

Full Council, 17 December 2024

Councillor Neil Hargreaves: Portfolio Holder for Finance and the Economy

Finance Team

Our finance area has recently had a review by accounting body CIPFA. The report was supportive and complimentary but does note the function is understaffed and that the accounting system is outdated. Addressing this, a new system is being installed next year, and two new fully qualified members of staff are starting in January, a Director of Finance (deputy s151 officer) and a Head of Finance. The report was included in the package of material for the Peer Review of the council which took place earlier in December

Airport Parking

Our consultants 'parking matters' undertook a series of reviews in 2022 and we have implemented most of the action points for our off-street parking, including recent repair works to a number of car parks. Signage in the car parks was upgraded to reflect the new tariffs and we have approached NEPP to do town centre reviews of signage but we do not have costs for this yet so not at this stage committed. Additional signage for Catons Lane car park has been ordered as it currently has none.

We are now on the next phase which is seeking solutions for, or at least alleviations to, the parking affecting villages surrounding the airport. A report setting out the options with the pros and cons has been done. This will go out to a consultation to the most affected areas in Takeley and Canfield where the issues are concentrated.

Officers and myself have met with the two parish councils to agree the process, which will involve 100% leafletting, meetings and an online consultation, also available by post and email. We are keen that the PCs take ownership of 'getting out the vote' either way because any scheme needs a majority approval and Residents Parking needs at least a 50% response and then 75% for the scheme for it to move forward. Schemes must be all encompassing otherwise it moves the problem without solving it. Should a set of schemes have residents' approval then MAG may cover implementation costs, subject to agreement by the Stansted Area Transport Group. But residents will need to pay for Residents parking scheme annual charges - other options, such as controlled parking zones, do not have a cost to residents.

UDC is not the Highways Authority. ECC has delegated some parking responsibilities to NEPP, not UDC, and on the current agreement also retains all powers to itself. ECC is a member of NEPP. However, as an issue affecting our residents we have taken a coordinating approach to finding solutions and UDC has funded the consultation work. The leafletting will make clear that we need a workable consensus on the actions otherwise that must be the end of UDC's voluntary work on this.

Audits

At the time of writing BDO have failed to meet the deadline for the Audit and Standards Committee to publish the accounts with whatever degree of audit they may have completed, out of their multi year backlog. This is very disappointing and particularly so when we consider the huge effort by our finance team to support BDOs work. I will give a verbal update on this.

Included as an example of the work of our Economic Development team, here is one of their monthly service updates

The REPF and UKSPF work over three years was reported in detail to Scrutiny in December

December 2024

Visitor Economy

Discover Uttlesford:

Web users – 29,000 in 12 month period to end of October
<https://www.discoveruttlesford.co.uk/>

Staycation campaign starting- batches of leaflets distributed to stakeholders throughout district. Key stakeholders and some local businesses have been approached to design itineraries highlighting how to spend a weekend in the district. Itineraries are a key component for tourism sector and increases engagement on social media platforms to drive visitors to website. First itinerary will be in collab with Down Hall Hotel and Spa (The AA's Hotel of the Year 2024 winner).

Creating a range of assets (leaflets and posters) to promote the district offer. Will be used in TIC, libraries, village noticeboards: key messages – things to do in Uttlesford with kids, dog friendly Uttlesford, arts/culture.

Visit Essex – Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP):

The new destination management plan has been launched which sets out agreed key priorities, current opportunities and a shared vision to grow Essex's visitor economy over the next 10 years. UDC have fed into this plan and are part of the working groups to deliver the priorities.

REPF

Most of the fund has been allocated and claims are coming in. Funded projects are on track to be completed and fully paid by March 2025.

A couple of high value projects fell through which left £225k to be re-allocated. One of those projects has managed to secure external funding meaning it can now proceed. This leaves us £175k to allocate.

Panel meeting 12/12/24 to consider applications submitted under the new grant schemes opened. 2 funding streams target growth and increased productivity for local businesses, including visitor economy sector, and food/drink manufacturers. The third stream is aimed at rural tourism and heritage organisations. Some good applications have been received so hopeful we can allocate approx. £90k at the panel meeting.

UKSPF

Funding nearly all allocated.

£60k set aside for community supermarket – tender via ECC closes 06.12.24. Still looking at other delivery models as lots of competing voices about best way to deliver affordable food.

<https://www.essex.gov.uk/help-cost-living/find-community-supermarket>

Awaiting details from GOV re the 2025/26 allocation.

Young Entrepreneurs (with NEEB)

Leading on this project run across North Essex. Funding for young market traders and membership for National Market Traders Federation; business support programmes aimed at 16-18 years olds and Rebel School online coaching for budding entrepreneurs 18-30 years.

School engagement programme starts w/c 9/12/24 with 3 sixth form schools being visited.

Re-ignite: Over 50's employability programme

This starts in January aimed at getting people over 50 either back into work or help them update CV's/understand how to apply for jobs if they haven't done this for many years.

Sessions are being held online so WECAN, who run our digital inclusion programme, are on hand to help with access to technology and data if needed.

Business Awards

Saffron Hall – 27 February 2025

Awards launched. Sponsored by MAG who are keen to continue working with us on events.

In 2024 we received 207 nominations so hoping to increase this in 2025.

Hospitality students from Stansted Airport College are doing the catering.

<https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/9571/Uttlesford-Business-Awards-2025-open-for-applications>

Business Networking/Engagement

Rural business engagement programme is starting. Focused on pubs at present but will also look at village shops. Difficult to get hold of right contact in pubs which makes timing difficult.

Event in collaboration with Innovate UK at Chesterford Research Park 10.12.24. Good opportunity to speak to businesses we don't traditionally engage with. This is the third time we have visited so hope more people come along.

Meet the Buyers took place 28.11.24. We were sponsors for this event. Awaiting final visitor numbers but was a well attended event.

Ambitious Women in Essex – next event will be at UDC council offices in January.

New networking programme will be starting in January with an event in Stansted Mountfitchet in partnership with the parish council and business forum. Idea is to move small events around the district rather than hosting a big breakfast every year.

Business Bitesize

5 people attended the last bitesize. Still a small number but continuing for now to see if this can grow. May try an alternative time.

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/uttlesford-business-bitesize-support-tickets-992591577127>

Inward Investment

Innovation Core – this is on pause for the time being whilst a decision is made about whether to continue. A paper has been sent to all CEX's outlining the proposition. Contract with marketing agency finishes in January and still a sum of money left to use. Officers have instructed the agency to film a video of a business in each district saying why they chose that location, this can then be used by the districts, ECC and UK Innovation Corridor.

NEEB – have started to compile a list of key sites with a view to creating a new website.

Current website <https://neeb.org.uk/>

ECC – about to launch Extraordinary Essex which has been delayed due to ill health of key officer.

Concerns that the NEEB and ECC offer overlaps. ECC are seeking engagement with NEEB to avoid potential duplication.

