



UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Felsted & Stebbing Ward

District Councillors John Evans & Richard Silcock



DISTRICT COUNCILLORS' REPORT: FEBRUARY 2026

Please find below our monthly Report to the Parish Council.

UTTLESFORD LOCAL PLAN

We are starting our Report with the latest “state of play” concerning the draft Uttlesford Local Plan 2021-2041. We are pleased to advise that we really are now in the last 10 mins of the match, the final set and in the finishing straight of the race towards making the Plan (we are sure you will excuse the mixture of sporting analogies!).

We last reported that UDC were awaiting the Letter of the Planning Inspectorate (“PINS”) as to whether or not they considered the Local Plan, as examined by them last Summer, to be compliant with relevant legal requirements, including the duty to co-operate (ie with other County and District Councils as well as Statutory Consultees as to their requirements and objections) and whether it is “sound”. To be sound, the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that the Plan should be positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

It was very pleasing to receive the Letter dated 16 January 2026 from PINS confirming that the Local Plan passed muster in all these respects, subject to various Major Modifications as they are termed. These had been anticipated in the course of the Examination and are acceptable to UDC and have been agreed. The Letter may be read here:

[https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/media/14064/Local-Plan-Inspectors-Report/pdf/Uttlesford Local Plan 2021-2041 Examination Report.pdf?m=1768841792443](https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/media/14064/Local-Plan-Inspectors-Report/pdf/Uttlesford%20Local%20Plan%202021-2041%20Examination%20Report.pdf?m=1768841792443)

The next stage is one of internal governance by UDC and a report will be presented by way of report later this month to the Local Plan Panel (of which John is a member) and then to Cabinet. Cabinet will then consider matters and will be asked to recommend that Full Council adopts the Local Plan. Council will meet on 25th March for this purpose.

It is to be hoped that Council will vote to adopt the Plan. That will then mean that Uttlesford will have a current plan in place of the current version which was adopted as long ago as in 2005. Prior to that (hoped

for) adoption, the provisions of the Local Plan as now examined and approved by PINS will carry increasing weight when planning applications are considered, even though not in full effect.

Once a Local Plan is formally adopted, then the opportunities for opportunistic applications for development (such as we have been seen in such quantities in the past decade in several locations in our Parish and that of Little Dunmow on Station Road) will be greatly diminished. Further, once Uttlesford attains a five year housing land supply (as is very likely to be the case during the course of this Spring) the prospects of successfully resisting such speculative development applications (of whatever scale) will be bolstered very substantially.

You will recall that we have previously explained that the Local Plan is being examined under the terms of the **National Planning Policy Framework (“NPPF”) 2023** which permits the District’s annual housing “requirement” under the Standard method to be set at **675** dwellings pa. It is a multiple of five of this value which represents the Five Year Housing Land Supply figure (with which your Planning Committee is very familiar) and determines whether or not when planning applications are considered there is a “presumption in favour of sustainable development” to be applied, all laid down in accordance with **NPPF**.

Had the Local Plan been examined under the **NPPF 2024** (which is the present case for Braintree DC – see below), then the relevant housing requirement figures would be **749** dwellings. Had the Council of UDC wisely not resisted, on 30 July 2024, an opposition proposal to amend the draft Plan then put before it (the very day that the Secretary State announced higher housing targets), we would not be in the position we are today.

Despite this very positive latest news from PINS, matters will not be entirely straight forward going forward since, as we reported last month, a revised **NPPF 2026** is likely to be introduced (after the consultation upon its draft currently underway) at the end of July 2026. This is likely to have the effect of watering down some of the ambitious/cutting edge provisions as to for example carbon efficiency and Bio Diversity which are contained in UDC’s text.

UDC will be making strong objections to the proposed revisions which are inimical to the forward looking policy concepts in the Local Plan as examined and which were favourably remarked upon not only by PINS in the examination but also by very many independent observers and other equally forward looking local planning authorities. Suffice to say, it was only the builders/land promoters and their mouth piece, the Home Builders Federation, who had objected at the examination to the advanced thinking represented by the proposed policies. It would seem unfortunately that their voices have received a favourable hearing from Government, no doubt as part of their expressed encouragement to “Build, Baby Build”.

HOT OFF PRESS – BRAINTREE LOCAL PLAN

At their Council meeting on Monday 2 February, Braintree District Council resolved to proceed with their draft local plan to Regulation 18 stage. We mention it because what “goes on” in our immediately adjacent District in this context can have a direct impact on our Ward.

Development growth in Braintree District is now proposed to be addressed mainly via urban extensions. Braintree town, will have a new urban extension with over 2,500 new homes to its east and Halstead with 2,750 new homes (enabling a bypass to be provided) and the A12 corridor around Kelvedon having 5,600. These are gross figures and permissions already granted would be netted off from them. However, Braintree's annual target is 1,098 dwellings, which as will be noted is significantly higher than that of Uttlesford in the equivalent period. Having said that however, Uttlesford's population growth in the last decade to 2021 was 15.8% compared with of Braintree of merely some 6%.

Notably for our residents in the Ward, no development is proposed at West of Braintree/Andrewsfield.

ESSEX ELECTIONS

As we reported last month, in the context of Devolution and Local Government Reorganization, the new/first Mayoral Election for a Greater Essex Mayor, which were initially due to take place in May 2026, have been postponed to May 2028.

However, despite some initial apparent equivocation on the part of the leader of Essex County Council, in response to a nationwide enquiry by Government to the relevant Councils involved in Local Government reorganisation as to whether or not they supported a postponement of the elections due this May, Government decided in the case of Essex County Council that they should proceed.

So there will be **County Council Elections** taking place in **May 2026**. No doubt County Councillor Foley will wish to explain the impact upon our Ward when he comments on this further.

UDC HOUSING STOCK – REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE

As you will know, UDC is unusual among our near Council neighbours in still owning a substantial social housing stock, in fact amounting to some 2,800 dwellings. There has been cross party agreement in support of this philosophy and policy not only historically but also, we are pleased to state, currently. We, as your Councillors, are also personally very supportive of this policy.

The proportion of social housing in our ward is rather modest (compared for example with that located in some of the larger communities in the District) but its continued existence remains vital. In this regard, it might have been noted that the Government is proposing to introduce some additional limitations upon the operation of the "Right to Buy" scheme.

The management of the current housing stock in way of repairs and maintenance is however about to change. This has proved to be a contentious and unwanted outcome of the very disappointing performance by Axis, who are contractors engaged as recently as 2025 by UDC after a competitive tender and lengthy procurement evaluation. By mutual negotiated agreement, these arrangements are to be

brought to an end and repairs and maintenance will be supplied through direct labour employed by UDC and to be managed by a number of additional professional housing specialists in house.

UDC HOUSING STOCK & OFFICE DECARBONISATION

Much of UDC's housing stock is not in the first flush of youth and do not rate highly under Energy Performance measurements. In consultation with the Tenants, a decision has been taken to seek to improve the energy performance of the stock. UDC was successful in a grant funding bid submitted to the Government under the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund and secured an allocation of £3.8 million. In addition to this grant funding, UDC has committed to contribute to the overall funding of the project in the amount of £4.9 million.

This sum will be funded from the UDC Social Housing Revenue Account ie it will not be met out of general council tax funding. The Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund project will enable the retrofitting of 276 properties in the first instance so as to attain a minimum of Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) standard C. The range of measures will include the installation of roof-mounted photo voltaic panels to generate power and air source heat pumps to provide space heating and hot water as well as cavity wall insulation, loft insulation, external wall insulation, and replacement windows and doors as necessary.

This will result in reduced energy consumption and provide expected energy cost savings for tenants. The project will deliver a substantial contribution to council's climate commitments in way of reducing carbon emissions.

As to the latter, the decision has also been taken towards implementation of UDC's decarbonisation policies by a project at UDC's offices at London Road, Saffron Walden which will involve a funding combination of government grants and UDC's own resources. This will be a challenging project given the historic/listed nature of the building and the level of retrofitting is extensive and costs not insignificant. Of this, a grant from the Government amounting to some £ 627,000 has been secured with match funding provided by UDC to the order of some £741,000. This Project is expected to deliver a reduction in operational carbon emissions of circa 2,000 tCO₂e 1 over the lifetime of the installation (around 91 tonnes of carbon per year), together with providing a case study for decarbonisation of a complex historic building.

UDC SUPPORT FOR BUSINESS

We encourage local businesses to sign up to the frequent e mail advice provided by the UDC Economic Support Team describing forthcoming events which will be of interest and possible benefit to employers and local business owners. There are for example [13 events and training opportunities](#) taking place across the County in the next two months which may be of value which we encourage interested concerns to review and sign up to: [What's On](#)

There is a current opportunity to take part in a business support survey to let UDC know what further support might be of interest and help to which access is here: [Complete our business support survey](#)

HEDGEHOG SOLAR DEVELOPMENT

As your Chairman was not able to attend the meeting of the Community Liaison Group which was held last month, it might be helpful if we noted it for the benefit of Members and residents who will be reading our Report. The meeting was held in Rayne Village Hall as facilities in Felsted were not available. Representatives of Rayne Parish Council, Friends of Flitch Way as well as three appointed residents from Felsted as well as ourselves were however present.

Total Industries were well represented with their project lead joining for the first time. A schematic plan of the scheme was tabled which showed that Total proposed to set the proposed development further back from existing residential development than initially contemplated, as well as from the River Ter, other water courses/ditches and the Flitch Way. Discussion took place as to the planned additional native tree and 5km of hedge planting as well as the need for protection of crops and outside the site from increased deer predation.

Concern remains about the impact on the community from disruption caused during the construction period which is likely to last some 18 months. The majority of this period will be occupied by interior site/panel assembly works rather than for example incessant deliveries of components. Deliveries of frames and panels will be accomplished via two access ways, the principal one being from the northern sector, having reached it via A120 and then crossing over the Flitch Way by haul route and one from the east and south, access being reached via A131. There would be no internal access created from/to the western and eastern sectors by a crossing of the River Ter. The greatest local/road disruption would potentially occur during the construction of the substation itself and its associated 70/80 ton transformer infrastructure when access will be provided in the vicinity of French's Green.

A positive improvement to the scheme in terms of minimising disruption to residents was however disclosed namely that it is now proposed that the principal delivery cable will run underground from the site to the major sub station at Gallows Corner via the vicinity of A120, meaning that local roads and footways will not need to be trenched to accommodate it.

Total intend to submit their Planning Application to both UDC and BDC during February 2026 so very many documents with further details will then be put into the public domain. A very detailed Environmental Impact Assessment will be submitted in support and Members and residents will wish to verify the extent to which their no doubt many questions arising will be answered by the Technical Summary contained in it.

OUR WARD ACTIVITY

As to other matters, we continue to follow the proposals of UDC for ongoing maintenance and repair of the road surface at Chaffix where the the road surface is indeed in poor condition with several pot holes. Some residents have been pressing for its urgent repair. All residents have now been consulted by UDC

as to the considerations/costs involved which will involve a contribution by those who own their homes towards those costs.

We have asked recently for two planning applications within the Ward to be “called in” to be decided by Members of the Planning Committee in the event that the UDC Officers were to recommend approval. This is not a procedure lightly asked for and has to be based upon a genuine planning policy consideration. In the event of matters proceeding before Committee, then we shall ask to speak at it.

The very serious problem as to drainage and flooding under the Tin Bridge over the Flitch Way on Stebbing Road persists. Direct contact has been established not only with the ECC Highways maintenance team but the ECC flood team. Priority has been given by ECC to the clearance of the roadside drainage sumps and culvert beneath the road surface and we hope to hear soon that the work has been completed.

We remain very troubled however at what seems to us to be the primary cause of the blockages namely the escape of volumes of soil and stone carried in water run off from the adjacent field lying to the south east of the bridge and what steps can be secured effectively to prevent this.

WARD MEMBER’S INITIATIVE

We are very happy to consider requests for financial support, utilising our Members’ Initiative Grant where 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. We favour making capital (rather than routine support expenditure) grants to suitable beneficiaries and indeed any awards to be made will have to be made before the end of March 2026.

DISTRICT COUNCILLORS’ AND CONSTITUENTS’ SURGERY

We shall be holding our usual monthly surgery in the URC Hall at 1730 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 but do remind all concerned that they are published and included by way of a link in each Month’s Parish Council Minutes. Back Editions commencing as far ago as June 2019 are available additionally on request !

Cllr John Evans

E: cllr.evans@uttlesford.gov.uk

Cllr Richard Silcock

E: cllr.silcock@uttlesford.gov.uk