



UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Felsted & Stebbing Ward

District Councillors John Evans & Richard Silcock



DISTRICT COUNCILLORS' REPORT: OCTOBER 2023

We are pleased to submit our monthly Report to the Parish Council.

THE DRAFT LOCAL PLAN – A CONTINUING UPDATE

This Report begins with extensive news regarding work on a replacement Local Plan. It is likely that many of our forthcoming Reports will also see the Local Plan featured extensively, since when hopefully it is made, the Local Plan will have a fundamental effect and make a long-lasting contribution to the development, facilities, infrastructure and general make up of our District over the plan period, being 20 years ie until **2041**.

Local Plans in rural districts like ours are always controversial since so often, they anticipate development in locations which some part of the community or another considers unsuitable or undesirable. Since effectively the ability to develop land was “nationalised” under the post World War II legislation, the allocation of larger tracts of land for potential development has become of very considerable economic importance. There is an inevitable and irreconcilable tension between the aspirations of prospective promoters and developers of land on the one hand and the preferences of those on the other hand who do not wish to see open countryside built upon.

However, as we all know and agree, it is essential to have in place an up to date Local Plan, so that an evaluation of district wide development need can first be made on examination in public by an independent body, namely the Planning Inspectorate. The appropriate “spatial” and other policies can then be ascertained and described. With all the evidence available, allocations of prospective development sites can then be made. Having a Local Plan being as out of date as the current (2005) plan is utterly unacceptable – it leads to the ad hoc speculative development that we have experienced in the past. Indeed, good planning practice requires plans once adopted to be reviewed and refreshed every 5 years, a gross omission unfortunately allowed to have arisen in the past.

We apologise if the procedures described below are well known to PC members, but as this Report is widely read by members of the community, we hope you will excuse some repetition by us.

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So, a draft Local Plan has now been published last week ready for consideration on 4th October 2023 by the cross-party Local Plan Leadership Group (“LPLG”) - of which John is a voting member. Being a working party appointed by Cabinet, LPLG is to review the draft before referring it to Cabinet, which then passes it to Full Council for a decision to be made as to whether or not to permit the draft to proceed to public consultation (the *Regulation 18* Process). If there is agreement from Full Council on 30 October 2023, this consultation will take place on the draft throughout November and into December.

The draft Plan contains a full suite of proposed policies and policy chapters and has identified provisional housing and employment site allocations, following officers’ meetings with a range of stakeholders (including neighbouring councils, Essex County Council, the NHS and Education providers). There was also a local plan workshop with Parish Council colleagues. There was community consultation on possible draft policies and themes undertaken at the outset of the process through the Community Stakeholder Forum.

The draft Plan seeks to provide for housing in the most sustainable way, that minimizes the need for travel and maximizes opportunities for walking, cycling and using public transport. Thus, new homes are proposed to be near to jobs, shops, services and facilities. The draft seeks to support existing economic centres (retailers/ businesses/employers), but also seeks to ensure that any new infrastructure (schools/ health care/leisure facilities/open space) benefit as many people as possible, including our existing communities rather than solely new residents.

The *Regulation 18* stage is still a relatively early stage within the plan-making process and the draft can be amended following responses to the consultation. Thus, the decision made by Full Council on 30th October 2023 will be a decision on whether or not to publish the draft for consultation; not necessarily to support each and every aspect making up the constituent parts of the draft plan. The representations made will be reviewed very carefully and taken into account which will then lead to the *Regulation 19* version of the Plan, which is then submitted to the Planning Inspectorate to begin its work.

During the recent workshops, officers explained that some 6,000 homes across the District had been consented since 2021, ie the beginning of the current plan period, some granted by UDC and some by the Planning Inspectorate. This is a considerable number and it means that the housing target for the draft local is considerably reduced – meaning that no large new “garden communities” are required across the nor indeed can be justified to meet the Government’s “Standard Method”.

Further, the latest five year housing land supply figures will now reflect this level of housing delivery, which will assist your planning sub-committee in their representations in response to those planning applications which seek to justify development in the absence of a “five year supply”. The precise housing land supply statistics will be published separately – earlier than is normally the case because of the Regulation 18 Local Plan work.

Whilst this results in 6,000 fewer homes that UDC now has need to plan for, being one component of the Housing Target imposed by Central Government of some 14,000 dwellings required to be supplied in total, it has again demonstrated that development does not stop coming when there is no local plan in place. We just get more in locations that we do not support and may not be particularly sustainable nor for which sufficient infrastructure is provided.

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We are not providing a summary of the principal approaches contained in the draft since it merits a comprehensive reading as it pertains to the entire District – a parish limited approach would not therefore be appropriate in this Report at this stage.

Some of the demographics lying behind the Local Plan work are interesting and explain the pressure for development in the District. Since 2011, the population of Uttlesford has grown at a rate of 14.9%, which is faster than the average for England as a whole, which has grown by 6.6%, being a similar level of growth in adjoining Braintree District while that of East Herts is about 9%. Moreover, the age structure of Uttlesford shows the proportion of people aged 65 and over has increased by 36% since 2011 and 20.2% of the population in Uttlesford were aged 65 and over, compared to England's average of 18.6%. This significant change might be explained by “inward migration” of people coming to the District from North and East London, capitalising on the price difference in housing stock there as compared with that of Uttlesford.

There is a very great deal of information and background contained in the evidence in support of the draft Plan and Residents and others will be able and are very much encouraged by us to comment on this draft and make submissions on it during the six week consultation period, always assuming of course it is first approved for that purpose by Council on 30th October 2023.

We will ensure that reminders of what is happening continue to be circulated widely as we hope that as many residents as possible will put forward their comments and representations.

We would encourage all residents to sign up for updates at www.uttlesford.gov.uk/local-plan-news and also to follow the timetable which is available at www.uttlesford.gov.uk/local-plan-timetable. A set of Local Plan FAQ's has been prepared also which are very useful as well as readable in plain English and they are to be found at <https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/4923/Local-Plan-FAQs>. Updates are also provided by means of social media. The main page on the UDC web site referring to the Local Plan is worth bookmarking since it contains references, to be added to in coming weeks, to the detailed technical evidence which have been used in arriving at the draft *Regulation 18* policies.

In summary, the anticipated Timetable/Path Ahead would be:

- Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) – October - December 2023
- Submission Plan (Regulation 19) - Summer 2024
- Submission to Secretary of State - Winter 2024
- Examination - 2025
- Adoption - Early 2026

The following are the draft plan materials for review by LPLG on 4th October 2023, before coming to Cabinet and then to Full Council which gives you the opportunity of early review, in anticipation of the formal consultation period commencing:

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<https://uttlesford.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s33027/Draft%20Uttlesford%20Local%20Plan%202021%20-%202024%20Regulation%2018%20Consultation.pdf>

<https://uttlesford.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s33028/Appendices%201%20-%202016%20Except%20%20-%20204.pdf>

<https://uttlesford.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s33029/Appendices%202%20-%20204%20Site%20Development%20Templates.pdf>

CLIMATE CHANGE - ZERO CARBON INITIATIVES

We are sure that this subject will be of interest to many. UDC has created The Zero Carbon Communities Grant Fund whose purpose is to support community groups in Uttlesford take action on climate change.

Non-profit groups or organisations, including our town and parish councils, can apply for funding for new projects that are focussed on carbon emission reduction, community engagement, or ecological restoration and enhancement.

Projects might include energy conservation or efficiency measures on community buildings, nature and biodiversity projects, or other initiatives that promote sustainable lifestyle choices.

This round of funding is open until **December 2023** and grants of between £1,000 and £35,000 are available.

► [Find out more about the Zero Carbon Communities Grant Fund and apply](#)

The last round of funding was successful and one project in our Ward was opened in September, namely The Woodland Walk at Mill Lane Playing Field in Stebbing which has been named The Kingdom Memorial Walk, in memory of the late Mr Michael Kingdom, a former Chairman of Stebbing Parish Council, whom many Felsted PC members will recall. He was very active in work leading to the restoration of Stebbing Village Hall and The Friends' Meeting House.

HOME INSULATION

In anticipation of colder weather approaching, we thought that we would highlight the availability of home insulation grants. Free or cheaper insulation to reduce residents' home's energy bills are available on application through the Great British Insulation Scheme. Support is available if a home qualifies, namely if it:

- has an energy performance certificate of D to G – [check your EPC](#)

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and

- is in Council Tax bands A to D – [check your Council Tax band](#)

Applications can be made by a homeowner, landlord or tenant (either renting privately or from a housing association) – and the [government website](#) has more information on who can apply and the types of installations available.

REFUSE COLLECTIONS

The difficulties experienced during August regarding reliability in the refuse/waste collection service have now been overcome, we believe. However, a detailed review is being undertaken of the service with a view to ensuring its resilience, including as to crew rostering and capital equipment such as consideration of additions to the refuse vehicle fleet. These are expensive items and are built (in the UK) to bespoke order by the specialist builders and for which there is a long lead/order time.

Each vehicle in use has to be inspected and serviced frequently – every few weeks - which is undertaken by UDC at its new depot at the former banana warehouse at Little Canfield. If one of the larger triple-axle vehicles requires major work, it is substituted by an older standby twin-axle vehicle, having a lesser capacity and thus not the same ability to complete a round in the same time as the larger vehicle. This has led to delays in route completion.

The Environmental Services Team and responsible Cabinet Member in their review will be considering fleet issues, rostering, route organisation and financing methods (the fleet was purchased outright when first acquired). We will update you as further news is available.

HIGHWAYS MATTERS- 2023/24 CONSULTATION

ECC has just launched its annual Survey on **29th September** concerning their Highways service and we are sure that you and many residents would wish to contribute to this by providing responses and so we include the link to the questionnaire. The survey is open until **5th January 2024** :

<https://consultations.essex.gov.uk/essex-highways/c93174aa/consultation/>

We of course continue to support County Councillor Foley in his efforts to secure a satisfactory outcome from ECC Highways concerning highway maintenance.

Indeed, one issue which has troubled him and us recently is the high cost of what are apparently minor road and signage maintenance jobs. No doubt, County Councillor Foley will discuss his actions to escalate this further, including his efforts to require ECC to show that there is consideration given to and value for money received.

One specific recent case in point arises on the Crooked Mile leading to Stebbing where a weight restricted sign at Throws Farm which was damaged requires replacement. The design and installation cost to do this

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appears exorbitant, given at £ 8,000 – representing the cost of the restoration of one replacement road sign to be placed in a previously used location! Are the ECC (Ringway Jacobs) working teams adequately supervised and deployed in terms of labour and equipment utilisation, we have asked?

There will be several other instances of similar work being undertaken in the Parish at apparently high cost and we hope that ECC will respond and explain the value for money approach called for, which is what we are all keen that they demonstrate.

RENTAL HOUSING – RENTING: LANDLORDS AND TENANTS

Members and your Clerk might well on occasion be asked by residents concerning rights and responsibilities in the private rental sector. There is a considerable proportion of our residents who do of course rent property, whether themselves being tenants or indeed landlords.

The Government has just published this handy updated Guide “*HOW TO RENT*” which may be a useful point of reference for all concerned This guide is for tenants and landlords in the private rented sector in order to help them understand their rights and responsibilities. It provides a checklist and more detailed information on each stage of the process, including:

- what to look out for before renting
- living in a rented home
- what happens at the end of a tenancy
- what to do if things go wrong

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1188064/DLUHC_How_to_rent_Oct2023.pdf

There is a further Guide as to a landlord’s repairing obligations and how a tenant might best tackle problems faced in this respect:

<https://check-how-to-get-repairs-done-in-your-rented-home.form.service.justice.gov.uk/>

These might be useful additions to the PC reference library.

SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM

Many members will have visited the Saffron Walden Museum but it may be that some residents will wish to learn something more of it. The Museum is housed in a building located within the bailey of Saffron Walden Castle, the site of a Norman Motte which is owned by UDC who also employ the Museum personnel, who are of course supported by a group of volunteers and the Trustees.

Some of the exhibits have their origins in donations by the Braybrooke Family of Audley End House but there is an extensive display of bygones of a local agricultural and industrial interest as well of course an extensive collection of archaeological discoveries and remains. Several of the latter are from Felsted and

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Stebbing and any significant discoveries made as a result of development activity are typically deposited with the Museum.

Visits from school parties and other groups are encouraged. Should some members of the Parish Council wish to visit the Museum and see exhibits of interest to the Parish, this might be arranged.

Of interest to many would perhaps be the full size copy of the 1777 Chapman and Andre Map of Essex – the first detailed map of the County to show individual buildings, rivers and topography etc. It is always referred to in Heritage Reports relating to planning applications and listed buildings and so has an important role to play even today. It fills one whole wall of the entrance to the Museum! ,

The Curator and Museum Manager Miss Caroline Wingfield is retiring this month after 23 years of dedicated service who will be greatly missed. Additional information may be found here:

www.saffronwaldenmuseum.org

DISTRICT COUNCILLORS' AND CONSTITUENTS' SURGERY

We continue to 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 or indeed anything we have commented upon in our Monthly Reports. As usual, no appointment is necessary.

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.

Of course, 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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