

## **Cllr John Evans, Portfolio Holder for Planning**

### **Report to Full Council – 18 December 2025**

#### *Local Plan and General Policy Update*

The Council's Main Modifications Consultation on the emerging Local Plan concluded at the end of October. All consultation responses were reviewed, considered and have been submitted to the Planning Inspectors and are publicly available online. We now await the Inspectors' Final Report and Recommendations. The programme for adoption of the Local Plan in spring 2026 remains on track.

In parallel, officers have commenced a review of Uttlesford's Green Belt, taking account of the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the introduction of national policy relating to "grey belt" land. This will not be a policy document, but when completed a guide that will assist officers, and therefore our planning committee, in future consideration of applications made within our green belt..

The Council has also recently completed the consultation on the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). Only around 20 responses were received and are currently being reviewed. Officers intend to submit the CIL documentation and responses to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) within the coming weeks. The work remains on track.

To support those parish councils with housing allocations, the Planning Policy Team has prepared a draft Neighbourhood Planning Protocol, including a proposed financial support package for neighbourhood plan-making. This work follows upon the disappointing withdrawal of government funding for Neighbourhood Planning support by MHCLG earlier in the year. The protocol is scheduled to be presented to Cabinet in early 2026 and has already been reviewed by parish council colleagues.

#### *Development Management & Enforcement*

Performance in Development Management remains strong as we approach quarter four. We go into the new year with a 100% of our major planning applications determined within time or within an agreed extension of time, and almost 90% of our non-major applications. This is the highest DM performance on record.

Our appeal record has been stronger in the past year than any other year on recent record. Just 2.9% of major decisions were lost and only 1.1% of non-major decisions. We now outperform many of our comparator councils on these metrics. This is positive testament to the work of our Planning Committee and officers. There remains more work to be done on how we approach and manage public inquiries, although it is to be noted that recent national statistics show around 75% of public inquiries result in the

appeal being allowed. The applicable percentage is much lower for other forms of appeal.

On 27 November around 30 developers, agents, and promoters joined us for a productive Developers' Forum. The group reviewed DM performance, acknowledging what's working well and where we need to continue to improve. Our Quality Review Panel (UQRP) presented at the forum, speaking on the role and recent success of design review in shaping successful schemes in Uttlesford. The group also discussed upcoming national planning reforms and what devolution and local government re-organisation could mean for the future of planning in our area. It is vitally important that we keep a dialogue with the industry on such matters and use it to promote our paid-for services, all of which are over-performing in terms of income generation expectations.

In enforcement 42 new cases were received this quarter and all have been, or are being investigated. Around 28% of have been closed through informal negotiations and seeing compliance achieved without the need for formal action. What is frustrating is those that go to appeal are currently taking on average 72 weeks to receive a decision from PINS. This causes frustration among residents, parish council colleagues and our officers alike.

### *Building Control*

Following recent inspection by Building Safety Regulator (BSR), we have been asked to make improvements in 5 areas. These were flagged by the BSR in a 'letter of contravention' to us (the lowest level of post-inspection response available, and not a formal Improvement Notice, or Threat of Intervention). In most areas of the work no contraventions were identified. The inspection audited the Council's compliance with the Operational Standards Rules under Building Safety Act 2022. The team quickly produced an action plan in response, and the majority of actions / improvements have already been made.

The Team continues to be one of the most high-performing and resilient in the county, and in November picked up 17 applications from a private company (Approved Inspector) which recently went into liquidation, thus ensuring development and residents' projects were not prejudiced or delayed as a result.