

COUNCIL HELD AT COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, ON TUESDAY, 22 APRIL 2025 AT 7.00 PM

Present: Councillor M Foley (Chair)
Councillors M Ahmed, A Armstrong, N Church, A Coote,
C Criscione, J Davey, A Dean, B Donald, G Driscoll, J Evans,
C Fiddy, R Freeman, N Gregory, N Hargreaves, R Haynes,
P Lees, M Lemon, J Loughlin, T Loveday, S Luck, J Moran,
E Oliver, R Pavitt, A Reeve, N Reeve, B Regan, G Sell,
R Silcock and M Sutton

Officers in attendance: P Holt (Chief Executive), B Ferguson (Democratic Services Manager) and N Katevu (Head of Legal and Monitoring Officer)

C80 MINUTE'S SILENCE

The Chair opened with a tribute to former Councillor Graham Barker, who had recently passed away. He said Councillor Barker had served on the Council from 2011 – 2019 and represented the ward of Great Dunmow South (later, Great Dunmow South and Barnston). He held a number of important positions during his time in office, including the Vice Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee and the Vice-Chairman of Council. He also was the Portfolio Lead for Children & Families, Health, Education from May 2015 to May 2016.

Councillor Moran praised Councillor Barker's character, noting his dedication to his country, having served in the Royal Army Medical Corps, community and council. He said he recalled Councillor Barker's personal warmth and that he was a pleasure to be around. He would also be remembered for "doing the hard miles" and his effectiveness in local campaigns and council work. He would be very much missed.

The Chair called for a minute's silence in memory of Councillor Graham Barker.

C81 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies were received from Councillors Asker, Barker, Emanuel, Taylor, Coletta, Bagnall, McBirnie, Gooding, and Martin.

Councillor Church declared a non-registrable interest in respect of Item 13.

Councillor Criscione declared that he was a member of the Georgian Group in respect of Item 12 and a member of the National Trust and British Association of Shooting and Conservation (BASC) in respect of Item 13.

Councillors Loveday and Regan declared that they were also members of BASC in respect of Item 13.

C82 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING(S)

The minutes of the meetings held on 25 February and 19 March 2025 were approved as correct records.

C83 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair said he had attended a number of civic events since the previous meeting, including the High Sheriffs Awards in Chelmsford, whereby he highlighted the work of the Wilderness Foundation, an Uttlesford Foodbank quiz fundraiser and civic dinners in Bishop's Stortford and Brentwood. He thanked everyone who had helped raise £1,500 for the foodbank.

C84 REPORTS FROM THE LEADER AND MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE

The Leader provided a report to Council and said there had been a smooth transition to new housing contractor, Axis, and shared positive tenant feedback from recent Housing roadshows. She encouraged all councillors to attend the roadshow when it visited their wards.

She also mentioned a number of issues including an upcoming briefing in May regarding car parking, the intention to bring a report to Scrutiny Committee regarding the reduction of bin lorry carbon emissions prior to the consideration of Cabinet and expressed disappointment over the closure of the Saffron Walden police front desk.

In response to a member question regarding the new Housing contractor, the Leader said that current feedback remained positive overall.

In response to a question regarding Chesterford Research Park, Councillor Hargreaves said an update would be provided on the asset at the next Investment Board meeting.

In response to a question regarding the Council's three new bin lorries and whether they had solar panels, Councillor Neil Reeve said he was not sure but the Council had previously piloted solar panels on lorries to supplement fuel.

In response to a question regarding political leafleting and claims therein, Councillor Hargreaves said he had written to Councillors Oliver and Moran to say the claims were false. He had not received a response.

In response to a question regarding Sustainable Uttlesford, Councillor Neil Reeve said the group was progressing well and demonstrated the Council's commitment to community groups.

The Leader and Councillor Coote said they wanted to put on record their thanks to the Strategic Director of Housing and Interim Director of Property for their excellent work in the housing department.

C85 QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER, MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS (UP TO 30 MINUTES)

In response to a question of clarification from Councillor Sell regarding Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and being 'grouped' with Harlow, the Leader said the question was abstract as Uttlesford had no border with Harlow District Council and any merger could not happen between the two councils alone. She said she would not be drawn into a hypothetical debate regarding the "pros and cons" of merging with Harlow.

In response to a question of clarification from Councillor Dean regarding costs of LGR and the transparency of the process, the Leader said that £2.75 million had been budgeted by the Council and the government had been informed of a projected £5.5–7.5 million cost. She said there were no secrets and regular meetings were held with opposition leaders in order to keep them informed.

C86 MATTERS RECEIVED ABOUT JOINT ARRANGEMENTS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

No matters were received about joint arrangement and external organisations.

C87 MATTERS REFERRED FROM THE EXECUTIVE AND THE COUNCIL'S COMMITTEES

The Chair said two reports, Items 8 and 9, had been recommended for approval by the Audit and Standards Committee.

C88 MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Councillor Oliver, Chair of the Audit and Standards Committee, presented the report regarding the Member Development Strategy. He said the Strategy had been produced by the Member Development Task and Finish Group, and thanked Councillors Lemon (Chair), Driscoll and Silcock for their work. He proposed approval of the Strategy.

Councillor Lemon seconded the proposal and extended his thanks to the Group and the Democratic Services Manager.

The proposal was approved unanimously.

RESOLVED to approve the draft Member Development Strategy (Appendix A).

C89

CO-CHAIRING PROTOCOL PLANNING COMMITTEE

Councillor Oliver introduced the report regarding the Co-Chairing protocol for Planning Committee and proposed approval of the recommendation set-out in the report.

Councillor Fiddy seconded the proposal.

Councillor Freeman, the Chair of Planning Committee, said it had been a challenge chairing the committee, due to the length and frequency of meetings and the complexity of decision making. He urged members to support this proposal which would effectively allow the role to be shared.

The Leader praised Councillor Freeman as the current Chair of Planning Committee but said the role could lead to exhaustion and she welcomed the proposal to share chairing duties.

Councillor Driscoll said he had noted the additional burdens placed on Planning Committee, such as site visits, and urged members to support.

The proposal was approved unanimously.

RESOLVED to adopt the protocol for Planning Committee Co-Chairs in Part 5 of the Constitution.

C90

FEES AND CHARGES UPDATE

Councillor Hargreaves presented the report regarding Updated Fees and Charges and said the changes were proposed due to legislative requirements, as well as the desire to raise fees for allotments, which would be raised from £20 to £40. He said this was not unreasonable compared to other councils allotment fees. He said the other changes related to heritage advice and border inspection charges at Stansted Airport for animal-origin products. He proposed approval of the recommendation set-out in the report.

Councillor Driscoll seconded the proposal.

Councillor Coote said he had visited the allotments in Saffron Walden and the UDC sites were the most neglected. He said he supported higher allotment fees to tackle neglect and in order to afford inspections of such sites.

In response to a question from Councillor Gregory regarding a wider review of revenue maximisation as requested by the Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Hargreaves said this was unrelated to the report before members but he would provide an update in due course.

The proposal was overwhelmingly carried.

RESOLVED that Council:

- i. Approve the additional fee of £18 for the official reduced checks that are required for low-risk Products Of Animal Origin (POAO) at the Border Control Post (BCP) Stansted Airport.
- ii. Approve an additional fee of £16 for consultation emails with importers where more information is required to secure clearance of POAO.
- iii. Increase the annual allotment rental fee from the current charge of 12p per square metre up to 24p per square metre for 2025/26 and then to 30p per square metre from 2026/27.
- iv. Introduce a paid service, delivered by Essex Place Services, with administration by UDC, to appropriately research and consider queries around the formal listed status of buildings in the curtilage of listed buildings. This will be at cost (bespoke fee).
- v. All charges to commence from 23 April 2025

C91 **POLITICAL BALANCE UPDATE**

The Leader spoke to the report regarding Political Balance and said changes were required following Councillor Asker's resignation from the Residents for Uttlesford Group. Councillor Asker now sat as a Reform UK councillor. The Leader said she had discussed the changes with Councillor Moran and Councillor Lemon would be appointed to the Audit and Standards Committee as the Conservative Group's nomination. She proposed approval of the recommendations set-out in the report.

Councillor Armstrong seconded the proposal.

The proposal was approved unanimously.

RESOLVED that the Council approves:

- I. The political balance and the allocation of seats on its committees as detailed in the report.
- II. That Councillor Lemon (CONs) is appointed to the Audit and Standards Committee.

C92 **MEMBER MOTION: THE GARDENS TRUST**

Councillor Criscione introduced his motion regarding the removal of The Gardens Trust as a statutory consultee in the planning process. He said the Gardens Trust were an important consultee in Uttlesford, due to the number historic gardens and parks in the district, such as Audley End house. He said it was important to safeguard these historical landscapes and expressed concern about losing the Gardens Trust's expert input. He proposed approval of the motion.

Councillor Hargreaves seconded the proposal and cited historic gardens in his ward (Quendon Hall and Shortgrove). He also had concerns relating to planning enforcement issues and weak protections for historic gardens. He said he strongly supported the motion.

Councillor Alex Reeve said the Gardens Trust had been introduced as a statutory consultee in 1997 and urged members to support the motion. He outlined the links between gardens, philosophy and culture, and said it was important the Gardens Trust remained a statutory consultee.

Councillor Evans said planning case law affirmed the importance of statutory consultees' views; such views held weight and relevance in decision making, and robust reasons were needed if decision makers were to depart from such expert advice.

Councillor Moran said the accessible green spaces and historic sites across the district were of great value to residents, and many people made use of these spaces, especially those with limited gardens.

Councillor Sell said he disagreed with the government's justification of "removing bureaucratic burdens" as he felt this rationale was counterproductive. He urged members to support the motion.

The motion was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED:

This Council notes that Uttlesford District is home to 3,801 listed buildings, scheduled ancient monuments, and parks and gardens. Ensuring the historic preservation and enhancement of these assets is paramount to the district's unique character, landscape and heritage.

Seven of the Historic England listings are registered parks and gardens throughout all corners of our district, as follows:

• Audley End (Grade I, Saffron Walden) • Down Hall (Grade II, Hatfield Heath) • The Maze (Grade II, Saffron Walden) • Quendon Hall (Grade II, Quendon) • Shortgrove Hall (Grade II, Saffron Walden) • Easton Lodge (Grade II, Little Easton) • Bridge End Gardens (Grade II*, Saffron Walden)

This Council is dismayed at the Government's proposed removal of The Gardens Trust as a statutory consultee in the English Planning System, and is RESOLVED to:

- I. Ensure that The Gardens Trust remains a consultee in the determination of relevant planning applications (i.e. where the Council's appointed case officer assesses that there is an impact on registered parks and gardens within the District) at local level.
- II. Write to the District's Members of Parliament and the Minister for Housing & Planning telling them that the Gardens Trust must remain a statutory consultee

C93

MEMBER MOTION: FARMS INHERITANCE TAX

Councillor Church left the meeting at 8.13pm and took no part in the discussion or vote on this item.

Councillor Hargreaves spoke to his motion calling for changes to the proposals regarding inheritance tax exemptions for farmers. He proposed that tax relief should only apply when farms remain in active agricultural use, referencing an alternative policy from the National Farmers Union (NFU), in order to close the tax loop-hole whereby farms are bought to avoid inheritance tax, with no intention to continue farming. He urged members to approve the motion as a show of support to the local farming community.

Councillor Moran seconded the proposal and thanked Councillor Hargreaves for bringing the motion to Council. He said small family farms were the backbone of the rural community and that farmers were often the first to respond to emergency situations in the countryside. He said the district would lose so much if they small family farms are put out of business.

The Monitoring Officer added clarification regarding the “seven-year rule” used in inheritance law, which she said reinforced the alternative policy proposed by the National Farmers Union (NFU).

The motion was overwhelmingly carried.

RESOLVED:

This Council supports the government’s ambition to stop the use of the current farm tax regime by non-farmers to avoid inheritance tax, which also inflates the cost of farmland above its real value for agricultural production, but notes that the changes intended would still leave a significant avoidance ‘benefit’ and therefore will not achieve their objective.

The Council therefore urges the government to drop its current intention and instead consider other ways of stopping the avoidance while still supporting genuine farm families to continue farming without unviable inheritance tax charges, such as the scheme proposed by the National Farmers Union.

Therefore, the Council is RESOLVED for the Chief Executive to write to the District’s Members of Parliament and to the Minister of State at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to convey the Council’s views.

C94

MEMBER MOTION: LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

Councillor Church re-entered the meeting at 8.20pm.

Councillor Sell spoke to his motion regarding Local Government Reorganisation and said that if the “local was removed from local government”, there would be

more disenchantment with the political process. He said the intention of the motion was to provide a steer as to what local government would look like in 2028.

Councillor Silcock seconded the motion.

Councillor Hargreaves said he would oppose the motion as it was timewasting; Council had met in January and March and these matters had already been discussed.

Councillor Fiddy said she would support the motion as it echoed the sentiments she had raised at the meeting on 19 March regarding LGR.

Councillor Criscione said he would abstain as he did not agree that all decisions were best taken at a local level, and cited the example of social care as a complex issue that required joined up thinking. However, he said he understood the strength of feeling behind the proposal.

Councillor Driscoll said he agreed with the statement included with the motion and would support the proposal.

Councillor Silcock said it was not timewasting to consider the future of local democracy and, while the Council could not determine the structure of future unitary councils, it could influence the future of town and parish councils. He said it was important to make the role of parish councillor an effective one and people should be encouraged to consider the role, as many people were put off by the lack of resources, training and support required to fulfil the position, and the purpose of local representation was to support people improving the places where they live. He urged member to support the motion.

The Chair declared that the motion was carried with 13 votes for, 2 against and 15 abstentions.

RESOLVED:

This Council believes that:

- i) local government reorganisation should ensure that decision making is made at the lowest possible level.
- ii) It further believes that it is essential to keep the local in local government.
- iii) That local government reorganisation should ensure a greater role for town and parish councils.

The Chair thanked members and said the next meeting would be Annual Council on Thursday, 22 May.

The meeting was closed at 8.32pm.