



UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Felsted & Stebbing Ward

District Councillors Sandi Merifield & John Evans



DISTRICT COUNCILLORS' REPORT: JANUARY 2023

Cllrs. Sandi Merifield and John Evans are pleased to present their Monthly Report to the Parish Council.

Much of this Report is devoted to non-specific to Parish matters but we think that members and residents generally will find the items covered very topical and may themselves wish to follow up questions they might have via the details contained in the hyperlinks below. We are as always happy to discuss further details at your meeting, agenda time permitting, or outside the meeting in person or in correspondence.

PLANNING – NATIONAL POLICY MATTERS GENERALLY

You will no doubt have been following closely the progress in Parliament of the Levelling Up & Regeneration Bill. This is a topic frequently referred to in the national press and broadcast media and indeed the resistance mounted to it by a number (60) of back bench MPs (led by Theresa Villiers MP of Barnet North) during December 2022 caused the Minister (Michael Gove) to issue policy statements indicating that the Government was prepared to “water down the housing numbers” (as reported in some of the Press). It will be recalled that in the instance of Uttlesford District, our housing requirement as it currently stands is 701 dwellings pa (arrived at by the “Standard Method”) for the next Local Plan period.

The Government has not expressly reduced this requirement for Uttlesford (or any other District) since it still maintains its national policy target of building 300,000 dwellings pa. This volume is significantly more than the numbers built in recent decades (for example, 242,700 were built in 2019-20 and 216,490 in 2020-21).

However, the upshot of the parliamentary manoeuvres is that the target will hereafter be advisory and not mandatory as it had been previously and will be a starting point with new flexibilities to reflect local circumstances. These revised policy principles are to be found here, published after our last Report, on 6 December 2022: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/communities-put-at-heart-of-planning-system-as-government-strengthens-levelling-up-and-regeneration-bill>

Uttlesford District Council, Council Offices, London Road, Saffron Walden, Essex CB11 4ER

e-mail contacts: cllrmerifield@uttlesford.gov.uk and cllrevans@uttlesford.gov.uk

As is, this was not enough, the Government released on 22 December 2022 a major consultation on planning reform generally and very importantly upon proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (“NPPF”). We anticipate that your Planning Sub-Committee will wish to review these materials in detail and we set out here the materials released for consultation:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/levelling-up-and-regeneration-bill-reforms-to-national-planning-policy/levelling-up-and-regeneration-bill-reforms-to-national-planning-policy>

together with a mark-up of the current NPPF showing the proposed amendments to it:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1126647/NPPF_July_2021_-_showing_proposed_changes.pdf

These documents contain particularly important policy proposals and UDC will be responding to them by the consultation deadline of 2 March 2023. Of course, individual Parish Councils, members, and residents themselves are very welcome to submit their own responses to the Department directly.

Rather than burden this report with too much detail, we would be pleased to discuss these developments with your Planning Sub-Committee at a time convenient to them, if you thought that would be appropriate.

Meanwhile, however, the following are among important *potential* changes to the NPPF being consulted upon:

- *Amendments to paragraph 11 (d) “tilted balance” (i.e., the presumption in favour of sustainable development) and of the requirements on local planning authorities to maintain an adequate housing supply and meet housing delivery targets*
- *Loosening of the local plan “soundness” test*
- *references to the standard method as only an “**advisory starting point**”*
- *express references to the needs for retirement housing, housing with care and care homes*
- *References to “beauty”*
- *“Green Belt boundaries are not required to be reviewed and altered if this would be the only means of meeting the objectively assessed need for housing over the plan period”*
- *Changes in relation to climate change and renewable energy*
- *“The availability of agricultural land used for food production should be considered, alongside the other policies in this Framework, when deciding what sites are most appropriate for development”*
- *Currency and relevance of Neighbourhood Plans*

The views of Parish Councils upon these matters will be sought so as better to inform the UDC response to the consultation.

“FIVE YEAR NUMBERS”

Uttlesford District Council, Council Offices, London Road, Saffron Walden, Essex CB11 4ER

e-mail contacts: cllmerifield@uttlesford.gov.uk and cllrevans@uttlesford.gov.uk

We reported last month on the good news regarding the five years' housing land supply values which are relevant under the NPPF (as it *currently* stands) linked to a "presumption in favour of sustainable development" which is applicable unless five years' supply can be demonstrated.

The updated value of 4.89 years as of 1 April 2022 has very recently been published and its detail is to be found here:

https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/media/11757/Housing-Trajectory-and-Five-Year-Land-Supply-1-April-2022-December-2022/pdf/Uttlesford_5YHLS_Statement_1_April_2022.pdf?m=638066240204870000

We have noted that planning applicants who have submitted applications recently are still referring to the prior data, but the UDC Development Management team are we understand including on the planning application portal the updated position so that any reader of it can familiarise themselves with the accurate position.

AIRSPACE AND ROUTEING

You will recall that we have reported upon consultation exercises being undertaken by Civil Aviation Authority regarding yet more potential changes in routeing/flight paths relating to all UK airspace. This continues and there is a yet another stage to be consulted upon dealing with the method and level of consultation on the proposed changes which closes on **5 March 2023**. So, the CAA is now ready to consult on options on what the new airspace change guidance may look like and the CAA have reported that they have:

- Completed workshops with internal stakeholders in the CAA (in June 2021) and with external stakeholders (in September 2021); and
- Completed an engagement survey and published a report on findings on all engagement activity up to September 2022.

John is a member of the Strategic Aviation Special Interest Group (representing local authorities in the proximity of English airports) ("SASIG") and it will be meeting shortly to review these and we will report further thereafter concerning potential impacts in routeing consultations. In previous responses, he submitted that routeing considerations should consider the location of conservation areas and the number of heritage assets/listed buildings below flight paths, these being particularly sensitive given the difficulty or even inability to fit double glazing and other noise attenuations to their windows and doors.

SOLAR FARMS

In anticipation of the two applications for solar farms which are anticipated to be made, John has introduced your Planning Sub-Committee to the local representative of the Council for the Protection of **Uttlesford District Council, Council Offices, London Road, Saffron Walden, Essex CB11 4ER**

e-mail contacts: cllrmerifield@uttlesford.gov.uk and cllrevans@uttlesford.gov.uk

Rural England (“CPRE”). He lives in Thaxted and has made submissions on behalf of CPRE in the case of other applications in the district and we are pleased that he has provided some materials and advice likely to be of assistance. Contact with him and your Sub-Committee will be maintained regarding this topic.

Residents may be unaware however that The Essex Climate Action Commission has recommended that “Essex produces enough renewable energy within the county to meet its own needs by 2040”, with the Commission seeing a role in this for large scale solar production. The County is experiencing a significant number of planning applications for solar farms at a range of scales and this is expected to continue to rise if Government targets for renewable energy are to be met.

This page appearing on the ECC website [Solar Farm Guiding Principles | Essex Design Guide](#) has been developed to provide local guidance on planning proposals for ground-mounted solar farms and inform a consistent set of minimum requirements of issues that need to be addressed.

The guidance will help residents understand the issues and, perhaps address some of their concerns and enable them better to make suitable representations at the material time.

COST OF LIVING SUPPORT

At the risk of repeating this entry, but we think it bears repetition given the very difficult economic conditions being faced by many, we would like to commend again this link appearing on the UDC website which itself contains a number (11) of points of reference and advice to those who might be in need of cost of living support. It is updated as further elements of support become available or are changed. In addition to the practical measures and other advice given by UDC, we continue to support the excellent work of *Citizens Advice*.

[Cost of living support - Uttlesford District Council](#)

VISIT UTTLESFORD – TOURISM

Significant efforts have been made and financial support provided by UDC over the past two years to promote tourism and hospitality in the district and businesses involved in can now benefit from free annual membership of **Visit Essex**.

Visit Essex is the shop window for Essex tourism businesses with 1.2 million visitors to its website every year and 50,000 social media followers.

During the past year Visit Essex has reached its largest growth in social media followers, a 91% increase in traffic to its website, won five marketing awards, hosted twenty press/influencer trips and over 260 media articles. Membership is at the highest it has ever been with a 95% retention rate of members. We would recommend local hospitality and other relevant businesses to consider this benefit:

[Uttlesford District Council, Council Offices, London Road, Saffron Walden, Essex CB11 4ER](#)

e-mail contacts: cllmerifield@uttlesford.gov.uk and cllrevans@uttlesford.gov.uk

[Free annual silver membership with Visit Essex - Uttlesford for business](#)

ELECTORAL PURDAH

It will be recalled that District Elections will be held in May 2023 and thus from mid-March, there will be a period of pre-election purdah when communications of a “political nature” by Councillors will not be permissible. We do not think – as that was our aim – that our monthly Reports during the past 3.75 years have contained anything of a “party political nature” and that will remain the case and continue throughout the period that we shall have served the residents of the Parish. However, we mention it to explain to residents that we are required to be especially careful during the latter part of March until the Election takes place to avoid giving advice or taking action which could (wrongly) be construed as being said or taken for perceived “political advantage”.

OUR ASSISTANCE AND MEMBERS’ INITIATIVE

We have now been able to use most of our Members’ Initiative funding in this municipal year and will in our next Report list the sectors of the Communities in both our represented Parishes to whom funds have been allocated/their purpose.

Of course, we are always incredibly happy to hear from any parish councillors and residents and to meet them, whether at our Surgery held immediately before your Parish Council meeting or otherwise, should there be anything they think we can help with or answer any questions.

Cllr Sandi Merifield

E: cllr.merifield@uttlesford.gov.uk

Cllr John Evans

E: cllr.evans@uttlesford.gov.uk

Uttlesford District Council, Council Offices, London Road, Saffron Walden, Essex CB11 4ER

e-mail contacts: cllrmerifield@uttlesford.gov.uk and cllrevans@uttlesford.gov.uk