



UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Felsted & Stebbing Ward
District Councillors John Evans & Richard Silcock



DISTRICT COUNCILLORS' REPORT: DECEMBER 2024

Please find below our monthly Report to the Parish Council.

CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE

We referred in our last month's Report to the fact that Uttlesford would be undergoing a Corporate Peer Challenge. These are run by the Local Government Association upon request and provide a key opportunity for District Councils to invite independent expert colleagues to perform a "health check" by way of review as to how well they are performing across a range of headings including governance, partnership, financial management, leadership and so on.

The Cabinet decided that it would be helpful to undertake such a challenge and it is taking place this week.

Six representatives selected from the LGA panels of advisers/specialists will spend three days with Uttlesford in the offices in Saffron Walden, the group being made up of five local authority officers (with accounting, planning, governance and administrative backgrounds) who come from other councils elsewhere across the country but also a senior elected member from a local authority with commensurate cabinet experience across several business and technical portfolios.

John will be among his cabinet members to present to the group who will also invite a selection of councillors and a wide ranging body of UDC officers to describe their functions and provide their opinions as to how they consider the Administration is meeting the aims and policies set by the Council for the effective discharge of its corporate plan and also identify the difficulties currently faced, the challenges remaining and how they might be surmounted.

The significance of the Corporate Plan 2023-2027 is perhaps not always well understood and so, we would like to draw it to your and residents' attention once more, it being in its second year of application. It can be found in here as relevant to the second year of its existence:

<http://www.utlesford.gov.uk/corporate-plan>

There are four principal themes applicable to the second year of the Plan, namely:

- Protecting & enhancing our environment

- Encouraging economic growth
- Building strong communities
- Putting residents first

The vision is to make Uttlesford the best place to live, work and visit. UDC wants to preserve and enhance the natural beauty, rural character and heritage of our district, while supporting sustainable growth and development that meets the needs and aspirations of our communities. UDC wants to provide high quality and accessible services that are responsive to local needs and deliver value for money. UDC wants to work with its “partners” (including the County Council, the Health Authorities and other statutory bodies) and residents to tackle the key challenges and opportunities facing our district.

To deliver this Corporate Plan, UDC will:

- Develop annual service plans that detail how each service area will contribute to the corporate priorities
- Monitor and report on our performance against key indicators and targets on a quarterly basis
- Review our financial position regularly and ensure effective budget management and control
- Engage with our stakeholders, including residents, businesses, partners, staff and councillors on a regular basis
- Review this corporate plan annually and update it as necessary to reflect changing circumstances

The commissioning of this challenge/exercise is not mandatory; it is entirely voluntary but the Administration considered that having set high standards and requirements of itself, it was proper and helpful to have a “sense check” to be undertaken by independent parties with relevant experience and form them objectively to report as to how well UDC was doing in meeting those standards and requirements.

The review will be reported on in writing and it will be published in full. We hope that there will be a reasonable degree of approbation to be found in the review but equally, suggestions for improvement and fine tuning will no doubt be inevitable but equally, of course will be welcomed. The Administration believes that the commissioning and publication of such a review demonstrates a proper willingness on its part to be accountable and transparent towards residents as to the extent of its corporate and municipal aims and the standards of performance achieved in that regard.

We will report further.

THE DRAFT LOCAL PLAN – REGULATION 19

After the last consultation on the Regulation 19 Local Plan closed, the Local Plan Panel (“LPP”) received a report on it on 19 November and Council will also receive an update report at its last meeting of 2024 on 17 December. The report to LPP is here:

<https://uttlesford.moderngov.co.uk/documents/g6465/Public%20reports%20pack%2019th-Nov-2024%2019.00%20Local%20Plan%20Panel.pdf?T=10>

Work towards assembling all the representations received continues and all will be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in an unedited form together with the Plan and accompanying evidence base in the

last week before Christmas. Once that is done matters are in the hands of the Planning Inspectorate to determine progress and timetables.

Residents might be bemused to read in the local press of planning applications by certain developers still being submitted, notwithstanding the current state of play towards making of the new Local Plan. It is the case that such applications can still be made without any fetter by UDC, irrespective of whether or not the sites in question have been “allocated” in the draft Local Plan. Any such applications will however be determined against compliance with the current Local Plan 2005, although the current evidence base may be used as supporting material by the applicant who might (depending on its case) also seek to argue that some weight should be attributed to the emergent Local Plan policies themselves. It might appear illogical but is entirely permissible; in short, such applicants who have sites allocated but are not willing to await the Examination in Public might be described as “impatient”, while others who have not been able to secure allocation of their interests might be described as “disappointed”.

To keep themselves updated on this topic over coming months, we encourage residents to follow matters via this link:

[Local Plan timetable - Uttlesford District Council](#)

STANSTED AIRPORT AND AVIATION MATTERS

There are some residents living in the northern part of the Parish (as there are many in the centre of Stebbing) who remain concerned about the effect of aircraft overflying and the resulting aircraft noise. We have reported previously about flight/route changes which are the subject of national consideration and also the recent night flight consultation exercise. We will continue to keep you updated when further news is to hand concerning routeing, probably in the early few months on 2025.

To some residents therefore, Stansted Airport is an unwelcome presence in the District; yet to others, it is an important asset providing significant employment opportunities. The reality is that it is here to stay and it will expand in the years and decades to come. We know that a £ 1 bn investment is on the cards – it was “announced” by the Prime Minister at the economic summit chaired by him although it was in fact old news having been decided upon long before by Manchester Airports Group (the owners of Stansted Airport) (“MAG”). The investment will be deployed in expanding the existing terminal by the depth of three bays to be constructed along the entire airside length of the building (the transit rail system thereby being done away with). Additionally, a solar farm will be built to supply power for the airport’s own needs.

However, an announcement is expected later this week from MAG concerning its detailed development plans over the next few years and it remains to be seen what these might entail. We will advise when we hear further.

Interestingly, MAG earlier this year resisted the proposal from Historic England to have the Sir Norman Foster Terminal Building “listed” due to its historic/iconic status. This recommendation was in the event very recently refused by the Secretaries of State of the relevant Ministries.

As you might recall, UDC has appointed a working group of the Cabinet to assist it regarding matters concerning Stansted Airport, namely Stansted Airport Advisory Panel (“STAAP”), of which John is currently the chairman and Councillor Martin Foley Deputy. A meeting was held recently and for those interested in the airport and aviation matters generally, its business is reported here (it includes a paper from John describing “who does/what” in regard to UDC and aviation topics/bodies represented):

<https://uttlesford.moderngov.co.uk/documents/g6475/Public%20reports%20pack%2018th-Nov-2024%2014.00%20Stansted%20Airport%20Advisory%20Panel.pdf?T=10>

As to the future, while currently drones and unmanned craft are lightly regulated, this is very likely to change as the aviation industry continues to seek to decarbonise and as freight opportunities increase. The Strategic Aviation Special Interest Group, one of the bodies serving under the umbrella of Local Government Association in different policy/advisory fields is holding a webinar late this week concerning the future of such craft. This will be an important and evolving area of change in the future, it is anticipated and might be relevant to the extent to which these craft are deployed not only at Stansted but more probably, also at commercial sites in the countryside which might be put forward as commercial/logistics bases. One can imagine that the local communities potentially affected in the future would wish to know more any possible plans especially in regard to matters of privacy as well as noise.

CONTINUING EDUCATION & TRAINING

Richard and John were pleased to attend a workshop on Planning Enforcement which was held last week in person at UDC’s offices in Saffron Walden and also at the Little Canfield Depot Site. It was held for both District and Parish Councillors and Cllr Richard Freeman was able to attend representing Felsted PC. The event was hosted by the Director of Planning, Mr Dean Hermitage and presentations were given by Mr Nigel Brown and Miss Sarah Marshall, the Managers of Development Management and Planning Enforcement respectively.

The subject was explained to good effect and the opportunity was taken to reaffirm to attendees that planning enforcement is a matter in the exercise of discretion and a matter which came as a surprise to many was that there is no statutory duty resting on a planning authority actually to enforce breaches of planning legislation/permission/condition. However, if a local planning authority failed to undertake at large such duties, it would be regarded as “maladministration” – to everyone’s ears, a complete nonsense of legislative and regulatory effect! Nonetheless, planning enforcement is a discretionary matter and while some residents and the Parish Council might on occasion feel that enforcement matters are dragging on slowly or not at all, it is often the case that further investigations are progressing or that breaches need to be better evidenced before enforcement action can be taken, under the expediency test.

The involvement of Parish Councils is very important and their possible role as “interpreters” and possible mediators among aggrieved members of the community/neighbours in this area was highlighted in the presentations and questions and answer session. The current UDC policy regarding planning enforcement issues is set out here, although this under review and will be updated in early 2025.

https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/media/1241/Planning-Enforcement-Policy/pdf/Adopted_Planning_Enforcement_Policy_Oct_2017_refresh_March_2022.pdf?m=1682334259190

One important legislative change which came about in May 2024 pursuant to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, which residents will be interested in, and that is as regards the revised immunity period applicable to enforcement cases. Historically (except in the case of deliberate concealment – eg the case of the house being built in secret while concealed behind straw bales), enforcement of a breach was not possible after the expiry of four years from the date of breach. Now, this period is 10 years – so beware home owners who develop/act in breach of planning legislation and conditions hoping to “get away with it”. There is scope for such breaches to be enforced upon up to 10 years thereafter. It is quite possible that such matters will come to light as part of the sale enquiries and due diligence undertaken on conveyancing transactions. Importantly, there is no time limit for the enforcement of listed building consents or the absence of such permissions; those breaches “travel with the property” and a subsequent owner might be required to remedy them – as one famous character on screen frequently said “not a lot of people know that!”.

Further joint training opportunities involving both District and Parish Councillors will be identified during the course of 2025. This seems a very effective way of continuing education/training and we have the impression that it would be welcomed by both sets of Councillors. If there are topics upon which training would be especially welcomed, we shall be glad to hear of any suggestions.

DIGITAL HOME TELEPHONES – BT – Landlines

We have reported previously about impending changes to the availability of analogue supported telephone connectivity and the impact of impending digital connectivity in its place. Rural Services Network recently facilitated an event for their members so as to hear from BT on the Digital Home Phone Switchover and what it means for customers, particularly those in our rural communities. Richard was able to attend the presentation and has been sent a slide pack and the link to the RSN material is reproduced here:

[13/11/24 - RSN/BT: Digital Telephone Line Switchover Session - Rural Services Network](#)

A video presentation is included in the link and we encourage those concerned about the implications to view it. Additionally, this Guide might be suitable for posting/further dissemination by the Parish Council:

[digital-landline-switchover-local-authority-information.pdf](#)

As the Guide summarises:

“Phone numbers remain the same, and most handsets will work fine. But, other services that use the landline - such as telecare devices, payment systems, and burglar alarms - should be checked for digital compatibility. Your communications provider will inform you ahead of the migration, but don’t underestimate the scope of the change. Start preparing now - check your devices for dependencies and encourage your community to check theirs”

COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

We see our Reports as a medium to convey to you, and thereby Residents too, of instances of policy, news and activities which might otherwise not attract as much attention as they deserve. We are pleased to do so and are also always happy to research or report to you upon a particular area of our work or matters of particular interest to you that we might not have covered.

However, in addition, it might be worth noting that there is a good source of topical information released by UDC's communications team as it arises and it is to be found here:

[News - Uttlesford District Council](#)

For example, there were four items listed in November 2024 and one regarding Community Grants is repeated here which we would like to draw to the attention of community groups in the Parish who might be looking for some grant funding:

[Revamped community grants scheme opens for applications - Uttlesford District Council](#)

DISTRICT COUNCILLORS' AND CONSTITUENTS' SURGERY

We will be holding our usual monthly surgery this month at 1730 at URC Village Hall and look forward to meeting residents without making any prior appointment.

We are always, of course, pleased to meet up elsewhere, by appointment as required, with any resident who wishes to discuss a matter of concern or indeed anything we have commented upon in our Monthly Reports.

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.

We remain very happy to consider requests for financial support, utilising our Members' Initiative Grant as appropriate and which can be made available to community groups for suitable purposes.

Finally, we are very pleased also to extend to Parish Council Members and Staff as well as all Residents our seasonal

Very Best Wishes for Christmas and also a Healthy and Tranquil 2025

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