

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES  
POLICY & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD,  
ON 19 MARCH 2010**

**Membership**

Councillors:-

D. Abrahall	
K. Bentley	* C. Pond (Vice-Chairman)
* J. Deakin	* M. Skeels
* M. Fisher	* S. Walsh (Chairman)
* M. Garnett	* L Webster
R. Howard	

(\* present)

Also Present: Councillor J. Lucas and Councillor J Whitehouse

The following officers were in attendance throughout the meeting:-

Graham Redgwell Governance Officer  
Janet Mills Committee Officer

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am

**14. Apologies and Substitutions**

The Committee Officer reported apologies and substitution notices as follows:

**Apology**

**Substitution**

Councillor D. Abrahall  
Councillor K. Bentley  
Councillor R. Howard

**15. 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
Councillor M Skeels	Member for Tendring Rural East (Heritage properties in his division were discussed during the meeting).

**16. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

With a note being added to minute 10 of the previous minutes, to clarify that the Essex Record Office would not form part of this heritage scrutiny but could form part of a future separate scrutiny, the minutes to the meeting held on 12 February 2010 were agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

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

The Committee received and considered report (SSC/07/10), setting out background information and report (SSC/08/10/) outlining the programme for the Committee's proposed visit to Waltham Abbey, from Graham Redgwell, Governance Officer.

Members had also received and considered written submissions from the National Trust, Witham Town Council and Manuden Local Historical Society. Members agreed these submissions would be considered prior in the Committee's final scrutiny report being prepared.

### **Witness Session**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting, and outlined health and safety notices.

The Committee heard from the following witnesses.

#### **Mr. Michael Herbert**

Mr. Herbert introduced himself as being an individual who had a keen vernacular interest in Essex heritage for many years. He was a Local History Recorder and Editor of the Great Waltham Village Design Statement, He had also written guides on historical buildings.

Mr. Herbert advised the Committee that he had been concerned for some time at the way that English Heritage undertook to protect historical buildings. Mr. Herbert considered that English Heritage was not so much concerned with protecting the historic heritage, as it was concerned with preserving "chocolate box" images and perfect examples of buildings and street scenes, whilst the remaining historic buildings were being lost more rapidly than in previous periods.

Mr. Herbert had particular concerns regarding the way that English Heritage applied the criteria regarding buildings that had been "substantially changed". English Heritage would not award a listing to these buildings. As a result of this many historical buildings were being lost. Mr. Herbert considered that changes made to historical buildings over their lifetime served as a 'living history' of that building. Through history these buildings would have needed to adapt over the centuries to accommodate changes in lifestyle and social circumstances through the years. There was particular difficulty in obtaining an English Heritage listing for buildings erected pre 1700. Many of these had now been lost, to storm damage, dereliction, or had been knocked down and the site redeveloped.

Mr. Herbert outlined a number of recent examples of local buildings at risk or lost in his area. These included the following:

The Ridley's Brewery, in Hartford End, was considered to be a first class example of a Victorian tower brewery, it had been virtually unchanged, (the original copper boiling vessels had been changed to stainless steel), and was still operating the traditional top down brewing process up until its sale to Greene King in 2005. English Heritage eventually said it was not worth listing as it had been substantially altered, by when Greene King had destroyed the interior to ensure it did not survive.

The Leather Bottle in Pleshey, near Gt. Waltham had a very rare medieval single story public bar, described by English Heritage in its street listing as being a later addition to the Victorian public house. English Heritage had been asked to re-list the building in 2009 as the property had been sold twice in recent times and was potentially at risk, but the building had not been reassessed by English Heritage since it was alerted.

In particular Mr. Herbert was concerned regarding the preservation of historical buildings in Broads Green near Great Waltham where he resided.

The Committee was advised that Broads Green was a hamlet consisting of approximately 60 buildings. Mr. Herbert advised that about 60 years ago there were approximately 22 buildings of historic merit in Broads Green. This number reduced to 16 buildings 35 years ago at the time of the original listing of buildings in this area. Currently there were eight remaining historical buildings in the area, two of which were currently under threat.

The Committee was advised that the only building that was listed in Broads Green was a pleasant eighteenth or nineteenth century weather-boarded and thatched building. Mr. Herbert explained to the Committee that three years ago, he had written to English Heritage raising concerns when Broads Green had just lost two historic buildings and two more, (both now lost), were under threat. English Heritage eventually inspected four buildings, two of them 15<sup>th</sup> and two of them 16<sup>th</sup> Century. After a year, English Heritage reported that all four buildings had been substantially altered and were therefore not worth listing.

As an example of a historical building that English Heritage considered to be substantially altered, and subsequently would not receive a listing, Mr. Herbert described his own property to the Committee.

The Committee was advised that the property was built in approximately 1450 as a hall-house with a cross-wing at the high end of the hall and the service rooms under the same roof as the hall. In about 1560, an extension, probably a cross-wing, with a 2 metre wide fireplace was added to the side of the original cross-wing and a ceiling was inserted in the hall. Sometime in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the hall end was rebuilt as a two story structure, reusing many of the original timbers but also integrating elm for windbraces, upper wall plates, tie beams, collars and purlins. The original wall plates at hall wall height were still in place and the ceilings had been reinserted using their clamps, but the original doorways and therefore the hall plan had been lost. Two chimneys using 2 inch Tudor bricks were probably rebuilds at this time. At the same time, the fronts of the cross-wings were pulled back to align with the front of

the hall and the whole roof changed to a continuous roof across the whole building. In 1870, the farm house was split into three cottages with stock brick lean-tos in three places and four new doorways and two staircases inserted using hand-sawn elm planking and hand-forged nails. In 1970, one lean-to was pulled down and a modern end built under a continuation of the roof. The most untouched part of the house consisting of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Century cross-wings had been lovingly preserved over the 57 years by Mr. Herbert's neighbour without contemporary damage. Unlisted sites such as this could be disposed of more easily, this building was now under threat as it would soon be sold.

Mr. Herbert acknowledged that the building in which he resided, had been much altered, but put forward to the Committee that English Heritage needed to consider that any building that had been continuously lived in and used over 560 years would naturally be altered over time. In some cases buildings that had substantial alterations should be considered by English Heritage as living historical documents of all the changes over the period of history. Mr. Herbert again raised concerns that these types of building would not survive in a recognisable form if they were not protected.

Mr. Herbert summed up his presentation by advising the Committee that there were seven remaining unlisted historic buildings in the hamlet where he lived. He put forward the suggestion that these would disappear within the next 35 years if English Heritage past performance, with regard to listing, is repeated.

In his opinion, Mr. Herbert put forward to the Committee that English Heritage should take its role much more seriously. The Committee was urged to recommend that more consideration be given to the right listing process. Mr. Herbert asked if the Committee could lobby English Heritage about its listing criteria and urged that this happen before any more of the remaining Broads Green heritage was lost.

Members asked how many building had disappeared and for what reason.

Mr. Herbert advised the Committee that a local farmer had knocked down Head Hall on the grounds that it was not fit for agricultural purposes. Historical barns had been left in poor repair and some had fallen down during storms. Most recently a builder had stripped the interior and exterior of a fine example of a traditional Essex type of timber framed house, instead of renovating it piece by piece and preserving the building. These actions had made the building unstable thus making it justified for the builder to flatten the building. A new building had now been put in its place.

Members asked whether the Chelmsford Borough Council (CBC) implemented a 'local listing' scheme. It was acknowledged that local listing could be overturned by building inspectors. Mr. Herbert advised the Committee that work had been undertaken to gain a local listing with Mr. Michael Hurst the local conservation officer employed with CBC. CBC had agreed that the buildings in Broads Green could be listable, however English Heritage disagreed, stating the buildings were not worthy of local listing.

Members asked whether gaining 'conservation area status' might help the situation. Mr. Herbert advised the Committee that an application for conservation area status had been submitted in 2008. It was acknowledged that this was a long and complex process. Again CBC had been supportive but it was recognised that it was not always in the best interests of local authorities to grant conservation area status and it was not therefore automatically supported.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Herbert for his interesting presentation.

### **Mr. Nicholas Charrington, Owner of Layer Marney Towers**

In undertaking this scrutiny the Committee wished to seek the views from an owner occupier of a listed building. Members wished to establish the difficulties faced by owners with regard interactions with the local authorities and other associated bodies and establish the difficulties faced with regard to ensuring the upkeep and maintenance of the building.

In answer to a number of questions related to these matters Mr. Charrington, addressed and advised the Committee as follows:

Mr. Charrington is the owner of Layer Marney Towers. The Committee was advised that the tower had been built originally in 1518, was a Grade 1 listed building, and was sited within 120 acres of land. The property had been purchased by his parents in 1959. He now had taken over the running of the estate from his parents.

### **Relationships with Local Authorities and Other Bodies**

Mr. Charrington advised the Committee that one big issue was planning. Generally speaking relationships with planners had improved over a number of years; however there was a difficulty due to having to deal so many bodies such as Essex County Council, with Colchester Borough Council and English Heritage. English Heritage had a more in depth knowledge and far more understanding that, for Layer Marney to be maintained, it needs to adapt and change. Twenty years prior to this it was much more difficult. Mr. Charrington advised the Committee that in his experience, whilst matters had recently improved slightly, his biggest problem had been with the Colchester Borough Council. It seemed there were no suitably experienced officers and no consistent approach. Mr. Charrington suggested to the Committee that there must be room for improving the Borough/District Councils system.

With regard to relationships with local conservation officers, Mr. Charrington advised the Committee that in his experience when dealing with the Colchester Local Authority, he considered there to be was a lack of expertise

and some local officers were not qualified to make decisions. This may have been because there were very few Grade 1 listed buildings in Essex

### **Business and Tourism**

The up keep of Layer Marney Towers was reliant upon receiving an income. This was generated in the following ways.

- Open to visitors (12000/14000 visitors per year).
- Guided tours (visited by a number of schools)
- As a wedding venue, this was the most profitable venture
- Provided a small holiday let. (usually used by the Bride and Groom)
- Hosted local fetes
- Undertook a small amount of farming
- Hosted business and corporate events
- Special events and trade shows

The business assisted the local economy by employing 25 local people and providing work for local builders and local craftsmen. The annual turnover was approximately £600,000, however the business rarely made a profit due to the high cost of the property maintenance required. Mr. Charrington advised the Committee that in 2006, repair and restoration of a roof had cost £180,000 and more recently, providing a visitor's toilet block had cost in the region of £140,000.

Mr. Charrington put forward that as an owner he considered it difficult to maintain a balance between spending money on necessary repairs to the fabric of the building and spending money on the necessary facilities for visitors.

Layer Marney Towers was in direct business competition with other tourism related organisations. It was necessary for the visitor attraction to be promoted jointly with other bodies related to tourism and heritage. Organisations such as Essex Gardens, Cressing Temple, Essex Rural Attractions and English Heritage would come together. This provided a 'critical mass' working together to produce brochures and publicity.

Mr. Charrington put forward that he considered there were two main difficulties with regard to owning and operating Layer Marney Towers. These were as follows:

- **Local Signage**

The lack of local heritage and tourism brown road signs used nationally to direct visitors to local attractions was a major problem. Mr. Charrington considered that the system, in Essex, for installing these was chaotic and haphazard. At present there were very few visitors to the Layer Marney Towers from places such as Colchester or Maldon. This could be as a direct result of poor signage on main routes. The situation was made worse by the existing local signage which had sent visitors in the opposite direction. In

particular wedding parties and wedding guests from outside of the local area had difficulties in finding the venue. This spoilt visitors overall wedding experience. Mr. Charrington considered that a more structured approach for installation of the signs was required, to ensure that signs appeared on the main trunk roads such as the A12 and A120. Mr. Charrington gave examples of signage systems used in Derbyshire and which he considered to be best practice.

Mr. Charrington advised the Committee that he had received little support from Colchester Borough Council regarding the matter as they did not agree that there was a problem with the existing signs.

The Chairman agreed that the matter would be considered further.

- **Obtaining Grant Funding For Some of the Work Required.**

Private owners were eligible to apply for grants to undertake some of the work, but experience had shown that funds available were more likely to go to 'public' and charitable owners. In turn these publically owned buildings also could be subsidised on their pricing. This Mr. Charrington considered was not a level playing field, as he was in direct competition for visitors with places such as Cressing Temple and Hylands House. These were far more likely to receive a higher priority for subsidised funding. Mr. Charrington put forward that the problem was compounded as National Lottery Funding was scarce at present due to the funds being used for the forthcoming Olympics.

English Heritage could give grants for 'high level' schemes, such as the roof project mentioned earlier. In reality it deemed the roof not to be bad enough to receive funding. Mr. Charrington questioned the rationale of this decision and wondered how bad something needed to be before assistance was given.

### **Enablement Development**

Mr. Charrington advised the Committee that consideration had been given to this but the family considered that it not desirable to undertake an enabling development on the site, to help with the costs of maintaining the fabric of the listed buildings. The family had also considered, but rejected, the idea of setting up an Endowment Trust/Fund as it appeared that the family would be in a much better position for quick decision making and be able to respond to changes in market forces if they remained as private owners.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Charrington for attending the Committee and answering Members questions.

### **Mr. Owen Bedwin Head of Historic Environment**

Mr. Bedwin gave a personal introduction and advised the Committee that he had a background in archaeology and had worked at Essex County Council for the past five years.

Mr. Bedwin outlined the work undertaken by the Historic Environment Team as follows:

### **Records**

The department held a complete historic environmental record for Essex, covering the following areas:

- Historical buildings(14000 listed & 700 not listed) ,
- Various sites of archaeological interest (16,000 sites),
- A historical battlefield, and
- Historical parks & gardens (20)

Material stored could be from 500,000 years ago up to recent decades. Historical records could cover a diverse range of subject matter. Records now included documentation of 'crop art' (crop circles) of which there had been thousands across the county. Records were never static and were always being updated

Currently there was a focus upon World War II heritage and industrial archaeology. With regard to World War II heritage, 8 of the 12 districts had now completed surveys of 250 installations across the county so far. There were now some excellent World War II records. Braintree and Uttlesford still needed to be recorded. It was recognised that there was always a danger of losing some of this heritage before it could be recorded.

Public documents held within County Hall Chelmsford were available for consultation or could be accessed by people on line via the English Heritage national portal. The site had received 108,000 'hits' last year.

The department undertook approximately 2000 public consultations per year and had visited approximately 6000 school children.

### **Planning Matters**

As far as planning matters were concerned the Historic Environment Department covered the following areas:

- Archaeology
- Significant buildings above ground and
- Landscape

The department advised Essex County Council on planning matters via the Development and Regulation Committee. The department also worked with 11 of the 12 District Councils. The team worked well together. Colchester and Thurrock used their own departments.



More strategic advice regarding both buildings and landscapes would be given in respect to the councils Local Development Frameworks and other associated documents.

### **Field Archaeology and Other Work**

The team also undertook field archaeology work commissioned by English Heritage or other businesses and undertook work on historic mills owned by Essex County Council.

### **Conservation Areas**

With regard to conservation areas, these were mapped and it was the Essex County Council Built Environment Department that was responsible for these. With regard to the skills of conservation officers, experience had shown that the Epping Conservation officers were excellent.

### **Scheduled Monuments**

With regard to protection of scheduled monuments, these were the responsibility of English Heritage. Farmers entered into agreements with English Heritage with regard to sub soil drains etc. It was accepted that some agricultural areas had been ploughed by farmers; there may be a need to revoke some current consents.

### **Listings**

Compared to other authorities Essex County Council fared well in dealing with these matters.

In its work the Historic Environment department was aware of Essex's Grade I and Grade II listed buildings. Records were also kept of some buildings of notable historical significance; these were classified as 'unlisted' buildings. A survey of industrial housing of notable historic significance was currently being undertaken, one or two sets of these types of buildings, would be recommended for listing. English Heritage listing criteria was to a degree based upon the matter of professional judgement

### **Local Lists**

District Councils can establish good up to date local lists and write policies around them. There was variable practice across the county. Epping Forrest undertook good practice some other districts were not so good, more consistency was needed. English Heritage was keen to see a consistent policy on local listing and they were assisting in the matter.

In summing up his presentation Mr. Bedwin advised the Committee that due to it's geographical location, there were few historical stone buildings. Buildings were mostly made from timber. Timber buildings were therefore very important in the history of Essex. Timber constructions rotted over time and

more did disappear. These buildings should be celebrated and preserved where ever possible.

Below ground there was a diverse and remarkable archaeology, some of which near the Thames were dated as being over 2000 years old. There was a clear danger of sites etc being destroyed before they can be recorded.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Bedwin for his interesting presentation.

### **Mr. Graham Tite, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council**

Graham Tite introduced himself to the Committee and gave some of his personal background details.

The Committee was advised that Essex Heritage was most important to himself as he was born and went to school in Grays Thurrock in Essex until moving on to Cambridge University where studies of English and History of Art & Architecture had led to his current role as a conservationist. In 2009 he had worked for one year in the Historic Buildings team at County Hall covering a colleague's maternity leave. During this time in Chelmsford he had found the quality of the team's work very high and was most satisfied with the leadership given.

The philosophy underpinning the work carried out by Mr. Tite was outlined to the Committee as follows:

*The structures that make up our cities, towns and villages are more than the functional spaces in which we discharge our public and private energies – they modify our behavior, our states of mind and our actions towards our fellow men. Buildings impact all people on an imperceptible, unconscious level every day of lives. We sleep in buildings, travel between them, work in them, celebrate in them – they frame practically every part of our lives. They have the capacity equally to inspire and motivate as they do depress and alienate.*

In his everyday job as a conservation officer, he believed that he had a moral duty to preserve buildings of historic and aesthetic significance. These were the legacy of our forebears and the enjoyment – both psychological and physical – and the education we got from them must be passed on to future generations.

Mr. Tite advised the Committee upon a number of matters, and answered Members questions as follows:

### **Listing and Demolitions**

Statutory listing, which had now passed into the hands of English Heritage, had proved to be a valuable tool and there was no doubt that the rate of demolitions had decreased overall in the past twenty years of the sixty-year history of listing. However it was worth challenging the views of English Heritage.

Although Mr. Tite greatly supported the point-of-view of witness Mr. Herbert in being concerned when individual losses were experienced, the fact was that listing had been a success overall.

In answer to a question, related to a property in the Tendring District, which had now disappeared, Mr. Tite was asked whether, in his opinion, there was an issue when owners deliberately allowed listed building to deteriorate in order they can be demolished and the land sold for profit to developers.

Mr. Tite advised the Committee that deliberate deterioration was not as widespread as perhaps thought. Listed buildings were generally well preserved and were considered to be an asset to their owners. Enabling development could be sought. Usually approval of these enablements relied upon the fact that any profits made from an enabling development would be put back into maintaining the existing listed building.

The November 2009, issue *No 112 of Context*, the professional journal of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation, was edited by himself to review this 60-year period of statutory listing. The issue put forward that the mechanism and processes for listing was not everything it should be, and could be reformed. (Copies of the journal could be obtained by telephoning 01747 873133 or 871717).

Local listing was widely recognised as being useful and sympathetic and shrewd planning officers could make use of this as a device. There was scope here for work by voluntary groups and town councils.

### **Conservation Areas**

These were of possible use in preventing demolition but it took years to designate or extend a Conservation Area and it should not be seen as an easy remedy. Essex had particular problems due to its size and diversity.

Conservation Areas were the responsibility ultimately of Local Planning Authorities and there was a natural reluctance on their part to dedicate present and future resources to designating them etc. when there is no obvious return. This can be seen as a structural weakness in the present set up. There was scope to improve the designation of conservation areas where areas of Essex bordered the London area. Many local Council's had not been establishing conservation areas as there was no financial rewards for doing so and due to the cost and the difficulties in processing applications.

### **Buildings at Risk**

The Buildings at Risk Scheme had been running for about 10 years and was updated every six months. It could be defined as "not a cure, but at least a way of knowing how ill you were". It applied only to buildings that were already on the statutory lists. Local Planning Authorities could serve repair notices and

ultimately could purchase buildings, although this took time and was now extremely rare.

### **The Role of Conservation Officer**

In general, larger teams such as Essex County Council or teams in the London Boroughs could provide the highest standards. Effective work in the field depended on resources, leadership, good customer relations and overall organisation of the Local Planning Authority.

An effective conservation officer needed a wide experience (preferably in the course of a varied career), creativity, appropriate qualifications and excellent communication skills aimed at the client-side as well as well as internally within the organisation.

Drawing on his recent experience, Mr. Tite raised concern regarding the model of service provided by Epping Forrest District Council when comparing their service to that of Sevenoaks District Council and Chichester District Council, which Mr. Tite considered were models of good practice.

### **Local Authority Planning Departments**

In answer to a question regarding how Essex fared in its expertise and approach to conservation matters against other authorities, Mr. Tite explained to the Committee that through experience he had gained, local authority planning departments varied greatly according to size, staff quality, leadership, organisation and the quality and openness of their customer relations. The clients of the organisation should be given ready access to back-up staff, officers and team leaders. Call centre's could be useful if well run. Lack of confidence in dealing with the public can lead to defensive and negative attitudes on the part of Local Planning Authorities. Essex County Council was unique in the fact that there was a wealth of experience in conservation it was well led and it operated a good quality system. Other counties such as Kent, Sussex and some London Boroughs also implemented good practice. There appeared to be problems at district council level where there was little good practice.

Again Mr. Tite put forward Chichester and Sevenoaks local authorities as models of good practice.

### **Making Older Buildings Green and Efficient**

In answer to a question regarding the problems encountered when owners wished to improve properties in respect to double glazing and other energy efficient installations, Mr. Tite advised the Committee that there were difficulties when making older buildings 'green' and energy efficient. There were many differing views on guidance for owners especially with regard to replacement windows and double & secondary glazing. Every council had a

different way of dealing with this and the matter was rarely mentioned in the local plan. Mr. Tite considered that the blanket prohibition enforced by some councils' was not necessary and was unreasonable. Energy efficient installations could be sympathetically undertaken under permissible circumstances.

### **Town and Parish Councils**

In answer to Members questions regarding how could Parish and Town Councils be more engaged, Mr. Tite advised the Committee that engagement with Parish and Town Councils varied considerably across Essex.

Some Town Councils such as Loughton were very engaged and had put forward areas for conservation. Waltham Abbey Town Council had enjoyed a close relationship with himself as conservation officer. Engagement in some other places in Essex, was very poor. Mr. Tite put forward the importance of the model undertaken in Cheltenham where Town Clerks could now take university courses. Cheltenham was also a venue for an annual conference of Town Clerks. Mr. Tite suggested that Town Councils had a valuable part to play and could perhaps play an even greater role in engaging public participation.

In summing up his presentation Mr. Tite advised the Committee that any building could be listed. It did not need to be in a conservation area. The main purpose of listing was to control development and it was not designed to prevent buildings falling into dereliction. Local Authorities could use a Compulsory Purchase Order as an ultimate sanction or issue repair notices. They could also purchase buildings voluntarily and put building on an 'at risk register' which had been introduced approximately 10 years ago. The register was updated every six months and gave listings in each county. Mr. Tite reminded the Committee that the National Lottery also provided some heritage funding.

In his experience local councils in Essex, unlike many other areas, were keen to engage in the matter of conservation and had a valuable role to play.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Tite for his informative presentation.

### **Mrs Miriam Stead and Mr. Stephen Dixon Essex Records Office**

Mr. Dixon introduced himself to the Committee as being the Archive Service Manager and gave details of the work undertaken by the Essex Records Office.

The Committee was advised as follows:

The main role of the Essex Records Office was to preserve Essex County Council's documentary evidence of the county. The Record Office also accepted historical records about the county from other organisations such as

development corporations. Officers of the Record Office also gave advice to Town, District and Borough Councils.

District and Borough Councils also lodged their planning and building control historical documents at the Essex Record Office.

The Records Office was keen to encourage digitisation of planning and building control records. The digital copy of the documents would be retained for local use and the manual files being sent to the Record Office for safe keeping.

### **Electronic Records**

Members wondered if it would be possible to make available a seamless long term arrangement encompassing the physical and electronic record which could be displayed on line under a catalogue of holdings. The online site could also display a link to where the physical record was held.

Mr Dixon explained to the Committee that there were a number of issues that would need to be addressed before electronic storage of all records could go ahead. These included:

- The exercise was very costly.
- Types of electronic storage were continuously changing. Electronic systems were being superseded before large projects to change from paper to electronic storage could be completed, making the chosen type of electronic record out of date before it can be implemented.
- There were questions regarding the durability of electronic records. The Government was looking into the matter.
- There were questions to be resolved regarding who would store the information, should it be held locally or held on a UK national database. Should district and borough councils be asked to migrate their information to Essex County Council?

It was acknowledged that the current SEAX site had the potential to develop. In the meanwhile the Essex Records Office continued to receive online and physical records for district and borough councils.

### **Depositing Records**

The process for depositing records at the Essex Records Office for District & Borough Councils currently relied upon good will and the officers in the local councils being aware of the process.

The process needed to be formalised so as to ensure better preservation of the counties records.

A number of issues needed to be addressed before a formal process could be put in place. These issues included the following:

- Currently there were no Service Level Agreements in place
- District and Borough Councils did not have archivists'. There was a need to split Essex Record Office archivist's time into work undertaken in the office and work undertaken in the field. At present there was not the scope to undertake this. This would require additional staff resources.

### **Records in Private Ownership**

Individuals with private ownership of historic documents were encouraged to deposit their records at the Record Office. It was acknowledged that some historic records pertaining to Essex may be lodged with record offices outside the county. There was good communication between county records offices however there were problems about how this best could be managed. There were difficulties about ownership, depositing arrangements, splitting up collections and transferring assets, if records were to be returned to Essex. There was a system to ensure that records need not be lost to Essex. Most record offices could supply a proxy digital copy of the historic document which could be purchased for approximately £300.

The Chairman thanked the presenters for their contributions to the meeting.

### **Mr. John Neale English Heritage**

Mr. Neale introduced himself to the Committee and gave details of the English Heritage organisation and how it was involved with Essex heritage.

In answer to questions the Committee was advised that English Heritage was established by statute to advise Government, preserve buildings and provide stewardship of advice and grant aid. The organisation also promoted appreciation of heritage, was part of the Heritage Champion Network and was currently looking at climate change issues, and conservation principles.

Over the past 10 years Essex had been offered £1.25 million from English Heritage East of England funds.

### **Work in Essex**

Essex was rich in historic sites and historic environment. There was a heavy work load. Over the past five years matters that had been covered included the following:

- 553 planning applications
- 596 listed buildings
- 236 scheduled monuments
- Looking at climate change issues
- Promoting appreciation of heritage
- Developing a Heritage Champion network
- Developing conservation principles

### **Assessing Buildings**

Reform was intended as the process for assessing buildings had been under review for some years. The criteria principles for selection for assessing buildings were now based upon interest rather than age or value of the building and the process was becoming more open. Currently, English Heritage tried to deal with applications within 21 days.

### **At Risk Register**

English Heritage held an at risk register. It was used to direct resources to the buildings considered to be most at risk. Almost 50% of properties on the baseline register had now been removed. It was acknowledged that there were a large number of buildings at risk around the Stansted Airport area.

With regard to areas at risk, the Committee was advised that Councils should use their powers to address highways municipal dereliction, of which there was some in Essex.

### **Conservation Areas**

English Heritage had tried to reflect the concerns expressed by the public in its publication conservation areas. Funds were available to assist at risk conservation areas. English Heritage was currently working in partnership with Witham and in Harlow where there were at risk areas.

English Heritage was keen to promote more partnership schemes. The 'Elmbridge' model, was considered to be a good way forward as it included a good number of local people but the level of funding available to be able to implement the model may present an issue.

### **Grants**

English Heritage had separate budgets for their own and other properties. The Committee was advised that applications for grants were accepted from any owner. Few other organisations would give grant funding to private owners. Private owners had the option to allow an enabling development so as to fund maintenance of the fabric of the main building(s). The criteria for awarding funding to private owners was very strict, and was used as a last resort, as it could be viewed that private owners were being financially subsidised. The priority was only given to buildings deemed to be at risk. A well maintained property was a very valuable asset and many owners did have the money to buy and maintain them.

The highest amount of grant funding went to Churches.

Mr. Neale was thanked for his presentation.

**Barry Shaw Head of Built Environment and David Andrew Historic Buildings and Conservation Manager**



Barry Shaw and David Andrews gave personal introductions and gave details of the role and functions of the Essex County Council's Built Environment Department.

In answer to various questions the Committee was advised as follows:

### **Aspects Covered**

The Built Environment Team Department was the largest of its type in the country. Team members included 25 environmental officers encompassing 5 conservation officers and 1 educational officer. The work of the team covered the following aspects:

- 400 historic parishes
- 30 historic towns
- 14,323 listed buildings
- 233 conservation areas

The Committee was advised that Uttlesford district had more listed buildings than any of the districts within the entire Eastern region (3757 buildings).

### **Internal Working**

The team worked internally with the following areas:

- The historic environment team and with historic environment records, maintaining and monitoring the buildings at risk register.
- Country Parks, giving advice on places such as Cressing Temple and other historic buildings.
- Asset Management, giving advice on works to County owned listed buildings.
- Essex Record Office, depositing records and giving advice to building owners.
- Highways Department, giving advice regarding conservation areas and listed bridges.

### **External Working**

The team worked with the following external groups and organisations:

- Undertook a range of work via service level agreements with eight of the 12 planning authorities in Essex.
- English Heritage – the regional team commented on all grade I and grade II listed buildings
- National Amenity Societies
- Parish Councils
- Institute of Historic Building Conservation
- Essex Conservation Officers Forum
- Building Preservation Trusts
- Essex Society for Archaeology and History

- Essex Historic Building Group
- Essex Gardens Trust
- Maldon Archaeological & Historical Group

## **Conservation**

The Committee was advised that the Built Environment Department had more conservation officers than were available across all the district and borough council's in Essex. There was scope to develop working relationships with District and Borough Councils. It would be important to retain and conserve the element of local knowledge.

## **Scale and Volume of Work**

Listed building work had been relatively unaffected by the recession. In the East of England, in 2008/09, planning applications were down by 19%, but listed building applications fell by only 13%.

In 2008/09, 1109 approvals were given to listed building and conservation area applications in the county of Essex. This figure excluded advice given on setting of listed buildings and designs in conservation areas. In 2008 the Essex County Council Historic Buildings department dealt with 1367 applications in 8 authorities.

In Braintree in 2008/09, the authority approved 240 listed buildings and conservation areas from the 723 applications received and responded to.

The Committee was advised that the figures quoted excluded the numerous preliminary applications dealt with and the requests for the public for general information about historic buildings and their repair. This represented a large workload for the six front line staff, so they had little time for proactive initiatives.

## **Heritage at Risk**

Eleven conservation areas in Essex were on the English Heritage's 2009 Heritage at Risk Register.

The Committee was advised that in the year 2000 there were 192 buildings at risk in Essex. This had increased to 207 buildings over the past 10 years.

Witham was the at risk area covered by the team.

## **Grant Funding**

Grant funding was the most effective method of getting buildings repairs and conservation areas improved. The impact of the recent Heritage Economic

Regeneration Scheme in Walton on the Naze was outlined to Members as a good example of how grant funding had been used.

### **War Memorials**

Grant funding was available for the restoration of war memorials through the War Memorials Trust. War Memorials could now be listed and applications to list them were usually regarded favourably.

The War Memorials Trust had recently issued guidance on how to deal with the recent spate of vandalism to War Memorials. Damage had been caused in part by the high value of scrap metal.

The UK National Inventory of War Memorials was an on-going project which had so far recorded 60,000 memorials. The inventory was available to the public on line.

### **Local Listing**

Local listing was optional and not binding. Well drafted policy was required to support local listing and the local development frameworks.

### **Enablement Schemes**

An example of a recent case whereby the design of an enabling scheme was reluctantly approved in order the main listed building could be restored was given by Members. Members questioned how designs could be better developed in the future.

The Committee was advised that there were bodies that could help in these matters. The Exemplar Programme had been set up in 2008 to create a forum for best practice discussions and the Essex Planning Forum was considered to implement best practice.

There was also the Essex Design Review Panel, which gave advice to district and borough councils this was also well regarded. The Review Panel was mostly used for schools and larger sites but the panel could be used in certain heritage circumstances.

### **Victorian Buildings and Schools**

Members raised some concern regarding the preservation of Victorian school buildings.

The Committee was advised that Victorian and Edwardian buildings remained largely unprotected. There had been no reviews since the 1980's.

With regard to school buildings, it was acknowledged that there was a great deal of work being undertaken in the County under the 'Building Better

Schools for the Future' (BSF) programme. Essex was undertaking the largest programme in the country.

It was accepted that on some occasions a sensitive compromise was needed with some old buildings. Advice to retain existing Victorian school building wherever possible had been given by the conservation and design and development team to the Essex County Council asset management team who were involved in the BSF Programme.

### **Asset Management**

The Committee was advised that the Asset Management team was responsible for the maintenance of buildings such as County Hall in Chelmsford (a listed building) and all other buildings that were owned by Essex County Council.

### **Highways**

Currently there was evolving debate with Highways Area Teams to try to get more consistency. The successful rebuilding of the Brentwood Town centre was briefly outlined. It was acknowledged that signage could be a key element to any area scheme.

Mr. Shaw and Mr. Andrews were thanked for their contributions.

## **18. Future Work Plan**

Members noted that this review would continue on until at least May and noted the arrangements for placing items on to the future work plan.

## **19. Date of Next Meeting**

Members noted and approved the arrangements for the meeting on Friday 16 April 2010 to be held at 9.15 am at the Waltham Abbey Town Hall.

There being no urgent business the meeting closed at 1.07 pm

Chairman

