

Appeal over 13 flats plan

● SWAN Housing Association is appealing against Southend Council's refusal of planning permission for 13 flats on the site of former garages at Derek Gardens, Southend.

The development control committee rejected the proposals as overdevelopment of the site.

The site was originally sold to the association by the council for a low figure to allow for the provision of social housing. The appeal will be dealt with through written representations and a site visit by a Government inspector.

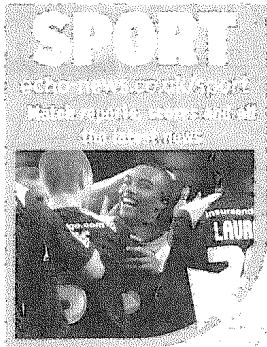
Teenager, 17, denies theft

● A TEENAGER has denied stealing a crate of lager.

The 17-year-old pleaded not guilty to theft at Southend Youth Court.

He is alleged to have stolen a crate, worth £9.99, from a Spar shop in Southend in October.

The boy, from Langdon Hills, who cannot be named for legal reasons, will appear at Southend Magistrates' Court on February 5 for a trial.



Tools taken during works

● WORKMEN had £20,000 of tools stolen while they carried out a survey on drains.

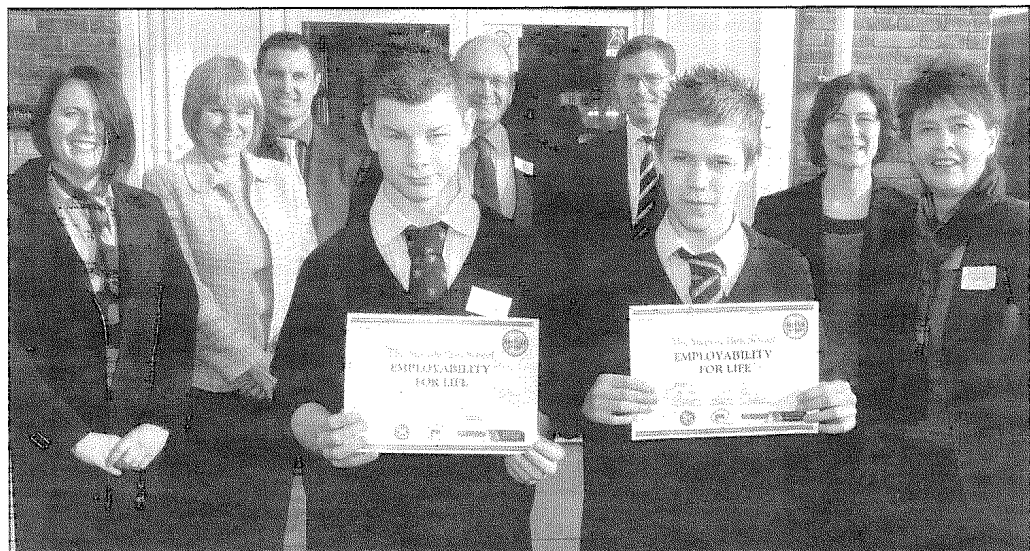
Thieves got into a Leyland Daf van in Surig Road, Canvey.

They took a hydraulic pecker and an underground camera between 2.30pm and 4.30pm on Tuesday.

● BURGLARS broke into Card Warehouse, in the Knightswick Centre, Canvey. They smashed a rear door and forced open a safe, stealing £1,385.

● SIX bottles of gas worth £300 were stolen from a metal cage at Morrison's petrol station in Northwick Road, Canvey.

● THE ice rink at Festival Leisure Park in Basildon will stay open until Easter Monday next year.



Employable — pupils with Tracey Hill, Georgina Clark and Sue Potter from Petroplus, Simon Cox and Andy Hodgkinson from Sweyne Park School and Denise Rossiter from Essex Chambers of Commerce

Picture: STEVE O'CONNELL LBPQDZ

Scheme prepares pupils for work

By JOHN GEOGHEGAN
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- Emphasis not just on qualifications
- Social skills play a big part in schooling

MAKING the leap from school studies to the world of work can be a tough adjustment for many youngsters.

But a simple ground-breaking new scheme which has just launched at a Rayleigh school aims to make that transition much smoother.

The Employability for Life scheme tries to get pupils ready for the job market and has just completed a successful pilot year at Sweyne Park School.

All pupils are judged on attendance and punctuality, appearance, communication, motivation and professional conduct.

They are assessed by teachers throughout their school career based on their approach to work, behaviour in class and participation in various programmes, extra-curricular activities and work placements.

Pupils are able to achieve gold, silver and bronze levels in their final gradings and receive certificates which they can take to job interviews.

In April next year, the scheme starts for real and will be rolled out to all schools in Rochford district and neighbouring Castle Point. If a continued success, it could spread even further afield.

Sweyne Park has teamed up with Essex Chambers of Commerce and oil company Petroplus, based at Coryton Refinery, to run the project for Year 11 pupils, aged 15-16.

The idea was thought up by headteacher Andy Hodgkinson with maths teacher Simon Cox, who drew up the employability charter.

Mr Hodgkinson said: "The idea for this came about because of my involvement on the Essex Business Consortium, which has representatives from major businesses.

"One of their issues has been the need to recruit people of the right calibre into business.

"They're not just concerned

about qualifications, but want people who are work ready, which means being good at communicating, attending and being motivated.

"So myself and Simon had this idea to get students to reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses and improve on any weaknesses.

"Then they can leave school and go to the employers with a certificate that carries some weight.

"It's a really exciting opportunity for young people, particularly in these difficult economic times. It's a very simple idea which could have a lot of benefits."

The scheme, which may be extended to 18 year olds in the future, was brought to the attention of other local schools and Essex County Council, whose representatives sit on the Area Planning Group. And they were so impressed they all wanted to get involved with Employability for Life.

Mr Cox, who is also the school's vocational co-ordinator, added: "It's taken two years and a lot of blood, sweat and tears.

"It's really exciting to do. Hopefully, it's something that will go nationwide.

"As a social responsibility, we need to prepare these young people for the world of work. When I was at school, there wasn't the means to develop these skills.

"The charter awards someone who does an honest day's work for an honest day's pay and is good for those pupils who work hard but perhaps don't always get the high exam results."

16, from Hullbridge, said: "The course has been good. It's helped prepare me for the outside world. I got gold level and a certificate for attending it. When I finish here, I will go to Seevic in Thundersley, to do a sports and exercise course. Then I want to be a personal trainer."

Fellow pupil 15, from Southend, added: "Employability has been really good. I got my gold too and this has helped me get my head round the world of work. I do a City and Guilds building course in Basildon which went towards completing my charter here."

Sid, 88, quizzed over alleged racist remarks

AN ELDERLY BNP activist has been interviewed by police in connection with alleged racist remarks made in letters to the chief executive of Basildon Council.

Sid Chaney, 88, from Mellow Mead, Laindon, was interviewed for three hours by Basildon police's hate crime unit over letters to Bala

Mahendran, who is of Sri Lankan origin.

Mr Chaney, who has stood several times as a candidate for the BNP in Basildon, and was formerly a member of the National Front, has written a number of letters making accusations against the council.

In one of the latest, the letter

suggested the council was wrongly favouring people of ethnic minorities for high-ranking jobs.

Essex Police spokeswoman Donna Veasey said: "Police are investigating following a complaint from Basildon Council with regard to racist comments.

"A man from Basildon has

been interviewed in connection with this allegation. As this investigation is ongoing, it would be inappropriate to comment further at this time."

Council spokesman Ray McKay said: "A complaint has been made by our legal department to police in relation to letters received by the chief executive."