



## UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

### Felsted & Stebbing Ward

District Councillors John Evans & Richard Silcock



### DISTRICT COUNCILLORS' REPORT: MAY 2025

Please find below our monthly Report to the Parish Council.

This monthly Report is rather brief, by our normal standards, since this past Month has been relatively quiet, but perhaps not unexpectedly, given the intervention of two bank holidays and that the period covers the end of the Municipal Year when there are fewer UDC meetings scheduled.

Normal business for us has however continued with attendance in correspondence and in person upon many residents, several of whom have expressed concerns and a wish to be informed concerning both a possible new development being promoted by the builders, Bloor Homes, at Watch House Green/Bannister Green and also as regards sites proposed for possible allocation in the revised/updated Felsted Neighbourhood Plan.

#### **A FURTHER SOLAR FARM (TO BE KNOWN AS HEDGEHOG GROVE SOLAR FARM)**

This matter remains as the first item to report upon as we both are members of the Community Liaison Group ("CLG") which has been established and has now met on three occasions. We were pleased to be able to support the inclusion to the CLG of three lay members of the Parish (living in different areas of Felsted and able to speak to different professional and practical issues of potential relevance to the topic).

The Chair of the CLG is the Chairman of the Parish Council and its membership also includes Cllr Freeman with John in his Portfolio capacity for UDC and Richard as Ward District Councillor. In addition, the CLG includes representatives from Rayne/Braintree DC and Friends of the Flitch Way. The details of potential area, general layout, Bio-Diversity, landscaping, "green wedges", cable routeing, construction management and alternative road closures were among several matters raised in the round table discussion held last week among members of the CLG and Total.

At that meeting, a further restatement was made by Total as to the community benefits which would be volunteered by them, in the event of the scheme being permitted, and an indication given of an increase in the sums payable. We are entirely supportive of the proposition that those benefits should be received and administered by the community itself and since Felsted already has established a body, the Felsted

Community Trust, which would be suitable and capable of being used for that purpose, it should be regarded as the receiving and administering body of Felsted's choice.

At the last CLG meeting, a Total representative was in attendance who specialises in the administration of those several community benefit schemes in which Total are interested in different parts of the country. We have reemphasized that Total should properly offer benefits at a scale which is equivalent to the best that they have established in the context of any alternative energy schemes in which they are involved, wherever they are operating (in this country or abroad). Further improvements in the level of benefit offering are expected.

The deployment of such benefits would be a matter for the Felsted Community Trust to determine in due course, including also as to the extent to which Rayne Parish will be included as potential beneficiaries, remembering that they would also be affected by the scheme, including by the routeing of the cabling to the sub-station at Braintree, as well as construction traffic. We anticipate it is likely that at least a proportion of community benefit funds received over the lifetime of the generation period of the scheme would be deployed in carbon reduction/green energy/insulation efficiency and similar benefits.

Meanwhile, Total have kicked off the procedure involving a National Infrastructure scale project of this type and they have submitted a set of Scoping Documents to the Planning Inspectorate which identifies the various themes and subject matters to be looked into and evidenced. It is a massive piece of work (20 Chapters comprising 320 + pages plus Appendices) and so is a foretaste of the scale of documentation that will ultimately be created and examined as to the merits/demerits of various aspects of the scheme. The purpose of the Scoping Report is to provide environmental information to the Planning Inspectorate to support a request for a Scoping Opinion (ie identifying all potential facts and subject matters to be gone into) to be adopted by the Planning Inspectorate for its examination on behalf of the Secretary of State.

The link to the Total document submitted to the Planning Inspectorate is here and the site is worthy of bookmarking for ready reference. We might mention also that it is possible to request to receive auto-updating of additions to the site as and when deposited:

<https://national-infrastructure-consenting.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/projects/EN0110021/documents>

The generic community level web page created by Total as to the scheme has been well publicised already to residents and contains less detailed information than that appearing on the Planning Inspectorate site and to which residents can easily make reference as convenient:

<https://www.hedgehoggrovesolarfarm.co.uk/>

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM ("LGR")**

As previously reported, our full Council approved a joint submission from all 15 councils in Essex to the government back in March. This submission concerns the future alignment of new unitary councils, ahead of the planned abolition/merger of all 15 councils, including Uttlesford, from **1 April 2028**.

We have now received feedback from the government dated 2 May 2025 (see link below). In summary, the government has reiterated its previous advice on the additional information needed for the detailed submission/business case(s), with a deadline of 26 September this year for it to be received

In practice, this means that Uttlesford and the other authorities are collaborating to produce likely two competing submissions by the deadline, backed by masses of evidence/statistics. Uttlesford, along with nine other councils, supports the “business case” for five new unitary authorities. Other councils have not yet decided on their preferred model for local government across the county, but they are likely to favour two, three, or four new councils instead of the five we prefer.

The rationale behind supporting a larger number of new councils, preferred by Uttlesford Members, is that each would cover a smaller area and population, making them more locally accessible and representative compared to an outcome arising from having a smaller number of larger councils.

As we develop this draft proposal over the coming months, there will be opportunities to learn more about and influence the detailed proposals/business case. We will continue to keep you and residents updated.

[Read the feedback for Greater Essex's interim plan](#)

### **SUSTAINABLE UTTLESFORD**

We previously reported of a new body which has been established, *Sustainable Uttlesford*, and upon which Richard serves as a representative of UDC and to which he is also the representative of Felsted PC.

It hosted a launch evening at UDC Little Canfield on 9 April which proved to be very well attended and indeed most enjoyable. Both Richard and John were in attendance, as was a Stebbing Parish Council member as well as representatives from Parishes across the District.

*Sustainable Uttlesford's* aim is to motivate and support village, town and other local community sustainability groups, by providing them with expertise, advice, financial and other support in this important arena. The evening included presentations, discussion, and Q&A with the opportunity to network and learn about practical ways for the community to take collective action and so, there will be presentations and discussions relating to:

- Projects providing community energy advice and installing renewable energy on community buildings
- Local projects that are acting to restore and enhance nature and biodiversity in their community
- Farmers who are working to provide greater benefits to wildlife, water and soil
- Community collaborations working to clean up and restore our rivers

### **BUS SERVICE – 133/Braintree to STN via Rayne, Felsted, Dunmow & Takeley**

Since our first Report on the subject, news has been received that the service is to be continued (but re-numbered) by a different operator on commercial terms. The early and late service and at weekends is we believe likely to be re-introduced also with some financial support (unspecified as to amount as yet) being provided by Stansted Airport. John through his membership of Stansted Airport Consultative Committee is pressing for this support to be underwritten and details are yet to be provided.

## **UDC COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS**

At the last full meeting two weeks ago, there were raised at Council two separate issues which had a national flavour to them; one concerning the position of farmers and Inheritance Tax and the other concerned the proposed removal from consultation in planning matters of the Gardens Trust as Statutory Consultees. It was resolved, along cross party lines, that UDC as a body should write to the respective government departments and local MPs concerning both matters and residents and members might like to be aware of the letters' content, to be found here:

▶ [See letter on Farms Inheritance Tax](#)

▶ [See letter on Gardens Trust](#)

## **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 at 1730 in the URC Hall, immediately prior to the 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.

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