



UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Felsted & Stebbing Ward

District Councillors John Evans & Richard Silcock



DISTRICT COUNCILLORS' REPORT: OCTOBER 2024

Please find below our monthly Report to the Parish Council.

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy ("LNRS")

We would like to draw to your and residents' attention an important NEW consultation which is presently underway concerning the very important topic of nature recovery. We are certain that this is a subject which will be of interest to members of every generation in our community, but knowledge of the strategy is currently little known. The Environment Act 2021 introduced the requirement for a LNRS to be established in every area (the area applicable to us is that of the County of Essex) and it will provide the primary means whereby ecological and biodiversity declines will be tackled within that area.

The primary purpose of each LNRS is to find locations for the creation or improvement of essential habitat, identifying spaces most likely to provide the greatest benefit for nature and the wider environment. The Essex LNRS also outlines agreed biodiversity priorities for nature recovery in the county and includes a series of proposed actions, known as potential measures, to achieve these priorities. Within the strategy, the Essex LNRS proposes where actions could be carried out that will connect and expand existing spaces for nature. The strategy will demonstrate how actions can be taken to protect and restore local ecosystems in order to support the health and wellbeing of both people and wildlife.

The LNRS is a very substantial and heavily illustrated document (at over 120 pp of A4) including graphics and maps etc. so takes an instant or two to download. It contains a great deal of data and information and importantly, mapping which would benefit from zooming in.

https://consultations.essex.gov.uk/rci/ddb68e54/supporting_documents/Essex%20Local%20Nature%20Recovery%20draft%20strategy.pdf

The Essex Local Nature Partnership is hosted by Essex County Council (ECC) and is structured Local Nature Partnership Board ("LNPB") around a Board, an officer working group and sub-focus working groups. There are currently 4 sub-focus working groups:

1. Local Nature Recovery Strategy Working Group
2. Community Engagement Working Group
3. Planning and Biodiversity Net Gain Working Group
4. Agriculture Working Group

The LNPB has agreed on the following 4 targets, to be achieved by 2030:

- the existing extent of 14% of Natural Green Infrastructure coverage is to be increased to 25% by 2030;
- 50% of farmland in Essex to adopt Sustainable stewardship practices by 2030. This target has been adopted from the Essex Climate Action Commission;
- 1 in 4 people in Essex to be taking action for Nature Recovery. This target has been adopted from the Essex Wildlife Trust;
- access to sufficient high quality green space is to be identified and established for all.

The aim is to create an additional 18,000 ha of woodland, 22,000 ha of new grassland, 3,100 ha of new green habitats in urban areas, 22,000 ha of new freshwater habitats and 4,000 ha of new coastal habitats. It can be seen that these are very substantial proposals, although it needs to be remembered that the area of the entire county amounts to some 400,000 ha. Quite how these targets will impact upon the need for agriculture to provide food will no doubt raise many questions for farmers and associated concerns. We all would recognise the imperative for domestic food production, which is currently at around 60% of consumption and of indigenous food at 73%. For those interested in statistics and food security generally, a new Index has recently been published by DEFRA - see [UK Food Security Index 2024 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-food-security-index-2024); rather interestingly, while in our area we might consider that nearly all agricultural land is cropped, nationally the picture is very different with more than half of agricultural land being uncropped/grassland.

The Essex LNRS is currently in public consultation, all interested persons to review the strategy and share their comments. The Consultation is to be responded to via the following link and is open until **24th October 2024**:

<https://consultations.essex.gov.uk/rci/ddb68e54/consultation/>

and:



Further information may be obtained by a review of the LNPB website: [Visit the Essex Local Nature Partnership website](#). We would encourage as many people as possible to take time to review this material.

It is of course a matter of considerable pride that we are able to commend both Felsted and Stebbing PCs as having been ahead of matters in this respect, by owning and managing for some considerable time substantial nature areas with public access provided.

UDC DEMOCRACY – TO BE SEEN AND HEARD IN ACTION !

We have reported previously that, earlier this Summer, UDC has installed a replacement audio visual system in the Council Chamber in Saffron Walden. This took the place of a 15 + year old system which was beyond its efficient life span, barely fit for purpose and further, did not respond well to the needs of Councillors and members of the public in attendance who benefit from the use of audio/hearing boost devices.

So, the proceedings of all UDC Council and Committee meetings held in public in the Chamber are available to be viewed live and after the event. The link is embedded in the page carrying the agenda for the relevant meeting. This facility has proved to be both accessible and of interest to the community; indeed recently, a planning application which had been submitted for development upon two fields off Stebbing High Street/The Downs and which were designated as Local Green Spaces (akin to Green Belt) in the Neighbourhood Plan and also lying adjacent to the Scheduled Monument of The Mount and a grade 2* Listed heritage asset, was determined by the Planning Committee. Such was the interest in this controversial application that many residents watched the proceedings “live”. The Parish Council subsequently publicised the link to it via social media. County Councillor Foley and the Chair of Stebbing PC addressed the Committee as did Richard and John and four members of the public who in the limited time available of 3 minutes spoke to individual specific themes, thus avoiding duplication and overlap.

This audio visual facility does in our view enable the community to appreciate and understand more fully the work of the Council and its members and warrants dissemination.

NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK (“NPPF”)

For any resident reaching for an explanation as to what is important for the making of planning policy and decisions on individual planning applications, one document to be understood is the NPPF. This provides a vital tool in the planning process and actually supplies the flesh filling out (in a planning context) the statutory bones created by the Town and Country Planning Acts as well as the range of other relevant legislation including very wide topics such as for example, heritage/listed buildings, the natural environment and ecology (and in each case the Regulations brought into being under the relevant Statutes).

It will be recalled from our last Report that the Government on 30 July announced that it proposed revisions to the NPPF and the consultation upon it has now closed. UDC of course submitted its response to the consultation as did North Essex Councils (the group of nine District Councils located in the north of

the County, including Uttlesford) (“NEC”). Among the responses was one to the effect that the proposed increased mandatory targets for additional housing were excessive. The Deputy Prime Minister has put forward increased requirements which for each District is tabulated as follows (“SM” = Standard Method ie dwellings to be planned for annually):

LPA	Current SM	New SM	Increase	% Change
Braintree	813	1,098	285	35%
Chelmsford	913	1,406	493	54%
Colchester	1,043	1,290	247	24%
Epping Forest	725	1,210	485	67%
Harlow	514	648	134	26%
Maldon	276	544	268	97%
Tendring	770	1,043	273	35%
Uttlesford	675	749	74	11%
NORTH ESSEX TOTAL	5,729	7,988	2,259	39%

For some LPAs, the increases are huge. The proposed increase for Uttlesford however, will not “bite” under the applicable transitional arrangements for the reason that UDC in full Council decided on the very day that the Deputy Prime Minister made her announcement, to proceed with the Regulation 19 Local Plan process. The imperative for this was described to Council by John as Portfolio Holder and the controversial debate leading from it was described in last month’s Report. So, while Uttlesford might be regarded as having “escaped” these proposed increases lightly to date, it could be that Local Planning Authorities with genuine constraints (eg green belt) and with a resulting inability to meet these targets might in future seek to “lay off” (by agreement) some of their requirement upon adjacent authorities. Uttlesford will need to keep a weather eye open against this.

Other suggestions were incorporated in the Consultation response following interventions by John at a NEC Leaders’ Meeting, including:

- planning permissions/allocations should be implemented ie delivered within a specific period of time or if not achieved, then lost (ie “use it or lose it”) so as to have the effect of encouraging developers and builders to complete dwellings in order to meet need rather than merely satisfy their own market/pricing strategies
- better access by SME builders to finance building/site development upon more competitive terms required policy review and support
- setting targets alone was not sufficient – there needed to be government funding/support for accompanying infrastructure as well as capacity support for affordable housing and to councils in way of social housing

UDC HOUSING STOCK

You will recall our briefing you some long time ago that UDC (unlike our neighbours in Braintree District) still retains ownership of a substantial amount of social housing, some 2800 dwellings across the District. Retaining ownership of much needed social housing in house remains a cross party policy we are pleased to say. Indeed, there is an aspiration on the part of the Administration to augment the stock, whenever capital receipts permit. Management of the stock was however contracted out in 2018/19 to *Norse Group*,

a company owned by Norfolk County Council under joint venture arrangements. That arrangement has not proved to have been satisfactory in regard to quality of maintenance and service standards and providing genuine value for money.

Accordingly, the management and service required for the stock is to be brought in house once more with effect from 2025 and a very experienced officer, Ms Simone Russell, who has been employed by UDC on an interim basis for several months, has now been appointed as Strategic Director of Housing, Health & Communities as well as a property professional with extensive experience in managing public sector housing, Mr Brian Burton who is engaged as Property Services Director. Councillor Arthur Coote is the Cabinet Member with portfolio responsibilities in this combined area and he has recently submitted to Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee extensive reports and proposals going forward.

Over the coming months, new contracting arrangements will be negotiated with a view to securing greater control and better value for repairs and maintenance of the stock; this is a challenge given its high average age and ensuing substantial maintenance requirements.

We will keep you informed of matters as they evolve.

ZERO CARBON COMMUNITY GRANT SCHEME – THIRD ROUND



This Scheme we are pleased to confirm, is being continued this municipal year. It supports community groups in Uttlesford take action on climate change. Non-profit groups or organisations, including 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, river and biodiversity projects, or other initiatives that promote sustainable lifestyle choices. This round of funding is open until **2 December** and grants of between £1,000 and £20,000 are available. There is an introductory webinar open to all community groups, organisations and parish councils arranged for **Thursday 10 October, 7.30pm** when further details can be obtained and participants will also be able to hear of previously-funded community net zero and nature projects.

[Email the Climate Change team to receive the Teams link](#)

In the second round of the Zero Carbon Communities Grant scheme in 2024, UDC awarded funding to 15 new community projects and in 2023, funding was provided to 11 community projects, including in both Felsted and Stebbing.

Further information:

- ▶ [Apply for funding](#)
- ▶ [See some of the projects that were successful in the previous rounds of funding](#)

GENERAL ELECTION – JULY 2024

The General Election already seems a very long time ago! We have reported on the change in electoral boundaries introduced by the Boundaries Commission which led to our Parishes falling into the Parliamentary Constituency of Braintree, those of Hatfield Heath and Hatfield Broad Oak into Harlow and four wards from within the Chelmsford City district area being added to the newly named North West Essex. These electoral rearrangements did however cause more than a hiccup on the part of the Electoral Officer and team at Uttlesford in the distribution and receipt of postal votes destined to be delivered to some of the voters in the Chelmsford wards.

The Leader of UDC, Councillor Petrina Lees, caused an independent review to be undertaken by the independent Association of Election Administrators as to how the process had been managed and whether delay in receipt of 2,688 postal votes had any impact on the election outcome in the North West Essex Constituency. The Association has completed their review and submitted a report which was considered and noted last week at the Audit and Standards Committee whose paper on the subject is to be found here:

<https://uttlesford.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s37204/Independent%20review%20of%20postal%20voting%20processes.pdf>

There were no errors on the part of the printers in all of this but there had been miscommunication between the UDC electoral team and the printers which led to delay in despatch of the batch of the papers destined for the new postal voters located in the Chelmsford wards. Once this was discovered, there was a very prompt intervention by the UDC electoral team and all the postal votes due to be received were then despatched and delivered and in this regard, the service provided by Royal Mail was exemplary.

A very small number of postal electors who had not received their papers as early as others might have missed the opportunity to vote (eg they had gone on holiday in the intervening period) but after analysis, it was concluded that the delivery delay had not led to any possible difference in outcome of the election, whose process generally otherwise had been well administered.

THE DRAFT LOCAL PLAN – REGULATION 19

This is now in the very last stages of consultation and we would like to remind you and residents that it closes at **2359 H on 14th October**. Further details and information are to be found here:

[Local Plan \(Regulation 19\) consultation - Uttlesford District Council](#)

We do not anticipate reporting further on this subject, except briefly concerning the submission of the Regulation 19 Local Plan to the Planning Inspectorate and ensuing timetables etc, namely when the next stage(s) of the Local Plan making has been announced including the process set for the Examination in Public by the Planning Inspectorate, that being entirely in its rather than UDC's control.

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 first making any 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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