



UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Felsted & Stebbing Ward

District Councillors Sandi Merifield & John Evans



DISTRICT COUNCILLORS' REPORT: FEBRUARY 2021

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

We are very pleased to have the opportunity of reporting to you in detail, particularly during this period when physical meetings cannot be convened. Moreover, since some Residents have asked if we report to the Parish Council and if they could have sight of our Reports. We would be grateful if publication of our Reports might be thought appropriate and perhaps made available to the Community by way of hyperlink incorporated in the Minutes of your Meeting. We hope that this request might be considered positively.

COUNCIL INVESTMENTS AND FINANCES

We have not previously provided an overview of the Council's investment activity in the past 12 months, but as this is now coming towards a conclusion and the Council Tax requirements for 2021/22 will be issued shortly, this is perhaps an opportune time to do so. The purpose of the programme is to be **income generating**, seeking to avoid the need for substantial increases in the part of the UDC element of the Council Tax precept. The investments have been/are to be made with the assistance of borrowing from the Public Works Loan Board and are the subject of detailed review by and approval of the UDC Investment Board (made up of 11 Members and two independent experts) before being considered and approved by the Full Council. All the sites purchased/to be purchased have been visited by Officers. The Investment Board was provided with professional expert reports and appraisals on each proposed investment.

Further explanation and justification for the Strategy will be found at:

[Commercial Strategy 2021 - 2025.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

UDC's commercial investment portfolio is now growing towards its target investment total of £300m and you may be interested to see a summary of the investments, values invested and the tenants:

Completed Investments

£

Chesterford Research Park (29 tenants - mostly pharma)

60,841,000

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Stane Retail Park, Colchester (Aldi and B&Q as anchor tenants)	30,424,000
Vet Hospital, Livingston (Pets at Home)	5,925,000
Retail distribution centre Chorley (Waitrose - NW England and Scotland)	55,000,000
Skyway House, Takeley (Weston Homes)	20,000,000
	172,190,000

Further Committed Investments	£
Chesterford Research Park	13,400,000
Investment X	42,555,000
Investment Y	35,000,000
	90,955,000
Current Options	£
Investment Z	35,000,000
Total	£ 298,145,000

The investments not identified relate to purchases yet to complete and so remain commercially confidential for the present.

The purchases are all of freehold land and the related buildings, not the businesses operating there. These investments result in the expansion and balancing-up of UDC's portfolio to correct the previous concentration in one asset ie Chesterford Research Park, so that when the portfolio is complete, that proportion will have reduced from 100% to about 25% of the whole. The capital value of investments within Uttlesford will be around 31% of the total.

The Council's investments generate a significant income servicing not only the capital and interest payments but vitally provide a surplus enabling council services to be fully supported including business Covid recovery initiatives, cover the costs to the council of the pandemic so far, sports provision as well as £1m of green initiative/environmental work. This enables the inherited future funding gap of £5m pa for the provision of council services to be filled.

CORONAVIRUS

We both attended a briefing on Tuesday 2nd February by the West Essex Clinical Commissioning Group on the Vaccination Programme and will be happy to pass on any relevant information at the meeting. The following link will take you to the webpage on the UDC website that gives the latest information on help and guidance for residents and businesses on all things Coronavirus related.

<https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/coronavirus>

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LOCAL PLAN & POLICY MATTERS

We continue to update you regarding this topic and indeed, it will remain a report item for quite a long time to come.

Importantly, early consultation with the Community continues via the Community Stakeholder Forum, whose schedule of work is found at:

<https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/consultation-and-the-community-stakeholder-forum>

We are pleased that you are also able to participate in the Councils' own specialist forum for members of the Uttlesford Town and Councils to discuss the consultation themes, and which we both propose to attend as invited observers. Thank you for providing meanwhile detailed comments upon the draft Statement of Community Engagement and Associated Strategy, which have been taken into account – it is an important document and one which has to be seen by the Local Plan Inspectors in due course to be complaint. That will be coming before Cabinet on 9 March 2021.

Further, since our last Report, the Government has just put out a further consultation on planning policy including to NPPF and focussing on design policy looking to strengthen design quality in new developments including a proposed National Model Design Code. We shall be engaging in this consultation exercise.

STANSTED AIRPORT APPEAL

The Appeal Inquiry has commenced as you know and sits Tuesday – Friday each week (although not during the period 15 -19 February 2021) and proceedings are now being conducted virtually, with the Inspectors, the Parties' representatives and experts all located remotely. Proceedings are being broadcast however on YouTube and can be followed "live", as well as on catch up via:

http://stream-uk.venue-av.com/e/sai/live_stream

This week's proceedings are focussed on Climate Change and further information is available including the Inquiry Programme on:

<https://programmeofficers.co.uk/ssairport/>

LAND EAST OF HIGHWOOD QUARRY – DUNMOW

As you will recall, Landsec is currently consulting on its emerging proposals for up to 1,200 new homes on the Land East of Highwood Quarry. They had asked for all feedback to be received by 1 February, however as they are continuing to receive a high volume of feedback they have decided to extend the end date of the consultation to **Monday 8th February** to allow anyone who has not already responded but would like to do so, a further opportunity to submit their comments.

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As part of the planning submission, Landsec will include a consultation report which will detail the pre-application engagement and consultation undertaken on the proposals and also an analysis and summary of the feedback received. More information on the proposals and the consultation can be found at:

<https://landeasthighwoodquarry.co.uk/>

COUNCILLOR INITIATIVE FUND

As previously advised, there are still funds available from our Councillor Initiative Fund, therefore we would be very pleased to hear from any individuals or Community groups that feel we could contribute towards an activity or idea that would help residents of any age or gender.

Meanwhile, perhaps it would be helpful for you to be aware that we have approached the Head Teacher team at the Primary School enquiring as to any assistance that would be helpful. We look forward to hearing to what we can contribute for the school.

While we are still unable to hold face to face councillor surgeries, 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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Cllr John Evans

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