



UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Felsted & Stebbing Ward

District Councillors John Evans & Richard Silcock



DISTRICT COUNCILLORS' REPORT: MARCH 2024

Please find attached below our monthly Report to the Parish Council.

UTTLESFORD REFUSE SERVICE

We started last month's Report with a section concerning the Refuse Service. We again repeat our apologies to the community for the disruption and inconvenience experienced in recent weeks but the service is now operating regularly again, with the HGV Operators' Licence reissued .

A report as to the cause of the Operators' licensing breach, and as to steps to be taken in future to avoid any repetition of the "single point of failure" which brought it about, is underway. This is being undertaken by a cross-party Task and Finish Group commissioned by the UDC Scrutiny Committee and a report will be submitted to full Council. We will also report to you as to its findings and recommendations.

Meanwhile, however, as anticipated in our reports in the Autumn and last month, additional new refuse vehicles will be ordered to supplement the existing fleet as well of course as the engagement of additional drivers and loaders in order to improve the reliability and punctuality of the refuse collection rounds, District-wide. This has been budgeted for in the 2024/2025 Accounts (which we report on further below) at an aggregate cost in the region of £ 1m. So, by year end, there will be a marked and noticeable improvement we anticipate in the service experience for residents.

The extended fleet and operators planned for will overcome the recent logistical difficulties consequent upon the need to take the refuse collected on longer (and thus slower) journeys to the recycling centre in Braintree rather than to the transfer station in Great Dunmow, which we have mentioned previously.

OUR IMMEDIATE AND CURRENT LOCAL WORK

Continuing on a matter mentioned in our last report, we have been consulted further regarding flooding at Causeway End, where we continue to be supportive of the helpful intervention of County Councillor Foley together with his colleagues at ECC. Certain householders there continue to be afflicted by flooding of their front garden and the inundation of their foul sewer tank and drainage system by water escaping

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from the ditch on the opposite side of the road. We remain convinced that the cause is related to soil and ditch engineering works undertaken in the adjacent field by its owner and will seek to have these objectively assessed and to the extent that they are shown to be causative, press ECC as the Local Lead Flood Authority to require (by enforcement means) that steps be taken to remedy the cause. Practical suggestions have also been made by drainage engineers with local knowledge as to what these might encompass.

Additional issues have arisen elsewhere at Bartholomew Green regarding drainage and septic tank problems which have been experienced there by householders as a result of grounds work undertaken in the course of development of adjacent premises. Again, this is a matter raised by householders with ECC and County Councillor Foley and we continue to investigate matters of underlying detail. Given the geological and topographical nature of the “Felsted Plateau” areas in the south of the Parish, it might be that householders in those areas should be encouraged to pay particular attention to potential drainage and ditch filling/clearance issues when making representations in response to planning applications. We are sure that your Planning sub-committee will continue to take such matters into account in their work too.

By comparison, such matters have not been troublesome in Stebbing Parish but there the geology is entirely different from much of Felsted, with the majority of its developed area sitting on well-draining strata made up largely of yellow sands and gravel.

John is “hosting” on behalf of UDC a Water Summit later this week, to be attended by senior Councillors across the East Anglian Region as well as leading representatives of the water industry and senior officers from government agencies and local authorities. The ECC Senior Officer (Director) responsible for the Environment, including water and flood issues, is one of the panellists speaking at the event and an opportunity will be taken to discuss with her (outside the platform) the particular problems thrown up by drainage engineering and SuDS issues in the Parish, the latter having been experienced in the recent past at certain developments in Gransmore Green too.

Concern had been raised with us by some residents at Chaffix as to antisocial/inconsiderate behaviour on the part of some other residents who are tenants of UDC regarding abandoned vehicles/being worked on while under repair on the footway and generally. The UDC Housing Department did intervene and some improvement has resulted although a further issue concerning vehicle working on footways has also recently been raised with us.

We are following up with UDC the practicalities involved in the removal of a long abandoned vehicle upon the Fritch Way (in the area of Grandcourts).

UDC BUDGET: 2024/2025

At the recent Council meeting, the new Budget for 2024/25 was reviewed and set. This of course had already been considered by Cabinet and the procedures involved were also brought before Scrutiny

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Committee in advance. Some residents will be interested in understanding the fine detail involved in annual budget setting and approval and the principal papers brought to Council for the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024-2028 and Annual Budget 2024/25 are found in the next link. A balanced budget must be set annually of course and the statistics by us below are the product of that exercise. UDC increased its Council Tax by 2.9%, the maximum permitted by the Government for those local authorities, typically District, without responsibility for social care:

<https://uttlesford.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s34503/Medium%20Term%20Financial%20Strategy%20and%202024-25%20Budget%20Proposals.pdf>

As result of the Budget being set, the total of all precepts that will levied in and collected by Uttlesford in 2024/25 is **£85,790,169**, for its own purposes and for distribution as follows. This results in an average total band D Council Tax of £2,148.96, an increase of £104.29 (5.10%) on the previous year. This rate reflects the increases in precepts imposed by [Essex County Council](#), the [Police Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex](#) and the District's parish and town councils.

So, the break down for a band D property and how this has changed compared with 2023/24 is:

Authority	2024/25 band D £	Change compared with 2023/24 £ and (% age increase)
Essex County Council	1,522.53	+72.36 (+4.99%)
PFCC - Essex Fire	82.62	+2.34 (+2.91%)
PFCC - Essex Police	246.42	+12.96 (+5.55%)
Uttlesford District Council	176.74	+5.13 (+2.99%)
Town/Parish councils (average)	120.65	+11.50 (+10.54%)
Total Band D (average)	2,148.96	+104.29 (+5.10%)

The tax base is the total number of properties in the district converted to "band D equivalents" using ratios (defined by law) is as follows:

- a Band A dwelling pays 6/9ths of Band D
- a Band B dwelling pays 7/9ths of Band D
- a Band C dwelling pays 8/9ths of Band D
- a Band D dwelling pays 9/9ths of Band D
- a Band E dwelling pays 11/9ths of Band D
- a Band F dwelling pays 13/9ths of Band D
- a Band G dwelling pays 15/9ths of Band D

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- a Band H dwelling pays 18/9ths of Band D

After a year anticipated to close £ 1.3 million above original budget expectations, total usable reserves stand at £ 22 million, with a £ 2 million rise in reserves available for balancing to £ 8 million. A helpful guide to the complete Budget is found on the UDC web site at:

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

However, it might be helpful for us also to summarise some main points concerning the cost of UDC services etc. For 2024/25 the total cost of providing its services is budgeted at £18.3 million. This is the net cost after taking into account the income received from fees that are charged for services such as planning, licensing, and car parks.

These are the headline figures where spending is to be incurred on services this forthcoming municipal year.

Communities and Local Partnerships: £1,299,000

This includes community hubs, emergency planning, grants, community safety and Saffron Walden Museum.

Environment and Climate Change: £4,094,000

This includes animal welfare, grounds maintenance, climate change, street cleansing, waste management and street services.

Finance and the Economy: £1,375,000

This includes car parks, economic development, financial services and Private Finance Initiative (PFI).

Housing and Equalities: £260,000

This includes homelessness and housing strategy.

Planning: £1,914,000

This includes building control, development management, planning policy (Local Plan) and planning specialists.

Strategy and Governance: £3,741,000

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This includes committee administration, conducting elections, electoral registration, internal audit, legal services and communications.

Corporate Services: £5,682,000

This includes asset management, benefits administration, customer services, Land Charges, offices, Council Tax collection and support.

In summary, and as a helpful reminder for residents receiving their Council Tax demand shortly, for every **£ 1** collected by UDC, only **£ 0.08** in the **£ 1** is payable to UDC, with **£ 0.71** going to ECC, **£ 0.12** to the Police Authority, **£ 0.04** to the Fire Service and **£ 0.05** to the Town/Parishes.

The above summary of service costs does not of course provide for social housing, which is ring fenced both as to revenue and capital expenditure and is separately accounted for and included in the Housing Revenue Account. It will be recalled that UDC has retained its Council owned stock which remains at about 2,800 dwellings (after allowing for disposal/acquisition under the Right to Buy Schemes).

UDC has historically considered it appropriate and important to retain ownership and control of its own social housing stock (unlike some other local authorities, for example, our neighbours in Braintree DC whose historic stock was disposed of and is now held by third party Housing Associations). That policy remains in place and indeed the construction of further social housing in Takeley at a cost of £ 1.08m and £ 2.35m on other projects is anticipated and budgeted. Plans to raise rents for the council homes by 7.7 per cent have also been announced and also agreed by the Tenants' Forum, resulting in an average weekly rent of £ 125.74.

BLUEPRINT UTTLESFORD – ECONOMIC MATTERS AND COMMERCIAL INVESTMENTS

We have anticipated in previous reports that work was being planned towards securing greater economic efficiencies over a period of time, the plans being named "Blueprint Uttlesford". This will secure cost savings through greater use of IT and indeed AI prospectively. Work stream efficiency will be evaluated not merely for the sake of improvement in service levels by additional training and modern technological means of support but also to secure cost savings.

This is the result of the fact that local authorities are not in receipt of central government support to the extent that they once were. Indeed, greater efficiency is the sought after aim of Government also, reflected even by Ministerial statements made this very week. Many local authorities are not able to set balanced budgets, as readers will know, meaning that several (ranging from large to small authorities) have had to go to Government, cap in hand, to secure financial and other intervention under the "section 114 Process".

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You and residents will be pleased and reassured to know that is not the case for UDC. It has been able to set a balanced budget again for 2024/25 (as above). However, in the long term, savings in expenditure will be needed and that is what the aim of Blueprint Uttlesford will be. We will keep you informed as to developments in this regard.

Moreover, a decision has been by Council at its last Meeting, to seek to market for sale one of its main commercially held assets, namely its 50% share in Chesterford Park (jointly owned with Aviva). It was bought some years ago in order to generate income to supplement the income otherwise received from council tax and government grants etc, to meet the shortfalls arising from depleted central government funding. It stands in at a substantial profit currently compared with the historic cost of acquisition, but the yield compared with the rates of rental return on more recently acquired commercial assets is substantially lower. Since the more recently acquired assets were added to the income generating portfolio, however, as we know, interest rates have increased substantially and the borrowing costs incurred by UDC have equally increased. So, a decision has been taken by Council to market for sale the largest (in terms of potential capital gain) asset and in the event of a satisfactory price being obtained, then the net sale proceeds would be applied to reduce the borrowings carrying the highest interest cost. This prospect is not a fire sale by any means – the budget is balanced, irrespective of disposal – but to the extent that there is a good profit to be “taken”, commercial prudence suggests that it be realised. These are commercially sensitive matters and have been discussed by Council under PART II of the Local Government Act procedures, meaning that the details of the marketing/pricing approach and the like cannot be further discussed nor disclosed.

However, a detailed explanation as to the applicable strategy and background, including governmental investment requirements as to proceeds of sale and their application under CIPFA (the public accounts rules for this purpose), is set out here:

<https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/9136/Decision-to-sell-a-commercial-asset>

THE DRAFT LOCAL PLAN – AN UPDATE

The work of the Local Plan Panel (successor to the Local Plan Leadership Group) continues and a further public meeting will take place on 21 March at which it is anticipated that members will be advised, among other matters, of the substantive responses received under the Regulation 18 Consultation.

You might be interested to learn further about the extent to which the consultation “reached” the Community and others. This is a summary:

- 35,000 leaflets distributed to households
- 24 posts “pushed” by UDC social media with a combined reach of 23,761 persons (the number of people receiving the content) with an impression hit of 27,188 (the number of times the content was displayed)
- 3,761 people reached via Facebook and Instagram
- 5 Local Plan e-newsletters (10,500 subscribers) with 4,100 links clicked

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- 2 Parish Briefings
- 3 District News
- 6 Local Plan Press Releases and associated local press coverage
- Full page news paper advertisement
- 284 social media engagements, including video presentation by Portfolio Holder
- 5 across District Exhibitions (attended by planning policy officers, cabinet and several other members)
- Councillors' Bulletin and Staff News

As to neighbourhood planning and its relevance in the context of the Local Plan work, a presentation and workshop will be held with Parish Councils (particularly the “larger villages” – thus including both Felsted and Stebbing) towards the end of March when discussion will take place regarding their contribution towards policies to be included in the Regulation 19 version of the Local Plan, which will if accepted by Council, proceed to the Planning Inspectorate for examination in public.

In this context, we shall also attend at the drop-in meetings shortly to be arranged by Felsted Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group concerning the review of the Felsted NP.

As we have reiterated previously, there is no wish on the part of Uttlesford to delay or pause the Local Plan process; indeed, any departure from the currently published Local Plan timetable could well lead to positive intervention and direction from central government which would be most undesirable and unwanted, in that the result would be the imposition of a Local Plan “from above” with less local input.

STANSTED AIRPORT AND OVERFLYING

We include references to this subject from time to time. While overflying might not be a matter of major concern to those residents living in the centre or southern parts of the Parish, it can be for those living in the northern and eastern parts, and certainly it is for the residents living in the centre of Stebbing, since it is directly overflown by east bound aircraft (which adopt this route when prevailing winds dictate departure in this direction – about 30/40% of the year on average).

We have previously mentioned that consideration is being given to re-routeing ex Stansted being considered at national level (thus not merely restricted to the four London area airports) and this is being conducted by the Civil Aviation Authority. The outcome (to which UDC contributed representations including as to the desirability of avoiding overflying Conservation Areas and places where there is a preponderance of listed/heritage buildings which are not easily susceptible to noise insulation) is some time off. We will keep you advised.

However, a consultation by Department for Transport has just been announced regarding night flights and this will be considered by UDC's Stansted Airport Advisory Panel (John and County Councillor Foley are Chair and Deputy Chair of this body) which is a working group of Cabinet, and responses will be submitted to DfT by the applicable date in May. It is UDC's policy to seek a night flight ban but the realities of securing such an outcome must be looked at in a realistic light, given Governmental policy support for

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the economic benefits of the aviation industry. Your and residents' attention is thus drawn to the consultation exercise in case participation in it is wished for:

[Night flight restrictions: Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports from October 2025 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

County Councillor Foley and John were incidentally, able to join colleagues from East Herts DC, ABTA as well as students from Harlow College (located at the airport and who are being educated in aviation matters) recently in a guided tour of the Stansted Operations Centre and other critical areas of Stansted Airport and which assisted them in gaining a better understanding of its operational activities and procedures.

DISTRICT COUNCILLORS' AND CONSTITUENTS' SURGERY

We will hold our usual monthly surgery in the URC Hall at 1730, immediately prior to the Parish Council meeting.

We are always, in addition, 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.

Finally, 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.

Cllr John Evans

E: cllr.evans@uttlesford.gov.uk

Cllr Richard Silcock

E: cllr.silcock@uttlesford.gov.uk

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