

Minutes

Cabinet



7th July 2008

Present:

Cabinet Members	Portfolio	Present
Councillor G Butland	Leader	Yes
Councillor N R H O Harley	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Enterprise, Culture & Leisure	Yes
Councillor Mrs J C Beavis	Customers & Communication	Yes
Councillor M C M Lager	Efficiency & Resources	Yes
Councillor Mrs J W Schmitt	Communities & Housing	Yes
Councillor R G Walters	Environment and Sustainability	Yes

Deputy Cabinet Members	Portfolio	Present
Councillor N G McCrea	Leader's Portfolio	Apologies
Councillor T S Wilkinson	Enterprise, Culture & Leisure	Apologies
Councillor D L Bebb	Customers & Communication	Yes
Councillor J McKee	Efficiency & Resources	Yes
Councillor Mrs E Edey	Communities & Housing	Yes
Councillor R G S Mitchell	Environment and Sustainability	Apologies

The following Councillors were also present as invitees of the Leader

Councillor J E Abbott, Leader of the Green Group

Councillor Dr R L Evans, Leader of the Labour Group

Councillor M G Gage, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee/Leader of Halstead Residents' Association

Councillor S M Walsh, Chairman of Braintree Local Committee

Councillors E R Lynch, D Mann and Mrs L Shepherd were also in attendance.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor T J W Foster, Chairman of Witham Local Committee.

28 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The following Declarations of Interest were made

- Councillor J E Abbott declared a personal interest in
 - (i) Agenda Item 1(a) – Provision of Sites for Gypsies and Travellers as (i) the

- site is adjacent to his Ward and (ii) the Chairman of Bradwell Parish Council is speaking on the issue (Bradwell is in his Ward)
- (ii) Agenda Item 1(b) – Draft Green Spaces Strategy as a Member of Rivenhall Parish Council who had made representation on this topic
 - (iii) Agenda Item 1(d) – BDC Allotments Task and Finish Group, as Ward Member for Silver End, whose Parish Council had made representations on security at the Silver End site
- Councillor D L Bebb declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 1(d) – BDC Allotments Task and Finish Group, as he had been Chairman of the Group.
 - Councillor M C M Lager declared a personal interest in
 - (i) Agenda Item 1(d) - BDC Allotments Task and Finish Group, as a Member of Witham Town Council who had expressed an interest in the management of allotments in Witham
 - (ii) Agenda Item 2(a) – Town Centre Regeneration – Braintree, Witham and Halstead as a Member of Essex County Council, and as deputy to County Councillor Peter Martin, who has portfolio responsibility for this area
 - (iii) Agenda Item 7 – Cabinet Members’ Update as the Council’s representative on the Community Housing and Investment Partnership Board (CHIP Board)
 - Councillors G Butland and Mrs J W Schmitt both declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 7 – Cabinet Members’ Updates as members of the Community Housing and Investment Partnership Board (CHIP Board).
 - Councillor S M Walsh declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 9(a) – Chief Executives Report as he is involved with the Witham Academies through his role as Cabinet Member for Schools, Children and Families at Essex County Council.

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

29 **MINUTES**

DECISION: That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 2nd June 2008 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

Minute 9 – Capital Programme Update – Little Elms Pre-School. Councillor Mrs Schmitt, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing, reported that she had been unofficially informed that the Little Elms Pre-School have found alternative accommodation at the local school. Therefore, the remedial work planned for Rickstones Pavilion, Witham funded from the Capital Programme, had been halted and further consideration will be given to the future of the Pavilion.

30 **QUESTION TIME**

There was one statement made, a summary of which is attached as an Appendix to these Minutes.

31 **PROVISION OF SITES FOR GYPSIES AND TRAVELLERS IN THE BRAINTREE DISTRICT**

The Leader invited local Parish Chairmen to the table to speak on the Twin Oaks issue.

Councillor John Clark, Chairman of Stisted Parish Council, referred to the traveller's site at Twin Oaks, Stisted and the local authorities failure to achieve closure of the unauthorised site and the cost involved. The local communities are appalled for the Council even considering authorisation and enlargement of the site. The sites have been inflicted on Stisted, and local citizens have suffered intimidation, vandalism, fly-tipping, theft, and antisocial behaviour from the Twin Oaks residents, and Police records verify this. The Cray's Hill site at Basildon was quoted, its enlargement and the impact on the local community and authority. It was considered that rural communities rely on a settled, happy environment for their families and these proposals will distort the population balances of our villages. The Planning Inspectors report four years previously had identified no social need for the site and had recognised highway safety dangers on the A120 – and due to the traffic hazard had delayed enforcement on the site's closure by one year to allow the authority to relocate the site occupants. Councillor Clark stated that the District Council had made no constructive consideration to alternative sites, and the need for 16 traveller sites – an assessment disputed by the Association of Local Councils of Essex. He urged Members not to continue to create a large traveller site, respect the rural location and effects on the local community.

Councillor Clive Hawkins, Chairman of Cressing Parish Council, raised similar concerns and concurred that the traveller site would not be at its current size if the District Council had done their duty. The facts remain that Twin Oaks 1 & 2 exist - one authorised and one not – an unlicensed increase in size has been allowed; and reference was made to the pitches at Sandiacres and Halfacre site at Cressing. The parishes of Bradwell, Stisted and Cressing are bearing the 'brunt' and concentration of the sites, totally out of balance with the population of the Braintree District and the villages where the sites exist. The Twin Oaks sites places burdens on environmental issues, schooling, traffic and policing; and there is a lack of drainage and sewerage facilities at the sites. The report quotes that when the requirements of the Review of the East of England is finalised, further sites may be required beyond 2011, and this was considered to be the District Council waiting again for others to make the decision.

Councillor Roy Webb, Chairman of Bradwell and Pattiswick Parish Council, fully supported the previous speakers and considered the Access Study Intermodal Transportation report as a 'sham' as it used 50MPH for the A120, whereas the speed limit is 60MPH for this trunk road. The Planning Inspectors papers of 12th January 2004 had stated that the highway was not wide enough to create a right turn, across the path of oncoming vehicles; and had also recognised that the present sightline is unsuitable and visibility splay impeded. It was considered that planning laws should be applied equitably and other residents in the area had planning applications refused on highway reasons. He continued to quote various road accidents at the location and considered that, eventually, someone would be killed.

Councillor Harley, Cabinet Member for Enterprise, Culture & Leisure stated that the Council had a duty to provide additional pitches and the transportation study had confirmed that access to the site can be constructed to meet highway needs. Earlier concerns were addressed:-

- The permanent structures at Twin Oaks would be addressed when a formal planning application is submitted for the site
- The site will be 'private' until the Council's authorisation has been processed
- Anti social behaviour issues are noted – however, this is not a planning issue

- The Highways Agency will consider the speed limit for the location

It was accentuated that the decision is for the principle of bringing the Twin Oaks site forward as an authorised site, and further discussion will be ensued at planning application stage on planning/highways matters.

Following concerns raised by Members the following was clarified:-

- access to the site - eastward on ghosted right turn and westward in normal lane
- access is a technical provision in the planning application and will require Highways Authority support
- if access is supported the gypsy/traveller site will need to cover the cost
- the site would comprise of the pitches already in place
- the other existing gypsy/traveller site in the District is located at Ridgewell

DECISION:

- (1) That the principle of bringing the site at Twin Oaks, Stisted forward as an authorised site be agreed and discussions are held with the landowners on the submission of a planning application and the delivery of the site.
- (2) That options for additional sites to meet the District's needs beyond 2011 be investigated when the requirements for the District have been confirmed by the Regional Spatial Strategy review.

32 DISTRICT-WIDE GREEN SPACES STRATEGY

Councillor Walters, Cabinet Member for Environment and Sustainability, presented the revision of the draft Green Spaces Strategy, that forms the evidence base for planning and provision of open spaces and sport and recreational facilities including S106 Agreements, and will influence the maintenance and quality of the Council's green spaces. Amendments had been made including historic environment issues and an Action Plan on Allotments.

Councillor Abbott advised that Rivenhall Parish Council had submitted evidence to support local rural footways (Rivenhall & Silver End) – wide green spaces, many of which having been ancient trackways. However, the evidence had not been accepted as the Appendix to the report referred this to field margins – therefore, this item was disputed. Councillor Walters advised he would take this issue back to officers.

DECISION:

- (1) That the Braintree Green Spaces Strategy as recommended for alteration by the Green Spaces Strategy Development Group be endorsed.
- (2) That the Strategy is considered by the Local Development Framework Panel as the evidence base for future green space planning policies and future management and maintenance plans produced by the Council.

ACTION POINT: Councillor Walters and officers to respond on comments regarding rural footways (green corridors) in Rivenhall & Silver End.

33 **REFUSE AND RECYCLING TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

Cabinet was reminded of the five recommendations of the Refuse and Recycling Task and Finish Group (as defined on Page 10 of the Agenda).

During the discussion it was confirmed that the Council will undertake a satisfaction survey early in 2009 when consistent levels of performance are achieved, following the wheelie-bin roll-out. The Conclusion of the report identified that many of the recommendations will form part of the Business Efficiency Review of Waste Management, and the minutes of the Performance and Efficiency Programme Board (24th June 2008) supported this. It was noted that, with regard to co-mingling of dry recycling, there is evidence that it increases performance and that kerbside segregation of waste is inadvisable, i.e. dependent on vehicles being unique to the authority, impact on traffic flows and dissatisfied residents. Therefore, it is proposed to make recycling easier and more understandable for residents, and deliver higher levels of recycling for the same cost.

Councillor Walters, Cabinet Member for Environment and Sustainability, agreed that the Task and Finish Groups had been a success for the Council, provided a fresh look and ideas on their projects, and produced valuable information for Cabinet to take forward various issues.

DECISION: That the recommendations of the Refuse and Recycling Task and Finish Group be taken into consideration in forthcoming decisions relating to the efficiency of the Waste Management service.

34 **BDC ALLOTMENTS TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

Councillor Walters, Cabinet Member for Environment and Sustainability, stated that the Allotments Task and Finish Group was another 'success story', and a three-year Action Plan had been produced on short, medium and long-term actions (Appendix 2 of the report). The objectives will require further funding; and a Survey & Improvement Plan 2008-2011 had identified schemes, totalling £128,000 in Capital needs. For 2009/2010, schemes at Cut Throat Lane, Witham; Silver Street, Silver End; and Tabor Field, Braintree are put forward and, if Local Members considered them a priority, they could be achieved earlier by taking the opportunity to use funding to Witham Local Committee and Braintree Local Committee respectively. However, Councillor Abbott considered that £70,000 for the costings in the Witham area, would utilise the majority of the Local Committee budget.

In response to queries the following issues were clarified: -

- The allotments are all Council managed and not under Greenfield's Community Housing
- The allotments in Halstead are already considered 'exemplary' and are, therefore, not included in the Condition Survey and Improvement Plan.
- The need and size of allotments has to be ascertained, i.e. ¼ or ½ size plots
- Parishes will be contacted to record allotments in their area – whether private or public –and the capacity for additional plots
- To liaise with schools to offer allotment spaces, for those schools with limited

- grounds
- Tenancy Agreements to be reviewed, including the lack of use and misuse of allotments
- Management of allotments should be devolved to the relevant Town or Parish Council
- Allotments in Conrad Road, Witham that are not in use
- That the Task and Finish Group held a database of non-BDC allotments that could be useful in the future

DECISION:

- (1) That an approach of self-management of allotment sites by town/parish councils and allotments associations be adopted.
- (2) That future fees and charges of allotments be considered further, prior to infrastructure improvements being carried out at some sites
- (3) That the proposals as outlined in the Action Plan at Appendix 2 of the report, be endorsed, subject to funding requirements being met.
- (4) That the Cabinet Member liaises with Local Committees for their considerations on the proposed schemes and to clarify any priorities.

ACTION POINT: Councillor Walters to ascertain the status of the allotments at Conrad Road, Witham

35 LICENSING ENFORCEMENT STUDY

Cabinet received the Action Plan following the recommendations of the Investigation into Licensing Enforcement, and noted responses/progress points including the successful appointment of a joint enforcement officer and on closer partnership working, i.e. a specific meeting on licensing matters (held six-monthly) involving the Police, the Council's Environmental Protection representative, Health & Safety, Planning Department representative, the Fire Service and Children Services.

DECISION:

- (1) That the report and the actions taken against the recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.
- (2) That the provision of additional resources in the Licensing Enforcement function be considered in the 2009/10 budget process.

36 **TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION – BRAINTREE, WITHAM AND HALSTEAD

Councillor Lager, Cabinet Member for Efficiency and Resources, presented proposals for the regeneration of parts of Witham, Braintree and Halstead town centres. It was noted that the reports are a result of consultant's advice in line with Council aims to make our town centres 'points of pride', and that the timescales for Witham and Braintree may be affected by the current difficult market conditions. Full consultation on the schemes will be held throughout the District, including Local Committees and Town Centre Strategy Groups.

Councillor Dr Evans advised that the Witham Town Strategy Group had already commented on the proposals and had highlighted loss of parking and market space in Witham town, and he referred to a previous detailed report from consultants, DTZ. The Leader stated that DTZ had been working jointly with Essex County Council on the joint offices project, and continued to advise that representations had already been received regarding parking provision in Witham and Braintree town centres.

All input will be welcomed through the consultation exercise, and regular reports made to Cabinet.

DECISION:

- (1) That the following Governance arrangements for the three Town Centre regeneration sites be approved:-
Programme Steering Board – Cllr Butland, Cllr Harley, Cllr Lager (plus three Members: one from each Local Committee), Peter Crofts and Allan Reid.
- (2) That Officer's be authorised to undertake a full consultation exercise and prepare a detailed development brief for both the Braintree and Witham Town Centre sites. The final development brief to be referred to each of the Local Committees and Cabinet for approval.
- (3) That the Council-owned land contained within the redevelopment site known as Land East of the High Street, Halstead, be declared surplus to requirements and disposed of on the open market on the terms to be agreed by the Programme Board.
- (4) That the costs of the recommendations (1, 2, & 3 above) be met from the capital provision made in the current Capital Programme. This includes any project management costs to deliver this project.

ACTION POINT: That each Local Committee appoints a representative to the Programme Steering Board

37 **CAPITAL FUNDING**

Councillor Lager, Cabinet Member for Efficiency and Resources, presented details of a review of the Capital Programme due to the current economic climate, including receipt of a revised bid (subject to planning) of the Riverside site, Braintree and a decrease in the 'right to buy' scheme. The proposal (b) within the report was slightly updated to show that the utilisation of the capital receipt from the Housing Stock Transfer was temporary funding, and is to be recouped from subsequent assets disposal.

It was noted that a review of funding for Local Committees would take place in October 2008.

DECISION: That the proposed strategy for funding the Capital Programme and meeting the additional revenue costs be approved.

38 **CUSTOMER ACCESS STRATEGY**

Councillor Mrs Beavis, Cabinet Member for Customers and Communication, referred to proposals on the Customer Access Strategy and the new booklet 'Improving Customer Service'.

Councillor M Gage advised that at the recent LGA Conference, himself and colleagues Councillors Mrs Beavis and Ramage, had seen a display of the Redbridge Council website, and were impressed with its' content. The Leader advised that staffing resources to maintain the website at Redbridge, were higher than those of Braintree, and stated that this Council would be looking for additional expenditure to improve their website service.

DECISION: That the Customer Access Strategy 2008-2012 be supported.

39 **HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2008-2013**

Councillor Mrs Schmitt, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing, presented the Homelessness Review and Strategy 2008-2013, including the new Strategic Aims for the next five years. The review on advice providers, i.e. Greenfield's Community Housing, the Health Service and the Citizens' Advice Bureau, to develop protocols was advised and noted.

DECISION: That the Homelessness Review and Strategy 2008-2013 be approved.

40 **CORPORATE EQUALITY PLAN 2008-2009**

Councillor Mrs Edey, Deputy Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing, stated that various errors appeared on Page 69 of the background papers to the report, and these are to be corrected. The Corporate Equality Plan 2008-2009 and the Race Equality Scheme are produced to current legislation and Appendix 4 depicts the actions and target dates for the Council.

DECISION: That the Corporate Equality Plan 2008-2009 and Race Equality Scheme be endorsed.

41 **DELEGATED DECISION**

That the following delegated decision be noted

- (i) Councillor Mrs Schmitt – to approve funding for a new additional mini-bus.

42 **CABINET MEMBERS' UPDATES**

Councillor Lager, Cabinet Member for Efficiency and Resources, presented the recommendations from the meeting of the **Community Housing and Investment Partnership Board (CHIP Board)** held on 17th June 2008.

DECISION: That the recommendations at Minutes 3, 4, 5 and 6 of the CHIP Board minutes of 17th June 2008 be accepted.

43 **REFERENCE FROM AUDIT COMMITTEE 26TH JUNE 2008 – STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS**

Cabinet received the recommendation on the Statement of Accounts 2007/2008 and Annual Treasury Management report.

DECISION:

- (1) That the Statement of Accounts for 2007/08, as amended, be approved and the Leader of the Council be authorised to certify the Accounts on behalf of the Council.
- (2) That the Annual Treasury Management Report for 2007/08 be noted.

44 **REFERENCE FROM BRAINTREE LOCAL COMMITTEE 1ST JULY 2008 - PROPOSED CIVIC AMENITY SITE AND RECYCLING CENTRE, SPRINGWOOD DRIVE, BRAINTREE**

Councillor Walsh, Chairman of Braintree Local Committee, presented the report for a Civic Amenity Site and Recycling Centre, situated off the end of Springwood Drive, Braintree, including transfer of land and Grant of Access rights. It was noted that the whole of Springwood Drive will be upgraded and adopted as a publicly maintainable highway.

Councillor Abbott requested that the street lights along Springwood Drive be replaced with modern flat light design, and that the height of the containers are at a suitable level, appropriate for all ages. The first request is preferred by way of correspondence, and the height levels will be included with the comments from Braintree Local Committee.

DECISION:

- (1) That Braintree District Council's land shown cross-hatched black on the plan (attached to the report) be declared surplus to requirements.
- (2) That disposal of Braintree District Council land to Essex County Council be on terms and conditions to be agreed by the Head of Asset Management.
- (3) That the terms and conditions in (2) include consideration on the type of recycling plant built to be as user-friendly for all ages as possible (including height levels), with suitable access for the disposal of waste.

45 **REFERENCE FROM JOINT CONSULTATIVE GROUP 7TH JULY 2008 – SMOKING POLICY**

The Leader stated that the Council's existing policy on smoking for staff formally comes to an end on 31st July 2008 and, at the Joint Consultative Group earlier in the day, talks had taken place between the Council and the Trade Unions, Unison and the GMB.

The Leader requested delegated powers to agree appropriate wording on the smoking policy, and advised that the full minutes of the Joint Consultative Group 7th July 2008

will be received at the next Cabinet meeting on 1st September 2008.

DECISION: That authority be delegated to the Leader of the Council to agree the final version of the Council's smoking policy.

46 **CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT**

The Chief Executive, Allan Reid, presented his report on 'Update on Current Issues', and advised he had recently received correspondence from the Essex Academies Project Office regarding the John Bramston Sports Centre. Bramston (and Rickstones) schools will be changing to Academy status from 1st September 2008 and delegation was requested for the final agreement between Braintree District Council and Essex County Council on the transfer of land and buildings.

An update was provided on the Municipal Journal Achievement Awards where the Council had been short listed in the category of Public Private Partnerships. Lincolnshire County Council had won the Award on 26th June 2008, and the Chief Executive commended Braintree staff and the local business community for their excellent work in being short listed.

In response to a query regarding dry-side facilities at Bramston Sports Centre or in Witham town the Chief Executive advised that leisure facilities will be part of a joint review (district wide), and the Council are entering discussions with the Academies to jointly enhance leisure provision in Witham, with news anticipated in the autumn.

Members' comments would be appreciated as to particular areas and subjects they would like covered in future reports. Councillor Mrs Beavis requested an update on health issues in the District, i.e. progress on the Braintree hospital, and the awaited Halstead Hospital project.

DECISION:

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That authority be delegated to Councillors Harley and Lager to agree the transfer of land and buildings at the John Bramston Sports Centre from Bramston School to Braintree District Council, and to re-negotiate a joint use agreement.

ACTION POINT: That Members submit requests to the Chief Executive, with regard to future topics

47 **CORPORATE HEALTH & SAFETY ANNUAL REPORT**

Cabinet received the Annual Health and Safety report for April 2007 to March 2008.

The Leader advised that the new requirements on Corporate Manslaughter will mean that the Council has more Health and Safety work to achieve involving senior management and Members, with some issues to be received at Cabinet.

Councillor Dr Evans raised various issues from the report:-

- The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 became operative in October 2006 and Page 37 of report quotes ‘Since September 2007, 28 Fire Risk Assessments have been completed....’ How quickly after 1st October were the Assessments taken?
- Misleading statistics – accident data of 60, 65 or 68 people – not being consistent; and data/bar chart on Page 47 – Accident by Cause being entitled January to December 2007, when the report refers to 2006.
- Page 41 – COSHH Assessments – How many staff had been assessed?

Councillor Walters, Cabinet Member for Environment and Sustainability advised he would respond in writing.

DECISION: That the Annual Corporate Health and Safety report be noted

ACTION POINT: That the Cabinet Member for Environment and Sustainability and officers respond to queries raised (see above)

48 **POSITION STATEMENT ON EMERGENCY PLANNING**

Cabinet received the report on Emergency Planning – Annual Audit Commission Self-Assessment Tool 2007/08.

DECISION: That the self-assessment position statement for 2007/08 be noted and action taken to ensure the emergency preparedness of Braintree District Council.

49 **BRAINTREE SWIMMING CENTRE SUB GROUP**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the Braintree Swimming Centre Sub Group held on 4th June 2008.

DECISION: That the minutes of the meeting of the Braintree Swimming Centre Sub Group of 4th June 2008 be noted.

50 **PERFORMANCE & EFFICIENCY PROGRAMME BOARD**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the Performance & Efficiency Programme Board held on 24th June 2008.

Firstly, attention was drawn to Minute 3 - Best Value Performance Plan 2007/08 and Targets for 2008/09, and the amendment log issued with the Cabinet papers – all to be formally approved by Council.

Secondly, to Minute 4 – Waste Management, that includes recommendations for cost savings and the proposal for all food waste to go in the green bin.

The Leader advised that public consultation would be undertaken before the new measures in waste and recycling collection are implemented.

The recommendation at Minute 6 – Customer Services Action Plan is to be discussed in Private Session.

DECISION:

- (1) That the minutes of the meeting of the Performance & Efficiency Programme Board of 12th May 2008 be noted.
- (2) That with the view to obtaining the maximum savings from the business efficiency review of Waste Management, option 4 be selected, along with the roll-out of accepting all food waste in green bins, as outlined in the officer's report.
- (3) That it be **Recommended to Council** that the Best Value Performance Plan for 2007/08, as amended, be approved.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

DECISION: That under Section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12 (A) of the Act.

Whilst the following item of business was discussed in private session, the minutes do not contain any confidential information and is therefore admissible in the public domain.

51 ****CUSTOMER SERVICES ACTION PLAN**

Cabinet received the Customer Services Action Plan and noted the main objectives to improve performance, improve customer satisfaction and to provide value for money. The costs/savings of the management restructure was noted.

DECISION:

- (1) That the Customer Services Action Plan be approved.
- (2) That the proposed costs/savings of the restructure as outlined in the officer's report, be approved

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 9.39pm

G BUTLAND

(Leader)

APPENDIX

CABINET MEETING

7TH JULY 2008

QUESTION TIME

Summary of Questions Asked / Statements Made During Question Time

1. Alan Mills representing Baytree Garden Centre, Coggeshall Road, Stisted
Agenda Item 1(a) Provision of Sites for Gypsies and Travellers in Braintree District

Mr Mills made a short statement on the proposals for the Twin Oaks site at Stisted and stated that, at the Council's own admission, Twin Oaks 1 site has been illegally occupied since 1992. The Council are aware of illegal permanent structures on the site (not caravans) that are inhabited and while it is incumbent on the Council that gypsies and travellers are treated equally, fairly, and with tolerance and respect the Council is not under any obligation to treat them more favourably than any other Braintree resident. To demonstrate this point is there any instance where the Council has allowed any resident to erect and inhabit any illegal structures.

In 1992 the Clark family purchased the site and 16 years later it has been deemed a suitable, 'permanent' gypsy and traveller camp, and it was queried if the Council had investigated alternative sites in the District. Mr Mill's quoted a Council report from 2006 that indicated that caravans at the site had matured into chalets and buildings erected – and gypsy and traveller sites are for caravans only.

Mr Mills referred to the policy position in the current report and that no formal action should be taken for Twin Oaks 1 or Twin Oaks 2, except for the serving of enforcement notices where unauthorised permanent structures remain. If this plan moves forward what will the Council do on this issue; and dealing with the 10 parcels of land that comprise Twin Oaks 2. In conclusion, Mr Mills stated that the report did not clarify whether the site will become an authorised private site or an authorised Council site, and this proposal was considered the easier option, but not necessarily the best option for the Council and residents.