



UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Felsted & Stebbing Ward

District Councillors Sandi Merifield & John Evans



DISTRICT COUNCILLORS' REPORT: APRIL 2023

Cllrs. Sandi Merifield and John Evans are pleased to present their Monthly Report to the Parish Council, this being their 48th and final Report submitted during the life of this Council.

We were very pleased to hear from you at recent meetings that the format of our Reports and level of detail provided have proved to be of interest and some value. By being made available through the hyperlink included in your Minutes, it has been possible we believe to provide a level of detailed reporting of District Council affairs to the Community which would not otherwise be as easily accessible or recorded.

BUSINESS SUPPORT MATTERS

We have referred to cost of living matters twice in recent reports as they affect individuals and households and so hope we have drawn sufficient attention to the help and advice available from UDC in that context.

We think it is likely to be of value in this Report however, if we were to highlight the extent of help now available to businesses. It is the local business community and the proprietors and managers of Small and Medium Enterprises who after all make up the back bone of the local employment scene which we are very keen to support.

Accordingly, we set out in some detail the extent of financial support grants and other assistance available via UDC. Full details are set out on the UDC web site but we set out extracts for immediate access as follows:

A. Business support grants Match-funded grants now available.

► [For full details and eligibility criteria](#)

[Find out more and apply](#)

1. Start-up Grant

Up to £2,500 for start-ups and businesses that have been trading for less than two years.

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The grant can be used for items including equipment or machinery, shop fittings, web design or advertising. The Business Start-up grant is funded by the government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

2. [Growth & Increased Productivity Fund](#)

Up to £5,000 for eligible businesses that are looking to increase productivity, increase commercial floorspace or create new jobs or apprenticeships.

The grant can be used for items including equipment or machinery, costs relating to research and development work, staff training costs or refurbishment of buildings.

▶ [Find out more and apply](#)

3. [High Street Premises Enhancement Fund](#)

Up to £5,000 for eligible businesses in town and village centres to improve their shop frontage.

The grant can be used for replacement shopfronts or windows, new signage, repainting and rendering, gutters and downpipes, access improvements and architect fees.

▶ [Find out more and apply](#)

B. Free HR support for small businesses

Many SMEs do not have access to full HR support. A programme has been set up to provide such organisations with free HR management support and training to improve the wellbeing of their workforce.

By signing up for the Small Business HR Support Programme, they can secure access to the following:

- Up to 2 MHFA England Mental Health First Aid training places (more training can be purchased at a highly discounted rate)
- Bespoke Manager training and online training on a variety of health, wellbeing and HR topics
- Confidential workplace and staff needs assessment
- Monthly Newsletter
- Apprenticeship Growth Programme
- Access to a personal development programme and app
- Regular meetings with HR Advisor

▶ [More information and to sign up](#)

C. Support for non-domestic alternative fuel consumers

On 21 September 2022, the government outlined plans to help cut energy bills for businesses.

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The Non-Domestic Alternative Fuels Payments Scheme provides a fixed payment of £150 to UK non-domestic consumers who are off the gas grid and use alternative fuels. This includes commercial businesses, voluntary sector organisations including charities and community interest companies and public sector organisations such as schools, hospitals and care homes. Most consumers that are eligible for this payment will have already received it automatically as a credit on their electricity bills.

Properties not connected to the electricity grid will not have received £150 automatically and will need to apply through the online portal linked below.

Those that use high levels of kerosene, 10,000 litres per year, may be eligible for the additional payment and will need to apply and provide evidence to support the claim.

Applications to the scheme will close on **28th April 2023**.

► [More information and to apply](#)

SOLAR FARMS

As one of the residents recently advised at your meeting, it would appear that Bluestone Energy is intending to submit planning applications for the two schemes (each of 49.9 MW) for which they previously held public exhibitions together, which as one conjoined scheme would exceed the threshold of 50 MW capacity, whereafter a scheme then becomes of a National Infrastructure nature and scale ("NSIP"). Beyond that threshold, any planning application would be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate on behalf of the Minister and would be determined not by UDC as the Local Planning Authority but by the Secretary of State.

The NSIP process for solar farms has not happened before in Uttlesford and it will be essential as and when any such application is made properly to prepare for it and for submissions to be delivered at an appropriate level of detail and expertise. We have passed examples of such NSIP schemes elsewhere in the country to your sub-committee by way of example as to the procedures and level of detail there involved. UDC (as well as ECC) will need to assemble a level of expert advice and professional input reflecting the seriousness of such an NSIP being pursued in our Parish.

A guide as to the procedures involved for those interested is found here:

<https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/application-process/the-process/>

We have contacted Bluestone Energy expressing our interest in holding an early conversation with them to ascertain their intentions and possible timetables. Apart from advising them (as your Planning Sub-Committee have done in the past too) to hold proper consultations in appropriate locations, we shall suggest that they hold a detailed forum including formal platform presentations, enabling informed and detailed explanations to be given by them. The previous "board presentations" undertaken by them, we shall suggest, were superficial and did not make for sufficiently effective nor genuine consultation.

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Matters such as use of BMV, concentration and scale given the existing solar farms will need, it seems to us, to come under the spotlight from the outset.

We will advise your planning sub-committee of further news from Bluestone as received.

PLANNING ENFORCEMENT MATTERS

We have been in extensive contact with Cllr Freeman and several residents regarding (mainly) enforcement of planning conditions. These include consideration by the UDC enforcement team of property interests and considerations of human rights and action is being taken following the appropriate procedures, although such, by reason of its nature, is not in the public domain. We wanted to state that enforcement is a matter of frequent frustration for many (including us) when incredulity is expressed as to the length of time taken to action such apparent breaches and/or failure to comply.

What we can say however that we are following such matters up with the Director of Planning to ensure that effective actions are indeed taken by the enforcement officers and when the steps themselves are able to be published, we will ensure that your Planning Sub-Committee is made aware of them.

As ever, that sub-committee is assiduous to the need to follow up/diarise matters but also we know they appreciate the difficulties involved and the need for enforcement procedures being followed precisely. There is no advantage gained if the procedures are not followed to the letter, since otherwise prospects of appeal and challenge might become available which would be counterproductive.

FELSTED RECORDER AND HISTORICAL ARCHIVES – LOCAL HISTORY

In anticipation of the retirement of the Recorder, Mrs Jules Wallis, John has been in contact with her and inspected the archive for which she has prepared an inventory and which John has viewed. He can store the archive until such time as a replacement Recorder is appointed or other arrangements made and it is intended that the archive will be transferred later this month.

John is the Vice-Chairman of Stebbing Local History Society and having discussed matters with his colleagues, the Society would be pleased to offer its assistance as requested to help launch a local history society in Felsted. It has provided such assistance to others in the past, including to Tilty.

The Society has its quarterly meeting in the Village Hall, Mill Lane, Stebbing on **Monday 17th April 2023** at 2000 H, when the guest speaker will be Mr Neil Wiffen, an archivist at Essex Records Office, who will be presenting on *The Rebuilding of Broomfield Church*. He is an entertaining speaker with a wide local history knowledge. All members of the Parish Council, and indeed from the community at large who may be interested in local history, are invited to be the guests of the Society at that event. Perhaps if any one might be available and would like to attend they could let John know in advance.

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THE LOCAL ELECTIONS & REGISTERING TO VOTE – 4th MAY 2023

As we reported last month, an extensive campaign has been taking place, prepared by the Electoral Services Team at UDC, to advise the community of the new Voter ID requirements coming into effect at this Election (covering of course both District and Parish) for the first time and perhaps you will excuse a repetition of it.

This is the principal link to the UDC page dealing with electoral matters and includes a comprehensive guide including the means for registration and proxy/postal voting which will perhaps be helpful for those contemplating a Spring Holiday or business trip:

<https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/8376/Elections-and-voting>

It will be necessary for voters exercising their vote in person to show some form of photo ID at the voting station and this link sets out the relevant information in detail:

<https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/ier>

We urge residents to check that they have appropriate photo ID and of course take it with them when they attend the Polling Station on the day. Many will have a suitable ID tucked away in their wallet or purse already and it is perhaps just worth listing examples of what are appropriate photo ID documents, namely:

- Passport issued by the UK, any Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, A British Overseas Territory, an EEA state or a Commonwealth country
- Driving licence issued by the UK, any Channel Islands, the Isle of Man or an EEA state
- Blue Badge
- Older Person's Bus Pass
- Disabled Person's Bus Pass
- Oyster 60+ Card
- Voter Authority Certificate (VAC) or a temporary VAC
- Biometric immigration document
- Identity card bearing Proof of Age Standards Scheme hologram (a PASS card)
- National Identity Card issued by an EEA state

If the photographic identity has date expired, it will still be accepted if the photograph is still a good likeness.

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OUR APPRECIATION

As we approach the end of our elected term on 3rd May, we have reflected on the past four years during which we have served as the elected District Councillors for the Ward. We feel privileged to have been able to represent the communities of Felsted and Stebbing at Uttlesford District Council in a way which has been “politically neutral”, in keeping with our personal philosophies and appropriate we believe to local democracy and the needs of parishes such as ours.

We will be offering ourselves for consideration and re-election on 4th May, as we anticipated in our last Report but meanwhile, “business as usual” remains the case and we continue to be available to assist the Parish Council and residents as required.

Meanwhile, we thank your Members and also of course, your Clerk and Assistant Clerk, for all the help and advice given to us during the past years which has made the undertaking of our duties and actions pleasurable and we believe the more effective.

Cllr Sandi Merifield

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