

**PLANNING COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES,
LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on WEDNESDAY, 14
JANUARY 2026 at 10.00 am**

Present:	Councillor R Freeman (Co-Chair) Councillors N Church, R Haynes, M Lemon, R Pavitt, R Silcock and M Sutton
Officers in attendance:	N Brown (Head of Development Management and Enforcement), C Forster (Head of Legal and Monitoring Officer), C Gibson (Democratic Services Officer), G Henry (Senior Planning Officer), K Jennings (Planning Officer), A Neale (Planning Officer) and L Trevillian (District Wide Team Leader)
Public Speakers:	K Armstrong, Councillor D Bardell, E Bayliss, S Cowley, S Dix, L Fitzgerald, G Hofer, D Mabb, B Pope, C Russell, J Russell, Councillor P Sampson, Councillor G Sell and M Young.

PC71 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Freeman took the Chair.

There were apologies for absence from Councillors Bagnall, Emanuel and Loughlin. Councillor Silcock substituted for Councillor Loughlin.

Declarations of interest were made by:

- Councillor Lemon: Ward Councillor (Item 6) and had called the item in but remained open-minded and would stay in the meeting.
- Councillor Haynes: Previous involvement with the site (Item 4). Would withdraw for item.
- Councillor Silcock: friend of applicant (Item 6) and had called in Item 7. Would withdraw for both items.

PC72 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2025 were approved as an accurate record.

PC73 QUALITY AND SPEED OF MAJOR AND NON-MAJOR APPLICATIONS

The Head of Development Management and Enforcement presented the standing Speed and Quality Report.

He highlighted the very favourable speed of Major Decisions (100%) and Non-Major Decisions (91%) and the pending Major Planning Appeal at Land North of Bedwell Road.

The report was noted.

Councillor Haynes withdrew from the table before the next item.

PC74 **UTT/25/1224/FUL - LAND NEAR PELHAM SUBSTATION, MAGGOTS END ROAD, MANUDEN & BERDEN**

The District Wide Team Leader presented an application seeking full planning permission for the construction and operation of the Pelham Spring Solar Farm with associated infrastructure.

He referred members to paragraph 4.10 of the report which compared a previously refused scheme to the current scheme. He said that there was an additional proposal in respect of De-Commissioning: Condition 4 would be removed and replaced by three additional conditions to strengthen the controls.

Members were also referred to the Addendum List which detailed that the application had been awarded a Gate 2 connection offer.

The District Wide Team Leader recommended that the Strategic Director of Planning be authorised to grant permission for the development subject to those items set out in section 17 of the report.

In response to questions from Members, officers:

- Said that there was no way of knowing if Gate 2 connection would be fast-tracked.
- Said that Place Services were satisfied with the proposals subject to Conditions; numbers 13, 14, 15 and 17 were referred to specifically in respect of biodiversity concerns.

Members discussed:

- The changes between the previous application refusal and the current application as highlighted in paragraphs 4.10, 4.11 and 4.12 of the report. Officers said that the Gate 2 connection to the grid was not a material condition in respect of planning and neither was a potential cost of an Appeal in the event of refusal. Several Members said that they were struggling to balance the need for green energy against the proposed mitigations.
- De-commissioning arrangements: officers said that UDC had previously made use of S106, but that Planning Inspectors took the view of managing this through Conditions.

Councillor Pavitt said that he could not see significant changes to the previously refused application. He referred to the previous decision refused on 11 May 2023 by the Planning Inspector detailed in paragraph 6.3 of the report. He said that he considered that most of the harms identified then were still valid in that there was:

- Significant adverse impact on landscape character and visual amenity.
- Harm to the setting of the heritage assets/ ancient monuments.

- Loss of Best and Most Versatile agricultural land.

Councillor Pavitt proposed refusal of the application, referring specifically to Policy S7, CP41, ENV 2, ENV 4 and ENV 5.

This was seconded by Councillor Sutton.

RESOLVED that the Strategic Director of Planning be authorised to refuse permission for the development in line with the proposal.

Councillor R Haynes, M Young, K Armstrong, G Hofer, J Russell and C Russell (Berden PC) spoke against the application. Councillor Haynes left the meeting following his speech. S Dix (Applicant) spoke in support.

The meeting adjourned for a comfort break between 11.30 am and 11.40 am.

Councillor Haynes returned to the meeting before the next item.

PC75 UTT/25/1742/FUL - LAND AT PARSONAGE FARM, FOREST HALL ROAD, STANSTED

The Senior Planning Officer presented an application for the construction and operation of a solar farm comprising ground mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) arrays and battery storage together with associated development, including inverter cabins, substation, customer switchgear, access, fencing, CCTV cameras and landscaping.

In addition to the information provided in the Addendum List, the Senior Planning Officer provided a verbal update. She said that:

- The Landscape Environmental Management Plan condition would add a line to request the details of the Operation Environmental Plan (OEMP) as it was stated within the Environmental Statement that this would be provided. (Officers had confirmed with the agent that this was acceptable)
- Officers considered that a Soil Management condition would be necessary to address concerns raised by Natural England to restore the land back to agricultural uses. In the event the application was recommended for approval an appropriately worded condition would be added – this would be similar to the wording of the Cutlers Farm Solar Scheme, Condition 25.
- The original comments from the Environment Agency (EA) stated an objection due to potential for groundwater contamination from Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS). The application site area was within Groundwater Zone Protection Zone 3.

In a letter responding to the EA, the applicant offered a condition which requires.

‘No development to take place until a Battery Safety Management Plan (BSMP) has been submitted to approved.’.

Following this the Environment Agency had lifted their condition, this had not been added to the listed conditions nor addendum list, but officers consider this should be added to the decision notice in the event the application was recommended for approval.

Officers consider this would be necessary for the protection of groundwater during the operational phase. This had been confirmed as acceptable to the agent.

The Senior Planning Officer recommended that the application be approved, subject to the items set out in section 17 of the report, the addendum list and the verbal update.

In response to questions from Members, officers:

- Justified their view that Very Special Circumstances existed to clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt.
- Showed on the plans where the battery storage would be located and said that this must comply with Fire Officer guidance (which are considerations outside of the planning process).
- Said that National Highways concerns regarding glint and glare had been addressed.

Members discussed:

- Concerns that not enough detail had been provided, given that this was a full application. Officers confirmed they had full facts and that concerns could be dealt with through conditions.
- The need to have decommissioning conditions in place. Officers confirmed that a strong model for de-commissioning had now been developed.
- Concerns regarding the necessary isolation of batteries and the protection of the chalk stream. Officers advised, as per the verbal update regarding Battery Safety Plan this could be boosted.

Officers then read out a suggested condition in full (condition 10 of an appeal decision for a Solar Farm development) put forward by the applicant in response to the Environment Agency (as per the verbal update) which stated.

“No development shall take place until a Battery Safety Management Plan (BSMP) has been submitted to, and agreed in writing by, the Local Planning Authority. The BSMP shall detail the type and specification of the batteries to be used, prescribe the measures to be implemented to facilitate safety during the construction, operation and decommissioning of the BESS, measures to be deployed in response to any incident with potential to cause pollution and a fire safety management and risk reduction strategy. An Emergency Response Plan must also be included. The BSMP should also set out a methodology detailing how there will be continued engagement with the Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Service (intended to read as “Essex”) throughout the lifetime of the development. The BSMP shall be implemented as approved and all measures shall be retained for the duration of the development”.

Councillor Haynes suggested adding the wording “it complies with Chief Fire Officers Council guidance regarding battery storage”. This guidance is provided in “The National Fire Chiefs Council Battery Energy Storage System Guidance for FRS.”

- There would be at least a 15m buffer zone from the solar panels and ancient woodland which is in accordance with national guidance (for ancient woodlands).

Councillor Pavitt proposed approval of the application, with Condition 10 to be strengthened by officers. This was seconded by Councillor Haynes.

RESOLVED that the Strategic Director of Planning be authorised to grant permission for the development subject to those items set out in section 17 of the report, the addendum list, the verbal update and a strengthened Condition 10.

M Young, Councillor P Sampson (Birchanger PC) and Councillor G Sell (Stansted Mountfitchet PC) spoke against the application. D Mabb (Agent) spoke in support.

The meeting adjourned for lunch between 12.50 pm and 1.20 pm.

Councillor R Silcock left the meeting before the next item.

PC76 UTT/25/1193/FUL - BRETTS FARM, CHELMSFORD ROAD, WHITE RODING

The Planning Officer presented an application for the demolition of existing commercial units at Bretts Farm, erection of a new commercial building (including four units), 8 residential dwellings and associated infrastructure.

This application had been called in by Councillor Lemon on the grounds of over development, loss of commercial properties, and village amenities and a very small car park area.

The Planning Officer said that Essex CC Highways had expressed no objections to the additional condition, and he recommended that the application be approved, subject to the conditions set out in section 17 of the report.

In response to questions from Members, officers:

- Said that there were no plans to remove plot 8 and turn it into further car parking space within the current application.
- Said that in respect of lighting and acoustic requirements, these were covered by Conditions 12 – 15.
- Said that the proposed commercial floor space was dropping from 787 sq. metres to 336 sq. metres but that adequate parking arrangements were in place for both the commercial properties (22 proposed spaces, when 17 were the minimum requirement) and the residential properties.

Members discussed:

- Parking concerns: these had previously been addressed by officers, and it was said that Members should be wary of encouraging a larger car park.
- There clearly being a need to improve the development.
- There being an opportunity to specify lighting requirements, with low level lighting preferred.
- The number of people employed at the site; it had been indicated that there would be no changes regarding the rate of employment.

Councillor Church said that parking arrangements should be prioritised and proposed approval of the application, together with an additional condition to be added in respect of strengthening lighting conditions.

This was seconded by Councillor Sutton.

RESOLVED that the Strategic Director of Planning be authorised to grant permission for the development subject to those items set out in section 17 of the report-
Conditions. Together with an additional condition re lighting.

Councillor D Bardell (White Roding PC) spoke broadly in support of the application but expressed concerns about car parking arrangements. S Cowley (Applicant) spoke in support.

Councillor Silcock returned to the room as a public speaker on the next item.

PC77 **UTT/25/1900/FUL - ROSEMARY COTTAGE, CAUSEWAY END ROAD, FELSTED**

The Planning Officer presented an application for the construction of one new dwelling and new access onto Causeway End Road.

This application had been called in by Councillor Silcock on the basis that this would be backland development on a Green Field site, outside Village Development Limits.

The Planning Officer recommended that the application be approved, subject to the conditions set out in section 17 of the report.

In response to questions from Members, officers:

- Outlined the NPPF definition of Previously Developed Land and the High Court judgement as stated in paragraph 14.3.24 of the report.
- Said that Essex CC Highways had raised no objections regarding access arrangements.
- Said that the 4 dwellings were under construction adjacent the site.
- Said that any waste collection arrangements would be roadside,
- Said that any foul water treatment arrangements were not a planning consideration.
- Said that the proposal was not out of keeping with the area.

- Drew Members' attention to the Emerging Local Plan (ELP) issues as highlighted in paragraphs 14.3.10 – 14.3.13 of the report. They said that moderate weight should be given to the ELP.

Members discussed:

- That the development would not intrude any further into the countryside.
- That a 5-bedroom dwelling would inevitably involve lots of personnel movement.
- Access issues. Officers said these had been satisfactorily addressed.
- Foul water drainage concerns. Officers said these had been satisfactorily addressed.
- Overdevelopment concerns.
- If there were any reasons for possible refusal.

Councillor Church said that whilst he was not overly happy with the development, he would propose approval. Councillor Pavitt said that he could not see a reason for refusal and seconded the proposal. This proposal was lost on the casting vote of the Chair.

A further proposal was invited.

Councillor Sutton expressed concern at the size of the development, cross-referenced to the Emerging Local Plan. She proposed refusal on the grounds of GEN2 – Overdevelopment in location. This proposal was seconded by Councillor Lemon.

RESOLVED that the Strategic Director of Planning be authorised to refuse permission on the grounds of GEN2.

Councillor R Silcock, B Pope and L Fitzgerald spoke against the application.

Councillor Silcock left the room following his speech and returned to the table before the next item.

PC78 **UTT/25/3169/HHF - 8 CHURCH STREET, GREAT DUNMOW**

The Planning Officer presented a S73A retrospective application for the construction of an outbuilding in the grounds of a listed building, which was a Council property.

She recommended that the Strategic Director of Planning be authorised to refuse permission for the development for the reasons set out in section 17 of the report.

In response to questions from Members, officers:

- Said that the submitted plans did not appear to coincide with what the client was proposing to build, together with the proposed materials.

Members discussed:

- The role of the Housing Department during this application. It was stated that the Housing Department had to comply with the law.
- The possibility of either refusing or deferring the application with an “olive branch” approach. Members were generally sympathetic towards the client’s situation but said that they were not in a position to support the application.

Councillor Church proposed refusal of the application. He said that a new application should be invited. This was seconded by Councillor Pavitt.

RESOLVED that the Strategic Director of Planning be authorised to refuse permission for the development for the reasons set out in section 17 of the report.

E Bayliss (Applicant) spoke in support of the application.

The meeting ended at 3.00 pm.