



UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Felsted & Stebbing Ward

District Councillors Sandi Merifield & John Evans



DISTRICT COUNCILLORS' REPORT: MARCH 2021

Cllrs Sandi Merifield and John Evans are pleased to present their Monthly Report to the Parish Council.

We would like to express our thanks to you for being able to incorporate our Monthly Reports by hyperlink into your Minutes – it is very helpful and will assist us in bringing to Residents' attention in an accessible way some of the more significant news and activities within the District.

CLIMATE CHANGE ISSUES

We thought that we would this month seek to bring you up to date regarding this important topic and also so as to raise awareness of the policies now adopted by UDC. Many local authorities are seeking to increase public knowledge of the challenges represented by climate change and the consequential legislative and regulatory requirements arising over the next few years. Specific and important policy changes as well as higher standards are also being introduced by UDC in several different areas and we think you would wish to be made aware of them.

In July 2019, the Council declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency, committed to achieving net-zero carbon status by 2030 and it resolved to protect and enhance bio-diversity by producing a plan of action that is realistic, measurable and deliverable and to ensure significant progress is made to deliver the action plan by April 2023.

Towards this, on 25 February Council adopted a climate change strategy whose full details may be found at:

<https://uttlesford.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s21936/CLIMATE%20CHANGE%20STRATEGY.pdf>

Green Biodiversity in the context of this topic was also earlier, on 10 February, the subject for discussion in the Community Stakeholder Forum (Theme 6) in the Local Plan Consultation exercise and a link to this is found here:



E_Biodiversity
CSF_Theme_6_Consul

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A most interesting and informative presentation was given at that event, describing the importance of “green space” generally, including footpaths, cycle routes, sports facilities, allotments etc. in the context of sustainable communities, by Professor Andrew Lovett, Director of Learning & Teaching at the School of Environmental Sciences, University of East Anglia.

His clearly presented and digestible talk is to be found here and we really recommend taking some minutes to watch it:

<https://youtu.be/CV3rLD07ahl>

In this context, a series of policies has been made by UDC to show how new developments in the District should take on board measures to address climate change. This includes encouraging greater use of renewable energy, the provision of adequate mitigation against flood risk, and increasing the number of trees. While these policies are currently in the nature of guidance and strongly to be encouraged upon developers (including by planning performance agreements where entered into), they, and a raft of more specific and stronger policies as to biodiversity in the context of planning, are likely to be part of a suite of concepts to be considered as part of the Local Plan making process.

The UDC Assistant Director of Planning, with John, gave a presentation last week to the District Council Planning Portfolio Holders and Essex County planning policy officers on the actions taken in Uttlesford regarding biodiversity in planning, which was well received.

We were encouraged to learn recently of another Parish Council in the District which had set up a sub-committee to consider its own contribution to biodiversity in the future. In the event that you consider this concept might be of interest to the Parish Council, any individual Members and the wider Community, we would be pleased to ensure that all information and any help which might be available or requested from UDC be provided.

COUNCIL INVESTMENTS AND FINANCES

Having referred in our last Report to Council Investments, perhaps we could provide and update a comment on one – “Investment 12”, involving an asset commitment of £ 35m, but which has not yet been identified/named by UDC, since it is still subject to commercial confidentiality. It has however been referred to speculatively in the local and national press and has since attracted some adverse comment from members of the community on the grounds that it is said by those raising the issue, as being allegedly “unethical”.

We would like to assure Residents that all the investments by UDC that have been made are in the nature of purchase and leaseback of land used for commercial purposes which will generate rental income over a long period, supplying needed revenue for the Council which enables the Council to avoid significant increases in Council Tax. The type and location of the property investments are varied in order to spread geographical and business risk and are in the way of warehousing, office, professional services and out of town retail use. One is located within the District, while the others are spread across the country in geographical terms.

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All prospective investments are reviewed by the Investments Board, which includes two independent professionally qualified individuals. Full consideration before approval is of course given to financial viability, security, quality of tenant and property as well as the general background of the business sector concerned. Professional advice is also taken from property and legal experts.

As we reported previously, all investments are in respect of freehold land and buildings and are not investments in the underlying companies/businesses operating there. That said, a decision has been taken by UDC to prepare an investment policy dealing expressly with matters and principles of ethical investment which will assist in providing further clarification and guidance, if needed, on such matters.

CORONAVIRUS

We thought this link would be of interest to residents and businesses showing a condensed roadmap, and although focusing on information relevant to businesses does help us as residents as well.

<https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/business/article/7094/Covid-19-roadmap-out-of-lockdown>

More information on all four steps of emerging from Lockdown can be found:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-spring-2021/covid-19-response-spring-2021-summary?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery

LOCAL PLAN & POLICY MATTERS

As you know, the early consultation with the Community continues via the Community Stakeholder Forum, and input responses are encouraged until April, whose schedule of work is found at:

<https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/consultation-and-the-community-stakeholder-forum>

The next forum meeting is on 10 March and the theme is "*Homes*".

Input from these fora/meetings and the community at large is supplied to the Local Plan Leadership Group, attended by both Sandi and John – and indeed is meeting this evening which necessitates their partial attendance with you this evening, for which we extend our apologies. It is this (cross party) body which will be considering in detail the various topics and specialist evidence to be gathered and will be making its views and recommendations known in due course to Cabinet.

Additionally, a Strategic Infrastructure Delivery Group (on which John serves) is in place whose purpose is to consider matters relating to necessary infrastructure (including roads, electricity, drainage, water or sewerage) associated with emerging Local Plan policies. This has met as recently as this week, taking advice from Hugh Ellis, the well regarded Policy Director of the Town and Country Planning Association. The Strategic Infrastructure Delivery Group has representation from Essex County Council which is needed given the contributions required prospectively at County level.

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COUNCILLOR INITIATIVE FUND

We have been pleased to use some of our available funds and have been pleased to fund Felsted Primary School to the extent of £1200 to enable the purchase of chrome books and head sets and a further £ 500 to support Uttlesford Community Travel.

NEWS – HOT OFF PRESS: GLADMAN AND STATION ROAD, FELSTED

We have reported previously about the excellent outcome regarding the unsuccessful appeal by Gladman in the Court of Appeal. We have just learned that they have now lodged an application to the Supreme Court seeking permission to pursue an appeal before the Justices. We will keep you advised.

Finally, as before, while we are still unable to hold face to face councillor surgeries, we would be very happy to hear from any parish councillors or residents by email or phone should there be anything they think we can help with or answer any questions you may have on our report.

Cllr Sandi Merifield

Cllr John Evans

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