

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES  
POLICY & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT WALTHAM ABBEY TOWN HALL,  
WALTHAM ABBEY, ON 16 APRIL 2010**

**Membership**

Councillors:-

D. Abrahall

K. Bentley

\* J. Deakin

M. Garnett

R. Howard

\* C. Pond (Vice-Chairman)

(\* present)

Also present:

Councillor Metcalfe

Howard Burton (PNC) was present as an observer looking at how the Council undertook scrutiny.

M. Skeels

\* S. Walsh (Chairman)

\* L Webster

\* J Whitehouse (substitute for M. Fisher)

The following officers were in attendance throughout the meeting:-

Graham Redgwell Governance Officer

Janet Mills Committee Officer

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am

**20. Apologies and Substitutions**

The Committee Officer reported apologies and substitution notices as follows:

**Apology**

**Substitution**

Councillor D. Abrahall

Councillor K. Bentley

Councillor R. Howard

Councillor M. Skeels

Councillor M. Fisher

Councillor J Whitehouse

Members noted a change in membership of the Committee. In future Councillor J Knapman would replace Councillor D. Abrahall.

**21. Declarations of Interest**

The following declarations of interest were recorded

Member	Personal Interest as:
Councillor S Walsh	Resided in a Grade 2 Listed Windmill
Councillor Pond	Chairman of the Local Historical Society User of the Essex Records Office for past 40 years

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	Member of the Loughton Town Council Conservation and Heritage Sub Committee
Councillor J Whitehouse	A Friend of Copped Hall

## **22. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

With an amendment to paragraph one, minute 21 of the previous minutes, to delete the word '*assessment*' and replace it with the word '*designation*' the minutes to the meeting held on 19 March 2010 were agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record. The Chairman commended Janet Mills the Committee Officer for taking extensive notes and drafting minutes which were an extremely accurate reflection of what was a long and complex meeting.

## **23. Members Visit**

Prior to the commencement of the meeting Members undertook a short tour of Waltham Abbey High Street, the Abbey and the Museum. Members noted the following local historical buildings and matters of historical interest.

### **The Town Hall**

The Town Hall was opened in 1904 and was owned by the Town Council. The building was locally listed but was not statutorily listed. The original ceilings had been covered up and the building was in a poor state of repair. The balcony, a feature to the front of the building, was used at Christmas time and for election purposes. The Town Council needed to find funds to be able to restore the building.

### **The Tourist Office**

The Tourist Office was well sited near to the Abbey, as most visitors to the area visited the Abbey. The Tourist Office held leaflets combining tourism and heritage, not only for the town but for the whole local area. It was hoped that a tourist office facility be established in Loughton as part of the Lopping End Hall refurbishment.

### **The Abbey**

Only the Northern Nave of the Abbey remains. The Historical Society had laid stones to show the outline of the original Abbey site. A brief history of the Abbey was given.

### **Victorian Building (Poorly Renovated)**

Members viewed a Victorian building, opposite the Abbey that had been renovated using materials and a design which were totally out of keeping with the neighbouring buildings.

### **The High Street and Market Place**

There were a number of shops that had closed. Trade in the main shopping street was affected by large supermarkets on the edge of the town. Members viewed the historical buildings in Sun Street.

### **The Museum**

Members undertook a brief tour of the museum. The following information was noted.

The Museum was housed in a building which dated back to 1520. The museum told the history of the Epping Forest District from the earliest inhabitants to the present date. The Waltham Abbey Bible (c.1200 AD) was currently on display. Good collections from the district including fine Tudor wall panelling and paintings by artists such as Lucien Pissarro were also on display.

There was currently a special exhibition of the Bayeux Tapestry to mark the 950<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of King Harold's Church at Waltham Abbey.

The museum displayed a number of different exhibitions throughout the year and provided educational outreach in the form of topic boxes containing original and replica object and history workshops for schools. Talks were available for adult groups and reminiscence boxes were available for those in residential care. The museum also ran a programme of child and family events.

Members returned to the Town Hall.

The Meeting Commenced at 10.00 am

The Chairman thanked Councillor Webster for organising the walk and giving an interesting running commentary during the tour. This has proved a very helpful addition to the Committee's review.

## **24. Scrutiny Review of Essex Heritage**

The Committee received and noted a report (SSC/09/10), giving details of the meeting arrangements and attaching a number of documents for discussion from Graham Redgwell, Governance Officer. After a short discussion Members commented that the information relating to the National Campaign was useful background reading.

### **Witness Session**

Graham Redgwell advised the Committee that a number of local organisations had been invited to attend today's meeting to present information about local heritage matters. Advertisements had been locally posted inviting members of

the public to attend to give their views. Members noted that this Committee was breaking new ground in the effort to involve the public and local organisations in the Councils new scrutiny arrangements. This was the first formal Policy and Scrutiny Committee meeting that had been held outside of County Hall in Chelmsford.

The Committee received representations from the following people and/or organisations:

**Diane Rhodes Hills Amenity Society Loughton**

Diane Rhodes gave a brief personal introduction and advised the Committee that she and the society were working with the local District Council on appraisals for three conservation areas in Loughton. To date there had been limited progress.

The Hills Amenity Society in Loughton had undertaken a conservation mapping and a character appraisal exercise in the three conservation areas. The mapping exercise had taken over 100 hours. The exercise had included cataloging what was native/natural for each of the three areas. The mapping included houses, other buildings, trees and highway hedges amongst other things.

Diane Rhodes raised a number of concerns as follows:

**Erosion of the Conservation Areas.**

The Committee was advised that hedges and trees within the conservation areas had been removed. The remaining highway hedges were being damaged by large vehicles and the volume of traffic accessing the area, particularly on York Hill.

**Loss of Buildings/Unsympathetic Developments**

District Councils operated a 'local listing' scheme. Some cottages had now disappeared; this had already altered the character of area. The Committee was advised that there seemed to be no explanation as to why some buildings were being knocked down and replaced by modern buildings (such as Dryad's Hall) which was part of the established street scene. This had been demolished and replaced with a modern building. Changes had also occurred because of lack of Article 4 directions.

Diane Rhodes raised concern that the approved designs of new buildings appeared to be totally of keeping with the existing style of buildings in the area. Drawing upon experience, and having attended planning meetings, Diane Rhodes advised the Committee that it appeared that District Councils raised no objections to planning consents and they did not seek public opinion or opinion of local groups. The developments appeared to be approved on the advice of officers of the Councils. Diane Rhodes put forward to the Committee

that District Councils should be actively seeking views from local residents and should use the expertise of local groups before approving planning applications in the conservation areas and that the views of Town Councils should be paramount and they should be invited to give evidence to planning meetings.

The Committee was advised that District Councils might be asked to consider this when future planning permissions for re-development were being approved.

### **Heritage Information**

The Committee was advised of the availability of a Bell Common appraisal booklet. There were a lot of leaflets available. The main problem was that not many people knew about them. The production and promotion of heritage and tourist information was very dependant upon the enthusiasm and interest of the individual officer in post. Epping Forest District Council had produced a leaflet giving information about local heritage and conservation areas. The Waltham Abbey HERR leaflet scheme was considered to be a model of good practice.

### **Concerns About How District Councils Manage Conservation**

Proposals for new conservation areas were very reliant on local people pushing them forward; it was often a battle between local groups and the District Councils to push things forward. There was a need to change attitudes of District Councils towards historical areas.

Speaking from experience, Diana Rhodes advised the Committee that the strength of conservation support depended upon the support available from District Councils. The level of support received seemed to vary dramatically from Council to Council.

The Committee was advised that Loughton Town Council had put forward new conservation areas for consideration, and that these and North Weald design statements were awaiting the outcome of deliberations by the local authority, who had no process or staff to progress them. It was acknowledged that District Councils had a lack of staff with appropriate skills and expertise in the matter of conservation and heritage. The Committee was advised that a new senior planning officer had recently been appointed, but conservation and heritage in Loughton was not now a direct part of the new person's remit.

In some cases District Councils paid 'lip service' to local conservation groups and societies. The Committee was advised that more could be done by Epping Forest District Council to give better protection to its historic buildings and better protection of its trees. Many of its historic buildings had disappeared over the years.

Diane Rhodes advised the Committee that Essex County Council operated a model of good practice within which there was collaboration and liaison with other groups. There were good links with Essex County Council heritage staff where there was a higher level of interest and expertise than that offered by District Councils. Essex County Council officers had appropriate expertise and appreciated the character of an area. Staff at the County Council had been very supportive and had intervened by giving reports to the District Councils which had saved several buildings.

### **How Planning Decisions Can Be Reconsidered.**

How the public can object to a decision made by a local authority was discussed. The Chairman explained that the public could contact their local District Council Member to ask that a planning decision be 'Called In'. The decision would then be further discussed before being implemented, by Members who had the appropriate knowledge of the site to be developed, rather than an officer decision. The Committee was advised that town councils could also object to planning proposals and give evidence to planning meetings.

### **Enforcement of Conservation Areas**

Diane Rhodes raised a concern that the District Councils did not enforce the rules relating to conservation areas. The Vice Chairman, Councillor Pond, advised the meeting that local planning authorities had powers to enforce the rules relating to conservation areas. Regrettably it was acknowledged that most authorities at district level did not possess the necessary expertise or have the manpower to undertake positive enforcement. It was suggested that District Councils could, if they chose to do so, devolve some of their responsibilities to their Town Councils.

### **Peter Huggins Waltham Abbey Historical Society**

Peter Huggins gave a personal introduction and advised the Committee that he was a member of the Waltham Abbey Historical Society which had been instrumental in excavating the Waltham Abbey site.

The Waltham Abbey Historical Society had premises over the Co-operative store in which it held its archive rooms. The premises were not ideal in terms of proper storage of historical documents. The Committee suggested that historical documents should be held at the central record office in Chelmsford where proper storage facilities were available; the historical society should then have digital copies of the documents for local use.

The Historical Society was currently cataloging the 'Chetwood' papers, property of the Town Council, to ascertain the importance of the documents; these were currently held in the strong room at the Town Hall. Once the work

was complete the Essex Record Office would be asked to store any important historic documents.

The Committee was advised that the Epping Forest District Council lacked stewardship of the town in relation to conservation. Concerns were raised that a number of listed buildings had been demolished. A number of shops had been closed over the last three years and historical buildings in the Abbey precinct had never been cleaned.

Peter Huggins questioned the rationale of continuing to demolish buildings such as these, which he pointed out, could not be resurrected once having been destroyed.

Peter Huggins raised concern and dismay that the local conservation management plan was being prepared by outside consultants from a firm of architects commissioned by Lee Valley Park Authority.

The Committee was advised that the Local Historical Society had previously been involved in the excavation of the Abbey site and had a wealth of knowledge and expertise on the matter. Peter Huggins questioned whether the outside consultants had the right level of local knowledge or experience to be able to undertake the work.

The Committee was advised that there had been what he considered to be a very unsympathetic extension to the church recently and minimal planting in the Abbey garden.

The Historical Society had recently made a new discovery of a cemetery belonging to one of the Abbots. The consultants had refused to accept the evidence. The consultants also wanted to down grade the 'crooked mile walk' where the Local Historical Society had identified a holy cross in one of the walls. Again, the Consultants would not accept this evidence.

### **Tony O'Connor, Curator of the Epping Forest District Museum**

Tony O'Connor advised the Committee that the whole of the Epping Forest District had a wealth of historical assets with many visitor attractions. These could be found in a fairly small geographical area, similar in geographical terms to the visitor attractions found in Ironbridge in Shropshire. Waltham Abbey was considered to be the 'hub' of the Epping District historic assets.

Geographically sited on the Essex/Hertfordshire county border, Waltham Abbey could potentially be a Gateway to Essex site. It was important that the local vernacular architecture be retained.

### **Tourism**

The Committee was advised that it would be important to gain inward heritage tourism during the 2012 Olympic Games and beyond. Tourism plans were

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currently being developed by a group consisting of District Council Economic Development Officers and Town Council Heritage Officers.

In terms of Infrastructure to support the expected 2012 influx of visitors the following issues were of relevance.

- Generally speaking the road network was good but there were some 'bottle necks' and a few motorway problems
- Railway links were at Waltham Cross
- Buses needed to be improved, particularly on Sundays
- Overnight accommodation - There was a need to increase overnight accommodation. Work was currently being undertaken with hotel chains in the area.
- Internal signage within the town (both maps and street furniture) was an issue as it needed to be improved. Work undertaken in Bristol on these matters was considered an example of good practice.
- More 'joined up' brown tourist road signage was required to maximise tourism in the Town, especially for the 2012 visitors.

Lee Valley Park Authority, which spanned NE London, Essex and Hertfordshire, was also working on projects to maximise inward investments from the Olympic Games and beyond, with a white water canoeing project which would continue post 2012. The Committee was advised that Essex County Council needed to take a more firm hold on what was being proposed at the Broxbourne site. Tony O'Connor suggested that an Essex 'cross county' officer should be assigned to the project to ensure the best outcomes for Essex.

There were no formal proposals in place for dealing with proposals for heritage and tourism. There was need to tie together and promote all the Essex attractions to maximize the benefits for the County. Tony O'Connor questioned whether there were any resources for this and who would be responsible for undertaking the work.

### **Local Heritage and Conservation**

With regard to local heritage and conservation matters, Tony O'Connor advised the Committee that there were problems with getting full listed status for local buildings as they were considered to have undergone substantial changes over a period of time which meant there was not sufficient of the original building still remaining. The County Council had assisted in conservation of Highbridge Street and Sun Street which had resulted in some buildings being saved.

There were issues related to retrospective planning consent being given to the removal of shop fronts. These were being replaced with shop fronts made from modern day materials which were manufactured in bulk rather than being restored or replaced using materials in keeping with the conservation status. The Town Council had intervened in the matter but did not have the staff or



the time to be fully involved. Tony O'Connor considered that there was no point in having a conservation area if it was not enforced.

Tony O'Connor raised concerns that proposals could go ahead without conservation officers being consulted and gave an example of the Epping Piazza which had been undertaken by the Epping Forest District Council under agency to Essex County Council.

Members commented that there was a connection between Heritage and Economic Regeneration. It was suggested that the Essex County Council's Economic Development and Environment Policy and Scrutiny Committee should look at how heritage sites and conservation areas were being managed.

In summing up his presentation Tony O'Connor advised the Committee that strong leadership was required. With regard to conservation and heritage matters it would be important to gain the interest of local councilors. There was a need to put in place a long term strategy which coordinated the activity of all the agencies and would link with local groups the voluntary sector and interested individuals.

### **Enid Walsh Town Clerk Loughton Town Council**

Enid Walsh gave a brief introduction and advised the Committee that Loughton Town Council had a specific heritage and environment Committee. The Committee undertook to discharge effectively, efficiently and economically the Council's duty in relation to the environment of Loughton and its heritage and to develop policies in this sphere. The Committee had tried to encourage and stimulate local interest in the heritage of the town by introducing and operating a local 'blue heritage plaque' scheme.

Enid Walsh advised the Committee that the matter of conservation and heritage was not managed very well at a local level and raised the following concerns:

- The loss and modern replacement of historical buildings which had resulted in the loss of character of the place and loss of 'street scenes'
- The relaxed nature of planning laws within conservation areas and lack of Article 4 Directions
- No clear strategy, which had resulted in conflict between the District Council and Town Council regarding planning decisions.
- Buildings being replaced with others on a different scale when they should maintain the flavour of the area.
- The County process was not helpful when protecting war memorials from being damaged.
- Lack of resources available to the Town Council to be able to deal with conservation heritage and planning matters.

Enid Walsh suggested to the Committee that many of the Issues could be publicised via the Society of Local Councils Clerks meetings and training events.

**Bob Whittome Town Clerk Epping Town Council**

Bob Whittome gave a brief personal introduction and advised the Committee that he was Town Clerk for Epping Town Council.

Bob Whittome expressed dismay and concerns about the management of the conservation areas. The Local Authorities operated a local listing scheme but did not enforce the rules or principles associated with conservation areas.

The following concerns were outlined to the Committee:

**Shop Fronts**

The Committee was advised that there had been a loss of locally produced shop fronts within the conservation area. Examples were outlined to the Committee as being the Apollo shop, the Black Lion Public House and the Pines Store which had a unique shop front dated 1910. All the shop fronts had been replaced; retrospective planning permission had been granted. The new replacement fronts were manufactured in bulk and were made from modern materials. Bob Whittome considered this action did not respect the needs of the conservation area.

The Committee was advised that the original shop front built in 1890 of the Holland and Barrett establishment had been replaced sympathetically 50 years later. Recently this had again been replaced but this time with a shop front that had been manufactured in modern materials. The District Council approved the action. The Town Council raised an objection but this had been overturned. The Town Council did not have the resources or expertise to deal regularly with these matters.

Whilst it was acknowledged that there was a difficult balance between attracting businesses and jobs to the area and maintaining historical street scenes, Bob Whittome advised the Committee that in recent times Marks and Spencer had wanted to open a store in the town sited on the old Pearce's Bakery site. The site would have been listed; however it had been deemed that there had been substantial changes to the original building, and listing was therefore not approved. The District Council approved the demolition of the bakery. The Town Council fought to keep the existing shop front style. The District Council approved a modern manufactured shop front. The decision could not now be overturned. Marks & Spencer had bought another site opposite, but the District Council had thought the prospect of getting M&S outweighed the claims of historic building preservation.

The Committee was further advised that, for car parking reasons, construction of a piazza had taken place in the Epping market place area. It appeared that the local conservation officer had not been consulted. Bob Whittome

considered this to be regrettable as there were very few original market places left in historical market towns. It was suggested that there was a need for an overall long term strategy required for Epping market area. The Committee was advised that developing a strategy could be difficult as there were three local authorities involved.

### **War Memorials**

The Town Council maintains the War Memorial. The Epping War Memorial had recently received a grade two listing. There had been a long term problem of the memorial being damaged by heavy Lorries, their drivers believing that they could use the area as a turning circle. Currently the green upon where the memorial was sited belonged to Corporation of London, and it was reluctant to help when lorries damage the memorial. To ease the situation some low stone bollards had been placed around the green area but these were no defence against 38 ton lorries.

There was also an issue with self seeded trees on the Green which were causing damage to the Memorial; the Council was not able to remove the trees without following a long protracted process that would probably take a number of years.

The Town Council was trying to address the situation by drawing up and implementing an improvement plan. Success of the plan would be very dependant upon good co-operation between three tiers of local authorities.

### **25. Scrutiny Towards Excellence- Action Plan**

The Committee received and noted a "Scrutiny Towards Excellence" action plan (SSC/10/10) from Graham Redgwell, Governance Officer.

### **26. Arrangements for May 2010**

Members noted and approved the arrangements for the Committee to view Operation Mermaid as part of the Two Wheeler Road Safety Scrutiny, instead of holding a formal Committee meeting. It would resume the review of Essex Heritage at its meeting to be held on 18 June 2010.

There being no urgent business the meeting closed at 12.20pm

Chairman