

Councillor John Evans, Portfolio Holder for Planning

Report to Full Council – 22 July 2025

As this is the first quarterly report to council this municipal year I have set out a summary of our achievements in 2024/25 as well as those from first quarter of 2025/26.

Local Plan Examination In Public

As you will recall from my All Member Advices, the Local Plan Examination in Public (EiP) Hearings commenced on 10 and concluded on 19 June. The Inspectors provided some informal feedback to the Policy Team and me at the end of the sessions, which was overall very positive. They asked officers to prepare a schedule of 'Main Modifications' for their approval. The Main Modifications are the Modifications the Inspectors consider are necessary for the plan to be found 'sound' – ie consistent with national policy, guidance and legislation. Officers duly completed this task within the timeframe required by the Inspectors and it picks up all the suggested modifications discussed during the hearings.

We must now await the Inspectors' post-hearings letter which will provide a summary of their headline findings, namely confirming whether they consider the plan is capable of being sound, with modifications, and if so, what actions are needed before a consultation can take place on such modifications. The Inspectors have indicated verbally that they consider the plan can be found sound, subject to modifications, but there remain some matters that they have taken away to consider in more detail.

Main Modifications are quite typically proposed in the local plan-making process and are modifications that affect or support the plan's soundness and could extend to changes that affect how an individual policy would function.

There will also be 'Additional Modifications' that will be published alongside the Main Modification consultation that correct more minor issues, such as typos, or minor textual amendments. These however do not require specific approval from the Inspectors.

The other main test that the Local Plan needs to satisfy relates to its legal compliance and the Council's "Duty-to-Cooperate". The Inspectors observed that they considered the Council have passed this requirement and no further work is required.

Assuming the Inspectors confirm that they are content that Main Modifications can be consulted upon, these will be finalised by the Inspectors and a six-weeks' consultation will then take place. This is anticipated to occur in September – October 2025. The consultation will be accompanied by an updated Sustainability Appraisal Report and Habitats Regulations Report; these reports have to be submitted in order to consider the Main Modifications and how they affect the plan, if at all.

The Inspectors will thereafter consider any responses to the consultation before preparing their Final Report, and this, when in hand, would come back to and enable the Council to adopt the Plan, subject to their Modifications being actioned.

Subject to the above, we remain of the view that the plan can be adopted by the spring 2026, in accordance with the Local Development Scheme timetable we published two years ago.

Alongside this, the establishment of a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) remains a corporate priority, and we have put in place sufficient resources to establish an Uttlesford CIL by the end of this municipal year. A briefing on CIL for lead members and Planning Members is programmed for 15 July. Further briefings for ward councillors and parish and town councils will be offered towards the end of the year.

Development Management & Enforcement

Development Management and Planning Enforcement has had its highest performing year for many years. As you will know, on 6 June the announcement to "de-designate" the council was made by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG). The Housing and Planning Minister, Matthew Pennycook MP thanked the council for its proactive collaboration with government officials and for the progress achieved to date. The Minister noted our "sustained improvement in performance".

This means developers will no longer be able to submit major planning applications directly to the Planning Inspectorate and must once again use Uttlesford's planning service meaning that all applications will once again be decided by Officers or the Planning Committee, as in each case provided for by our Constitution. This change restores full planning powers to Uttlesford and reflects the significant planning performance improvements made over recent years.

Over the past year the DM Team received 2691 planning and related applications. Of the major planning applications received 100% were dealt with within the agreed timescales for determination. 80% of all other applications were dealt with within time. This level of performance is far above government requirements (60% and 70% respectively). Of all applications received 98% were validated within our self-imposed five-day validation window.

Despite our designation throughout 2024/25, we received 417 formal requests for pre-application advice. This is a non-statutory service we provide and it generated additional income of £288,735.

In terms of Planning Enforcement, we dealt with 268 cases in 2024/25. We served 20 formal notices (including 8 Enforcement Notices, 9 Planning Contravention Notices, plus Stop Notices and a Listed Building Enforcement Notice). We have a number of applications for prosecution currently with the courts. Statistically, it was Uttlesford's most active year for Planning Enforcement.

We continue to drive continuous improvement in Development Management and Enforcement. The further digitisation of planning processes will be possible in the coming year, supported through winning a £50,000 grant from MHCLG for such. We also plan in the coming year to review and update our Enforcement Policy and produce guidance on improving the sustainability and the retro-fitting of listed buildings.

Building Control

Our small, but fully qualified and registered, Building Control Team attracted 2101 building regulations applications of all types in 2024/25. This is despite being in competition with 32 private companies able to offer the same service. It equates to more than 78% of the total market share in Uttlesford, which is thought to be the highest market share of any local authority in Essex. The applications generated £436,000 in income. In addition to this, the team attracted approximately £343,000 of further income by carrying out work with partners based outside the district. Again, this is within a highly competitive market. This additional income helps to reduce budget pressures within the directorate.

This year, the team also served a S36 enforcement notice under the building regulations, an uncommon but necessary intervention.

Our Building Control Team is currently undergoing an inspection by the new Building Safety Regulator (BSR). This is a new form of inspection arising from the outcomes of the Grenfell Inquiries and all building control authorities will be subject to inspection. I will report on the findings, once received, at a future meeting.

Stansted Airport and Other Matters

The council is in receipt of a planning application made by Manchester Airports Group (MAG) which seeks to increase the passenger cap from 43mppa to 51mppa at Stansted Airport. Officers are currently assessing the Environmental Statement (Environmental Impact Assessment) and reviewing representations made following public consultation. I expect the application will be reported to Planning Committee this autumn.

In the past few weeks and on behalf of the council, our Planning Committee Working Group, the Director of Planning and I have responded to a number of key government consultations including proposed reforms to planning committees. We have also been successful in attracting a second MHCLG Pathways to Planning graduate, which comes with a training bursary and other benefits to the council.

Summary

The past year was one of substantial progress, high performance, and operational resilience for the Directorate. The Local Plan remains firmly on track, and service delivery in Development Management, Enforcement, and Building Control not only met

but exceeded many key targets. The directorate is now well-positioned to meet the evolving needs of the district heading into a period of local government reform.

I would like to conclude my report by asking you to join me in congratulating members of the entire planning team for achieving the service improvements described earlier and thanking them for their dedication and professional commitment to the District.