



UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Felsted & Stebbing Ward

District Councillors John Evans & Richard Silcock



DISTRICT COUNCILLORS' REPORT: DECEMBER 2025

Please find below our monthly Report to the Parish Council.

SOMETHING DIFFERENT AND VERY POSITIVE TO REPORT !! – SUSTAINABLE UTTLESFORD



Members will have heard several references made to **SUSTAINABLE UTTLESFORD** ("**SU**") in the past months and Richard (being the Parish's representative at meetings of **SU**) has reported to the Biodiversity Working Group about its work and forthcoming activities.

Since **SU** will be approaching the first anniversary of its existence in early 2026, we thought that it was appropriate to provide some additional information as to what **SU** is and describe the excellent initiatives underway and being actively pursued by it. This piece will hopefully also generate additional awareness among members of the Community (of all ages!) of the exciting work afoot with a view to engaging them in some of those initiatives in 2026. The support of the Parish Council that has been extended to **SU** to date is of course very much appreciated and acknowledged.

So, what is **SU** and what is it up to?

Significantly, It is not a group established by nor managed by Uttlesford District Council; its members are not by any means restricted to elected UDC Councillors nor its Officers. Its membership is in fact made up of a variety of enthused volunteers who are linked informally only by reason of their commitment to and know-how in the ecological and sustainable fields. UDC does however provide the administrative support and office facilities required by **SU** as part of its Corporate commitment and in this respect Cllr Neil Reeve, the Cabinet Portfolio Holder responsible for this area, is a key supporter of its work. Practically, **SU** is a Network of individuals and groups from across the District who collaborate in order to identify and provide opportunities for mutual support in the emerging environmental work undertaken across the District at community level. Pleasingly, this has increased considerably over the last couple of years, with many

parishes and villages (and we are proud to state that includes both Felsted and Stebbing PCs) establishing their own eco groups.

These groups, with a wide range of initiatives behind them, have gathered a large amount of useful knowledge and have worked with people who have specialist environmental credentials and expertise. UDC is keen that these individuals and groups secure the support of their communities by engaging and educating their residents on *Green Issues*.

We both strongly support the aims of **SU** which is to bring along as many residents as possible in understanding and supporting environmental initiatives that are capable of being managed and tackled at a local “do-able” level. Some of the groups of **SU** Members have already undertaken projects involving clearing river banks of invasive growth, water sampling and testing, researching river invertebrates, wildlife monitoring, and several restoration projects. Given that Stebbing Brook and the River Chelmer pass through the length of the Ward and that the Ter rises in Stebbing Green and continues its way through Felsted Parish, there might be considerable interest among members of the community in understanding issues as to river and water body health.

Indeed, there is already scope for residents to be involved in this respect since The Essex and Suffolk Rivers Trust and Essex Rivers Hub are inviting volunteers to join *Essex River Watch*, a “citizen science” project that monitors rivers and helps identify where action is needed. Volunteers collect monthly water quality data from your local river and make observations of the wildlife and pollution. All equipment and training is provided. Additional information is here: [Find out more about Essex RiverWatch](#). Perhaps anyone reading this piece who might be interested can come into contact with us in the first instance.

SU has been very successful in securing access for member groups to larger amounts of grant funding as well as refining and improving the quality of grant applications to ensure a greater success rate. Its web site is a handy read and anticipates a Green Festival/week of events between 6 and 14 June 2026 to promote:

- Community climate action
- Nature recovery and biodiversity
- Sustainable living and circular economy
- Active travel and clean energy

Importantly and of potential assistance in future to the funding of projects which might be undertaken by community groups in this area will be the introduction by UDC of the Community Infrastructure Levy (“CIL”). CIL will potentially be available to support (among other matters of course) ecological policies (eg “Green and Blue Corridors”) to the extent contained in Neighbourhood Plans.

UTTLESFORD LOCAL PLAN

Since last month’s report, the proposed Major Modifications to the Local Plan are now being considered by The Planning Inspectorate. A table of these together with the representations made upon them and the responses to them and accompanying comments by the UDC Planning Policy Team are found here: https://www.localplanservices.co.uk/files/ugd/017f5b_7607cf60b6e147b1b8fb3d275c276b6f.pdf

These do not relate to specific issues nor particular concerns to Felsted and Stebbing. So, the ball is now in the Planning Inspectors' Court. They will now proceed to issue a final report as to the soundness of the entire draft Local Plan, including recommending Major Modifications and accepting the Additional Modifications (routine/non contentious corrections etc matters). It is quite possible that they will issue this report in the course of December. One imagines that they would like to be able to say that their Inspection was concluded within 12 months (it having commenced on 18 December 2024)!

The Inspectors' report will then be reported upon to the Local Plan Panel, a Working Group of UDC Cabinet, before coming to the Cabinet itself and thence to Full Council. Subject to the views and votes cast at Full Council in favour of adoption, we are on track for adoption by UDC Council in March/April 2026.

FURTHER GOVERNMENT PLANNING CHANGES

Afficionados of the planning system will however wish to know that the process for Local Plan making is about to be up ended by the Government yet further. It proposed last week that the timetable for making such plans in future will be foreshortened, evidence in support reduced in scope and the list of mandatory consultees reduced in number. The purpose of this is plain – namely, to drive development of housing further and faster, consistent with the Government's Policy expressed by the current Secretary of State as *"Build Baby, Build"*.

Again in this context, we expect a yet further revision to the National Planning Policy Framework to be released for consultation (on 19 December is thought a likely date). This can be expected to liberalise yet further the scope for approval of housing development. So, it will be all the more important that we have a new Local Plan in place which will provide some barrier to development outside the allocations provided for in it. However, the Government will hereafter be requiring that all Local Plans be updated every 5 years and so almost as soon as the ink is dry on the Uttlesford Local Plan 2021-2041, work on the next iteration will have to begin.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION ("LGR")



We and County Councillor Martin Foley have reported extensively on the subject of LGR in recent months, but you and residents will wish to know that the Government has itself recently launched a consultation upon the competing proposals for reorganisation as they were submitted for Essex.

It has now called for preferences to be expressed by members of the public on the alternative submissions in a consultation which runs from **19 November 2025** to **11 January 2026**. Comments may be made online via this link:

<https://consult.communities.gov.uk/local-government-reorganisation/essex-southend-on-sea-thurrock/>

It remains the strong preference of UDC and the majority of District and City Councils across the County that the “Five Unitary Model” (depicted in the graphic above) be put in place. However, the decision will be one for Government alone to make and it is expected that we shall hear from them in March 2026 with their decision.

We encourage all readers interested in this (once in 50 years perhaps?) important topic to review the competing Councils’ submissions and respond to the Government’s consultation.

There is a dedicated page on the UDC website which will be kept up to date and which interested Members and residents may well wish to bookmark:

[Devolution and local government reorganisation - Uttlesford District Council](#)

ESSEX MAYORAL ELECTIONS

In the context of Devolution and Local Government Reorganization generally, Elections will take place in May 2026 for the election of a Greater Essex Mayor. They will have responsibility for strategic planning, including providing for economic opportunities across the entire geographic area. Some of the challenges for the Mayor will be to plan at a macro strategic level for the enormous growth pressures expected in the County area at large, including for that purpose the areas to be included in and represented by the new Unitary Councils.

So, the Mayor will be required under the devolution powers coming their way to prepare:

- a Local Growth Plan
- a Spatial Development Strategy
- a Skills Strategy
- a Local Transport Plan

These Plans will also take into account the need for some additional **250,000 homes** across North Essex (the districts currently made up by Braintree, Chelmsford, Colchester, Epping Forest, Harlow, Maldon, Tendring and Uttlesford) over the next **30 years**. That level of housing requirement is “baked in” following the Government’s 2024 revisions to NPPF. Accordingly, the next iteration of a Local Plan for the area covered by the Unitary Council which will become a successor to UDC will have to reflect the “share” appropriate to it, as derived from housing figures assessed over a wider housing and economic area than is the case at present (ie Uttlesford alone). This will also be against the backdrop that we have described in several Reports of the expected population growth in the District in the coming decade, calculated by

the Office of National Statistics, as 14%, that itself being much greater than any of the other constituent elements of North Essex (or the County and North and East London Boroughs).

We hope that we shall be excused for again continuing to describe planning and economic topics at a macro level but consider it appropriate to do so, since otherwise such matters are possibly likely to pass Members of Parish Councils and residents by. With LGR on the way, decision making regarding development (in the widest sense of the word) will occur in future at a level more distant from that at present. It will therefore, in our opinion, become of ever increasing importance to those representing local residents, even at Parish level, to be properly briefed by the Councillors who will then have been elected at Unitary level of the macro changes contemplated through Mayoral and Unitary decisions but which would potentially affect their local areas on a micro level.

HEDGEHOG SOLAR

We, together with your Chairman and representatives of Rayne PC, Friends of the Flitch Way and the community, attended the recent Community Liaison Group to learn of the further preparatory work undertaken by TOTAL ENERGIES in anticipation of the planning applications for their 98 MW Solar scheme which they propose to submitted to UDC and Braintree DC early in 2026.

TOTAL told us that through the various consultation events held by them, concerns had been expressed by members of the public at the potentially adverse impact of the scheme including in respect of:

- impact on the Flitch Way
- impact on landscape and rural character
- proximity to houses at Banister Green and Frenches Green
- loss of wildlife/ecology
- loss of agricultural land
- construction traffic

Over 200 residents had attended three presentation events held both at the Memorial Hall and in Rayne and over 100 feedback forms had been received with comments. As a result of those, and of course views expressed (without prejudice) by the Community Liaison Group, design changes to the scheme as originally presented have been made so as to provide for greater “stand off” from existing housing and other important views, landscape and other constraints. The detailed layout of the scheme as finally to be submitted will again be presented for review and discussion by the Group prior to the end of the Year.

NOW FOR SOME USEFUL BENEFITS – GROUP BUYING OF ENERGY

It may be that many residents will not have heard about the opportunity to register their interest in switching energy supplier (both gas and electricity) through collective means. John stumbled across the initiative when some brief publicity about it was provided by ECC. It has not received very wide publicity locally however and so, it might be worth explaining here. Consumers simply register their possible

interest by providing their details to the scheme and then the level of collective interest enables a wholesale tender to be advanced against which a tariff pricing bid is made by energy providers (such as Eon, British Gas and other reputable suppliers).

An individual consumer then receives the offer of a tariff which they are individually free to accept or reject and if acceptable, the switch of provider can take place. While the scheme is supported by ECC, it acts as a mere introducer to *Switch Together Energy* which is a group-buying specialist operating in this field since 2012, having cooperated with participating local authorities (over 160 to date) to deliver such schemes. It involves grouping ie identifying a large number of residents from across the country to increase their bargaining power and to ensure they get the most competitive offer from pre-vetted suppliers of energy. More details are here:

[About us | Collective Energy Switch | Essex County Council](#)

John has no interest in this scheme beyond identifying its existence and describing it but to add that he did very recently switch supplier as a result and the energy tariff saving made was substantial.

OUR WARD ACTIVITY

As will be imagined, most of our representative work within the Community is made up of correspondence, receiving and responding to questions and concerns raised by residents as well as by your Clerk on behalf of individuals or bodies who have been in contact with her.

As to other matters, we continue to be very active in securing the ongoing maintenance and repair of the road surface at Chaffix. The road is not adopted by ECC, having been dedicated as a private estate road when the housing was originally built by Dunmow Rural District Council. Since the “Right to Buy” legislation was introduced, some of the housing is now in private ownership and thus UDC (as successor to Dunmow RDC) while owning the road is not liable for the entire cost of its maintenance. Those residents who own their homes are obliged to pay their proportion of relevant maintenance costs.

We continue to intervene with a view to ensuring that the necessary repairs are undertaken by UDC as owner of the road but while ensuring that the cost is properly shared and borne by all home owners concerned. We have emphasised to UDC that repairs to the concrete roadway are indeed urgent (we have inspected the holes in the surface ourselves) and a quotation for the work to be undertaken by UDC’s contractors is awaited.

While the site lies outside Felsted Parish (being in the Ward of Flitch Green and Little Dunmow), we are also very aware of the very unsightly deposit of rubbish outside the former Flitch Green station. There is no lack of action capable of being taken by UDC in securing its removal. The owner of the building (which has not been abandoned despite being vandalised on more than one occasion) is involved in the steps proposed to be taken to secure the site pending removal, as is ECC who are the owners of the adjacent Travellers’ Site. So, this is not a case of removal of material from public land or highway and thus there are legal impediments standing in the way of an immediate intervention.

Indeed, in terms of its “track record” in this area, we have to say that UDC has performed in an exemplary way previously where they were called upon to and did promptly remove very substantial volumes of shredded/part treated waste material which had been surreptitiously dumped (likely from 30 ton tipper vehicles) on the roads leading to Grandcourts and Greenfields.

Finally, we have been very impressed by the receipt recently of letters written by young people, of primary school age, in their “best handwriting” expressing concern about the lack of footways and cycle paths to enable them to cycle safely to school. We hope that it might be possible for us to visit the Primary School to discuss with pupils there their interest in walking and cycling to school in case we can identify safe means to encourage such activity. It is a subject likely to be a matter also of interest to your Planning Committee when making their representations to Planning Applications and to the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group when drafting future policies.

WARD MEMBER’S INITIATIVE

We are 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. We draw to your attention however, as previously reported by us to you, that this will be the last year (2025/2026) that the grant will be available.

DISTRICT COUNCILLORS’ AND CONSTITUENTS’ SURGERY

We will be holding our usual monthly surgery in the URC Hall at 1730 immediately prior to your PC 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 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 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 !

Finally, we would like to wish Members of the Parish Council and all readers a

VERY HAPPY CHRISTMAS AND HEALTHY 2026



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