

Councillor John Evans, Portfolio Holder for Planning

Report to Council, 25 February 2025

Local Plan

Following the last meeting of Council in December, we submitted our Local Plan to the Secretary of State (via the Planning Inspectorate - PINS) on 18 December 2024, as planned, and as agreed with the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG). The programme remains on time and on budget.

In January we received notice of the Inspectors appointed to examine the plan; Messrs G Davies BSc (Hons) DipTP MRTPI and W Cooper BA (Hons) MA CMLI. Throughout February, our officers have been responding to Messrs Davies and Cooper's initial questions. A dedicated local plan examination website has also been set up and all material and correspondence on the plan from submission up to its eventual adoption will be published there. Please see [Uttlesford Local Plan Examination](#).

We have been finalising the last of the Statements of Common Ground (SoCG) with key stakeholders. Further SOCGs have been agreed with National Highways and The National Trust, and Essex County Council. Manchester Airports Group (MAG) are expected to sign very soon. Progress has been made on all stakeholder issues raised on consultation.

It is anticipated that we will receive notification from PINS of the examination timetable by the end of March and that is likely that public hearings will commence in May or June. We await the formal letter from PINS.

At the same time, officers have been undertaking background work on establishing a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) for Uttlesford. The proposals will be presented to Cabinet later in March. Essentially, CIL is a charge which can be levied on new development for the purposes of delivering new or improved infrastructure. The levy rates must be set out within a CIL Charging Schedule and it is this that we will produce over the next three months, subject to Cabinet approval. It is intended that Uttlesford will become a 'CIL Charging Authority' in early 2026 and this will assist us in closing the infrastructure deficit that has long posed issues for us across the district.

In conjunction with the Local Plan and CIL, we will be updating our adopted Developer Contributions SPD in order that these three policy documents (Local Plan, CIL, and SPD) will drive maximum benefit, by way of increased developer contributions, for our residents.

Development Management

Performance within our Development Management & Enforcement teams remains strong. The performance of our planning function overall (including that of our Planning Committee) continues to improve.

Our Director and senior officers recently met with MHCLG officials on the council's behalf. MHCLG officials noted that the council's performance in terms of the 'quality

of decisions for major applications' (the measure for which the council is designated), is now well below the threshold for designation and has been for around 12 months. MHCLG will be formally publishing the latest national performance figures in late March / early-April and it is expected to show Uttlesford having only 4% of major decisions overturned at appeal (against the nationally mandated target of 10% or less). Uttlesford is no longer one of "less-well performing planning authorities" in the country. Indeed, we expect the forthcoming MHCLG statistics to show that Uttlesford has leap-frogged some 20 or more other councils over the past year in planning performance considerations. It is anticipated that MHCLG Ministers will consider a request to be made for our de-designation in April.

Uttlesford is now not only winning the majority of planning appeals; in January the team won a costs claim against a major developer and will recover all staffing and legal costs associated with defending the appeal.

Our 'speed of determining major applications' in the last quarter was 100% in time (12 out of 12 applications). This is the highest it has been in some years and is testament to the work of the Strategic Applications Team which we formed in 2023. This team has just agreed a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) with Manchester Airports Group, who have chosen to progress their latest planning proposal (increase in passenger numbers to 51m) with the council rather than via PINS under s. 62A procedures.

Both Officers and members of the Planning Committee continue to undertake professional training. Most recently, our vice chair attended a residential course for planning chairs and vice-chairs at Warwick University, arranged by the Planning Advisory Service. In January and February four in-house training sessions were provided for officers covering Professional Report Writing, Productivity, the NPPF & Decision-making, and Public Inquiry Training. I also have attended conferences in Lincoln's Inn and Cambridge on planning law hosted by specialist barristers' chambers.

The Planning Service is committed to continuing professional development and continual improvement. The tangible improvements in all areas of the Service are testament to this.

One of the elements of the Town Planning regime that is not within our direct control, is the delivery of new homes on the ground. Officers recently requested that MHCLG re-calculate Uttlesford's Housing Delivery Test score (that being the number of new homes physically built in the district compared to our housing target over a three-year rolling period – expressed as a percentage). We were of the view the previous calculation under-played delivery. Whilst the updated calculation shows an improved delivery rate (from 58% to 69%) it is still below the 75% target set by government. As such, the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' or 'tilted balance' still applies to planning decisions in Uttlesford. Of course, it is not the council that physically builds out homes in the district (except of course for the smaller numbers of affordable homes built directly by council), it is developers. The council is effectively "punished" for the development industry's slow build-out rates. I have asked our

Director to arrange for me to meet the principal developers to discuss such delivery anomalies.

In December, we held a Developers' Forum at the council offices. All the key developers operating in the district were invited to hear an update on the local plan and work presented by our DM and Building Control Teams and provide their own feedback. Feedback on the teams' performance was generally positive and there was some discussion on the upcoming Local Government Reforms.

Building Control

As you will recall, all of our established Building Control Officers are qualified and registered to undertake inspection work under the new Building Safety Act. In January, a second member of the team achieved the higher band qualification, adding further resilience to the Service. Our two trainees continue to work towards their professional qualifications.

In January, the Service was also successful in securing a government grant of £109,000 to administer the forthcoming Building Safety Levy. This is a fee that we will collect from major developments on behalf of government to fund the removal of unsafe cladding across the country. No such buildings have been identified in Uttlesford however, money we collect will help those living in such buildings elsewhere.

The team remains on call 24 hours a day for structural emergencies. Unfortunately, our officers were required to attend a dreadful house fire in February, and a separate incident where a car had struck a building. In both cases officers ensured the safety of the wider public.

Stansted Airport

In February I chaired a meeting of the council's Stansted Airport Advisory Panel (STAAP). The Panel received a presentation from the Planning Director at MAG on the airport's draft Sustainable Development Plan (SDP) and provided initial feedback. The plan sets out the airport's high-level plans for the next 20 year period. STAAPs comments have been included in the council's formal response to the draft SDP which will be issued to MAG on or before 10 March.

The SDP consultation closes on 10 March and can be found at [Sustainable Development Plan | London Stansted Airport](#).

I continue to serve as Uttlesford's representative upon Stansted Airport Consultative Committee and SASIG, whose meeting proceedings are the subject of updates to STAAP.