

Councillor John Evans,

Portfolio Holder for Planning

Report to Council, 16 July 2024:

Local Plan

The draft Regulation 19 (Submission) version of the Local Plan has been published for Local Plan Panel (LPP) Consideration. The document is currently in 'Word' document form with maps and diagrams inserted, accompanied by Policy Maps and a full suite of evidence. Once the document has been considered by LPP, Cabinet and then Council on 30 July, and subject to the approval of the latter, a final desktop-published version will be produced for formal Regulation 19 consultation. Consultation would run for 8 weeks from 8 August to 3 October.

It remains important for the council to continue on its local plan journey as set out in our Local Development Scheme (LDS) timetable. The incoming Government's manifesto outlined that it would "take tough action to ensure that planning authorities have up-to-date local plans". The Regulation 19 Plan also acknowledges that 6,812 homes have been consented in Uttlesford since April 2021; many on appeal. It has been extremely challenging to plan infrastructure strategically with so much speculative development coming forward year on year. Councils that have a Local Plan have greater powers to promote good schemes or reject unsuitable schemes compared to those that do not have a plan in place. It is vital that Uttlesford adopts a new Local Plan so that we can take back control locally.

The Local Plan proposes 3,738 additional homes on strategic sites (sites of 100 homes or more) and 900 homes through non-strategic allocations. The response to the Regulation 18 consultation was invaluable in taking forward this latest iteration of the plan. The Regulation 19 version removes the previously proposed strategic allocations from Thaxted and Newport. It includes noticeable improvements to the remaining allocations, including significant new areas of open space at Takeley, including a substantial extension to Priors Wood. A new allocation for 110 homes is included for Elsenham. This allocation secures sufficient land and contributions for a new primary school and early years facility in the settlement. Newport and the Larger Villages will proceed to provide for their respective allocations via Neighbourhood Plans.

As set out from the outset of our Local Plan journey, the Plan is to be "climate-led". Core Policy 1 of the plan is focussed on addressing climate change, and the detailed policies that sit below it are some of the most rigorous climate and energy efficiency policies in the country. Similarly, our policies governing the water efficiency of new homes set some of the highest standards in the country in order to help protect our precious chalk streams from over-abstraction and for water resilience generally. Our Affordable Housing policy has also been enhanced. The target of 35% affordable housing overall remains however, while the policy has been amended to prioritise social rented homes which are more 'affordable' than other types of affordable housing and will be within the reach of more residents within the district.

I would like to thank all those who took the time to contribute their comments during the Regulation 18 consultation and at the various LPP meetings held this year (and LPLG meetings before that). Those contributions have been taken into account. I would also like to acknowledge the input of the LPP, which has been reviewing chapters of the plan since late May and has prompted various amendments and improvements.

The Planning Team has worked very hard on the local plan, particularly so on the latest iteration, which was brought together in a little over 6 months. I thank all our officers for their dedication and professionalism in advising upon and drafting what is arguably the most important document the council has published for many years. We shall of course have the opportunity to consider it further at our Extraordinary Meeting on 30 July.

Development Management

Performance of Development Management & Enforcement remains strong. We have noted a welcomed reduction in major appeals being heard during this quarter, a factor which will contribute to the Council's journey towards de-designation. The council is now receiving a high proportion of directly made applications with a reduction in the number of applicants opting for the S62a (PINS route).

From April, it became a requirement to comply with Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) provisions on all non-householder (and some exempt planning applications). This will significantly change the way we operate. Officers are scheduling training for members on this subject for later this year.

In terms of training, mandatory training for Planning Committee Members was delivered by senior officers on 22 May and 17 June 2024. All Planning Members and their substitutes are able to sit on committee for a further year as a result.

I am pleased to report that the performance monitoring software, Power BI, which Cabinet recently agreed to fund, is now being used by all Development Management officers. Managers and officers are able to access live Performance Data at the click of a button. The software is soon to be tested by Building Control officers, who will start using it later this year. The Planning Service will then assist Environmental Services bring in the software for use in their function.

Building Control

Four of our Building Control Officers are now Registered Building Inspectors, three at Level 2A and one at Level 2A-G. This level of accreditation allows the team to check and inspect all but high-risk Buildings. Uttlesford officers are unlikely to be required to inspect high risk buildings, which include tower blocks and the like. A fifth officer recently sat the Level 2A exam and we await the outcome.

One of those accredited at Level 2A is now in the process of getting qualified for 2A-G. If successful, this will add further to the resilience of the service. The team is also

recruiting for a trainee or graduate building control officer to ensure succession-planning going forward.