



# Anger as council backs down in housing battle

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Uttlesford District Council was this week accused of “betraying” residents over its decision not to fight an 800-home development dubbed ‘Hellsenham’.

Leader of the opposition Liberal Democrat group, Councillor Alan Dean, claimed cross-party revolt was growing at the authority in the wake of the “unprecedented” move.

Developer, the Fairfield Partnership, which has appealed the decision by the district council’s planning committee to reject its scheme on two separate occasions, is seeking to build homes on the 755 acres of land it controls between Elsenham and Henham.

UDC will be represented at the Planning Inspector appeal but, following legal advice, the planning committee has chosen not to provide evidence in support of its refusal decision.

Had the council done so, and lost, there would have been the risk of incurring substantial costs, resulting in the loss of taxpayer money.

Another problem is that the site is included in the council’s emerging

Local Plan. The plan earmarks a total of 2,100 homes for the land, meaning the authority would effectively be contradicting itself by trying to provide evidence backing up the planning committee.

Cllr Dean dismissed this notion and instead claimed the planning committee had been made to look “incompetent”.

“I think they were frightened into believing that their refusal of 800 homes at the site undermined the credibility of the draft Local Plan, which says there should ultimately be 2,100 homes on Fairfield’s site,” he said.

“But the draft Local Plan has not been tested by an inspector and is potentially undeliverable and unsound. Now is the wrong time to renege on its commitment to fight the 800-home plan.”

Cllr David Morson, district councillor for Elsenham and Henham, said: “This decision to cave in to developers is about saving money. What’s the point of paying Council Tax to a council with no backbone – that so readily reneges on its taxpayers?”

“Save Our Villages [a residents’ campaign group] may now be our

only hope! It is reprehensible that this matter was discussed unannounced in secrecy. It was sneaked through the planning committee without anyone else knowing it was even under consideration.”

The Lib Dems intend to take the matter to the next full council meeting on July 15. The group is looking to get the backing of Conservative and Independent councillors in a bid to overturn the decision.

In an attempt to diffuse the uproar, UDC chief executive John Mitchell issued a statement.

He said: “The planning committee on June 25 was given confidential legal opinion from independent counsel about the strength of its case in defending the forthcoming planning appeal by Fairfield for 800 houses at Elsenham.

“After a long debate, and in the face of the legal advice, it was agreed by a substantial majority that the council will not be presenting evidence at the planning inquiry. As with all legal advice sought by the council, this legal opinion remains confidential by virtue of legal privilege.”

Parish councils will still be able to provide evidence to fight the appeal at the inquiry on September 23.

## Poignant memories of war



■ Helen O'Brien with her First World War displays.  
Pictures: GORDON RIDGEWELL

First World War memorabilia and floral displays decorated a medieval church as a community commemorated the centenary of the outbreak of the Great War.

The two-day display of stories and pictures was held at St Mary’s Church, in Walden Road, Radwinter over the weekend.

A themed flower festival is hosted by the church every

year but on this occasion organisers chose to focus on remembering the sacrifices of the local people who gave their lives for their country.

Included in the displays were poignant contributions from the village’s residents about members of their families who had fought in the Great War.

Proceeds from the event will be donated to the Royal British Legion.



■ It’s a Knockout sponsor George Cooper, St Clare corporate fundraiser Brooke Stacey and hospice supporter Jeff Brazier.

## Fundraiser is going to pack a punch!

TV presenter Jeff Brazier is helping ensure St Clare Hospice’s first-ever It’s a Knockout competition packs a punch!

The Hub host has lent his support to the fun team-building event taking place on Thursday, July 10 at Bishop’s Stortford Rugby Club.

In 2009, the Hastingwood-based hospice cared for his former partner, *Big Brother* star Jady Goody, the mother of his two sons Bobby and Freddie, before her death from cervical cancer aged 27.

More than 15 local businesses have already entered a team and will be pitching themselves against each other as they take on a series of games and challenges in a bid to win the coveted Knockout champion title. The course will feature a range of obstacles to conquer, from inflatables and props to water and bubbles.

Players are encouraged to come in fancy dress, and will be awarded extra points towards their total score for the best or most imaginative costumes.

St Clare corporate fundraiser Brooke Stacey said: “We are really excited to be running our very first It’s a Knockout competition to raise money for the hospice.

“It is guaranteed to be a great evening for all those taking part as well as spectators who are invited to come along to watch and cheer on their favourite team.”

The fundraising event has been sponsored by ex-West Ham physiotherapist George Cooper, who owns GC Physiotherapy and Sports

Injury Clinic in Stansted.

A barbecue and refreshments will be available and teams are invited to bring along their own gazebos and tents. Prizes will be handed out for the winning team and the team that raises the most sponsorship.

Teams of up to 10 players are still welcome to enter.

Registration costs £25 per player and each person is asked to pledge to raise a minimum £75 sponsorship.

For information, call the St Clare fundraising team on 01279 773750.

## Holidays on a low budget

Uttlesford Citizens Advice Bureau is to launch a social media campaign with tips on how to enjoy the summer holidays on a tight budget.

Every day during the holidays, the free advice team will be tweeting and posting on its Facebook page ideas for free or cheap activities and ways to budget over the summer break.

A spokesman said: “A little planning can only add to the fun of having the kids around for six weeks and could help take away some of the stresses.

“Try working out beforehand how much money you want to lay aside for activities so that there is no danger of overspending.”

He added: “Think ahead to take advantage of special offers to cut spending: Cineworld has bargain Tuesdays, Kellogg’s cereal packets offer ‘adult goes free’ vouchers to many popular attractions and Tesco’s vouchers can be converted to rewards which will help you get discounts.

“Include lots of free things like picnics, trips to the park and put in a visit to Saffron Walden’s invaluable Tourist Information Office to see what could take your fancy locally.”

Anyone who has good ideas for free or cheap things to do with kids in Uttlesford has been asked to tweet @UttlesfordCAB or get in touch via Facebook so the team can share them.