

Committee: Cabinet

Date: Thursday, 15
January 2026

Title: UDC Neighbourhood Planning Support

Portfolio Holder: Cllr John Evans,
Portfolio Holder for Planning

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Key decision: No

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Summary

1. Government announced in June 2025 that it will no longer provide financial support for communities preparing Neighbourhood Plans.
2. Uttlesford District Council is committed to supporting communities who wish to prepare Neighbourhood Plans, and the emerging Uttlesford Local Plan 2021-2041 makes provision for six Larger Villages to plan for non-strategic housing allocations (600 dwellings) to contribute towards the Uttlesford District Housing Requirement Figure of 13,500 dwellings. The six Larger Villages will have until approximately early 2028 for their Neighbourhood Plans to be 'made'¹.
3. This report summaries proposals for how the Council will (financially and officer time) support its communities in preparing Neighbourhood Plans, principally to ensure the Larger Villages, can progress Neighbourhood Plans effectively and to ensure there is some wider support available for other communities who wish to prepare Neighbourhood Plans.

Recommendations

4. Cabinet approves the following:
 - a. the proposed financial and officer support for Neighbourhood Planning groups from UDC as described by this report, which consists of:
 - i. £5,000 grant to Larger Villages who are proposing non-strategic housing allocations (part of which will fund an SEA)
 - ii. 'In-kind' officer support (to an approximate value of £5,000 in officer time) for specific technical support to Larger Villages who are proposing non-strategic housing allocations

¹ Neighbourhood Plan are 'Examined' by a Neighbourhood Planning 'Examiner' but must be subject to referendum before they can be adopted. This is referred to the Neighbourhood Plan being 'made'.

- iii. General Officer advice/ support for the Larger Villages (as above)
 - iv. Half a day per week funding for the Rural Community Council for Essex (RCCE) to enable them to support up to six Smaller Villages (total £14,700 per annum)
 - v. General officer advice/ support for other communities who may wish to pursue Neighbourhood Planning, subject to availability of resources.
- b. A proposed hybrid approach Note to supporting Neighbourhood Planning with UDC Officers primarily supporting the Larger Villages who are proposing non-strategic housing allocations, and RCCE primarily supporting Smaller Villages), albeit with realistic limits for how many communities can be supported at any one time.
 - c. To agree to the annual review of the Council's approach/ protocol for supporting Neighbourhood Planning.

Financial Implications

5. The proposals will cost:

- d. **£30,000** in year one to support the Larger Villages who are proposing non-strategic housing allocations to be taken from the Planning Policy Budget and,
- e. **£14,700** for the RCCE support in year one to be taken from the Planning Policy Budget
- f. The general officer advice to Neighbourhood Planning groups is not included in these costs because a core team of four Planning Policy Officers will be contributing approximately one day per week to neighbourhood planning, to be covered from the Planning Policy Staff budget.

Background Papers

- 6. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report.

An updated Council's Neighbourhood Planning Protocol prepared in parallel to this report is available at **Appendix 2**.

Impact

7.

Communication/Consultation	Affected NP Groups will be notified directly. A presentation promoting the new approach made at the Parish Forum held in September 2025.
Community Safety	N/A
Equalities	N/A
Health and Safety	N/A
Human Rights/Legal Implications	<p>There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.</p> <p>Neighbourhood Development Plans and Neighbourhood Development Orders are prepared in accordance with the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended by the Localism Act 2011) and the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended). The Council has a statutory duty to support the preparation of neighbourhood plans.</p>
Sustainability	Neighbourhood Planning can contribute to delivering sustainable development and the proposals will ensure communities can continue to pursue Neighbourhood Planning in Uttlesford.
Ward-specific impacts	<p>N/A</p> <p>There may be ward specific impacts of whether they wish to pursue Neighbourhood Planning but that will vary on a case-by-case basis and will be considered as part of the specific Neighbourhood Planning support.</p>
Workforce/Workplace	Neighbourhood Planning falls within the remit of the Planning Policy Team as one of their core functions.

Situation

- Neighbourhood Planning was introduced by the Localism Act in 2011. A Neighbourhood Plan puts in place planning policy for a neighbourhood area to guide development – the plans are about the use and development of land and may contain a vision, aims, planning policies, proposals for improving an

area or providing new facilities. Neighbourhood Plans can contain a number of policies across a range of topics or be focused on one or two key issues.

9. In Uttlesford, there are currently eight Neighbourhood Plans that have been 'made', with several more in preparation. The made Uttlesford Neighbourhood Plans are for: Ashdon, Felsted, Great and Little Chesterford, Great Dunmow, Newport and Quendon and Rickling, Saffron Walden, Stebbing and Thaxted. Currently the following Neighbourhood Plans are under Review i.e. Newport Quendon Rickling NP, Thaxted NP, Felsted NP and Stebbing NP.
10. Uttlesford District Council is committed to supporting communities with Neighbourhood Planning and has been contributing to funding a dedicated Uttlesford Officer, bespoke support from the Rural Community Council for Essex (RCCE) and dedicated consultancy support.
11. The emerging Uttlesford Local Plan 2021-2041 has provided an opportunity for selected Larger Villages to take responsibility for planning for 'non-strategic' scale growth (sites of less than 100 homes) themselves, rather than this being imposed on them, and all six of these communities have chosen to progress Neighbourhood Plans for that purpose. This relates to: Clavering, Debden, Felsted, Hatfield Broad Oak, Henham and Stebbing.
12. Core Policy 19 in the emerging Local Plan makes provision for the six Larger Villages to have two-years for their Neighbourhood Plans to be made following adoption of the Local Plan, which is expected in spring 2026. On that basis, these Larger Villages will have until spring 2028 for the Neighbourhood Plans to be made – this is sufficient time.
13. Once adopted, the Local Plan will provide an updated policy framework to guide development across the district and provide a more 'plan-led' approach to growth, following years without an up-to-date plan, and an influx of speculative development.
14. Earlier, this year, MHCLG announced that funding they had previously offered to communities undertaking neighbourhood planning would end. This had previously consisted of a basic grant of between £1,000 and £10,000 for groups writing Neighbourhood Plans and an additional grant of up to £8,000 being available for groups facing more complex issues and with some specific technical support packages also being available.
15. For these reasons: selected Uttlesford Larger Villages taking responsibility to plan for non-strategic growth within their areas through neighbourhood plans, the MHCLG funding coming to an end, and the Uttlesford Planning Policy team having more capacity to assist with Neighbourhood Planning as the Local Plan work reaches a conclusion – have led to the Council reviewing its approach to supporting Neighbourhood Planning.

- 16.** Before setting out the Council's proposals, it is important to first outline some parameters to neighbourhood planning that helps to provide some context.
- 17.** Neighbourhood Planning can be a positive and valuable process for a community to follow that can make a meaningful contribution to shaping the future of an area. It's important to start with a scoping exercise to first understand what issues affect an area and how a neighbourhood plan could assist. Neighbourhood Plans can be valuable, but they will not always be appropriate. Neighbourhood Plans are 'land-use' planning documents, that set out non-strategic policies, that can help to inform how decisions about planning applications are determined. On that basis, it is essential the Neighbourhood Plan policies are consistent with strategic Local Plan and national policies – they all form part of the same policy framework that should complement each other and work together to help achieve the desired outcome. There is no need for Neighbourhood Plans to repeat or duplicate Local Plan or national policy, and they should not create any conflict between them.
- 18.** On this basis, there should not be a one size fits all approach to preparing neighbourhood plans, and the work for an individual group should be tailored to the specific circumstances and issues being addressed. For example, the need for any 'technical evidence' should be considered on a case-by-case basis and in many cases, some technical evidence may not be needed. This is important as our objective should not only be for Neighbourhood Plans to be effective, but to be cost effective as well.
- 19.** One example might be around Design Codes. As we have up-to-date Design Codes for Essex and Uttlesford, it is unlikely that Design Codes would be needed for neighbourhood plan areas, especially if the level of development in those areas may be limited – the level of development at the Smaller Villages for example, should only be for 'limited infill' development. However, where Neighbourhood Plans include non-strategic allocations, such as selected Uttlesford Larger Villages, there may be value in preparing a site-specific Design Code. This approach is more likely to add genuine value to the specific site, but to be more effective and cost effective in its preparation. The Uttlesford Urban Design Officer may also be able to assist with this work.
- 20.** Other examples of where neighbourhood plans may add particular value could include:
- specific non-strategic site allocations – the community can lead the process rather than anyone else. The policy can define how the site comes forward and how it contributes to the local community
 - identifying local infrastructure priorities, either that relate to a non-strategic allocation, or to inform any windfall development – this could identify

- priorities for Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding²³, once this is in place, and where development comes forward within the parish, and
- specify local regeneration priorities, such as identifying a location for a new community facility, that provides on-site parking and integrated facilities.

21. In contrast, there may be examples of policies that are unlikely to be necessary in Neighbourhood Plans, where these are already set out in strategic policies within the Local Plan, or form part of national policy. These may for example include flood risk, sustainability credentials for development, parking standards, and the type of development that might be suited within a village, or outside a village within Open Countryside.

Proposed UDC Support for Neighbourhood Planning (2025/2026 and 2026/2027)

22. It is proposed that the support is tailored differently to different types of neighbourhood plans and that the support may also differ over time. It is proposed that the support package includes some direct financial support and some support in-kind (officers undertaking specific tasks but not including general advice and support which can be offered in any case). And, that the support is split between UDC Officers and RCCE (in relation to RCCE time being paid for by UDC).

23. It is necessary to be realistic about what can be achieved. The District Council will not be able to support an unlimited number of communities to undertake neighbourhood planning at the same time. The approach may be similar to how most Councils support the updating of Conservation Area Appraisals: i.e., this is often limited to updating one or two CAA's a year, but there is nothing to stop communities progressing them themselves if they are self-funding.

24. It is therefore proposed that the initial focus for supporting neighbourhood planning in Uttlesford (for the 2025/ 2026 and 2026/2027 period) from Uttlesford officers, is to the Larger Villages that are proposing to identify non-strategic site allocations in their Plans – this relates to six parishes.

25. Secondly, it is proposed that the RCCE support paid for by Uttlesford, would be directed to between four and six Smaller Villages at any one time.

² any contributions to infrastructure must be consistent with national policy Regulation 122 tests:

- necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms
- directly related to the development, and
- fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development.

³ It is anticipated that CIL will be adopted in Uttlesford following adoption of the Local Plan is the first part of 2026.

26. It may be possible that further communities can be supported to some extent, but it is unlikely there would be any financial support available, or dedicated officer or RCCE support available at the current time. Other communities could be self-funding or wait to see if they could be supported in future years. The approach to supporting neighbourhood planning should be reviewed annually
27. A more detailed breakdown of neighbourhood planning tasks is shown by **Appendix 1**, but in summary, the support from Uttlesford to the individual **Larger Villages** is proposed to include:
- up to £5,000 grant – around £2,500 to contribute to the cost of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and the rest to assist with general costs, including publicity/ consultation, etc.
 - up to £5,000 ‘in-kind’ support (not money), including preparation of the SEA Scoping Report, Urban Design Officer input and other specialist officer input, and
 - there would also be a range of more generic support options available from Uttlesford officers in addition to the specific grant and ‘in-kind’ support described above.
28. For the **Smaller Villages** being supported by RCCE Uttlesford can fund an average 0.5 days’ work of RCCE per week, which is considered to be sufficient for RCCE to support between four and six Smaller Villages to prepare neighbourhood plans at any one time. There can also be some Uttlesford officer support towards the Smaller Villages subject to resource availability however it is important we do not over-promise time
29. As explained above, any communities who wish to prepare neighbourhood plans over-and-above the support summarised here, these will be part self-funding or must wait to apply for funding in future years. This is in part why it is so important communities consider why they think a neighbourhood plan is important, especially if it is not proposing to bring forward any development.
30. The proposals set out above would cost £30,000 in year one to support the Larger Villages, plus £14,700 for the RCCE support, or **£44,700** per year in year one. This is within the current budgeted arrangements. General officer advice is not included in these costs. With the Local Plan work expected to be reaching conclusion, it is anticipated that a core team of four Planning Policy Officers could each contribute approximately one day per week to neighbourhood planning.
31. In addition to the support summarised in this report, the Planning Policy Team have also updated the Uttlesford Neighbourhood Planning Protocol, that sets out in more detail the ‘offer’ to communities (**Appendix 2**). There may also be other areas the team can contribute to that would be beneficial to anyone preparing a Neighbourhood Plan, such as preparing model policies, such as for identified infrastructure priorities, or developing a template approach for preparing the SEA Scoping Report.

Risk Analysis

32.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Not providing any Neighbourhood Planning support would be expected to make it difficult for communities to progress Neighbourhood Plans. This could delay the allocation of the non-strategic housing allocations that would need to be included in a Development Plan Document prepared by the Council.	3- Some risk	3	Funding and support package summarised by this report should off-set this risk.

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.