

**STANSTED MOUNTFITCHET PARISH COUNCIL****FULL COUNCIL**

MINUTES of a Special meeting of the COUNCIL held at 7.45pm on Wednesday 12 October 2011 at the Day Centre, 72 Chapel Hill, Stansted Mountfitchet, Essex

**PRESENT:** Cllr G Sell (Chairman), Cllrs C Dean, B Gott, J Hudson, P L Jones, T Owen, R Rawlinson, W Stiles and V Trundle

**ATTENDING:** Mrs R Clifford – Clerk  
Jan Cole, Community Engagement Officer, Rural Community Council  
2 members of the public

**203 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs D Brett, I Evans, J Freeman, J Loughlin, J Rich and J Salmon.

**204 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST** - None.

**205 NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN**

The Chairman introduced Jan Cole, Community Engagement Officer with the Rural Community Council of Essex, who had been invited to give further information relating to Neighbourhood Plans.

Jan started by pointing out the differences between Village Design Statements (VDS), Parish Plans (PP) and Neighbourhood Plans (NP). Many Councils, including Stansted, had produced a VDS or PP, but NP's were to be introduced as part of the Localism Bill, currently working its way through Parliament and now likely to be enacted in April 2012. Whilst PP's are action documents, VDS and NP's sit within the planning system for policy and guidance. A NP would result in setting policy at a local level – basically a localised version of the District Plan – but would sit within the District Plan once adopted. If Stansted were to start work on a NP, it must conform to the current District Plan (2005) and to all national policies.

Neighbourhood Plans must contain sustainability appraisals and an equalities impact assessment. They will be subject to independent examination by a planning inspector and only having passed that can they go to local referendum. 50% of those who turn out to vote must be in favour of adopting the NP. Parishes can join together to produce a plan.

Within the Sustainability Appraisal, all possible development sites must be considered, even those within the Metropolitan Green Belt – environmental, social and economic impacts must be considered. Sites should be viewed in the context of energy, employment, education and any other use, not just for housing. Members wishing for further information can find a good guide on Google at DIY SA.

Cllr Dean commented that much of this work would be beyond the competence of the Parish Council and would require professional input. Uttlesford District Council's officers are already tied up in preparing the Local Development Framework (District Plan) – what would be the advantages of a parish having its own NP rather than just waiting for the LDF? What would happen if the NP did not gain support at the referendum? The

Chairman had concerns that the referendum would be a judgement on the Council rather than the document itself.

Jan Cole warned of the risks of doing nothing. Much of the preparation work could be started now and used to feed into the core strategy for the LDF. The approval process for NP's has not yet been set by the DCLG – Jan would be attending a meeting later this week on this very topic and would endeavour to keep Councils informed of progress.

Cllr Stiles commented that the Parish Plan had been a huge task – some outside help had been given by parishioners, but the bulk of the workload fell on the Parish Council. He was very concerned that sites outside the Village Development Limit must be considered – there seems to be a presumption now that all sites are available unless they can be defended robustly and he was concerned that this could be challenged by developers. Cllr Sell agreed and said it was difficult to weigh up the pros and cons of NP's. Jan believed that the background work – establishing sites and gaining the views of local people, along with assessing agricultural value etc – could be undertaken now to build up an evidence base for the site the Council wanted to protect.

Cllr Jones reported the current position of this Council which is that certain sites have been identified upon which members would support limited development. With the development of Foresthall Park still in progress (some 600+ new homes), any major development will be firmly resisted. This view had been expressed by parishioners also in their responses to the Parish Plan questionnaire and Cllr Jones found it unlikely therefore that a NP would find support at a referendum. He was sceptical about taking on the project and did not believe the Council would find it easy to recruit voluntary helpers.

With regard to funding, UDC has acquired £20,000 from the Government to be shared between Newport and Stansted. Jan stated that Awards for All had been giving grants for VDS but she did not know if this would extend to NP's.

Cllr Stiles asked if there were any “model” documents produced by NALC or the EALC? Jan stated that the RCCE is currently drafting advice which should be e-mailed to the Clerk for circulation. She would welcome feedback from members on its “readability”.

Cllr Jones stated that the Council has an option to do nothing and take its chances, but he thought this would be wrong. He believed the Council could start putting a database together and get as far as looking at a Scoping Report and then review the position. The Chairman agreed that to do nothing would leave the village vulnerable and members would not be serving the community properly.

Cllr Jones queried whether, if the Parish Council had its document in place before the District Plan (LDF), would the NP “trump” the District Plan? This was unknown but the Clerk would endeavour to find out. Cllr Owen wondered whether the Council had to agree to complete a NP before grant funding would be handed over, and what would happen if we got so far down the line and had insufficient funding to complete the NP.

The Chairman thanked Jan Cole for her useful information and closed the meeting at 9.25pm.