



APPENDIX 2

Updated Uttlesford Neighbourhood Plan Protocol

13 November 2025

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Uttlesford District Council (UDC) is committed to supporting parish councils or 'qualifying bodies' including Neighbourhood Forums, interested in preparing a Neighbourhood Plan within Uttlesford District. The Council will continue to work with the Rural Community Council for Essex (RCCE) to deliver this support to groups following the withdrawal of funding from the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) earlier this year (2025). This Protocol sets out the working arrangements between UDC, RCCE and the various Neighbourhood Plan Steering Groups (NPSG) that will facilitate the preparation of positive and robust Neighbourhood Plans.

The Role of Uttlesford District Council in Neighbourhood Planning

- 1.2. The broad stages and process for parishes considering whether to develop a Neighbourhood Plan (NP) have been identified in Section 2 below. This Protocol identifies how Uttlesford District Council (UDC) and RCCE can assist with these stages. UDC can offer practical and professional support for Neighbourhood Plan Steering Groups, and in some instances, this may be supplemented by RCCE, where they are funded directly by UDC to help certain groups to bring forward Neighbourhood Plans.

The Council's support for Neighbourhood Planning will be reviewed annually, but for the remainder of 2025 and for 2026, UDC officers will focus on supporting the Larger Villages where land is being allocated for development. Then selected smaller villages will, in general terms, be supported by RCCE and from the Council as resources permit.

The Local Plan

- 1.3. The **Uttlesford Local Plan 2021 – 2041**, once adopted, sets out the 'strategic' policies to guide the location, size, form and design of development and to protect existing environmental, community, heritage and employment assets. It is anticipated that the emerging Local Plan will be adopted in the first part of 2026.
- 1.4. The emerging Local Plan has, through **Core Policy 3**, set out a 'Settlement Hierarchy', describing the scale of appropriate development for different types of settlements. The Local Plan has also provided an opportunity for larger villages and Newport to take responsibility for planning for 'non-strategic' scale growth (generally sites of less than 100 homes) themselves; the level of growth for each settlement has also been set out in **Core Policies 19 and 10a**.
- 1.5. Essex County Council (ECC) is a key infrastructure provider and delivers various strategic and public services throughout Essex. Although not directly involved in the Neighbourhood Planning process, many standards are set by ECC and Neighbourhood Plan policies should be in general conformity with

them. ECC provides guidance on roles and responsibilities through the 'Essex County Council's Neighbourhood Planning Guide'¹.

1.6. This Protocol provides a more detailed breakdown of how the Council, or RCCE, can provide support to the Neighbourhood Plan process, but in summary, headlines include:

- small grants of up to £2,500 will be available from UDC for the Larger Villages who are seeking to meet their non-strategic housing requirement as identified in the draft Local Plan.
- Ringfenced grants of £2,500 to complete the Strategic Environmental Assessments for the Larger Villages who are seeking to meet their non-strategic housing requirement as identified in the draft Local Plan.
- advice at all stages of the process until the adoption of the Neighbourhood Plan. There will be a principal point of contact for each Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (NPSG), with UDC officers generally supporting Larger Villages, and the RCCE generally supporting Smaller Villages.
- help with proposed policies so that they are relevant and likely to be robust and effective. This will be provided by UDC for all parishes
- advice on what evidence and data may be needed including where a valued 'Local Green Space' is proposed, and
- basic assistance with mapping

1.7. The principal point of contact depends on your settlement type as defined in the emerging Uttlesford Local Plan and is set out in the table below. However, this does not preclude groups from receiving varied support throughout the process as set out in the stages of the Neighbourhood Plan process.

Settlement Hierarchy Tier	Principal point of contact
Key Settlements	Uttlesford District Council Officer
Local Rural Centres	Uttlesford District Council Officer
Larger Villages	Uttlesford District Council Officer
Smaller Villages	Rural Community Council of Essex Officer
Open Countryside	Rural Community Council of Essex Officer

1.8. The key point of contact for Uttlesford District Council is planningpolicy@uttlesford.gov.uk and for the Rural Community Council of Essex is enquiries@essexrcce.org.uk.

¹ Available online: <https://www.essex.gov.uk/planning-land-and-recycling/planning-and-development/planning-advice-and-guidance/neighbourhood>

The Role of Essex County Council in Neighbourhood Planning

- 1.9. Essex County Council (ECC) is a key infrastructure provider and delivers various strategic and public services throughout Essex. Although not directly involved in the Neighbourhood Planning process, many standards are set by ECC and Neighbourhood Plan policies should be in general conformity with them. ECC provides guidance on roles and responsibilities through the 'Essex County Council's Neighbourhood Planning Guide'².

Is a Neighbourhood Plan right for the local community?

- 1.10. It is important that a community first consider why it wants to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan and what issues it is seeking to address. A Neighbourhood Plan is a planning document that can set out a community's aspirations and through local policies help deliver these and can be used to determine planning applications, alongside Local Plan and national policies. A Neighbourhood Plan is not the only way to address local issues. It is important for community groups to have a clear idea of what they are trying to achieve through this development planning process as there are other tools and mechanisms which may be more appropriate.
- 1.11. At this initial stage it is advisable to engage with the community and identify the key and priority issues. Some issues will relate to land use and spatial planning, but many will relate to service delivery and community projects. The NPSG may wish to discuss the land use and spatial planning issues raised with UDC/RCCE officers and consider how best to address these. They may have been addressed through the Local Plan, UDC's Design Code or Essex County Council development management policies. If not, UDC/RCCE officers can discuss the most appropriate type of Community-led Plan to address the key issues and priorities raised. A Neighbourhood Plan may not be the best tool to achieve the community's goals; there are other types of Community-led Plans that might provide a more appropriate tool.
- 1.12. **Parish Plans** (sometimes known as a Community Action Plan) assess current and potential future issues and set out an action plan to tackle the issues; they often relate to specific issues or priorities, for example the natural environment. They can identify projects and actions that may benefit the community and include an action plan to address the needs of the area and community. They have no weight in the statutory planning system and are not intended to be used in the determination of planning applications, but they provide evidence of community need and support and can be used to support funding applications for local projects.
- 1.13. **Village Design Statements (VDS)** assess the local character and set out guidelines to influence what future development should look like based on the

² Available online: <https://www.essex.gov.uk/planning-land-and-recycling/planning-and-development/planning-advice-and-guidance/neighbourhood>

community's views and opinions on various physical characteristics of the area. ~~and local aspirations~~. Such documents do not form part of the 'Development Plan' for the District but would be 'material considerations' in planning decisions. The UDC website includes those VDS completed in the district and currently being used.

- 1.14. **Housing Needs Surveys (HNS)** assess the need for affordable housing and can result in a proposal for a Rural Exception Site housing development (for communities with a population of less than 3,000) or for larger settlements, a Community Led Housing Project.
- 1.15. **Neighbourhood Priority Statements (NPS)** (sometimes known as Neighbourhood Priority Plans) assess key priorities and preferences in the local area. Introduced by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, UDC will be required to 'have regard' to NPS when preparing local plans. The details will be included in Regulations to follow. **Table 1** below sets out the difference between various plans. Parish Councils and Community Groups are advised to seek advice from UDC/RCCE before embarking on one of these plans or undertaking any preparatory work that may prove unnecessary.

What is Neighbourhood Planning?

- 1.16. Neighbourhood planning is a statutory process whereby communities prepare a shared Vision for their designated Neighbourhood Plan area and where more locally specific policies, can help to shape how development may be determined but always with regard to their being in accordance with the adopted Local Plan and national policy.
- 1.17. Neighbourhood Plan policies must be in general conformity with the 'strategic' or 'Core' Local Plan policies, but an NP can set out more locally specific policies, providing they do not conflict or duplicate Local Plan policies.
- 1.18. Once the Neighbourhood Plan is 'made'³, NP policies will be used by Uttlesford District Council Development Management officers to assist in the determination of planning applications within the relevant parish.

What is a Neighbourhood Plan Document?

- 1.19. The Localism Act and the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended) reformed the planning system to allow local people to influence the development of the communities where they live. Formally called the Neighbourhood Development Plan, the NP is intended to supplement the Local Plan with locally specific policies that address local issues. It does not replace the policies in the Local Plan, nor the District's

³ In the context of neighbourhood planning, for a plan to be '**made**' means it has been formally adopted by the local planning authority following a successful community referendum, giving it full legal force to help decide planning applications in the designated area.

adopted Design Code and therefore need not be complicated nor contain a large number of policies but those that are most relevant to local issues that would be included. It is useful to look at the Locality guide⁴.

- 1.20. The Neighbourhood Plan should set out the Vision and support the strategic development needs of the Local Plan for the locality and planning policies which, once adopted or ('made') become part of the statutory planning framework for the area. It will be used by the District Council to inform decision making on planning applications in that parish area.

Neighbourhood Plans are required to:

- Be led by a parish meeting, parish or town council and relate to one neighbourhood area.
- Specify the period over which it will have effect.
- Be in general conformity with the strategic policies in the adopted Uttlesford Local Plan⁵.
- Have regard to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and guidance.
- Be in compliance with EU obligations and human rights requirements.
- Where appropriate, be accompanied by a proportionate Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA).
- Meet the 'Basic Conditions' set out in Paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (see **Appendix 4**)

Neighbourhood Plans can:

- help to influence where and what type of development should be proposed within the parish, including the allocation of non-strategic sites to meet a housing need set out within the Local Plan.
- Promote additional development than that allocated in the Local Plan, where it is consistent with the Local Plan and supports sustainable development.
- Consider the infrastructure priorities for the community, including any needs arising from any non-strategic allocations. These could be set out as policy requirements provided that

Neighbourhood Plans cannot:

- Be used to prevent development.
- Include county council matters such as minerals and waste.
- Replicate or conflict with national or local planning policy

⁴ <https://neighbourhoodplanning.org/toolkits-and-guidance/create-neighbourhood-plan-step-by-step-roadmap-guide/>

⁵ In this case we mean the to-be adopted Uttlesford Local Plan 2021 – 2041 (expected to be adopted in early 2026).

they do not render the development unviable	
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Who can prepare a Neighbourhood Plan?

- 1.21. A Neighbourhood Plan must be initiated and prepared by a ‘qualifying body’. Where there is a parish or town council for the whole or any part of the area to be covered by a Neighbourhood Plan then they will become the ‘qualifying body’. Where there is a parish group or ‘parish meeting’, they will need to set up a Neighbourhood Forum to become the ‘qualifying body’. In Uttlesford district this means that generally, Neighbourhood Plans will be led by parish or town councils. **Appendix 1** provides a map of the parishes in Uttlesford.

What area is covered by a Neighbourhood Plan?

- 1.22. The Neighbourhood Plan area must be one that includes the whole or any part of the area of the parish. It is also possible to work with neighbouring parishes to produce a Neighbourhood Plan covering two or more parish areas. In this case there should be a Lead Parish with written evidence agreeing to the nomination of lead role that needs to be provided on application to the District Council of designation.

The Role of the Parish/Town Councils

- 1.23. The parish and town councils initiate and lead the process of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan. They are known as the Qualifying Body. It is important that the plan is prepared together and in consultation with their community. The parish council may set up a steering group to manage the project but remains responsible for the creation of the pre-submission draft plan for consultation and subsequent amendments, and for submission to UDC. For steering groups, the Locality Neighbourhood Planning article “How to write terms of reference for neighbourhood plans” may be useful.

2. Preparing a Neighbourhood Plan: The Process

- 2.1. The creation of a Neighbourhood Plan has 10 stages followed by a review two years after the plan is made (adoption). A summary diagram showing each stage and the process is available in **Appendix 2**.

The main stages are:

- 1) Scoping/Getting Started**
- 2) Designation**
- 3) Engagement**
- 4) Preparation/Evidence**
- 5) Developing Policies and Site Allocations**
- 6) Pre-submission Consultation Regulation 14**
- 7) Submission Regulation 15 and 16**
- 8) Independent Examination**
- 9) Referendum**
- 10) Adoption and Review**

Stage 1) Scoping/Getting Started

- The Parish/Town Council initiates a 'steering group' (NPSG), which can include councillors, residents, and business owners.
- The steering group (NPSG) should develop a Terms of Reference, a project plan (with a timeframe and budget), and a Communications Strategy.
- A skills audit can be undertaken to see what tasks can be done by volunteers.
- The group must decide on the Neighbourhood Plan Area (e.g., the whole parish, part of the parish, or working with a neighbouring parish).
- If working with another parish, a 'Lead Parish' must be nominated.

Support Available from Uttlesford District Council

- Officers can advise parish groups on setting up the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and outline the overall work programme needed to prepare the NP.
- Officers will discuss the scope of the Neighbourhood Plan and any issues that maybe covered in existing planning documents.

- 2.2. It is commonly the case that the parish/town council would initiate a 'steering group', the NPSG, formed of representatives and may include local residents/business owners and volunteers from the local community plus a selection of councillors. The steering group would be tasked with the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan and providing regular updates to both the full Parish or Town Council and the community. Locality provide guidance⁶ on how to write a Terms of Reference which provides structure on who will do what and what the responsibilities of each member are. Parish Councils can ask the Essex association of Local Councils (EALC) for advice on the most appropriate form of committee structure to comply with their Standing Orders.
- 2.3. Neighbourhood Plan Steering Groups as Qualifying Bodies are advised to develop a project plan with a time frame, key actions and a budget, to guide their activity through the process and to ensure that the programme, including the consultation and engagement programme, keep on track. As part of preparing the project plan, the steering group may wish to undertake a skills audit of their members to ascertain which tasks can be undertaken by volunteers and where contracted support or UDC/RCCE support is needed. The allocated officer can assist with developing the project plan and how to manage the process, risks and issues arising.
- 2.4. The steering group should, early in the process, consider how to engage with all residents, amenity and community groups, local businesses and statutory

⁶ <https://neighbourhoodplanning.org/toolkits-and-guidance/write-terms-reference-neighbourhood-plans/>

agencies and any other organisation that has an interest in the community. Good communication, covering all those interested in or affected by the Neighbourhood Plan is important right from the start and throughout the process. It is useful to have a Communications Strategy for social media and for regular parish communications, magazines etc as well as information leaflets, flyers and banners.

Defining the Neighbourhood Plan Area

- 2.5. The group should decide on whether the Neighbourhood Plan area includes the whole or any part of the parish, or whether to work with a neighbouring parish to produce a Neighbourhood Plan covering all areas. The consultation programme will need to be designed accordingly to ensure fair coverage. A Lead Parish must be nominated and written evidence of the agreement for this provided to UDC with the application for Designation of the NP area itself.
- 2.6. The Qualifying Body must notify formally UDC of their intention to undertake a Neighbourhood Plan and request that their area is 'Designated' as such. In order to fulfil the requirements of the designation process, the group has several matters to consider prior to formally requesting for Designation by Uttlesford District Council.

Stage 2) Designating a Neighbourhood Plan Area

- The Parish or Town Council formally submits the application to UDC to designate the Neighbourhood Area.
- Uttlesford will formally ratify this designation through Cabinet.

Support Available from Uttlesford District Council

- The Council will provide the NP groups with a **Designation Form** for submission to the Council for a decision on the proposed designated area. The Council can provide a map of the parish/specific neighbourhood area to accompany the designation form.
- Once submitted the Council will prepare a report to Cabinet for formal ratification.
- Following Designation, a lead and support officer will be allocated as a main point of contact for the designated group through the Neighbourhood Planning process.
- This is the point where select Larger Villages who are allocating non-strategic sites will be given a small grant of £2500 to support tasks set out in their project plan.

- 2.7. Once the area has been defined, the Parish or Town Council or Neighbourhood Forum should formally submit the area for designation to Uttlesford District Council in accordance with the regulations⁷. It is at this point that the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group is normally set up, The form for this will be made available from the Council's website. The submission needs:
- a map outlining the defined area which the plan will cover
 - a statement explaining why the proposed neighbourhood area is an appropriate area.', and
 - a statement that the organisation or body making the area application is the Qualifying Body usually the parish or town council, or forum if in an area with a Parish Meeting).
- 2.8. An application is then submitted to Uttlesford District Council who will then determine whether it is appropriate. Where the application aligns with parish boundaries the application will usually be immediately accepted. However, where an application does not meet these criteria, the Council may wish to consult on the proposed Neighbourhood Area.

⁷ Section 61G of the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act.
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/8/section/61G>

Stage 3) Engagement

- The Parish or Town Council will engage the community effectively throughout the process.
- Usually, a bespoke method will be undertaken depending on the arrangements within that specific Neighbourhood Plan area.

Support Available from Uttlesford District Council

- The Council can assist Neighbourhood Plan Groups on a bespoke basis with communications materials, following consideration of the level of engagement that may suit their own requirements, and can assist with access to an on-line survey form and setting up a procedure for processing the responses.
- The Council can also help to publicise key consultation stages of the process through its website and community newsletter etc.

- 2.9. Good community engagement generates a sense of community ownership of the project, is a way to identify a range of useful skills and knowledge in the community that may be helpful in the production of the Plan and ultimately is more likely to lead to acceptance of the final Neighbourhood Plan in the Referendum. Community engagement needs to be undertaken throughout the neighbourhood plan process. It will help to derive the Plan's Vision and Objectives by identifying key issues and themes as well as keeping everyone informed.
- 2.10. It is important to record the engagement undertaken from the start and throughout the process. This will help to ensure that the submission meets the legislative requirements demonstrating that community consultation has taken place at all stages of developing the plan and its policies. The plan will then gain public confidence and support and avoid conflict and delay as it moves towards the Referendum stage. There is a requirement for a Consultation Statement to be submitted alongside the Planning Policies to demonstrate that the group has engaged effectively with the community. It is vital to keep a record of what public engagement takes place so that it can be included in the Consultation Statement which will also be assessed by the Independent Examiner.
- 2.11. There are several engagement techniques at the Parish/town council's disposal. The following is a list of possible ways of consulting with community members and groups. *Locality* have published helpful guidance on their website⁸. RCCE are experienced in a variety of community engagement methods and keep examples from other past steering groups. As well as advice. RCCE have several resources that NP Groups can employ.

⁸ [Engaging with your community in a meaningful way - Locality Neighbourhood Planning](#)

- Drop-in sessions
- Adverts / posters
- Letter and leaflet drop to all premises in the neighbourhood area.
- Questionnaires
- Website and social media
- Notices in parish newsletters
- Talking to local established groups

- 2.12. Finding out what people think and drawing on their knowledge are important parts of developing understanding of the area, its issues and planning opportunities. Along with the evidence gathered from other sources, community engagement will help to direct the topics for consideration in the Neighbourhood Plan and on the draft Vision and Objectives.
- 2.13. Later on, in the preparation of the NP, planning legislation requires publicity and consultation on the draft Neighbourhood Plan prior to submission. Gaining support and early consensus are especially important for the public Referendum at the end of the process to reduce the risk of a 'no' vote.

Stage 4) Preparation/Evidence

- From the identified issues and continued consultation with Local Groups, the qualifying body must identify baseline information and undertake technical evidence gathering.
- In discussion with the allocated officer, the group must identify whether the Plan is likely to have a significant identified environmental effect.

Support Available from Uttlesford District Council

- The Council can discuss where particular evidence exists already; in addition, the Council could provide guidance where locally specific evidence may be beneficial, or perhaps where it is unnecessary.
- In addition, the Council can also provide groups with specialist assistance, for example from the Transport or Urban Design Officer when developing specific pieces of evidence.
- As the 'responsible authority' the Council will undertake an SEA and HRA screening opinion and provide the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group with feedback on potential environmental impacts of the proposals to help ensure that potential environmental effects are avoided or mitigated, and how to address opportunities for enhancing the environment, hence promoting sustainable development.
- If a group requires an SEA or HRA, the allocated officer will provide ongoing guidance throughout the SEA/HRA process. Once enough information has been gathered UDC will then undertake a SEA scoping report for the group, followed by the full Environmental report that would be undertaken by a consultant (grant funding will depend on whether the group is a larger village allocating non-strategic sites)

Evidence Base

- 2.14. The initial engagement will identify issues and priorities, as well as building on any issues already identified. The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group should consider what issues and priorities to address and how these issues may be taken forward. Some will be planning-specific, and some will likely be non-planning related. It may be useful to consult with other bodies, including the District and County Councils, health providers or local groups and organisations. Where some technical evidence may assist the process, the Council will be able to advise if this is necessary since many evidence documents have been prepared as part of the local plan-making process and are available on the Uttlesford District Council website. Detail on common sources of local evidence available to groups is set out in **Appendix 3**.

Environmental and Habitats (Screening) Assessment

2.15. Once the broad scope of the plan has been identified, it will be necessary to request a '**screening opinion**' from the Council to determine whether the plan needs to be supported by Environmental and Habitat assessments. It is recommended that this is undertaken early in the process after the scoping of the plan is complete and the objectives are clear. This is to ensure that the plan is in line with the 'Basic Conditions' of development plans (see **Appendix 4**). In relation to Environmental or Habitats Assessments, these include to be compatible with EU obligations and hence a plan must not breach EU obligations, in particular the requirement to undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and a Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA). The Council as Local Planning Authority (LPA) should undertake SEA screening for Neighbourhood Plans.

2.16. Further information relating to the Environmental Assessment of Neighbourhood Plans is available through Locality Guidance⁹

Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA)

2.17. The purpose of the SEA is to evaluate the environmental consequences of the Neighbourhood Plan and will be necessary if:

- a Neighbourhood Plan allocates sites for development for housing, employment etc, and
- the neighbourhood area contains sensitive environmental assets e.g. a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) that may be affected by the proposed policies, site allocations and proposals.

2.18. Not every Neighbourhood Plan needs an SEA though, however, when submitting a plan proposal to the local planning authority it is mandatory to provide, either:

- i. a statement of reasons as to why SEA was not required (an SEA screening report will contain this), or
- ii. an Environmental Assessment (a key output of the SEA process)

2.19. It is unlikely that a Neighbourhood Plan would require an SEA if the plan were not allocating land for development. This is because allocating land for development is more likely to generate physical changes which have potential to create significant effects.

2.20. Notwithstanding this, it is recommended that Neighbourhood Plan Steering Groups request a screening from their allocated officer as soon as there is sufficient information is available to consider whether the proposed content of the plan or its likely intent are likely to lead to significant effects.

⁹ <https://neighbourhoodplanning.org/toolkits-and-guidance/understand-plan-requires-strategic-environmental-assessment-sea/>

- 2.21. In the current Uttlesford context, this means that the larger villages allocating sites are likely to be the settlements that will require a full SEA. Throughout the process of producing the full SEA report, it is useful that when developing the plan and producing the policies, the outputs of the SEA process are considered. On submission, the NP must be accompanied by an SEA/HRA Determination Statement.
- 2.22. UDC have developed a standard template to prepare the Scoping Report. UDC are intending to procure consultants who will be able to undertake the work for the relevant Larger Villages, thus also securing some cost savings, etc.

Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA)

- 2.23. The purpose of an HRA is to determine whether the Neighbourhood Plan influences a designated European nature conservation site and is allocating development that would have a material effect on it. In Uttlesford there are no designated 'European sites' however parts of the District are within the affected 'Zones of Influence' for:
- Essex Coast including the Blackwater Estuary SSSI
 - Epping Forest SAC
 - Lee Valley SPA
- 2.24. The requirement of a HRA can be assessed in a screening report which will assess the significance of effects on these designations. However, this will be-checked on a case-by-case basis.

Stage 5) Developing Policies and Site Allocations

- The Qualifying Body is required by the regulations before submission to the Local Plan to publicise and consult on the draft plan and associated evidence.

Support Available from Uttlesford District Council

- The Council can help review those policies prepared by the NPGs, ensure there is no duplication with the Local Plan, and provide interactive feedback with the NP group. Advice can be given on the use of the Council's Design Code and in creating a site or issue-specific design code but with more detail that relates to a specific location in the NP area. **It is important to note that the Council cannot write policies for the groups directly, the steering groups should take a lead on this.**
- The Council may also be able to provide groups with limited mapping or document formatting support for some simple tasks or accessibility requirements.

- 2.25. The format of a Neighbourhood Plan will have an introductory chapter, a description of the Village or area 'today', a description of the community engagement and survey 'headline' data and introduce the Vision Statement, the Objectives, and the proposed neighbourhood planning policies. These policies will have evolved from evidence gained from the community surveys and from published reports and data. It is this evidence that is used to 'justify' or 'support' the policies.
- 2.26. Supporting text to the policies will explain the objective and background to the policy. Policies should be clear and unambiguous in their requirements, in order to assist both the applicant and the planning officer.
- 2.27. With the intention to be adopted in early Spring 2026, Uttlesford's new Local Plan is well advanced, and its policies are available for consideration so that the Neighbourhood Plan does not repeat Local Plan policy requirements. or the adopted Council Design Code. NP policies may of course cover a specific issue or site in more local detail.
- 2.28. Neighbourhood Plan policies and site allocations can be used to enable housing, employment, including industrial, commercial and tourism-related development, meeting a need for business space such as providing hot-desking facilities at an 'office hub' or faster broadband for people working from home. The NP can include policies for improving public spaces, highways, pedestrian links or providing new community facilities, as long as

these elements of 'infrastructure' are essential to new development sites in meeting needs likely to arise from new residents or businesses.

- 2.29. In developing the NP policies for proposed site allocations different options may be considered and evaluated against a standardised set of criteria. They can also be subject to consultation to find people's preferences. Options could consider the appropriateness of potential sites for new housing, commercial development or community facilities.
- 2.30. The Community could also be invited to consider proposals for the designation of green spaces valued by the community as Local Green Space so that it is protected from inappropriate development in the future.

Stage 6) Pre Submission Consultation (Regulation 14)

- Using the evidence gathered, qualifying bodies must prepare policies that address identified issues.
- Policies within the plan should not repeat Local Plan or district wide Design Code requirements.
- If the plan intends to allocate sites, different options should be considered and evaluated against a standard set of criteria. Further engagement with the local community and is recommended for this stage.

Support Available from Uttlesford District Council

- The Council can help review those policies prepared by the NPGs, ensure there is no duplication with the Local Plan, and provide interactive feedback with the NP group. Advice can be given on the use of the Council's Design Code and in creating a site or issue-specific design code but with more detail that relates to a specific location in the NP area. It is important to note that the Council cannot write policies for the groups directly, the steering groups should take a lead on this.
- The Council may also be able to provide groups with limited mapping or document formatting support for some simple tasks or accessibility requirements.

- 2.31. The pre-submission draft Neighbourhood Plan with its policies and site proposals will have been through a wide range of consultations and community engagement exercises. Neighbourhood planning regulations require a pre-submission consultation to be conducted by the Parish or Town Council as Qualifying Body with the community of the plan area and statutory consultees before it is submitted to the District Council and progressed to an Independent Examination. The consultation must be no less than six weeks and will be publicised to the local community and the statutory bodies. The specific requirements are set out in the checklist available in **Appendix 5**

Responses received from this pre-submission consultation must be taken into account when considering any amendments or re-drafting parts of the Plan following this consultation. Once the appropriate adjustments have been made, the plan can be submitted formally to the District Council. The finalised Plan will be submitted along with the Statement of Conformity and

Stage 7) Submission to the Council (Regulation 15 and 16)

- Following further modifications based on the pre submission consultation the Neighbourhood Plan will be updated and once finalised will be submitted to the Local Authority with all the required documentation.

Support Available from Uttlesford District Council

- Regulation 16 requires that the Council publicises the draft Neighbourhood Plan for a further minimum 6-week period of a second public consultation.
- The council will pass the representations made along with the Plan and supporting evidence for the consultation statement and statement of conformity to the Independent Examiner when they are appointed.
- The Council will check the submission documents and is responsible for arranging an inspector for examination.

the Community Engagement Statement.

2.32. The draft Neighbourhood Plan is submitted to the District Council as the local planning authority as required by Regulation 15. After submission, the District Council becomes responsible for taking the Neighbourhood Plan forward. The District Council will be responsible for checking that the submitted draft Neighbourhood Plan has followed the proper legal process. The Neighbourhood Plan submission must include the following:

- a map or statement identifying the NP area
- a consultation statement (summary of the issues/concerns received and demonstrate how they have been addressed in the NP)
- the Neighbourhood Plan proposal
- any supporting evidence, and
- a statement on how the plan fulfils the basic conditions¹⁰

2.33. The Council will let a tender to appoint an 'independent examiner'. Independent Examiners are experienced planning consultants that have undergone additional training to undertake the task of reviewing the Plan. In conjunction with the Qualifying Body, an Independent Examiner will be

¹⁰ The basic conditions are that neighbourhood plans have regard to national policy, contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, be in general conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan for the local area and be compatible with EU obligations (SEA/HRA), they are available to view in appendix 4

chosen to review the documents and the representations made at the Regulation 16 consultation. The 'independent examiner' will consider whether the Neighbourhood Plan meets the basic conditions and has followed the legal process.

Stage 8) Independent Examination

- The appointed examiner will review the submitted documentation.
- They will then make a decision as to whether it can be carried out via Written Representations or by a Hearing.
- They will consider whether the plan meets the Basic Conditions (Appendix 4) and has been through the correct legal process. They may propose modifications to or ask for additional evidence throughout the examination.

Support Available from Uttlesford District Council

- The Council will appoint the independent examiner who will need to be agreed with the Qualifying Body
- Following this, amendments as recommended by the IE will be undertaken by the QB and Officers can assist in incorporating these Modifications to the Plan before presenting a report to seek Council Members' approval for its proceeding to the Referendum.

- 2.34. Following an initial review of the documentation the appointed Examiner will indicate whether further examination is to be carried out by the Written Representations process or by a Hearing. The majority of Neighbourhood Plans are examined via the Written Representations method. However, the Examiner may decide that a Hearing in person to discuss issues raised by representations further is required. All the Adopted Uttlesford Neighbourhood Plan Examinations have been through Written representations.
- 2.35. The 'independent examiner' will consider whether the Neighbourhood Plan meets the basic conditions and has followed the legal process. Their report will recommend changes to the policies to ensure that they meet the legal

requirements and thus confirm that the Neighbourhood Plan can proceed to Referendum or not. They may propose minor amendments to the policy wording or possibly ask for further evidence. Alternatively, they may find the Plan unsound and request that the Qualifying Body undertake a significant review. Furthermore, the Qualifying Body may disagree that the proposed amendments to the intentions of the policy are so far removed from their original intentions that they decide to consult the community again with another Regulation 14 consultation.

- 2.36. Following the Examiner's report, the District Council will consider any recommended changes. If the Examiner's recommended changes are significant the neighbourhood planning body may decide to undertake another consultation with local community again undertaking further consultation, reviewing the policy wording and repeating the Regulation 14 Pre submission consultation event before resubmitting to the council to repeat the Regulation 16 consultation.

Stage 9) Referendum

- A referendum will take place to determine whether the plan will be adopted or not.
- It involves a simple yes/no vote where to proceed with adoption will require majority support by Loca

Support Available from Uttlesford District Council

- The Council is responsible for arranging for the referendum. The Electoral Services department will organise and schedule the Referendum date.

- 2.37. Following the Inspector's examination stage, with any modifications to the NP the Council will arrange for a Neighbourhood Plan Referendum. The Council must publish information about the Neighbourhood Plan 28 working days before the date of the Referendum. The Referendum will involve a simple 'yes' or 'no' vote. If there is a majority 'yes' vote (more than 50% of voters supporting it), then the NP is 'made' and becomes part of the statutory development plan for the area. It will then be considered when planning applications are submitted, alongside the adopted Local Plan.

Stage 10) Adoption and Review

- The Neighbourhood Plan then is ‘made’ and will be used in planning decisions by the Local Planning Authority.
- A review of the Plan might be required to ensure it keeps up to date with changing legislation, local and national planning policy.

Support Available from Uttlesford District Council

- The Council will submit a report to the Full Council with a recommendation to adopt or not adopt the Neighbourhood Plan based on the Referendum Results.
- Once adopted the Council can assist in a NP ‘health check’ identifying which areas require review and how policies have been utilised in planning decisions. It can also assist the group on the review process will be taken forward.

- 2.38. Following a successful Referendum outcome, the Council will formally ‘make’ the Neighbourhood Plan, and it will form part of the Local Development Plan with the policies carrying full weight when assessing planning applications in the Neighbourhood Plan area. The Neighbourhood Plan should be published on the Parish Council website. As planning applications come forward for consideration by the Council, parish councils should monitor how the Neighbourhood Plan and its policies have been used to help determine the planning application decisions.

Review and Monitoring

- 2.39. Although there is no requirement to review NPs, policies may become out of date and less effective. The Neighbourhood Plan could be reviewed after a period of time (normally five years) to ensure it keeps up to date with changing legislation, local and national policies. The process for this will be similar but should be less lengthy because only specific sites or policies will need to be reviewed. However, if the amendments are major (materially affecting the policies in the plan) they will need to go through the later stages of the process, from Stage 6 – Pre submission consultation onwards.
- 2.40. When sending the plan to the independent examiner, the LPA must state whether it believes that the modifications are so significant or substantial as to change the nature of the plan, giving reasons.
- 2.41. The examiner will then decide whether the modifications proposed change the nature of the plan and the group must decide whether to proceed with the examination.

Acronym	Description
NP	Neighbourhood Plan (The community-led planning document)
NPSG	Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (The group of volunteers who write the plan)
LPA	Local Planning Authority (The district or borough council, e.g., UDC)
QB	Qualifying Body (The official body, usually the Parish Council, that submits the plan)
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework (The national rulebook for planning)
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment (A required check for a plan's environmental impact)
HRA	Habitats Regulation Assessment (A required check for impact on protected nature sites)
IE	Independent Examiner (The expert who checks if the plan meets the 'Basic Conditions')
VDS	Village Design Statement (A related, but less formal, document about local character)

Appendix 1: Map of the Parish Councils in Uttlesford



Appendix 2: Summary of Support Available

Key NPG Actions	Support from UDC/RCCE NB – UDC will support Larger Villages that are planning for non-strategic allocations	Principal support from UDC or RCCE
Initial meeting(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Attendance at workshop to provide general advice > Provide examples of publicity materials > Provide examples of good practice 'made' Neighbourhood Plans 	RCCE
Define the Neighbourhood Plan Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Explain the application process for Neighbourhood Area Designation > Provide map of the boundary of the proposed area > Review the designation application and take it through Council approval process 	RCCE/UDC
Establish a Steering Group and budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Attend initial meeting of volunteers > Advise on time plan and budget > For Larger Villages (with a non-strategic housing requirement), introduce the grant funding and 'in-kind' officer support that may be available 	RCCE
Prepare a Project Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Review and comment on the project plan, including both timescales and content 	RCCE/UDC
Community Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Advise on communications strategy > Provide feedback on draft surveys. > Publicise the establishment of the Neighbourhood Plan Group on UDC's website. > Assist with production of publicity material > Advise on the preparation of a Consultation Log and Statement 	RCCE/UDC
Draft Vision and Planning Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Comment on Neighbourhood Plan vision and objectives. 	UDC
Prepare an Evidence Base	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Signpost to existing sources of evidence > Help identify gaps in information and need for survey work to help achieve the objectives. > Identify need for a 'Call for Sites' > Provide comments on emerging evidence documents 	UDC
Prepare a Draft Neighbourhood Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Advise on presentation and structure of document > Advise on draft policies and allocations > Advise on the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment and support for the screening process 	UDC

Key NPG Actions	Support from UDC/RCCE NB – UDC will support Larger Villages that are planning for non-strategic allocations	Principal support from UDC or RCCE
Consult on the draft Neighbourhood Plan (pre submission consultation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Advise on the statutory consultation process > Comment on the emerging draft Consultation Statement > Advise on potential amendments to the Plan arising from consultation 	UDC
Regulation 15 Submission, Examination and Post Examination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Advice on documentation required for submission > Check Basic Conditions Statement, Consultation Statement etc > Set up Examination and advise Neighbourhood Planning Group of the procedure. > Assist with addressing comments/issues during the examination including those raised within the Inspector's report > Subject to the outcome of the examination and the subsequent referendum, UDC will confirm that the NP is now 'made' 	UDC

Appendix 3: Data Sources

Local Data

Data	<u>Detail</u>
Local Plan Evidence	A number of reports that assess various topics such as landscape sensitivity and sustainable transport to assist the emerging Local Plan.
Constraints Map	A map showing planning constraints within Uttlesford.
Uttlesford Planning Portal	Portal to access information about previous applications in your parish which may hold pertinent information regarding specific sites.
Essex Open Data	Open Data produced by Essex County Council on a number of topics such as transportation or education

National Data

Data	<u>Detail</u>
Census Data (Nomis)	A service provided by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) which provides demographic, social, and economic statistics.
Planning data for England	Interactive map of national planning designations in England, produced by MHCLG
Magic Map	Interactive environmental designation mapping, produced by DEFRA.

Appendix 4: Basic Conditions (etc)

Only a draft Neighbourhood Plan or Order that meets each of a set of basic conditions can be put to a referendum and be 'made'. The basic conditions are set out in paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as applied to neighbourhood plans by section 38A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. The basic conditions are:

- a) having regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State it is appropriate to make the order (or neighbourhood plan). Read more about National policy and advice.
- b) having special regard to the desirability of preserving any listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses, it is appropriate to make the order. This applies only to Orders. Read more about Listed buildings and conservation areas.
- c) having special regard to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of any conservation area, it is appropriate to make the order. This applies only to Orders. Read more about Listed buildings and conservation areas.
- d) the making of the order (or Neighbourhood Plan) contributes to the achievement of sustainable development. Read more about Sustainable development
- e) the making of the order (or Neighbourhood Plan) is in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan for the area of the authority (or any part of that area). Read more about General conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan.
- f) the making of the order (or Neighbourhood Plan) does not breach, and is otherwise compatible with, EU obligations. Read more about EU obligations.
- g) prescribed conditions are met in relation to the Order (or plan) and prescribed matters have been complied with in connection with the proposal for the order (or neighbourhood plan). Read more about Other basic conditions.

Appendix 5: Regulation 14 Checklist

Requirement	Check
Pre-Submission version sign-off for consultation by responsible body for the emerging Plan, supporting documentation and evidence base (Town/Parish Council) (letter or meeting minutes).	
Asked officers for a statutory consultee contact list, and created own local list of consultees. Advertise the emerging plan within your Neighbourhood Area and to those with an interest in the area (statutory and organisations/ landowners) in a way to ensure that all residents, businesses or people that work or have an interest in the area are aware of the proposals	
Set a clear consultation period of at least 6 weeks.	
Made clear where a paper copy of the plan can be seen, & electronic copy can be obtained i.e downloaded Neighbourhood Plan / parish Council web site. Supporting evidence including background information used to justify the emerging plan should also be made available for comment.	
Made clear how people can make comments and the period within which comments may be made.	
Formally invited/consulted with any statutory body whose interest may be affected by proposals in your emerging plan; i.e. specific invitation setting out the consultation period and copy / link to the emerging Neighbourhood Plan consultation document and supporting evidence.	
Sent a copy of the consultation documents to the local authority planning team / nominated officer.	
Included any Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment screening opinion.	
Published document and supporting evidence on Neighbourhood Plan / Parish Council web site and advised how to comment and where to obtain a copy.	