



## UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

### Felsted & Stebbing Ward

District Councillors John Evans & Richard Silcock



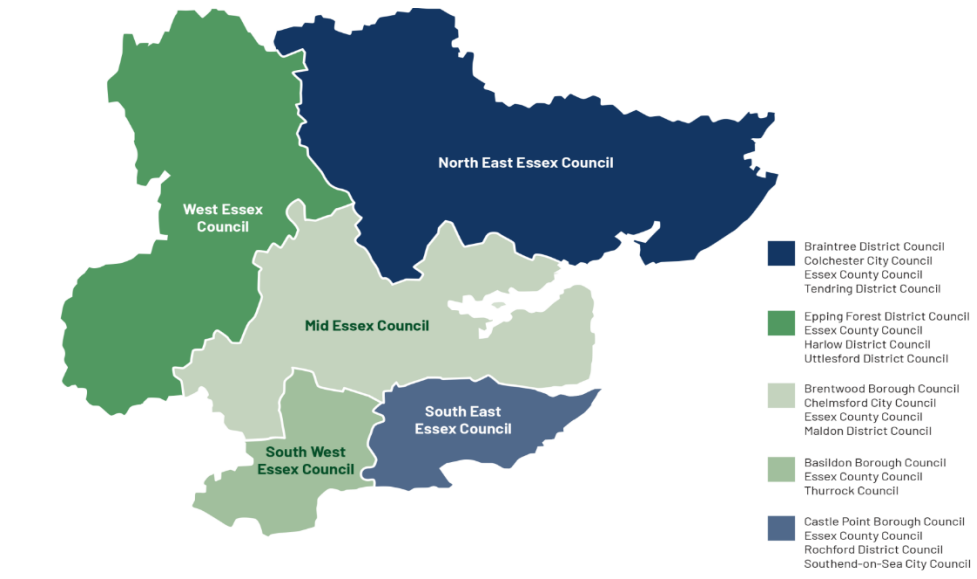
### DISTRICT COUNCILLORS' REPORT: APRIL 2026

Please find below our monthly Report to the Parish Council, one which we consider, without exaggeration, describes two of the most significant political and planning policy changes for the past four decades to impact our residents both so far as democracy is concerned and also the “look” of Uttlesford’s towns and countryside.

Coincidentally, they were announced/came about on the same day, Wednesday 25 March!

### LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION (“LGR”)

The New Organisation and Shape – Unitary Councils in Essex – from April 2028



The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has decided, after considering all representations made, to reorganise the existing 15 County, Districts and current Unitary Councils in Essex into five separate unitary bodies, as depicted above (the “Five Model”). The creation of three unitary councils, (the “Three Model”) as advocated by Essex County Council and incidentally, Braintree District

Council (whose leader has been a very strong and vocal supporter for devolution for many years) was rejected.

The letter explaining the decision of the Secretary of State is found here: [Local government reorganisation: decision letter to Essex, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock council leaders](#). There were similar decisions taken at the same as that for Essex in relation to several “shire” Counties, reflecting what soon after the 2024 Election became the Government's non manifesto-ed policy in this area.

It will be seen that the decision recognised the preference of the majority of Councils in Essex for the Five Model and accepted that the economics of this arrangement were sustainable, although there will be a bearing by Central Government of a proportion of the debt incurred by Thurrock Council amounting to £ 200 m. Each new unitary will be in receipt of central funding of the order of some £ 900k to assist in early reorganisation costs. The actual costs of reorganisation will be very substantial, with estimates ranging being from £ 73m - £ 100m across the board. Equally, “pay back” periods and extent of financial savings obtained vary depending on assumptions made. There is no definitive answer to this but it is safe to say that other LGR examples elsewhere in the country have invariably not produced the level of costs savings first predicted.

Given that the costs of social services, highways and education, representing the lion’s share of the current ECC budget, will be disaggregated and borne by the unitary councils in the stead of ECC, it is not likely that these overall costs incurred will be greatly different post LGR. There will be salary savings resulting through having a body of fewer executives employed in the unitary authorities than at present but what these will prove to be cannot precisely be predicted. It is the case that salary scales at ECC, being a very large authority and commensurately large budgets, are significantly greater than those at district council level. In this context and merely by way of interest, there are over 50 officers at ECC earning salaries (not including provision for final salary pension contributions) of in excess of £100,000 pa.

The arguments in favour of having a greater (five) or fewer (three) number of unitary councils do not boil down to budgetary matters only. The appropriate population numbers to be served and “closeness” to their communities of those elected to the unitary councils is equally, if not more important. In our view the Five Model will provide the means for better serving those communities than the Three Model.

Even so, the West Essex Council will have 83 elected Members, a considerable reduction compared to now. Incidentally, North East Essex (Braintree, Colchester and Tendring) will have 100 elected members who will represent their > 500,000 population. It might be appreciated in this respect, just what a monolith would it have been had Uttlesford been added to that unitary arrangement, bringing its population up to close to 600,000 represented by some 120 elected members!

This means that, with effect from 1 April 2028, Uttlesford District Council (and all the other existing Councils in Essex) will no longer exist and it will be “merged” with Epping Forest DC and Harlow BC to make up a new body to be called (for the present at least) “West Essex Council”. Thereafter, there will be five unitary authorities covering the historical county of Essex while a new Mayoral Combined covering its

geographic area will be created which will have responsibility for “strategic/semi-regional” functions, including transport, major infrastructure and large scale new housing provision, such as New Towns/Garden Communities.

Despite the Decision by the Secretary of State, the Cabinet of Essex County Council have expressed themselves dissatisfied with it and have threatened to challenge it by way of Judicial Review. We await further developments on that score. There is no suggestion however that any of the other Councils (including Braintree DC and Epping Forest DC which had supported Essex CC in promoting the Three Model rather than the Five Model) will be supportive of any such move by Essex CC.

Some readers might wish to keep abreast of this subject via a general web page created by ECC as follows: <https://www.essexlgrhub.org/changes-coming-greater-essex>

Pending the LGR vesting date (1 April 2028), it will be “business as usual” for all the Councils with each of their current functions continuing to be maintained and discharged by them. However, in the year preceding it, there will be a Shadow Authority for each new unitary in place whose membership will have been elected in May 2027 and inevitably, it will begin to take the major decisions which will then be required going forward for the future. “BAU” continues to be the case for Parish Councils which too will have elections in May 2027.

We believe that the roles of Parish and Town Councils, while undiminished under LGR, might in fact be capable of enhancement. Since there will be fewer elected councillors in the Unitary Councils representing their electorate than is the case in the combined County and District Councils presently, Parish Councils and Town Councils might in future need to keep themselves aware of policy matters and their implementation at unitary level to a greater extent than presently. Securing members in these bodies who will have the time and necessary attributes to do so might in some instances prove to be challenging.

#### **UTTLESFORD LOCAL PLAN 2021 - 2041**

At last, we are glad to report that Uttlesford has a new Local Plan, replacing one which was grossly out of date, the last having been adopted in January 2005, 21 years ago!

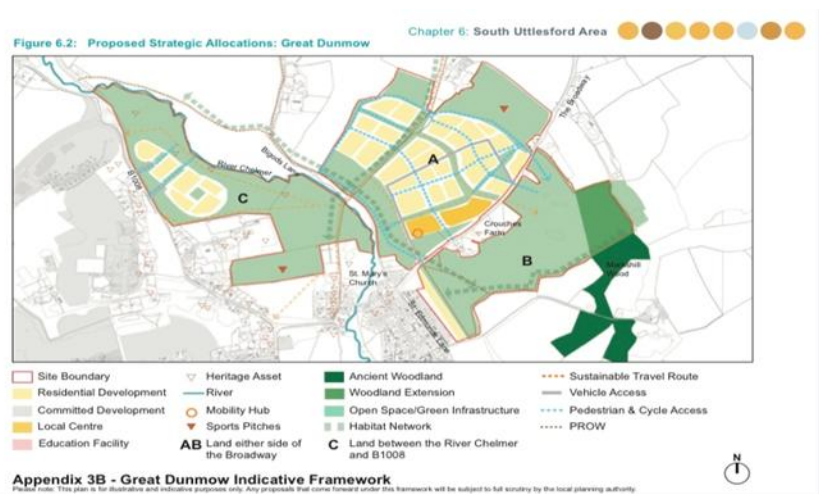
UDC met at an Extraordinary Council held on 25 March in order to determine whether to adopt the Local Plan 2021 – 2041 as examined, together with the Planning Inspectorate’s Major Modifications. We are glad to confirm that on a clear majority vote upon the resolution to adopt (which was proposed by John, as Planning Portfolio Holder) it was approved by Members. The vote was carried on an affirmative vote (including by John and Richard) of 26 Members. There was one vote cast in opposition (by the Member representing the Ward which includes Clavering) and six abstentions (including of two members representing Dunmow Wards and that representing the Rodings). None of the political parties were subject to “whipping” and all members thus had a free vote.

For ready reference this is the link to the Local Plan in pdf format, as it was put to Council for adoption: <https://uttlesford.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s43086/Annexe%201%20-%20UDC%20Local%20Plan.pdf>.

Of the Wards most affected by the proposed housing and employment allocations, the Members for Saffron Walden cast affirmative votes as did one of the three members for Takeley, another recused himself because of a pecuniary interest with reference to his own home and the other was absent, being abroad.

We are of course both pleased that the Local Plan is now adopted – indeed it has immediate effect. While recognising that it will sanction considerable development in and inevitable change to several areas within the District, in particular leading to large housing allocations in the Takeley and Little Canfield areas, the North East of Great Dunmow and the east of Saffron Walden, as well as the provision of commercial buildings in way of logistics and storage hubs at Takeley Street.

Readers may wish to review the Local Plan at their leisure but in terms of its likely effect upon residents living in our Parishes, both as to change in the nature and appearance of the countryside, the greatest will come from the proposed housing allocation (908 dwellings) with accompanying green open space in the north-east of Great Dunmow, lying on both sides of the Broadway/Church End and Parsonage Lane. This is an illustration of the potential development areas and types in these locations.

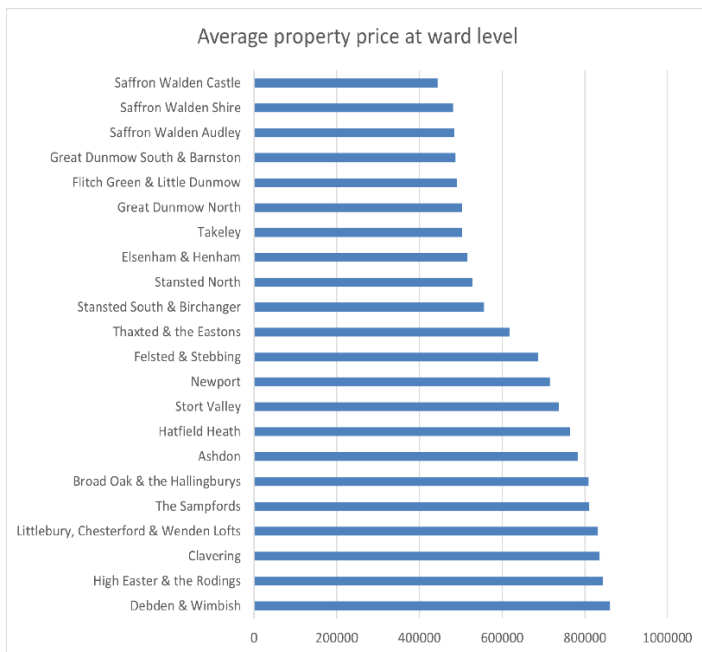


Now, that it has been adopted, the UDC Local Plan 2021 – 2041 Local Plan, together with its Policy Maps and made Neighbourhood Plans, will make up the Development Plan for the District. Thus, the 2005 Local Plan has been superseded and of no further relevance. Hard copies of the new Local Plan will be available for purchase in due course and, in addition to the presently available PDF version, it will also probably be available in a “flip book” format to aid access and reference to it via smart devices. The PDF is of course word searchable via use of “Control F”.

A list of the benefits and disbenefits of having an update Local Plan together with John’s address to Council has been shared with your Planning Sub-Committee for their information. It might be of interest also to provide an extract from the address which describes the change that has come about in our District in the past two decades and, quite apart from Government Policy requiring it, explains the need for an updated Local Plan :

“I would like to remind colleagues just how different was the Uttlesford of 2005 compared with now. Then, its population was some 69,000; now it is 95,000 and ONS predicts it will be over 111,000 by 2039. Then we had 27,500 households and now they exceed 46,600. Then, Uttlesford’s population grew in line with the national average of around 6% while now it has the greatest growth rate in the East of England of around 15% pa. Then, the M11 was the principal arterial road and the A120 had only just been completed. Then, Stansted’s passenger traffic was 12m pa while now it exceeds 30m pa.”

The principal change in our countryside has come about because of demand for housing to be built on green field sites leading to or being caused by (perhaps a chicken and egg question) inward migration by residents from North and East London, principally in the middle (which increased by 21%) and post-retirement age brackets and perhaps exacerbated also by the ability of those still in full time employment post COVID to “*work from home*”. The availability in the supply of larger homes of the types preferred to be built by developers/builders in our Parishes has largely provided the influx/draw for those new home buyers, often boosted by the advantageous differential in house prices making the change of location for new residents so attractive. This has increased the lack of affordability of Uttlesford’s housing stock yet further and limited the availability of smaller size dwellings in the social and affordable categories.



The average price of a house in Uttlesford in

February 2026 was £ 605,302 and the table above shows the average price per Ward. The average annual salary for PAYE residents is £47,382. The equivalent figure for the self-employed is not available. The

proportion of dwellings owned by Uttlesford residents free of mortgage is also significantly higher than the national average.

The Local Plan will go some long way to support the provision of well-designed and a greater number of suitably located affordable housing in the District, as well as sufficient market housing, all of which will be built according to higher carbon standards than is laid down nationally and in ecologically superior surroundings and with required infrastructure to suit.

The new Local Plan will continue to remain in place post LGR and the creation of the new West Essex unitary council. It will, under Government requirements, in future be reviewed every five years and no doubt, that will take into account not only the shape and requirements of both that unitary and neighbouring unitary councils but also the strategic vision of the new Mayoral Combined Authority.

### **HEDGEHOG SOLAR FARM**

The planning application for this development has now been submitted both to UDC and BDC. We attended the last meeting of the Community Liaison Group, as did your Chairman and no doubt he will wish to advise further as to matters as they stand.

### **ASSETS OF COMMUNITY VALUE (“ACV”)**

An important change is ahead for ACVs under the English Devolution & Community Empowerment Bill whose passage is presently underway in the House of Lords. If passed, it will amend the existing “Right to Bid” to one of “Right to Buy” and extend the period for the ACV nomination remaining registered as such with the local planning authority from a period of 5 years to one of 10 years. The Right to Buy mechanics will now involve the participation of the District Council, in the absence of an agreed purchase valuation, in the determination of the price for the prospective purchase of the ACV.

These provide important protections for the interests of our Parish Councils, local residents and any community bodies wishing to buy ACVs, of which we have 3 in each of Felsted and Stebbing Parishes:

- Felsted: Chequers, Swan, Memorial Hal
- Stebbing: Andrewsfield, Andrewsfield Club House, Village Stores

However, because there will be a Right to Buy, one could imagine significant challenges for community bodies in the raising of funding if more than one ACV were to come onto the market at the same time.

### **FURTHER GOVERNMENT PLANNING CHANGES**

A welter of additional materials concerning changes to the planning system including to the way in which the Planning Committees of the Local Planning Authorities operate and are to be managed was published last week. Consultation is open until 23 April (a very short period in the circumstances). Here it is:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-committee-reform-draft-regulations-and-guidance?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=govuk-notifications-topic&utm\\_source=aa2c95b0-ce10-47ab-a9a7-e94562cf94bf&utm\\_content=immediately](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-committee-reform-draft-regulations-and-guidance?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications-topic&utm_source=aa2c95b0-ce10-47ab-a9a7-e94562cf94bf&utm_content=immediately)

These proposals build on the consultation that was first launched last year and involves a National Scheme of Delegation to planning officers at Local Planning Authorities with two tiers being set:

- Tier A can only be decided by senior officers;
- Tier B decided by officers, but can go to Committee if a “gateway test” is met (i.e. the application is judged as having significant economic, social, or environmental impact, or significant planning issues).

By these proposals, MHCLG is clearly seeking to reduce Planning Committee involvement in cases which it sees as unnecessary. The days of Planning Committee members having locally delegated responsibility for planning decision making are to be curtailed.

One might justifiably believe that this is yet a further example of the Government's push to achieve its 1.5m dwellings built in the course of this Parliament.

#### **WARD MEMBER GRANT INITIATIVE**

You will recall that this is the last year when Member grant initiative funds are made available by UDC to individual ward members. These had been (to our way of thinking, unattractively) referred to in the past as being provided through the “*New Homes Bonus*” that had been provided by Central Government to District Councils as a means of encouraging the grant of planning permissions for new dwellings.

The funding has in recent times been provided from central UDC resources and from the next municipal year, all grant awards and funding will be consolidated. The aggregate funding of £ 39,000 currently available to all Members will hereafter be pooled and added to the larger District “pot” in order to secure greater impact for projects and needs of a larger scale than was the case hitherto.

We have decided to allocate our remaining Member initiative funding as follows:

Friends of Flich Way – 3 x Bench Seating & Table along Flich Way, within the Parish	£ 1,200
Buffy Bus – general support and equipment	£ 300
Daphne Rogowski Memorial Meadow, Stebbing Green/community orchard	£ 300
Litter Pickers – Felsted PC	£ 100
Litter Pickers – Stebbing PC	£ 100

In 2024/2025, we were able to make a substantial award to Stebbing Primary School in way of their carbon and green initiatives and reading materials.

## **COMMUNITY ENERGY**

Richard (through Sustainable Uttlesford connections) arranged introductions to both Felsted and Stebbing Primary Schools to representatives of Community Energy, a non profit organisation whose motivation is to encourage public buildings to go towards self sufficiency in their energy needs through the installation of their own solar panels and heat pumps. Stebbing Primary School is currently having a survey of its buildings undertaken through Community Energy to determine its suitability.

## **OUR WARD ACTIVITY**

We continue to work with UDC to support their teams as regards the ongoing maintenance and repair of the road surface within their estates.

At Bran End Fields, Stebbing, the road and footway surfaces which have been heavily flooded this winter because of a blocked sump and drainage have now been cleared and the immediate problems resolved.

John was able to provide your Assistant Clerk with copies of recent materials published by the Law Commission (the national Law Reform Body, made up of distinguished Jurists and legal academics) concerning future possible changes in the law regarding the maintenance and operation of burial grounds.

As may be imagined, we receive in our “post bag” a wide variety of enquiries from residents as to matters which concern them individually but are of general interest (sometimes arising out of these Monthly Reports to you, which of course we very much welcome).

## **OUR REPORTS – THEIR PURPOSE**

As we have stated before, we do consider that the level of necessary detail as to “What is Going On” at County and District Council levels has been missing from local press/newspaper reporting in recent years.

Our Reports are therefore intended to provide additional information in greater depth to enable both you, residents and businesses within the parish to keep themselves abreast and enquire further about issues and topics not merely of specific concern or objection to them individually but of general policy interest and application at large.

While the Reports are not a totally comprehensive account of the local picture, they are a reflection of what we consider to be of topical importance. So, if there are additional themes or areas of interest to readers upon which they would like further explanation or indeed research, we shall be pleased to respond to them.

We might add that Parish Council Minutes might be seen and enjoyed as a useful reference point for social and local historians and in years to come, since these Reports are helpfully included by your Clerk in your Minutes, they might we hope, when read together, be capable of providing a valuable record of Parish life and municipal concerns during these changing times!

## **DISTRICT COUNCILLORS’ AND CONSTITUENTS’ SURGERY**

We will be holding our usual monthly residents’ surgery in the URC Hall at 1730 prior to your Meeting.

We are always, of course, pleased to meet up by appointment, as required, with any resident who wishes to discuss a matter of concern or interest.

If any resident would like to receive a personal copy of our Monthly Reports, we shall be pleased to send one directly to them by e mail but do remind all concerned that they are published and included by way of a link in each Month's Parish Council Minutes. Back Editions commencing as far ago as June 2019 are available additionally on request !

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