



UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL
 Felsted & Stebbing Ward
 District Councillor John Evans



DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S REPORT: JUNE 2023

I am pleased to submit my monthly Report to the Parish Council.

This month there are a number of matters of District wide background and relevance but those following Felsted related matters in particular might find the item, towards the end of the Report, regarding "solar farms" a useful update.

I would first like to congratulate Cllr Richard Silcock on his appointment as Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democratic Group members and his appointment to serve on various UDC Committees.

I describe some of these bodies further below since the full range of work undertaken by District Councillors as part of their role representing the community is wide ranging and little known. I think the community would be interested to learn more of it.

UDC POST-ELECTION – WORKINGS OF THE ADMINISTRATION

As is always the case, following the four yearly District Council election, arrangements are made by the incoming Administration for the reallocation of roles and responsibilities for the incoming members of Cabinet. The R4U Administration has streamlined the number of the members appointed to Cabinet which now number 6 members, in place of 9 serving prior to the Election. I return to the Cabinet with the same functional responsibilities as before (Planning, the Local Plan, Stansted Airport and Infrastructure).

The Cabinet is made up of members representing the geographical spread of the District (two members coming from wards in the west, one in the south, one in Saffron Walden and two in the south/centre), so there is appropriate representation and awareness among them of the different issues and considerations arising across our geographically large and disparate district area.

As always, the Cabinet meets formally in public (members of the public can of course attend and raise questions) which meetings (held on a bi-monthly basis and on a call-in) are generally attended by the leaders of the opposition parties in order to put matters of challenge in a portfolio areas before the individual members of Cabinet. The areas of responsibility and functions covered by each Cabinet Member in his/her portfolio are set out in detail at:

<https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7678/Cabinet-portfolio-holders>.

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Cabinet members also meet informally on a fortnightly basis (alternating between the UDC offices in Saffron Walden and the business park/depot site in Great Canfield) with the UDC Directors (the Chief Executive and the heads of the professional/functional departments) to discuss matters requiring consultation and decision.

The Leader of the Council also has executive powers which are able to be exercised, but these are subject to “call in” for review by Scrutiny Committee within a short time frame. Typically, they tend to be formal in nature (such as recently was the case in relation to a response submitted in the name of UDC to a Government Consultation on evolving national policy on night flights).

In addition, Cabinet Members attend bi-monthly meetings (additional meetings may also be called as required) convened by the cross party Scrutiny Committee, whose members are nominated by their party.

This provides also a very effective means whereby the Administration can also be held to account, on behalf of the electorate, among other matters, for the effective implementation of their policies as contained in the UDC Corporate Plan.

The papers for each Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee Meeting are of course published on the main UDC site, [Meetings, agendas and minutes - Uttlesford District Council](#), 7 days in advance of the meeting and the proceedings themselves are broadcast on the night and available to be viewed subsequently. We would encourage members of the PC, as well of course as residents, to refer to the Agenda and view these proceedings as the opportunity to do so arises.

The next meetings of these bodies will be held at **1900** on:

Scrutiny -Thursday 22 June

Cabinet – Thursday 29 June

COUNCIL & COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS

While the Cabinet Members have wide Portfolio responsibilities, a number of Committees have been established also and report to the Cabinet with their views and recommendations, covering a very wide range of areas of responsibility. They are:

Community Achievement Panel	Community Services Review Working Group
Energy and Climate Change and Working Group	Highways Panel
Housing Board	Investment Board
Local Plan Leadership Group	Museum Management Working Group
Stansted Airport Advisory Panel	Strategic Infrastructure Delivery Group

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The work of the Local Plan Leadership Group will be familiar to many Members of the PC. It has not met however, since prior to commencement of the pre-Election Purdah period. It will be meeting again within the next month, but in the intervening period, the Planning Policy officers have been refining their work on the appraisal/suitability of the great number of potential sites advanced by land owners/promoters in the Local Plan “Call for Sites” process. This exercise is essential in helping to determine the spatial strategy for the District, ie to set where in principle within the District additional housing/employment sites will be recommended, always being in the context of the Government requirement for 701 dwellings to be allocated in the plan period up until 2040. It is this which will be included in the draft Local Plan under the Regulation 18 Procedure/consultation later this year. I will report further next month on the status then of the Local Plan work.

There may be many residents who will be interested (considering recent adverse publicity attracted by some local authorities - Thurrock BC and Woking BC come most recently to mind) in the work of the UDC Investment Board. As will be recalled, UDC have invested in 8 commercial properties in different areas/types (two being located in the District, including the Great Canfield site, formerly the banana ripening facility) in order to generate income to supplement the income generated by Council Tax and Government support. All investments have been considered by the Investment Board, which included two external independent members, advised by experienced external professional advisers (including as to property, financial risk and legal matters) but then reviewed and decided upon by full Council.

I would like to emphasise that there is no similarity between the approach adopted by UDC concerning its investments in commercial property for revenue generating purposes and that followed by those Councils which have now required central Government support. Greater information as to the investment approach and philosophy approved by UDC in full Council is found here:

<https://uttlesford.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s31231/Appendix%20B%20-%20Commercial%20Strategy%202023-2028.pdf>

District Councillors also receive a great deal of training to assist them in their work will it continue to be undertaken, some of which is mandatory. It covers areas including:

- Code of Conduct
- Planning Law & Practice
- Local Plan Making
- Safeguarding
- Finance & Investment
- Scrutiny
- Governance, Audit & Performance
- Standards
- Economic Development

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- Licensing & Environmental Health
- Highways

Finally, the following is the list of those representative and/or membership functions to be undertaken by me:

UDC Cabinet Member	UDC Local Plan Leadership Group
UDC Appeals Committee (Chair)	UDC Senior Appointments Committee
UDC Investment Board	UDC Assets of Community Value & Local Heritage List Committee
Strategic Aviation Special Interest Group	Stansted Airport Advisory Panel
UDC Stansted Airport Consultative Committee	Cooperation for Sustainable Development Board
Harlow & Gilston Garden Community Town Board	Local Government Association – SPARSE Rural Assembly
Rural Services Network	Essex County - Planning Portfolio Holders Group
Essex Coastal Forum (Felsted lies within the protection designated area)	Transport East (Regional Body)

PLANNING MATTERS - UDC

I mentioned in my last Report the very welcome outcome of two planning applications made by applicants to PINS directly under the section 62A Procedure (that being of designation of Uttlesford allowing for major planning applications to be submitted directly to the Planning Inspectorate in the option of applicant). Both were refused by PINS, in line with the detailed recommendations submitted by UDC Planning Committee and Officers to PINS.

As to this, members of the public might wish to know that although UDC is “designated” (it will be recalled because of the ratio of planning refusal decisions made by the Planning Committee but overturned by PINS on appeal having exceeded the Government mandated threshold of 10%), steps are being taken to seek de-designation. A meeting will be held with DLUHC (the relevant Government department) later this month for a review. It monitors the “performance” of all local planning authorities in terms of their speed of dealing with planning applications and also the “appeal overturn” statistic which UDC fell foul of in early 2022, but in fact while the statistics themselves covered decisions taken by the Planning Committee in the period 2018-2020.

These performance statistics are now reported to the Planning Committee for noting at its meetings, prior to consideration by it of individual planning applications, and the latest overturn statistics reported for its meeting on 7 June are found here:

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<https://uttlesford.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s31988/4.%20Quality%20of%20Major%20Applications.pdf>

They show an overturn ratio on major applications of 6.85% although there are several appeal outcomes awaited.

There has never been an issue concerning speed of decision making so those statistics, although presented to the Committee do not give rise to concern, unlike at some **11** other LPAs to whom DLUHC have recently written, stating that they are liable to be considered for designation by reason of their underperformance in this respect.

SOLAR FARM DEVELOPMENT

While no further news has been received recently from promoters concerning the two solar applications anticipated in the Bartholomew Green/School Lane areas (originally proposed at 49.9 MW each) but which now are likely to be advanced as one large scheme and thus of a scale falling within the National Infrastructure programme (ie exceeding 50 MW - “NSIP” and decided upon by the Minister and not by a local planning authority), we think that the community needs to anticipate that such is likely to happen in the near future.

We say this because another NSIP application was made by one of the two landowners interested in these schemes for their large site in the Terling/Fairstead vicinity (known as Longfield). The PINS Inspector has submitted his report to the Ministry in that case and he is required to deliver his Decision by 18 July 2023. There is a great deal of material on the PINS appeal site in that example to which residents might wish to refer to familiarise themselves with the arguments advanced by the promoters/landowners in that case and the objections/submissions made (including by the relevant Parish Councils, Braintree District Council and Essex County Council:

[Longfield Solar Farm | National Infrastructure Planning \(planninginspectorate.gov.uk\)](#)

DISTRICT COUNCILLORS AND CONSTITUENTS’ SURGERY

Cllr Silcock and I will hold our joint Surgery in the URC Hall immediately prior to the monthly Parish Council Meeting and we look forward to meeting any resident who wishes to discuss a matter of concern. As usual, no appointment is necessary.

Cllr John Evans

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