



UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Felsted & Stebbing Ward

District Councillors Sandi Merifield & John Evans



DISTRICT COUNCILLORS' REPORT: JUNE 2021

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

CORONAVIRUS

Now that restrictions are being progressively lifted under the Government's "Road Map" and in light of the requirement that Council Meetings, the Cabinet, its Committees and the regulatory Committee Meetings (Planning and Licensing) are held in public, we have for the first time since March 2020 attended those meetings in person. While it has been a pleasure actually meeting up with our colleagues once again, the precautions required to be taken, even in the large Chamber where all meetings are held, however few members are required to be in attendance (following social distancing, mask wearing unless speaking, windows open, temperatures taken on entry into the building and negative testing) serve as reminders that we all need to be on our guard against contracting or spreading the disease.

Only essential officers attend meetings in person, with others, as well as Members who wish to speak or observe but are not members of the particular body, attending remotely.

Working groups and the many non-Cabinet committees continue to meet remotely, which we have found to be a very efficient way of representing our constituents and conducting our Ward business.

STANSTED AIRPORT PLANNING APPEAL

The very disappointing news of last week (26 May), as you will have seen, was that the Planning Inspectors have decided to allow the appeal against the decision of the Planning Committee to refuse the application of Stansted Airport Limited, the owners of the airport (Manchester Airport Group) to construct infrastructure which will allow airfield operations to increase to 274,000 aircraft movements and the permissible throughput of passengers to increase from the current permitted level of 39 million passengers pa to 43 million pa.

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The Planning Committee (which it will be recalled is made up on cross party lines) unanimously (with abstentions however from two members who were past members of Stop Stansted Expansion group) refused the application in January 2020 on four grounds which included the potential impact of the proposed development on aircraft noise, air quality and carbon/climate change. Subsequent to closing of the Inquiry, on 20 April 2021, the Government announced that it would set a new climate change target to cut carbon emissions by 78%, compared to 1990 levels, and that for the first time the Sixth Carbon Budget would incorporate international aviation and shipping emissions.

In addition to its previous submissions, UDC then submitted that the Inspectors should wait until the end of July 2021 so that their decision could be informed by the policy statements promised by the Government before the end of spring 2021, including specifically: (1) the Transport Decarbonisation Plan; (2) the Heating and Building Strategy; and (3) the publication of the “net zero” aviation strategy.

However, the Inspectors concluded that the original basis for refusal of planning permission was without justification, the proposed conditions advanced by UDC to mitigate and manage the proposed development were unjustified. They found (among other matters too) that:

“Carbon emissions are predominantly a matter for national Government and the effects of airport expansion have been considered, tested and found to be acceptable in “Making Best Use” [of existing runways being part of their national aviation policy]. It is clear that UK climate change obligations would not be put at risk by the development, including in light of the Government’s 20 April announcement.”

The Inspectors also determined that UDC be liable for STAL’s costs and their own, which are as will be appreciated, substantial.

It is ironic that the Decision was handed down in advance of the further proposed developments described above and also notwithstanding the requests made to the two Secretaries of State (MHCLG and DfT) to have the Appeal called in to be determined by them, being of national strategic importance, but declined.

Advice is being taken by UDC from its Barrister team as to what steps are open to be taken by it in light of this disappointing Decision. We shall bring you up to date further in our next Month’s Report.

LOCAL PLAN & POLICY MATTERS

The Local Plan Leadership Group (on which Sandi serves and John is in attendance as Portfolio Holder) continues to meet (twice last month). They have recommended a Vision and Objectives for the Local Plan, which John took to Cabinet and were approved on 27th May 2021. They include (a brief extract):

“Our vision reflects the ambition required to achieve net-zero carbon status by 2030 and to protect and enhance Uttlesford’s rich natural environment and built heritage. Uttlesford will

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embrace the changes required to be net zero carbon, enabling us to live, work and play within the limits of the environment whilst protecting our natural environment.

The essential landscape value of Uttlesford's countryside will be enhanced promoting biodiversity and increased woodland, contributing to the region's prosperous rural and agricultural economy. The rivers of Uttlesford will be protected and enhanced, and together with green infrastructure, contribute to a network of blue and green corridors for the benefit of wildlife and people. Access to the countryside for recreation and tourism will be promoted in a managed way, supporting agricultural diversification, the creation of jobs and the healthy lifestyles of residents and visitors alike. The network of footpaths, safe cycle routes and bridleways will be expanded and improved resulting in Uttlesford residents having the highest levels of active travel and health in Essex.

New development will link homes with jobs, be of high quality design and focus on sustainable construction, materials and travel.”

The Agenda item brought to Cabinet which contains the details of the Vision and Objectives is at pp 30 – 34 of the pack:

<https://uttlesford.moderngov.co.uk/documents/g5731/Public%20reports%20pack%2027th-May-2021%2019.00%20Cabinet.pdf?T=10>

The Call for Sites exercise has closed and the UDC policy officers will be examining the details thereof and beginning to assess them against criteria which are being finalised presently. They will be reporting further in July and we will bring a more detailed report to you again thereafter.

In the interim, it seems that several promoters and land owners have submitted sites on the edge of villages across the District for proposed development of varying scale, contending that they are “sustainable” and that the balance of allowing permission under the NPPF “tilted balance” should be exercised in their favour by Officers and the Planning Committee, given the absence of a five year land supply.

CRIME ISSUES – COUNTY LINES

The following article/link has been prepared by the Essex Violence and Vulnerability Unit on the subject of “County Lines”. In Uttlesford, we liaise closely with this Unit through our Community Safety Officer and the Uttlesford Community Safety Partnership (CSP) which has just completed a week of virtual workshops involving year 6 pupils. Tic Box Productions (a theatre group) was commissioned by the CSP to assist in communicating to the pupils the relevant risks and dangers of being exploited by the criminals operating in this way.

The YouTube film in the link below looks through the lens to show how and why some young people can be lured into drug trafficking.

<https://www.essexcountylines.co.uk/?fbclid=IwAR3BQ06vub5fElcrsW9Ri2E-oAuTN7fWNkcK2HAG7Lp5-5sRHN6PJzCBtc>

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Community Governance

We have been asked by the UDC Electoral Services Manager to mention to you the consultation exercise about which he will have written to you separately, but for convenience his paper (without attachments) is supplied here.



Note for local
councils on Communi

Neighbourhood Planning (your neighbours)

The Parish of Little Dunmow has decided to undertake a Neighbourhood Plan and it was given approval to do so by UDC last month.

Stepping Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group have finalised the latest draft of their Neighbourhood Plan and it is to progress to submission to UDC at Regulation 16 stage in June 2021.

Finally, as before, while we have yet to hold face to face councillor surgeries given COVID social distancing regulations, we will do so as soon as a safe means of doing so is available. Meanwhile, we would be very happy to hear from any parish councillors or residents by email or phone should there be anything they think we can help with or answer any questions you may have on our report.

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