



UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Felsted & Stebbing Ward

District Councillors John Evans & Richard Silcock



DISTRICT COUNCILLORS' REPORT: NOVEMBER 2024

Please find below our monthly Report to the Parish Council.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURES

Resident may have seen some speculative articles in the press arising out of last week's Budget, suggesting that councils in Essex might be under consideration for merger into new unitary councils.

The Chancellor did indicate that in general terms, the government thinks unitary councils are a more sensible structure to provide for local government rather than by way of separate district and county councils. So, the Government is going to publish later in the year a White Paper on the subject of local government and devolution of powers from central government and it will not be until then that we shall get any better idea as to what the Government has in mind.

Meanwhile, along with the other 12 district and 2 unitary (Southend and Thurrock) councils in Essex, UDC will prepare research and data gathering to be better prepared to respond to that White Paper. It is the case however, meanwhile that active conversations are going on between Essex councils and the Government as to whether the County would benefit from having a Mayoral system put in place, as has occurred elsewhere in the country. This is not a remote possibility (either with or without a directly-elected Mayor) but the powers and duties of such a new Combined Authority would sit on top of the current two tier set-up and not instead of the District Council structures that presently exist..

If a new Combined Authority of this type were created, it would take powers and draw money "down" (ie devolution in the proper sense of the word) from central Government in Whitehall, such as for skills and transport funding, but would not take existing powers or monies away from district councils. Accordingly, we thought it important to dispel any misapprehensions that might have come into residents' minds arising out of press comment. We shall report in detail in coming months if, how and when these possible concepts progress.

THE BUDGET – OCTOBER 2024

We will all have heard and read in our newspapers and media probably more about the Budget than we would care to ! However, the Rural Services Network which is an apolitical body and to which John is the

UDC representative, has prepared a very useful overview of the implications of the Budget for the rural community and which may be accessed via their hyperlink:

[Autumn Budget 2024 - Rural Services Network](#)

There is a great deal to digest in this review, including the valuable observations of third parties which have a primary interest in rural matters (including eg the District Councils' Network, Local Government Association and NFU) which are further included in this promptly prepared piece.

One matter arising in the Budget which we particularly welcome, however, is the ability for local authorities to retain the entirety of sale proceeds received from the sale of social housing arising under the Right to Buy legislation. This will enable UDC to reapply those proceeds towards replacing their social housing stock to the extent that it shall be depleted in future by operation of right to buy.

UDC PLANNING COMMITTEE DECISIONS AND "DESIGNATION"

We know that members of your Planning Sub-Committee follow the proceedings of the Planning Committee with interest, providing relevant and useful guidance often to the approach and level of detail which they deploy when preparing representations concerning planning applications made within the Parish.

Included in the standing Reports brought to the UDC Planning Committee (which meets on the middle Wednesday of every month, and is incidentally made up of nine members) are two reports, a Speed and Quality Report and a Report of Major Applications. These Reports contain statistics which are provided (by all planning authorities) to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government ("MHCLG") and published by them quarterly. The reports on these matters which will be presented to the November UDC Planning Committee are here:

<https://uttlesford.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s37646/3.%20Speed%20and%20Quality%20-%20Nov%202024%20Committee.pdf>

https://uttlesford.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s37648/5.%20S62A%20applications%20to%20PINS.docx%20Nov%202024%20Committee_.pdf

There are four criteria whereunder a Local Planning Authority may be "designated" which relate to its performance under standards termed by MHCLG - Quality Major; Quality Speed; Quality Non-Major and Speed Non-Major.

The only one where UDC has not been able to demonstrate compliance historically is where the Planning Inspectorate ("PINS") on appeal has overturned decisions by the Planning Committee and/or Officers under their delegated powers, and the resulting percentage overturn ratio has exceeded 10%, calculated on a rolling average basis. Exceeding this ratio can lead to designation by MHCLG (as has occurred in the instance of Uttlesford and recently, for some other local planning authorities too). This does not amount to "special measures" (meaning that all planning powers are removed) but it does give rise to the opportunity for applicants of major planning applications (ie in excess of 10 dwellings) to submit their application directly to PINS for determination. There have been 29 such applications made to date and

for which the UDC Planning Committee submit their opinion, reviewing the application as they would normally to enable that opinion to be given. Designation by MHCLG has not impacted upon any other of UDC's planning functions.

For some time, we are pleased to say, the applicable majors overturn ratio has been substantially lower than 10% and presently stands at 4.41% for appeal decisions made to April 2024.

The window will open for MHCLG to consider a request for de-designation at the beginning of 2025 and the current substantially below threshold statistic, if maintained, would in combination with other improved performance measures – such, very importantly, as progress being made in the Local Plan process - justify the making of such a request. John as Planning Portfolio Holder is very supportive that one be made and we will keep you advised.

Currently, there are only four major appeal matters pending before PINS, one substantial one at Great Chesterford which was due to be heard this week by way of a formal multi-day inquiry, having been withdrawn by the applicant very late in the day, but before commencement of the hearing. In this regard, UDC had incurred some £ 40,000 in way of abortive legal and consultants' fees preparing for the hearing. Naturally, a request for these to be borne by the Applicant will be made to PINS. It might be said however, that this approach of appellants just goes to emphasise the substantial cost and trouble involved in the pursuit of some particularly larger planning appeals.

CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE

Corporate Peer Challenges are run by the Local Government Association upon request and provide a key opportunity for District Councils to bring in independent expert colleagues to perform a "health check" on how well they are performing across a range of headings including governance, partnership, financial management, leadership and so on.

The Cabinet has decided to undertake such a challenge and it will take place in December. The Corporate Peer Challenge team will be made up of leading council elected members and officers from other authorities elsewhere in the country and will draw its conclusions after both reviewing core written materials submitted by UDC but also by speaking directly with a representative sample of UDC front line staff across the different functions and seniorities and of course with various elected councillors.

We consider that this health check will be helpful with a view to building positively on the conclusions to be drawn by our Peers in their report, which we will be published in full.

UDC CABINET AND COUNCIL BUSINESS

Members and Residents might wonder from time to time as what is the UDC Cabinet and what does it do - is it a talking shop or is it more than this? It is most certainly more than a talking shop nor is it a "rubber stamping bureau" approving unquestioningly actions prepared or to be taken by the UDC Officers, of whom the most senior is of course the Chief Executive, Mr Peter Holt. So, it might be helpful to describe how the work of the Council is undertaken at a senior administrative level.

UDC is managed on corporate lines which involve a Corporate Management Team ("CMT") made up of employed officers, namely the Chief Executive, three Strategic Directors and six Directors. They are named

here together with their ascribed functions and responsibilities here: [Corporate Management Team - Uttlesford District Council](#)

The CMT meet among themselves in a collegiate fashion so that one area of activity is known in general terms to others so as better to enable the UDC Corporate Plan <https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/corporate-plan> to be coordinated and discharged. The Cabinet is made up of six elected Members (John being one) who meet fortnightly by way of an informal Cabinet briefing together with necessary officers in anticipation of actions to be considered at the forthcoming programme of Cabinet Meetings. An example of the work to be considered at the next two Cabinet meetings, which might be of interest to note is as follows:

Agenda for Cabinet meeting 18 November (supplementary):

- Public Sector decarbonisation fund
- Nuisance – Stansted Airport Parking Public consultation
- Procurement of accounting/finance system

Agenda for Cabinet meeting 5 December:

- Corporate Core Indicators Q2 24/24
- Local Plan update
- Disabled Facilities Grants Policy
- Hatfield Forest Governance report
- UDC Housing - Repairs Assistance Policy
- UDC Housing - Award of Compliance/Mechanical Electrical Contract and Repairs and Maintenance Contract
- UDC Housing & Repairs - compensation and reimbursement policy
- District Economic Development Plan

The Cabinet members and their responsibilities are described here: [Cabinet portfolio holders - Uttlesford District Council](#). All Cabinet Meetings Are of course held in public and their proceedings broadcast live and recorded for viewing through the Meeting Agenda link.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – TOURISM AND HERITAGE

As will be anticipated, included among UDC’s Corporate Plan is the promotion and development of tourism within the District. Tourism of course generates income and sources of employment for the hospitality sector and retail offerings in general and which justify greater support than historically has been the case, particularly in the instance of rural communities, their restaurants and public houses.

It is early days but the UDC economic team is working up policies designed to further bolster these areas of economic activity. The District is privileged to be home to a considerable number of listed buildings (over 3,700 – greater than any other non-metropolitan district in England) as well as having a wide variety of beautiful rural landscapes and so together capable of making for attractive day and short-stay visitor tourism. Access to and from the District into Suffolk and Cambridge, which are already noteworthy tourist destinations, is easy and there is scope for the making of themed heritage and attractive landscape routes, supported by easily accessible information and guides, which would describe attractive features and stopping off facilities and venues within our communities.

Recently, both the Parish Churches of Rayne and Stebbing have been in receipt of very substantial Lottery funding for the purposes of protecting and stabilising their structures (that of Stebbing was on the “At Risk Register”) and as part of the grant funding awarded, provision of and access to greater information concerning the buildings’ heritage relevance and significance will be required to be provided by the recipients. Given the extent to which such magnificent heritage “assets” exist (not intending, of course, to diminish in any way their spiritual and non-secular importance, in history and the present day) it is anticipated that useful information highlighting their interest and relevance can be given. Prospective heritage/tourist routes would be described as being made not only by car but also where appropriate by bicycle and on foot and prepared using current mapping technology and apps.

It is not usual for us to include images in our Reports, but we thought to include two of a memorial brass located in Holy Cross, Felsted. It is illustrated by the Monumental Brass Society on the cover page of their appreciation *The Monumental Brasses of Essex*, one of a county series. Residents might be pleased to know of its existence and recording. This is just one small individual example of matters of potential historical and archival interest to visitors to our District and it is of immediate local interest to us. There are of course dozens more!! We will let you know how further initiatives on this economic area might evolve.



Holy Cross, Felsted:
Demi-effigy and inscription to Christine, wife of John Bray, Esq.



Rubbing by Martin Stuchfield, MBS Hon. Conservation Officer

THE DRAFT LOCAL PLAN – REGULATION 19

Consultation on the Regulation 19 Local Plan closed on 14th October and the representations received are currently being analysed and then will be tabulated ready for submission to PINS, it is hoped, in the week ending 20th December. Further updated reports will be brought to the next meeting of the cross-party Local Plan Panel which will meet later this month and then also to Council at its December meeting.

There were some 500 consultation responses received (about half being from individual members of the public) which contained some 2,500 individual points of representation. To keep updated on this topic, residents will wish to follow matters via this link:

[Local Plan timetable - Uttlesford District Council](#)

DISTRICT COUNCILLORS' AND CONSTITUENTS' SURGERY

We will be holding our usual monthly surgery this month at 1730 at URC Village Hall and look forward to meeting residents without making any prior appointment.

We are always, of course, 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.

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