

Full Council, 17 December 2024

Councillor Neil Reeve: Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change

Climate Change

On 13 November I attended the Essex Climate Action Summit 'Enabling Net Zero Homes in Essex'. Our progressive local plan policy in Uttlesford and other work we are doing in the district was highlighted.

Several themes arise from this event, most notably a renewed emphasis on net zero being a pathway to building healthier homes, and for climate resilience. The event also underlined the importance of our role in leading the delivery of these standards in our own social housing. By building net zero homes we will reduce fuel poverty and be building for the better health of our most vulnerable residents.

It was an inspiring and stimulating event with some excellent expert speakers. You can listen/watch the presentations on the ECC You Tube Channel [here](#).

Climate Action Updates:

Biodiversity

- The public consultation for the **Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy** (LNRS) closed on 25th October 2024. The LNRS includes mapping of nature recovery opportunities, biodiversity priorities and key actions.
- We expect to continue to work with Essex Local Nature Recovery Partnership coordinator as they finalise the strategy for publication, due spring 2025. Stakeholder engagement is set to continue beyond consultation.

County and District Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) Consultation

- In November all members were invited to a briefing on the [Uttlesford LCWIP](#) study report ahead of the **public consultation** which launched on 22nd November, closing on 6th January
- The LCWIP is 10-year strategic approach to cycling and walking improvements, it focuses on delivering a new strategic cycle network, setting out the quality of current provision and priorities for future investment in Uttlesford and has two more settlement-based plans for Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow.
- Essex are also consulting on the proposed county wide framework for connecting the network of cycling and walking routes across rural areas [Essex County LCWIP public consultation](#).

UDC Carbon Baseline Report and Trajectory to Net Zero

- APSE (Association for Public Service Excellence) Energy is working with us to revisit the council carbon emission baseline data and create an updated trajectory to net zero. We expect to have the first report in early January.

Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme application

- On 25th November, we submitted a bid to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme for a grant to deliver a heat decarbonisation project at London Road. Outcome of our bid will be confirmed May 2025.
- If our application is successful, we will implement a range of energy efficiency measures at London Road such as secondary glazing, additional insulation and an air source heat pump (replacing our fossil fuel boilers). The project also includes installation of a small number of solar panels on site.

Zero Carbon Communities / Sustainable Uttlesford Network

- The 3rd round of the **Zero Carbon Communities Grant Scheme** closed for applications on 2nd December. 23 applications were received.
- Evaluation and moderation of applications will be completed in late December. Cabinet will approve the shortlisted successful projects in February.
- A celebration event for Zero Carbon Communities is planned for 2025.
- A meeting of the **Sustainable Uttlesford Network** took place in November. This is the second meeting that UDC have facilitated. This climate action support and networking group has over 40 members representing community eco groups and projects that have been supported via our grants scheme.
- UDC are collaborating with a small group of key stakeholders to set up and establish a **Sustainable Uttlesford Community Interest Company**.

Local Area Energy Planning / Community Energy Planning

- **The Regional Energy Strategic Plan (RESP)** consultation closed 8th October. This forms part of the new policy framework for LPAs and will be implemented in 2025.
- ECC have commenced work on the first phase of the **Essex Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP)**, UDC are contributing to this project which will report in early spring 2025. We expect the report to include recommended next steps for Uttlesford in developing their own LAEP.

Fuel Poverty/Warm Homes: Local Grants

- **Warm Homes Local Grants.** UDC will partner with Essex County Council (ECC) to enable delivery of the new government grant scheme to Uttlesford residents. ECC will act as lead authority for the Essex consortia for the scheme. UDC support this approach as we do not have the internal staff resource/capacity to administer ourselves. ECC will lead on coordination, contract management and reporting for the scheme.

- **Takeley Park Homes HUG2 project.** Over 30 residents have had successful applications to the HUG2 scheme, with 32 park homes on the Takeley site now in the process of having external wall insulation fitted in time for winter – many are complete. We will be looking to share some case studies in spring as to the impact of this project for residents.

Clean Air Projects

- UDC climate change team successfully completed phase 2 of the **Saffron Walden Clean Air Project** this year. Implementation of all shared mobility schemes was completed (bike hire, e-bike hire, community cargo bike and EV car club) alongside successful delivery of well attended town community events and bike try outs.
- First meeting of the senior officer **Saffron Walden Transport Strategy delivery group** will take place in December involving both ECC and UDC colleagues to deliver prioritisation of schemes for delivery in the town, using available S106 funding.
- A second burst of the [Global Action Plan Wood Burning](#) public health awareness campaign will commence in Saffron Walden in January, via local print news, social media and posters.
- The Saffron Walden **longer term bike loan scheme** is now available to anyone resident or working in Uttlesford and has been renamed '[Uttlesford Bike Club](#)'.
- This autumn we commenced a **district school pollution awareness project** with 10 schools in locations across the district to raise awareness of air pollution and encourage behaviour change (modal shift) to reduce car trips.

Essex Air Quality Strategy - update

- UDC are members of the Essex Air Quality Consortium, a group of professionals working together to deliver air quality improvements across Essex.
- On 11 November I attended an Essex Air Quality Strategy briefing.
- The consortium has recently launched the EssexAir website delivering real-time air quality information across the County as well as providing general information on pollutants, advice and reporting on initiatives and case studies.
- The group, representing districts borough and city councils is Essex as well as Essex Country Council has been developing the Essex Air Quality Strategy. The document is now complete and will be subject to public consultation in January.
- The document demonstrates the need for an overarching County wide strategy that details action already being taken and identifies future actions to improve air quality for residents. The district school awareness project (previously mentioned) is a good example of work being delivered now and the type of initiative that will be delivered during its 5 year lifecycle.

Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ) - Sustainable Digital SIG (Special Interest Group)

On 18 November I chaired a meeting of the Sustainable Digital SIG. This is part of the Herts and Essex DIZ on which I represent UDC. Work is progressing on developing projects to reduce our digital carbon footprint (for example low hanging website efficiency and email filing and storage, but also more ambitious projects).

Environmental Services Update:

Simpler Recycling – The government issued its new approach to ‘simpler recycling’ in late November. Within the near future, citizens will be able to recycle the same materials across England whether at home, work or school, and will no longer need to check what is accepted for recycling in their local area. A universal standard will ensure that everything that can be collected for household recycling is collected in every region.

From 2027 all councils are required to collect the same core range of materials including food waste for recycling. UDC already collects all the core materials apart from plastic films, from all households. We do not currently collect the same range of materials from businesses that choose to use our trade waste services and this will need to change quickly.

While simpler recycling sets out a preferred collection ‘default standard’, it removes the previous government’s restrictions on collection frequencies, allowing councils to operate services that meet their community’s needs. We retain the right to choose container types and critically for UDC the new rules will allow us to continue to operate our current service. We will need to explain why we are not operating to the default and will be required to review that decision on a regular basis.

We plan to organise an all-member briefing on simpler recycling in the near future.

Packaging Waste Reforms

From April 2025, producers of packaging waste, will need to contribute to the cost of collecting and recycling materials. This new requirement is called ‘packaging extended producer responsibility’ and sits alongside some other financial measures designed to improve environmental performance and reduce waste. For example, the plastic tax will make it more expensive to produce plastic packaging from virgin materials compared to recycled plastic.

In practice the changes will mean that UDC will receive a significant financial contribution to offset the cost of collecting packaging materials that we collect from businesses, households and via our street cleansing operations. The government has recently given councils indicative figures for the funding they will receive.

Deposit Return scheme

The Welsh government has recently pulled out of the joint deposit return scheme that was in the process of being implemented across England, Wales and Scotland. The government has said that it remains committed to inducing the scheme in England.

Waste Electrical & Electronic Equipment Trial - UDC are working with Essex County Council with the aim of introducing a new service to collect small electrical items alongside our normal household waste and recycling collections. Our vehicles could be fitted with a small cage that will be used to store items on the rounds.

Waste Composition analysis

An Essex County Council funded project to reassess waste composition across the county has been started. Samples of waste materials have been collected from carefully selected areas in all districts. These samples will be sorted to work out how well Essex residents are recycling. Understanding this detailed information is vital to planning future services and behaviour change projects.

Service communications update

Operational services are impacted on a regular basis by issues such as vehicle breakdowns or staff sickness, occasionally these issues mean that we are not able to deliver services as planned. A new communication protocol has been developed to better describe how we engage with the community when we have problems. The document also details timescales for keeping ward members updated on issues impacting their areas.

Christmas arrangements

Finally with Christmas fast approaching, our revised collection arrangements will be published shortly. All residents will receive information directly in the post. We are also putting out the collections schedule via the local press, UDC website and social media accounts.

Operations will not be closing down for week this year and our crews will be working additional days to minimise potential issues.

A personal climate change/biodiversity note

It is now overdue that we start thinking about our digital footprints. An often-quoted nugget is that a tweet by Ronaldo generates the same carbon emissions (CO₂ equivalent) as 13 trans-Atlantic flights. Whether true or not, the point is that we are not considering sufficiently the impact of our use of the modern digital world. Who is accounting for the 'Cloud'? Who accounts for our Facebook posts, and Instagram photos? Something for all of us to start thinking about. It will not be easy. Is this report itself too long, and should it be distributed differently?!