expenditure on a tourism website seemed a phenomenal amount for the Council to spend, and that students are involved in the College's website that costs a much lesser amount.

2. Statement by Giles Bryant, 5 Pye Corner, Castle Hedingham
Agenda Item 7 – Budget Recommendations – Tourist Information Centre

Mr Bryant stated that he runs a business in Castle Hedingham, and is proud to be associated with the Braintree District – an area of rich countryside, heritage, buildings and people. It was considered a great advantage to have a manned tourist centre and personal interaction, and this benefits local business – especially when (like Mr Bryant's business) people travel into the area from Europe and wish to explore North Essex. The area has many attractions, including the unique round church at Little Maplestead (one of only four in the country) and this area of North Essex has received recognition in the national press.

In conclusion, Mr Bryant advised that he attends craft fairs, and use tours to promote his business and for those people making the pictures of local attractions (as displayed at the meeting). The tourist service is very important to the local economy and to promote the numerous attractions in the area.

3. Statement by Fred Sheldrake, 11 Oakley Road, Braintree
Agenda Item 7 – Budget Recommendations – Tourist Information Centre

Mr Sheldrake had lived in the area most of his life, and was made aware in November 2009 that the Tourist Information office was under threat. Although the tourism service is not a mandatory function for the Council it does bring benefits to the area. It provides a worthwhile service and should be advertised and improved, not reduced, and made more financially independent. The benefits of the 'Eye-Site' service in New Zealand was explained as an information point for activities, accommodation, local events and information, and was highly used.

Mr Sheldrake referred to correspondence between the Chief Executive and himself, and the significant amount of public consultation that displayed 68% wanted less

spent on tourism – not for closure. Suggestions were put forward regarding a charge for tourist services, a winter timetable of reduced opening hours, and to review changes on an annual basis.

In response to the above three speakers on the Tourist Information Centre, Councillor Harley, Cabinet Member for Enterprise and Culture, stated that the net cost of the service is £76,000 and the proposals would realise savings of £30,000 in 2010/11. There are proposals to work with the East of England Tourism to enhance the website, with a personal touch provided by the new District Promotions Officer, when appointed. There will be tourist information points at Causeway House, Witham Town Council, Freeport and at George Yard, Braintree. An annual grant is also proposed for Witham and Halstead Town Councils to invest in tourism/visitor promotion in their towns; and the District Council will be working with specialists on the website. Councillor Harley advised that the suggestions put forward by the speakers will be taken on board, and gave reassurance that the promotion of smaller businesses will not diminish.

4. Statement by Bob Wright, 303 Rickstones Road, Rivenhall
Agenda Item 9 – Local Development Framework Core Strategy

Mr Wright advised that the Core Strategy continues to include a list of errors, e.g. that Forest Road/Rectory Lane site is closer to the railway station. It was also considered that developers would also not be providing the Motts Lane footbridge on this occasion, and the employment sites have already been removed across the railway line, and the nearest school is located at Conrad Road. There is also speculation that Phase 2 at Rectory Road – an additional 800 homes is proposed. The draft Core Strategy also refers to encroachments at Rickstones Academy, and employment land near the A12/railway line vicinity – both areas of Rivenhall (not Witham).

Mr Wright stated that throughout the public consultation process with Rivenhall residents, Parish Council, Witham Town Council, the Local Committee, and the LDF Panel the proposal had been voted against. Therefore, he was sceptical to the next stage of the consultation process.

5. Statement by Jack Prime, Chairman of Rivenhall Parish Plan Steering Group
Agenda Item 9 – Local Development Framework Core Strategy

Mr Prime referred to Parish Appraisals – an area considered as a ‘key role’ in setting planning policies. The results in Rivenhall’s Parish Appraisal had shown 88% against development at Forest Road, and 97% against development at Rectory Lane. The Village Design Statement and the decisions of Rivenhall Parish Council and Witham Town Council had also recognised this. An alternative site at Conrad Road for 150-200 homes had been proposed, with the remaining homes spread across village sites.

Mr Prime continued to speak on safety issues at Rectory Lane where pedestrians and dog walkers frequent the lane – that has ‘protected status – has a dangerous corner and is not considered suitable for an increase in vehicular traffic. Although the building may be delayed to 2021 -2026 it may be beneficial for the District Council, or for Witham town in the long term, but was considered a bad decision for Rivenhall and goes against the village Statement and Parish Plans.