



UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Felsted & Stebbing Ward

District Councillors John Evans & Richard Silcock



DISTRICT COUNCILLORS' REPORT: SEPTEMBER 2024

Please find attached below our monthly Report to the Parish Council.

THE DRAFT LOCAL PLAN – A YET FURTHER UPDATE !

Some Members might feel that our Reports have been dominated in recent months by mention of progress concerning the Local Plan. This is the inevitable consequence of important steps being taken to advance its progress. Its significance cannot be understated, bearing in mind the critical role played by it in providing for housing, employment and infrastructure policies in the District through until **2041**. These will affect not only today's residents and businesses but those yet to come. Furthermore, having heard some of the questions posed at the recent public meeting held in the URC Hall with Mr James Cleverley MP about development issues, it appears to be the case that many residents are not fully aware of the relevance of Local Plans and the cardinal role played by them in setting long term development policies, so some repetition of their background does bear repetition.

By way of an update, we are glad to report that Uttlesford's Regulation 19 Local Plan was in the event approved on 30th July at Full Council, enabling it to proceed to a further consultation which will now run until **14th October**. After this, the Plan with supporting evidence base (running to thousands of pages) together with the responses made in that consultation, will be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate. They will review everything in an Examination in Public, and after hearing further representations from all interested parties, will decide if the plan is "sound" ie complies with the legal requirements and meets both the housing requirements as set by the Government and also the employment needs for the District. Then, possibly containing recommended modifications, it will come back to Council to adopt. Hopefully, this will happen during 2025 so that it can be adopted with the least possible delay and then, finally, come into binding effect.

So, the importance of having an up to date Local Plan cannot be overstated; the District desperately needs to take control of its own development future rather than have it come about by happenstance at the hands of speculators, as has occurred. In fact, **8,614** dwellings have obtained planning consent across the District in this way since 2021.

By coincidence, on 30th July, the same day the council were to vote to approve the Plan to go forward, the new Government announced its intention to make substantial changes to its “housing numbers” ie the requirement for District Councils to plan for a given level of development and also to the National Planning Policy Framework.

At Council, unfortunately, all four LibDem members proposed an amendment to the draft plan (involving the omission of some 250 houses in the proposed allocation in Takeley, but which would lead to an arbitrary and non-specific redistribution elsewhere). Despite strong representations from John, as the Cabinet Member responsible for the Local Plan, that this unevidenced and unjustified last minute proposal would, in his opinion and based upon the advice of the Director of Planning, cause further delay and would also bring into effect the latest housing numbers requirement of the Government, resulting in an additional **11%** housing allocation for our District, this proposed amendment was persisted in. Fortunately, it was defeated.

However, on the main motion to proceed, the Conservatives (with two exceptions and one exception being that of Richard from the Lib Dems) still opposed it. In consequence, the Regulation 19 Local Plan was permitted to proceed to the next stage by a majority vote of 24 members in favour with 12 against.

Residents may now wish to respond to this final consultation stage, and the relevant link is at <https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/reg-19-consultation>.

The current version of the Local Plan contains, as was previously commented on by us, not only policies about the locations where development is in principle capable of being advanced, but also very important and progressive policies (aimed to be in excess of national standards) concerning:

- the carbon make-up of new buildings
- their energy efficiency
- BioDiversity Net Gain
- high quality design
- protection of the green and blue environments
- housing mix in way of size and tenure and for social housing. In these respects, policies are being set to encourage the construction of smaller and thus more “affordable homes” in order to meet the need of so many aspiring new home makers (both owners and renters). The ability of house builders to construct larger 4/5 bed roomed houses which generate greater profits for them than smaller units will hopefully through innovative policies be contained

Felsted is naturally classified as a “Larger Village” in terms of the spatial policies provided for in the Local Plan – this reflects not merely its population size but also the wide range of facilities provided and

contained within the Parish. The quality of the facilities and services available to the community has also, resulting from the various representations made by all consultees at the Regulation 18 stage, led to an increase in the number of additional housing to be planned for in the Parish to be increased from 84 to 104. This of course is to be undertaken over the life of the Local Plan ie until 2041 and the task of determining where and how this will come about will be undertaken as part of the review of the Felsted Neighbourhood Plan which is currently being “refreshed”.

It might be noted that the “smaller villages” having much fewer/more limited facilities and services than those in the Larger Villages, and which for this purpose include Little Dunmow and Flitch Green, will fall under the definition of “countryside” in spatial terms and thus not required to supply sites for development, other than by way of infill.

Paper copies of the Local Plan will be available to view at the district council’s offices in Saffron Walden, at local libraries and the Parish Council has been provided with a copy also and a briefing to be able to assist members of the public in their own review and possible input.

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

FIVE YEAR HOUSING LAND SUPPLY

Remaining on the subject of Planning however, and it is a topic applicable until a new Local Plan is adopted and in place, we have reported to your Planning Committee the publication of the latest Five Years Housing Land Supply for the District. What is that and why is it relevant?

The Council is now in a position to “demonstrate” a housing land supply of **4.12** years for the period 2024/25 - 2028/29. This means that there are just over 4 years’ “worth” of housing planning permissions already granted and likely to lead to that volume of housing (675 pa per the “Standard Method”, uplifted to 810 pa including the Government’ imposed 20% buffer) being built in that five year period.

For so long as the current NPPF remains applicable, that represents a means of disapplying the presumption in favour of development (the so called “Tilted Balance”). However, the Government’s proposed reforms to the NPPF will amend this provision and we shall then be required to demonstrate a five year supply which on current projections we would not be able to meet, resulting in the Tilted Balance being applied once gain, until at least the time that we shall have an adopted Local Plan. Only then shall we be in a position to withstand the presumptions just described.

A fuller account of the details involved is to be found here:

<https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7051/Housing-Trajectory-and-Five-Year-Land-Supply>

OUR WARD WORK AND INTERVENTIONS

August is traditionally a quiet month for the holding of District Council meetings. Routine business for the Cabinet Members continues of course and John attended its fortnightly informal meetings (held

alternately at the UDC offices in Safron Walden and at the former banana depot at Little Canfield) and also his fortnightly portfolio meeting with the Director of Planning. Richard also served at the monthly Planning Committee meeting when a full list of applications was considered and determined.

We continued to have issues raised with us by members of the community. By way of example as to assistance provided by us regarding constituents' concerns and requests for our intervention, we have recently advised regarding matters concerning the following issues:

- Flooding at Causeway End
- The installation of a solar panel scheme within the curtilage of a listed property – listed building consent was given
- Hedge Cutting at Causeway End
- Planning condition compliance in connection with a recent housing scheme

As we explained in our last Report, we do receive periodical advice from the UDC Planning Enforcement Officers of development within our Ward which is believed to have been undertaken in breach of planning policy or conditions. This information is provided to us in confidence on the basis that it is by way of first advice of an alleged breach being investigated. We mention this practice so as to advise and reassure Members that there are instances of this type of work being undertaken "behind the scenes" even though it might not be immediately possible for us to disclose details of it to the wider community, pending conclusion of the investigations.

If there are instances of suspected planning breach which concern Members or residents, we shall be pleased to look into them and give what support we can to UDC officers in order to conduct their investigations.

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR TRAINING

We are both very committed to training for District Councillors and attend all the opportunities presented to us. Some training sessions are conducted by UDC Officers and others by external professional support. While it will be a matter to be further discussed, we are also happy for details of training opportunities made available to all Councillors but not attended by them to be made published as a matter for public inspection/awareness.

As part of this drive for transparency and accountability, we shall advise you of the training having recently or shortly to be undertaken by us, namely:

- In house and Barrister led Planning Committee Training (Richard as substitute Committee Member and John as Portfolio Holder, having overall accountability for training in this discipline)
- To be conducted by the Local Government Association - an overview of local government finance focusing on roles and responsibilities, key terminologies and processes.
- In house Code of Conduct training.

We consider that it is incumbent upon elected District Councillors to undertake professional development training so as to enable them the better to discharge their functions and meet the need for ongoing

awareness. There is a great deal of research and information made available to us by the Local Government Association and we shall draw to your attention matters which have come to our attention through that means which we consider are likely to be of interest and relevance to the Parish and its residents.

Among the pieces of research undertaken by LGA, which may be of interest to members interested in residents' views of Local Government is this link.

<https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Resident%20Satisfaction%20Polling%20Round%2038%20-%20Final.pdf>

It contains the results of satisfaction ratings as to Council service and "value for money". It is a nationwide survey and so does not pertain to Uttlesford expressly. However, many of the themes raise questions about how Uttlesford might measure its own performance. In this regard, we shall include in a future report Uttlesford's Key Performance Indicators as measured against our Statistically Similar Neighbours (large, rural districts with relatively low population numbers) and also our immediate geographic neighbours.

On a lighter note and since we are reporting following a "quiet month", we include some "fun facts" that we have gleaned from LGA sources (incorporating some links to the Office for National Statistics) !!:

- Isles of Scilly Council is the [smallest local authority](#) by population with 2,100 people as of the 2021 census.
- Kent County Council is the [largest local authority](#) by population with 1,578,500 people as of the 2021 census.
- The [most changeable council](#) is probably London Borough of Merton. Since 1964 control has passed between Labour, the Conservatives and no overall control several times. It is currently under Labour control.
- London boroughs account for the 20 most [densely populated areas in the UK, as of the 2022 mid-year ONS estimates](#). The highest population density in the UK, of 16,500 people per square kilometre, is found in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. This is followed by Islington with 14,800 people per square kilometre.
- Since the May 2024 local elections, Castle Point Borough Council has no councillors from any national political party. It is one of only two councils in the UK where all councillors are Independent, the other being the Isles of Scilly.

DECARBONISATION MATTERS AND HEAT NETWORKS

Concerns have been expressed by many residents across the District who live in older/historic/listed dwellings and those perhaps located in Conservation Areas, as to how in the future when carbon fuelled heating systems will no longer be permitted/feasible, they will be in a position to heat their homes/domestic water. This may become relevant to our residents who live in the historic cores of Felsted and Stebbing where the fitting of air source heat pumps might not be possible for space limited reasons. This piece might therefore be written a little "early", but we draw its content to the attention of the

community as an example of how this issue might be tackled in the medium/long term, namely on a collective rather than individual householder basis. The detail applies to the village of Littlebury (lying to the north-west of Saffron Walden).

Littlebury Energy Project (LEP), a community organisation supported by its Parish Council, were successful in receiving a grant from the Community Energy Fund (CEF) for a feasibility study on heat networks for the village to be undertaken. The feasibility study aims to assess the viability of decarbonisation approaches for Littlebury village, primarily focusing on communal heat networks. The study will assess the village's energy demand, explore options for improving energy efficiency in buildings, evaluate renewable energy sources like water, air, and ground source heat networks, and engage with residents and businesses to gather feedback on proposed solutions.

Some members/residents who have an interest in the subject and wish to learn more of it might be interested in attending a presentation by the scheme's organisers and consultants which will take place on Wednesday 25th September at Littlebury Village Hall, 7pm to 8.30pm. Further details and a form to fill in to register for the event here - <https://lep.swce.co.uk/community-survey/>.

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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