



Corporate Plan 2023-27

Making Uttlesford the best place to live, work and visit





Introduction

This plan sets out the vision and priorities of Uttlesford District Council for the next four years. It also outlines how the council will deliver its services, measure its performance, and manage its resources in a challenging and changing environment.

Our vision is to make Uttlesford the best place to live, work and visit. We want to preserve and enhance the natural beauty, rural character and heritage of our district, while supporting sustainable growth and development that meets the needs and aspirations of our communities. We want to provide high quality and accessible services that are responsive to local needs and deliver value for money. We want to work with our partners and residents to tackle the key challenges and opportunities facing our district.

This version of the plan contains actions specific to the 2024/25 year, which is the second year of the plan's life.



Priorities

To achieve our vision, we have four strategic priorities that will guide our work over the next four years:



Protecting and enhancing our environment



Encouraging economic growth



Building strong communities



Putting residents first

Delivery

To deliver this corporate plan, we will:

- Develop annual service plans that detail how each service area will contribute to the corporate priorities
- Monitor and report on our performance against key indicators and targets on a quarterly basis
- Review our financial position regularly and ensure effective budget management and control
- Engage with our stakeholders, including residents, businesses, partners, staff and councillors on a regular basis
- Review this corporate plan annually and update it as necessary to reflect changing circumstances

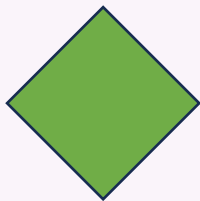
Our four-year plan will be delivered during challenging financial times in which we need to reduce our budget by around 25 percent.

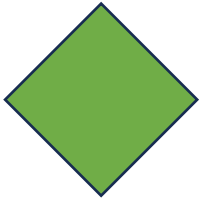


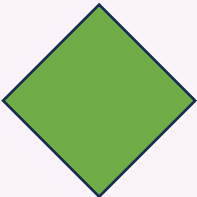
Protecting and enhancing our environment

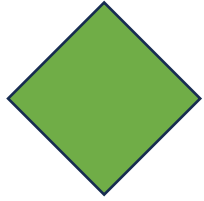
We will protect and improve our environment by reducing our carbon footprint, promoting biodiversity, managing waste and recycling, and supporting green initiatives.

Priority	What we will do	How we will do it	How we will measure it
Take action on climate change	Clearly set out and publicise our priorities for the coming years to meet our net zero by 2030 pledge, including reducing emissions from our vehicle fleet and corporate buildings.	We will implement the new 24/25 Climate Change Action Plan that details the projects we will focus on during the year. These will support work to reduce carbon emissions.	We will monitor successful completion of activities with the Action Plan and provide quarterly updates on progress.
	Reduce direct emissions from council housing stock. This includes new-build homes being planned/developed.	We will install clean-air heating solutions and develop measures to retro-fit homes to improve sustainability and contribute towards meeting the 2030 net zero pledge.	We will publish a Carbon Management framework and plan by December 2024 to track carbon emission reduction in Council operations, including energy, fuel and water consumption.
	Provide community leadership and enable local action on climate change.	We will review the Zero Carbon Communities Grant fund to agree a revised scheme to support delivery of community projects that are focused on carbon emission reduction and biodiversity restoration or enhancement.	We will submit a bid to the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund with the aim of improving the environmental performance of c.200 of our housing stock. Subject to a successful bid we will commence the decarbonisation project in quarter 1 of 2024/25.
			A proposal for a revised grants scheme for community groups will be agreed by June 2024 subject to approval of the scheme, applications will be submitted by December 2024 and a decision made in the early part of 2025.

	<p>Deliver sustainable ways of working across the council to reduce the carbon impact of business activities.</p>	<p>We will develop and deliver Carbon Literacy training for all staff to support embedding sustainability and climate change into ways of working across the council.</p> <p>We will set up a Sustainability and Climate Action Board to lead delivery of the Council climate action plan across all parts of the organisation and commence work to develop a corporate Carbon Management Plan.</p>	<p>Training will be developed and piloted to the first staff cohort by May 2024.</p> <p>We will set up the new Board in April 2024 and review its effectiveness after 12 months.</p>
	<p>The 24/25 Climate Change Action Plan has been approved. The bid to the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund was successful and as a result around 200 homes will be improved to EPC rating C through the coming months. A decarbonisation survey has been undertaken on key Council assets of London Road and Canfield which will provide evidence for a future decarbonisation plan for those sites.</p> <p>Carbon Literacy training is being developed although has not be delivered by the May 2024 date. Instead, it is likely to be rolled out in the summer. This minor delay is not considered significant enough to warrant rating overall progress in this priority as amber. The Sustainability and Climate Action Board has been established as per the timescales and its first meeting was held in April.</p> <p>Other activities in this priority area are scheduled for later in the year.</p>		
<p>Conserve and enhance the quality and diversity of the district's natural habitats and wildlife</p>	<p>Fulfil our bio-diversity duty by using the planning system to conserve, enhance and create new ecological habitat.</p>	<p>We will support and promote the public consultation on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Uttlesford, to ensure widespread reach and engagement.</p> <p>We will manage Council land and property using environmentally friendly practices</p>	<p>We will promote the consultation, which is due to be published in early 2024 through our communication channels to drive engagement among district residents.</p> <p>We will identify and deliver projects on our own estate and publish our progress and achievements by March 2025</p>

		that will promote biodiversity. We will develop robust planning polices as part of the Local Plan relevant to habitat protection, enhancement and creation.	We will fully consider Regulation 18 consultation responses and use them to draft a Regulation 19 version of the plan for consultation in July 2024.
		We will require and monitor bio-diversity net gain in relation to new development and ensure the council has access to specialist advice from a qualified ecologist.	Bio-diversity net gain data will be monitored for every major planning decision from January 2024 with a rolling target of 100% of schemes to include bio-diversity net gain.
	<p>The Planning Department is now requiring bio-diversity net-gain details at the point of validating new planning applications and assessing relevant applications against bio-diversity net-gain requirements. The emerging Local Plan is also bringing forward ecological policies in order to achieve this priority.</p> <p>Several sites have been selected to trial alternative grounds management regimes with the aim of improving biodiversity. Work to produce a more formal 'rewilding and biodiversity' plan for our own sites will commence later in the year. It will involve some consultation with town/parish councils and residents to maximise the chances of success and ecological improvements.</p>		
Manage waste in a sustainable way	Work with partners across Essex on a new waste strategy for the county.	Following national policy, we will treat the waste and recycling we collect as a resource. We will contribute to the development of the new Waste Strategy for Essex which will help determine how we will manage waste for the next generation.	We will play an active role in the development of the county-wide strategy through attendance at appropriate meetings and forums, ensuring the views of this district are taken into account. We anticipate the strategy being approved in the summer of 2024.

	Review our domestic recycling and waste services to make sure they are as efficient as possible and review and improve our waste service for businesses.	We will conduct a detailed review of all our waste and recycling services through the change programme Blueprint Uttlesford to ensure they are operating efficiently and effectively.	The review of Environmental Services is scheduled for 2024/25. In the meantime, support from national charity the Waste Resources Action Programme has been sought to explore potential improvements.
	The new Waste Strategy for Essex has been drafted and public consultation was completed in the early part of the year. A revised version of the strategy has now been produced and due to be considered by all Councils across Essex between July and September with a view to adoption. The new strategy will set out aspirations that may be built into our own service delivery strategies and plans. This will provide this Council the opportunity to review its current services and policies. This work is being rolled into the Blueprint Uttlesford review of Environmental Services. A workshop was held in early May to start exploring the emerging issues with Members.		
Work with partners to deliver sustainable transport	Steer development to the most sustainable locations using the Local Plan and via planning decisions.	Deliver the active travel and shared transport pilot schemes in Saffron Walden as part of the DEFRA funded Clean Air project, to build evidence to support roll out of schemes elsewhere in the district. Develop a spatial development strategy and robust planning policies as part of the Local Plan in order to support sustainable travel.	EV Car Club scheme was launched in November 2023 and uptake will be monitored and evaluated through 2024 as part of the two-year trial period. We will fully consider Regulation 18 consultation responses and use them to draft a Regulation 19 version of the plan for consultation in July 2024.
	Work with Essex County Council and other stakeholders to promote and facilitate sustainable, reliable, and adaptable transport infrastructure.	Complete the Uttlesford Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan.	We will complete the Plan by March 2024 and following consultation will develop from it a priority list of schemes for investment during 2024/25.
	The Electric Vehicle Car Club scheme was expanded to two locations in Saffron Walden. The bike hire scheme was launched in spring, enabling residents and visitors to use electric or traditional bikes from several hubs in Saffron Walden.		



The aim of the scheme is to help reducing car usage in the town centre and improve air quality. Uptake in relation to both schemes will continue to be monitored. A community cargo bike scheme has been introduced at the Market Square in Saffron Walden, allowing residents and business access to a larger bike designed to carry a small load.

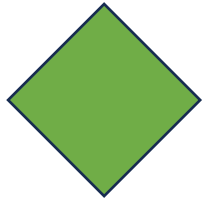
A number of studies relating to sustainable transport have been carried out, including a Local Cycling and Walking Plan, and will now inform the emerging Local Plan and future schemes. This is in accordance with the programme.



Encouraging economic growth

We will support and promote a vibrant and diverse economy by attracting investment, facilitating business growth, enhancing skills and employability, and improving connectivity and infrastructure.

Priority	What we will do	How we will do it	How we will measure it
Improve connectivity infrastructure	Support work to ensure residents and businesses benefit from superfast broadband.	We will continue to work with Essex County Council on the Superfast Essex project, particularly targeting areas where major broadband suppliers cannot deliver service.	We will have an officer representative in attendance at all Gigaclear Project Board Meetings to ensure our position is presented against the delivery plan outcome for the district.
	Identify opportunities to improve connectivity, including 5G technology.	Work as part of the Essex and Herts Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ) to ensure residents and businesses get maximum benefit from superfast/gigabit broadband and 5G delivery.	We will continue to have a member and an officer in attendance at the DIZ meetings and regular engagement with Digital Essex, ensuring we have early access to information and initiatives available to enhance connectivity across the district.
The Gigaclear contract has now come to an end. The matter is currently with Essex Legal Services who are considering the contractual terms.			



Officers attend the monthly Essex and Herts Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ) advisory board and executive board meetings and have regular meetings with Digital Essex to understand how residents, businesses and the public sector can make better use of digital technologies. A special interest group is running, chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change, exploring the digital carbon footprint of council services. Support was provided by officers to the DIZ and Digital Essex funding bid to the department for Science, Innovation and Technology-funded 5G Innovation Regions programme which, disappointingly, was unsuccessful. A pilot project with Enterprise Nation aimed at small businesses in the DIZ geography is in development.

One of the programmes being funding via UK Shared Prosperity Fund is the Digital Share programme, which is aimed at targeting older residents, particularly those in rural locations, to help them get online.

Support the resilience and growth of the local economy

Provide business support, information and advice to help the business community recover and grow.

We will complete the actions set out in the Economic Development Recovery Delivery Plan which contains detailed information about the way the council supports the business community.

We will deliver the schemes as set out in the Economic Development Recovery Plan, progress on which will be reported to the Scrutiny Committee.

The delivery programme of the plan was over three years with 2023/24 being the final year. Delivery outcomes for the whole plan will be presented to Cabinet in the summer of 2024/25.

Enhance the skills and employability of local residents. Attract tourism and investment to the district.

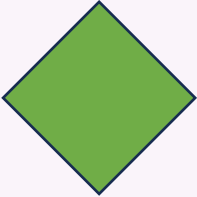
UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) are government funded schemes related to the levelling up agenda to support the local economy and administered at a local level. This provides a local business support package, skills training and grants for the rural business community.

The UKSPF and REPF allocations/awards are reviewed by the local partnership panel made up of members, officers and community/voluntary representatives on a quarterly basis.

The outcomes of the awards are included in the progress reports for the Economic Development Recovery Plan to Scrutiny.

We will work with partners including other Essex councils to deliver economic priorities across a wider area, benefitting from

We will play an active role in relevant county and regional forums including the London Stansted Cambridge Consortium, the Innovation Core

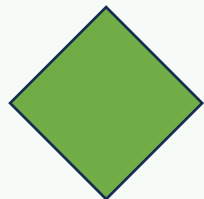
		economies of scale in procurement and scope of delivery.	Group and the North Essex Economic Board, ensuring at least one council attendee at all relevant meetings to ensure the district's views and priorities are represented.
	<p>A report was presented to Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in June, providing members with the progress on the Economic Recovery Plan and an update on the grants awarded from the UKSPF and REPF. A further progress update will be presented as although the recovery plan formally ended in March 2024 some funds were carried forward. to support projects and workstreams that were being delivered over a longer period of time. This includes low carbon, high street premises and start up grants.</p> <p>The economic development team has partnered with local businesses who offer support and provide 1:1 consultation to start-up businesses and young entrepreneurs.</p> <p>Uttlesford is an active partner in the Innovation Core. The new prospectus has been published and used as our main engagement tool during the UK's Real Estate, Investment and Infrastructure Forum (UKREiIF), the UK's biggest real estate and investment show, at which Innovation Core exhibited. A marketing campaign is under development to build on the contacts made at UKREiIF to promote a cohesive offer to investors.</p> <p><u>North Essex Economic Board (NEEB)</u></p> <p>Officers attend all Steering Group meetings of the North Essex Economic Board (NEEB) and are actively involved in ensuring Uttlesford residents and businesses benefit from the workstreams coming out of the Strategy's delivery plan.</p>		



Building Strong Communities

We will build strong and resilient communities by engaging with our residents, delivering new housing and tackling social isolation.

Priority	What we will do	How we will do it	How we will measure it
Provide and maintain quality homes and invest in thriving communities	Commit to improving the condition of our homes by investing in our housing stock.	Develop an Asset Management Strategy aligned to the HRA Business Plan that delivers Decent Homes compliance through planned work programmes.	We will publish and maintain a five-year Capital Works Programme and our progress against it by March 2025. We will refresh asset data through stock condition surveys, asset grading and maintaining a validated compliance register. This is an ongoing process.
	Provide quality homes through managed growth.	Seek development opportunities and work with other social housing providers to maximise the delivery of affordable housing.	We will draft and publish an Asset Management Strategy by March 2025. We will publish the HRA 30-year business plan to identify capacity for investment in new and affordable housing by April 2024.
	Deliver high-quality housing management services to empower our tenants and ensure communities prosper.	Use customer feedback and engagement to shape the services we provide and continue our multi-agency community events.	We will produce an action plan to deliver the priorities of the Tenant Engagement Strategy by March 2025.
	We have engaged an asset management consultant who is supporting the council in advance of the procurement of the new repairs and maintenance service. The draft Asset Management Strategy will be developed in October. We are working with Savills to refresh the HRA Business Plan and the draft strategy will be feed into the HRA Business Planning process.		



The capital programme for 2024-25 is being delivered and looking ahead to 2025-26 we are in the process of developing the new capital programme. Primarily this will focus on the social housing decarbonisation works. We are utilising the stock condition survey data and will be working in partnership with the newly procured maintenance contractor to develop the five-year plan beyond 2026.

We are refreshing our strategic approach to compliance, focussing on bringing data management back into full council ownership and control. We have brought in a compliance transformation specialist to support us, whilst ensuring we deliver business as usual at the same time. We are exploring the best cloud-based IT solution and are in discussions with two of the sector leading providers of compliance data software with the aim of having these in place by the time the new contracts mobilise in April 2025.

We are reviewing our approach to tenant engagement, in order to meet the requirements of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023/Consumer Standards. Our priorities will be to extend our reach using digital channels and put in place effective scrutiny arrangements for engaged residents. In advance of this we are in the process of cleaning our tenant data around contact information/vulnerability/special requirements for access to services.

Plan for future housing needs in a sustainable way

Introduce a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to support the Local Plan and fund new infrastructure in the district.


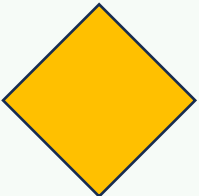
Work with a range of stakeholders, including Essex County Council, the NHS, water companies, and neighbouring councils to ensure adequate provision of infrastructure is made to support new development.

We have an agreed Local Plan timetable (the LDS) which sets out that a Regulation 19 Version will be published in July, consulted on, then submitted to government in December 2024.

Deliver a robust Local Plan that sets out a vision, and objectives, for addressing climate change, meeting future development needs in a planned and managed way, and setting out policies and standards to ensure that our historic and natural environment is conserved and enhanced.

Prepare a draft Local Plan, for public consultation, utilising a range of approaches to resident engagement to ensure that all who want to contribute are able to do so. Use the outcome of consultations and best possible evidence to produce final plan for submission to government.

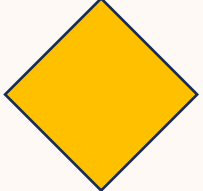
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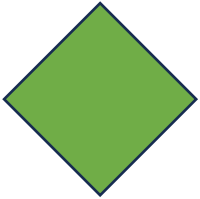
	<p>The emerging local plan is drafted for Cabinet and full Council consideration. It includes fully-evidenced and robust policies on climate change, and various other protectionist policies. It makes provision for the district’s development needs up to 2041 and includes various design standards. This is in general accordance with the LDS programme. Publish of the Regulation 19 was postponed by 11 days owing to the general election.</p> <p>Work to bring in a CIL for the district has been scoped and will commence once the Regulation 19 work is completed in July 2024.</p>		
<p>Tackle rural priorities</p>	<p>Draw together our understanding of issues and challenges particularly facing our villages and rural communities – including rural isolation, rural poverty and homelessness, rural economy, rural crime and safety issues etc.</p> <p>Develop this into a coherent plan across of the range of interventions we and other partners both currently make and can potentially introduce to serve our rural communities to the fullest.</p>	<p>Work with our partner agencies, councils and communities to map out the issues and the interventions, and to stimulate a debate around priorities, leading to a new and coordinated plan.</p>	<p>The project’s priorities will be mapped out in a three-stage discovery, challenge and action process involving stakeholder representatives, through to April 2024.</p> <p>Progress with the mapping of issues and services will then be tracked against the project plan developed.</p> <p>The ultimate product of this work is improved opportunities and outcomes for local communities, and those measures will be identified along the way as part of the process.</p>
	<p>Initial work on this priority has been delayed, but early scoping conversations have begun, and the broader initiative is now set to commence over the summer, post the end of the pre-election period and the General Election on 5th July.</p>		

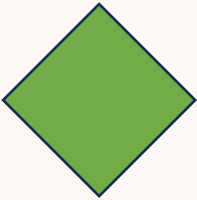
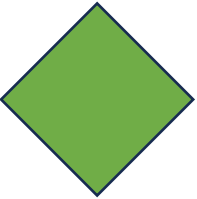


Putting Residents First

We will deliver excellent services for the benefit of our residents by ensuring budgetary stability and value for money, embracing new technology and developing our workforce.

Priority	What we will do	How we will do it	How we will measure it
Ensure financial stability	<p>Deliver a balanced budget every year.</p> <p>Review services through a structured programme to ensure efficiency and value for money.</p> <p>Prioritise money towards the areas of greatest need and impact.</p>	<p>The required budget savings over the next four years will be delivered through the Blueprint Uttlesford programme, through which every council service is being reviewed. Savings will come from a combination of increased income and budget reductions.</p> <p>The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2024 to 2029 demonstrates a need to reduce the net the General Fund budget by £5.5 million, once year 1 Blueprint Uttlesford savings are taken into account.</p>	<p>A separate workstream of benefit realisation and cost control has been established and is being led by the Director of Finance and Revenues and Benefits. This ensures financial changes are logged and maintained.</p> <p>The financial position of the council is reported on a regular basis to Cabinet and annually the budget and MTFS are approved by Full Council.</p>
	<p>The council is undertaking a review of revenues and benefits to identify opportunities for transformation (and cost savings). It is expected to report in September. Similar reviews are underway in Environmental Services and Museum Services. The council also managed to repay a £35.4m private loan at a £10.2m discount. This loan was taken out in light of the Chesterford Park Investment and will average £0.7m in annual savings over the life of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.</p> <p>It is amber rated as a significant portion of the savings relates to the sale of the council's 50 per cent share of Chesterford Research Park and that is not a certainty. Equally, reviews need to lead to concrete plans with clearly identified and approved savings. Until the majority of the reviews have reached that stage, it would be difficult to declare this position as green.</p>		

<p>Use commercial assets to fund services</p>	<p>Manage the commercial asset portfolio to maximise income for the council to be used on services for residents.</p> <p>Review the portfolio to ensure it represents best value for the council.</p>	<p>The commercial asset portfolio generates income to support the council’s services. Regular reviews will continue to be undertaken to ensure it still provides the best value.</p>	<p>The CIPFA Prudential Code requires an annual report on commercial investments and option appraisals. This report will be presented to the Investment Board and as necessary to Cabinet and Council.</p>
	<p>The annual review takes place in Q3 of the financial year and reported in Q4. In the meantime, markets are monitored and portfolio performance reported quarterly to the Investment Board.</p>		
<p>Enhance digital access and innovation across council services</p>	<p>Consider emerging technology, such as AI, when redesigning services.</p> <p>Review our online services to ensure they are helping residents do what they need to do, within the council’s financial constraints.</p>	<p>Through the Blueprint Uttlesford programme and the ICT Business Plan, service reviews will include consideration of the best way to deploy value for money technology to ensure we can continue to deliver the services on which our residents rely.</p> <p>We will implement enhanced technology including the use of AI to improve customer service.</p>	<p>Through the ICT Business Plan, we are beginning to make use of robotics and artificial intelligence to streamline routine tasks and processes.</p> <p>Each Blueprint Uttlesford review has a set review methodology and template. Through this it will be possible to demonstrate how technology has been used to maintain or enhance service delivery. The Blueprint Uttlesford programme will last for four years.</p> <p>Procure and implement AI systems through the Blueprint Uttlesford transformation programme, considering service requirements during each review., This programme runs until the end of 2027/28</p>

	<p>A bot is currently live and working within the council’s asset management system, dealing with all initial enquiries. This is a trial period with evaluation due to take place at the end of 2024.</p> <p>A second bot trial will be put live in Customer Services within the next six months, following the current design and testing stage. This will automatically identify and filter some common enquiries in order to speed up the response given to residents.</p> <p>In addition, the council has established an officer group to explore further options for AI technology.</p>		
<p>Further develop a skilled, motivated and diverse workforce</p>	<p>Review our recruitment, onboarding, induction and retention processes to ensure we attract and retain a workforce that is representative of our community. Promote an inclusive workplace to help us recruit the best people in line with our values and behaviours.</p> <p>Ensure our learning and development offer is accessible to all, affordable, efficiently delivered and aligned to emerging developmental priorities.</p>	<p>We will monitor progress against the activities set out in the Workforce Action Plan and will use self and external assessments to measure success such as Disability Confident and Armed Forces accreditation, an increased number of candidates for jobs, a reduction in staff turnover rates, targeted training for our priority areas and improved compliance with mandatory training.</p>	<p>This priority will be delivered through the Workforce Plan and Action Plan 2023-2027, which will be regularly reviewed and updated according to corporate priorities and engagement with staff.</p>
	<p>The Workforce Plan and action plan were launched in October 2023. Following staff workshops, reviewing the council’s appraisal scheme was identified as a priority and a new process was launched on the 1 April 2024.</p> <p>We are currently developing a new ‘Starters and Leavers’ onboarding and offboarding computerised system.</p> <p>We will be launching an Agency Worker framework in July 2024 (piloting in Environmental Services), partnering with Essex County Council. This framework brings together recruitment agencies into one place, operating at pre-negotiated and set rates and provides a full overview of the agency workforce, including spend.</p> <p>We have been working with the LGA on a national recruitment campaign to take place in the autumn, and on career pathways to attract candidates to our hard to recruit roles such as Planning Officers.</p>		

	<p>We are working towards our Armed Forces 'Gold' accreditation and council staff recently used their volunteer days to support our Armed Forces at Carver Barracks with a clean-up of their children's playground.</p>
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