

## **District Councillors Report for Annual Parish Meeting 2025-26**

### **The New Uttlesford Local Plan 2021-41**

The Council adopted our Local Plan at an Extraordinary Council meeting on Wednesday 25 March 2026. The 2021-2041 Local Plan now has full weight in the determination of planning applications. This plan supercedes the previous 2005 Local Plan, which due to its age and therefore ineffectiveness, allowed the establishment of poorly planned developments with a lack of provision of appropriate infrastructure.

The council must determine planning applications in line with the local plan, unless other overriding considerations need to be taken into account.

The plan sets out a vision and planning framework for how Uttlesford should develop and grow until 2041. It includes how and where high-quality new homes should be built, where employment sites should be placed and what infrastructure, including schools, health care, community and leisure facilities, retail as well as transport will be needed to support them.

Embedded within the New Local Plan is agreement taken by the Council in 2019 that we pledge to take local action to prevent a climate and ecological catastrophe through the development of practices and policies, with an aim to achieving net-zero carbon status by 2030 and to protect and enhance bio-diversity in the district.

The Council is also currently preparing the strategy for a Community Infrastructure Levy(CIL). The Community Infrastructure Levy is a charge on most types of new developments that propose:

- development over 100 square metres net additional floorspace (gross internal area)
- one or more new dwellings of any floorspace

Funds raised from CIL can help to pay for local infrastructure projects that are needed to support new developments, such as schools, health services, leisure, open spaces and transport improvements.

### **Local Government Reorganisation**

On 25 March the Secretary of State announced the government's decision to implement the proposal for 5 unitary councils in Essex.

We will be part of the new West Essex Council currently served by:

- Epping Forest District Council
- Harlow District Council
- Uttlesford District Council

What happens next?

For now, nothing changes in the way UDC will provide services to us.

The Council priority is to make sure that residents, businesses and our local communities continue to get the support they need without interruption.

Then, on 6 May 2027 there will be elections to the new unitary authorities, known initially as shadow authorities and will start planning how the new councils will work.

Once the new councils are created on 1 April 2028, they will gradually start to join up how they work and the systems they use. These changes will be relatively gradual, developed with "thought and care". As the new councils form, some services will be joined up behind the scenes to make things simpler and more efficient.

UDC is taking a very positive attitude towards LGR, being proactive about changes, but acknowledging that there are many challenges. The new ward comprising the existing wards of Thaxted and the Eastons, and The Sampfords, represented in the new West Essex Unitary Authority by two, or maybe three ward Councillors and will be known as "Thaxted". There will be 86 councillors as members of the new council.

I believe that these new councillors representing this new ward must be able to strongly represent the rural nature of this community, resisting the imposition of changes which may affect its sustainability, and being able to liaise with the Parish Councils who will hopefully have an influential role.

### **Housing Board**

Following the failure of the housing and maintenance contract for council housing with Axis Europe, this work has been taken "in house", with "UDC Repairs Direct" going live on 1 April 2026. So far anecdotal reports are that this is working well, and there will hopefully be cost savings, due to the different business model.

There is some concern amongst residents of council properties that pressure is being applied for them to accept insulation to their homes and introduction of, for instance, air-source heat pumps, as part of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Project. Some of this appears to be due to mis-information, but the Housing Board acknowledges that more education is needed.

Concern has also been raised by tenants of private rental properties that homes may be at risk due to the imposition of insulation and energy use standards by 2023, and costs involved.

I am also concerned that lack adaption of older and listed buildings and modernisation of energy use is not occurring in a way which will render them sustainable in the future, this of course is more of a planning issue than housing.

Moving forward towards the initiation of The West Essex Unitary Authority, The Housing team are working with Epping and Harlow Councils to unify IT systems used to manage and monitor housing issues.

### **Planning function**

The council has successfully moved away from its development management service being 'Designated' by government. This is a very significant step and was achieved in June 2025. It is seen to be the result of a "huge endeavour" both by officers and elected members in reducing, to around four per cent, the number of major planning application decisions overturned at appeal. This is a

reduction from the level of around 18 per cent previously seen, which is what led to the designation, given the threshold is 10 per cent. The improved situation has been aided by the council managing to develop greatly increased officer stability in this area despite the challenges of a very competitive employment market. This greater stability is also enabling the council now to process consistently 100 per cent of major planning applications within required timescales. This achievement reflects improved processes, more effective case management and a more collaborative approach.

### **Buses**

Essex County Council planned the withdrawal of a number of bus routes effecting, in particular in this ward the 320 and 321 routes from Saffron Walden to Haverhill, risking a significant loss of independence and potential isolation for some residents and a major problem for some school pupils (and their parents).

Through the joint efforts of residents, parish councils and particularly Cllrs Martin Foley and Paul Gadd, this decision has been reversed at least until 2028.