



UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Felsted & Stebbing Ward

District Councillors John Evans & Richard Silcock



DISTRICT COUNCILLORS' REPORT: SEPTEMBER 2023

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

Inevitably, it contains details of a wider District application, rather than being directly relevant only to the Parish, but as they can have a significant impact on it or are of topical interest to residents and the community at large, a full account of them is provided. This is therefore a “bumper edition”!

GENERAL

The Summer Break is over and with it, the Autumn programme of work and meetings for Councillors at Uttlesford District Council will begin to intensify. In fact, there is no Council “recess” in August and several meetings were held in that period, including a Full Extraordinary Council Meeting, a Cabinet, a Scrutiny Meeting and a meeting of Stansted Airport Advisory Panel. Of course, the usual Planning and Licensing Committee meetings were held (but neither of us serve on those bodies).

There were for those of us having portfolio responsibilities as Cabinet Members, additional commitments to meet – for example, the six Cabinet Members meet informally on a fortnightly basis throughout the year. John also meets the Director of Planning and the Local Plan Planning Policy Manager each twice a month, in addition, so as to be updated on matters relating to the Planning Department and the draft Local Plan.

He held a meeting also with representatives of Department of Levelling Up, Housing & Communities in support of UDC’s forthcoming request to the Secretary of State, Mr Michael Gove, to “de-designate” UDC. This prospect was, as will be recalled, reported on in our July Report. If the request is successful and the Minister agrees, since it is a matter within his discretion, it would mean that for the purposes of major planning applications (eg development applications of dwellings exceeding 10 in number), applicants would then once again be required to follow the normal procedure of submitting their planning applications to UDC, instead of having the current option of applying directly to the Planning Inspectorate.

Further news on this is hopefully to be expected later this month.

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e-mail contact: cllrevans@uttlesford.gov.uk and cllrsilcock@uttlesford.gov.uk

THE DRAFT LOCAL PLAN – TIMETABLE AND CONSULTATIONS

What is a Local Plan? Members and most Residents will already be very familiar with its purpose but in summary, once made after examination in public by the Planning Inspectorate, it stands as a blueprint to identify, in general outline, areas where additional housing, sites for businesses and other infrastructure (including schools and health facilities) can or cannot be located during the new Local Plan period, which will run until 2033. The vision and aspirations for future growth will be described in it, together with detailed policies on the environment, landscape, heritage and many other updated topics and against which individual planning applications will be decided.

We are finally coming into the last lap of a four lap event for the Local Plan and early this Autumn (week beginning 30 October) a draft plan will be published proposing draft policies and also setting out where in the District potential development might be permitted. Additional housing across the district is needed and the Government in fact requires Uttlesford to plan for about 700 additional houses every year on average during the Plan period, going towards its national annual build target of 300,000 additional homes.

Residents will be able to comment on this draft and make submissions on it during the six week period after publication and we will ensure that reminders of what is happening are circulated widely closer to the time. We hope that as many residents as possible will put forward their comments and representations. This stage is known as *Regulation 18* and once all the input on the draft is considered and taken into account, then in Summer 2024, an updated version (*Regulation 19*) will be submitted for the Planning Inspectorate to begin its work.

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 will have been used in arriving at the draft *Regulation 18* policies.

A Local Council Forum is being hosted at UDC's offices in the evening of 12 September, to which your representatives have been invited, when the Director of Planning and the Local Plan Planning Policy Manager will give a presentation on the work being undertaken by officers and the Local Plan Leadership Group towards the *Regulation 18* draft Plan. John will be in attendance also.

REFUSE COLLECTIONS

There have been considerable disruptions to the refuse/waste collection service in recent weeks and inconvenience suffered by the community, for which UDC apologises. There were several reasons and causes for this, which some residents might have already learned of, but they are:

- Extra distances (out and back) required to be covered by the refuse vehicles because the waste transfer station (owned and operated by ECC) in Great Dunmow has closed

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permanently, necessitating transit instead to principal waste receiving centres out of District and located some distance away

- Holiday rostering
- Vehicle breakdowns

The Environmental Services Team and responsible Cabinet Member are urgently reviewing measures to overcome these causes so as to ensure the usual smooth and efficient waste collection service is restored and maintained and we shall report further on steps taken/to be taken in our next Report.

UDC INVESTMENTS AND FINANCES

As Members will recall from Reports in previous months, a considerable proportion of UDC's income is derived from rental income secured on a number of commercial premises which have been bought by UDC for the purposes of generating rental income. All of these, apart from Chesterford Research Park (described here as Aspire – a company wholly owned by UDC), have been acquired since 2019. The commercial assets are listed here and tenants include Waitrose, Amazon, B&Q, Aldi, Weston Homes, MOOG. Chesterford Research Park is a 50/50 Joint Venture with the insurance giant Aviva and is let to scientific and bio research enterprises (thus forming part of the South Cambridge science cluster).

Asset No.	Asset	Acquisition Price	Rent p.a.	Yield
		£	£	%
1	Loan to Aspire (CRP) Ltd	60,656,500	2,796,057	4.61
2	Skyway House, Takeley	20,000,000	1,128,000	5.64
3	1 Deerpark Road, Livingston	4,758,374	372,546	7.83
4	Regional Distribution Centre, Chorley	54,608,773	2,840,000	5.20
5	Stane Retail Park – Phase 1	27,004,322	1,784,024	6.61
6	Distribution Warehouse, Gloucester	42,692,000	2,293,433	5.37
7	Headquarters, Tewkesbury	37,749,262	1,667,000	4.42
	Total	247,469,231	12,881,060	5.21

At the Full Council Meeting held in August , a proposal for further funding in the sum of £ 21.06 m was put and passed in order to finance UDC's 50% share (ie with Aviva meeting their matched share) of the costs of development of a new major building at Chesterford Research Park and a Green Renewable/Solar Energy facility on campus (to generate electricity for the site).

It might be thought by some members of the Community “what on earth is our Council doing - buying warehouses and offices with our Council Tax?”

That is a perfectly fair question to ask but the answer is that generating income over and above Council Tax revenue received has proved necessary in order to balance the UDC annual books and this comes

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about because Central Government has in recent years reduced very substantially the funding which historically it provided to local authorities. The alternative would be to increase Council Tax very substantially, but that is not practical (no local authority has taken this step) since to increase Council Tax beyond a Government imposed 3.5% pa cap (which was the increase set this year) requires a positive Referendum in favour of doing so from the electorate – a costly exercise in itself.

This has led to many District Councils looking to bolster their income by acquiring income generating assets. Members will have seen in the Press over the Summer reports as to the difficulties which some (Thurrock BC and Woking Council particularly) have got into. There are **no** similarities between the policies and procedures of those Councils and UDC for the following reasons (as well as others) since precautionary policies and measures were always put in place and applied at UDC, while none of these existed or were not applied at Thurrock and several at Woking were absent:

- No officer, whether acting alone or in conjunction with others, has authority to make any investment
- All investments are freehold, new build real estate (no bonds or intangible income streams etc) generating income in good locations and are pre-let
- Good tenants and strong lease terms
- No concentration of investment in one single type of asset (investments extend to - warehouses, research facilities, distribution centre, veterinary hospital, out of town retail “sheds”)
- No concentration of geographical locations
- Independent advisers, leading consultants and lawyers are retained to advise and monitor
- The UDC Investment Board reviews and monitors all investments and their performance
- The UDC Investment Board reports to Cabinet with its advice and recommendations
- Full Council considers and approves all investment decisions and funding

This is the latest quarterly report to the UDC Investment Board which sets out the current estimated values of the various assets acquired, all of which are substantially greater than cost of acquisition. The gross and net rental yield after costs of borrowing is also shown, which is now substantially lower than was the case prior to recent interest rate rises but still generates a positive net income for UDC.

<https://uttlesford.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s32686/UDC%20Property%20Portfolio%20Q1%20Report%20202324.pdf>

This document also provides interesting details regarding the further investment intended at Chesterford Research Park, described above.

If Members or residents would like to be reminded of the UDC financial picture in terms of its general income and expenditure, this summary is where to look:

https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/media/11939/2023-24-Budget-Book/pdf/Budget_Book_23-24.pdf?m=638180343492770000

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Importantly, however, there are plans to be considered in the coming months to review the cost base and overheads of UDC, called “Blueprint Uttlesford”, which will seek to reduce its overheads and expenditure and we will report further as matters evolve.

OVERFLYING AND AIRCRAFT NOISE

Previous Reports have touched upon prospective changes to aircraft routeing being considered by CAA – these are national matters. While overflying and aircraft noise does not affect all residents of the Parish, it does trouble those living in the northern portion of the Parish, including Gransmore Green and part of Stebbing Road. It is an issue of particular concern however to Stebbing Residents as aircraft departing from Stansted on an easterly direction, fly directly overhead the centre of the village. We are being assiduous therefore in our attempts to monitor and seek to improve/limit aircraft noise over our communities at district and parish levels.

UDC’s Stansted Airport Advisory Panel (“STAAP”) met in order to consider its response to the consultation exercise recently undertaken by MAG/Stansted Airport Ltd regarding its Noise Action Plan and its response is attached here:

<https://uttlesford.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s32819/Response%20to%20Stansted%20Airport%20u2019s%20Noise%20Action%20Plan%20NAP%202024-2028.pdf>

It remains UDC’s policy to seek to reduce night flights ex Stansted, ultimately in the hope of banning them, but meanwhile, issue is taken in the response (among several other topics) with the dispensations apparently being freely dispensed by MAG to late arriving flights, permitting them to arrive at the airport late at night/early hours of the morning, without financial penalty.

Great concern is being expressed at overflying by the larger, older engined and more noisy Azerbaijani 747 freighter aircraft, those of DHL as well as the 777 type operated by Emirates and Turkish airlines.

When John attended the last meeting of Stansted Airport Consultative Committee (being a body made up of several other County and District members) when MAG made their initial presentation concerning their Noise Action Plan, concern was expressed by him as to the deadline for response (end of August) and as several Parish Councils, including yours did not meet in August, he secured an extension of time for Parish Councils to respond to the consultation until **20th September**. It is hoped that the UDC STAAP response in the link may assist you in formulating some of your proposed responses to the consultation.

SuDS AND FLOOD MAPPING

As Members will recall, the installation of SuDS will become mandatory in respect of new developments from 2024 onwards and there is a useful Guide published by Essex on the subject which contains a very useful Guide to the subject and includes also an interactive link to a map, showing degrees of localised flood risk and it is to be found here:

<https://flood.essex.gov.uk/new-development-advice/suds-design-guide/>

This is the map which can be zoomed in to any (despite its title) area in the Parish):

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<https://www.essexdesignguide.co.uk/suds/surface-water-management-plans/braintree-and-witham/>

The problematic area of flooding in Causeway End is shown very clearly on this map and the link will we think generally be a useful tool to assist your Planning Sub-Committee in its work.

We of course continue to support County Councillor Foley in his efforts to secure a satisfactory outcome from ECC (Highways and LFFA) in regard to this long standing and unacceptable problem.

RAAC CONCRETE

Residents might wish to know if any schools in our District have been prevented from reopening after the Summer Holidays due to the presence of the RAAC Concrete within their structures. The answer presently is No – although one school was possibly affected by it and urgent contingency plans were put into place by UDC officers to accommodate pupils and teachers in temporary class room facilities set up within the UDC main building in London Road, Saffron Walden. In the event, that fortunately proved to be unnecessary.

However, there is one public building in Uttlesford which is known to contain RAAC and it is found within the roof structure of the squash courts at the Lord Butler Leisure Centre, Saffron Walden. This has been known for some time and the facilities were closed several months ago to allow a thorough evaluation, risk assessment and determination as to possible remedial measures. The courts remain closed until those tasks have been completed.

TELECOMS AND INTERNET

It had escaped our notice until attending a presentation by BT Openreach at an East of England LGA meeting (held actually at the conference facilities at Chesterford Research Park earlier this week) but with effect from 31 December 2025, all analogue telephone lines (ie PSTN and ISDN) will be “switched off” and all data will be transferred to digital services. This will affect not just telephone lines, but essential devices, such as CCTV, security and fire alarms, alarm pendants, door entry systems which currently are reliant on analogue connections.

We will report further as to this prospect (the relevance to those using alarm systems is particularly obvious) so that members of the public, especially carers and their patients, might become aware of the changes needed to facilities/lines in very good time ahead of the cut-off date. BT Openreach will be publicising it widely, we are advised, in the coming months/year, so there is plenty of time to plan ahead.

UDC CHAIRMAN’S CHARITY – CLLR GEOFF DRISCOLL

This year’s UDC Chairman is Cllr Driscoll (Member for The Hallingburys and Hatfield Broad Oak) and he will be undertaking a fundraising bicycle ride for one of the Chairman’s nominated charities (ACCURO – STRIDE) and will be cycling through our Ward on Thursday 7th September to publicise the good works undertaken by the Charity whose purpose is to support young people in West Essex with learning disabilities .

If any Member or resident would like to meet him and wish him well as he cycles through the length and breadth of the District on an electric bicycle, his week long programme will include:

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Thursday 7 September: Day 4 – Stebbing to Thaxted - 9am Start

0900 - Mill Lane Playing Field - Nature and Biodiversity Project, **Stebbing**

1100 onwards - Community Safety Partnership Trailer – **Felsted (at Chaffix)**

Route: Stebbing – Felsted – Fitch Green - Little Dunmow - Great Easton – Thaxted



His cycling gear and its colour combination, as seen in this photograph when he left UDC Offices on Monday of this week, leaves something to be desired (!), but bravo to him for his valiant fund raising and awareness raising efforts, which also enable him to meet a good many local groups and residents across the District in the process. It seems that fine weather will accompany him on his journey.

DISTRICT COUNCILLORS' AND CONSTITUENTS' SURGERY

We will 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.

Cllr John Evans

E: cllrevans@uttlesford.gov.uk

Cllr Richard Silcock

E: cllr.silcock@uttlesford.gov.uk

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