

**LOCAL PLAN PANEL held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES,
LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on WEDNESDAY, 24
SEPTEMBER 2025 at 7.00 pm**

Present: Councillor R Freeman (Chair)
Councillors J Emanuel, J Evans, J Moran, N Reeve, G Sell and
M Tayler

Officers in attendance: J Blakey (Planning Policy Officer), D Hermitage (Strategic
Director of Planning), J Procter (Democratic Services Officer), C
Welham (Senior Planning Policy Officer).

1 PUBLIC SPEAKING

Mr A Ketteridge, a public speaker, addressed the Panel. A summary of his statement has been appended to these minutes.

The Strategic Director of Planning responded to points raised by the public speaker. He said: -

- The political history of the Local Plan prior to Regulation 19 was not strictly relevant to the main modifications that were to be discussed at the meeting.
- The sites allocated for development had been through formal scrutiny procedures, which he believed reflected sustainability.

In response to questions from the Panel, the Strategic Director of Planning said: -

- Regarding the Saffron Walden site allocation, the inspectors proposed removal of the land for a potential future country park as it was a longer-term ambition that still featured in the green and blue infrastructure strategy.

Members discussed how the Local Plan Panel had aimed to approach its task by responding to evidence, causing the plan to change and evolve.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies were received from Councillor Gooding.

Councillor Emanuel declared that she was part of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Committee for Newport, Quendon and Rickling.

Councillor Freeman declared that he was a member of Saffron Walden Town Council.

Councillor Evans declared he was the Chair of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Committee for Stebbing.

Councillor Sell declared he was a member of the Stansted Mountfitchet Parish Council.

3 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 19 November 2024 were approved as an accurate record.

4 **LOCAL PLAN MAIN MODIFICATIONS UPDATE**

The Strategic Director of Planning presented the report on the Local Plan Main Modification Update. He suggested the Main Modifications (MMs) could be considered as the penultimate stage of the Local Plan process. The Inspector had identified a series of MMs to ensure the Plan was legally compliant and sound. He stressed the MMs were not optional, could not be amended by members, and were central in achieving the Plan. It was reasonable to assume that the Inspector was happy with the parts of the Plan that had not been modified.

The MMs had been sent out for consultation, after which the inspectors would consider them and final reports could then go to Full Council.

Members expressed thanks to officers for their work on the Local Plan.

In response to a question from a Member, Councillor Evans, the Portfolio Holder for Planning, said in his view the Plan was on track to be adopted as per the timetable. Through comparison with the Local Plans of other authorities, his view was that Uttlesford's Local Plan had been well received by the Inspector.

In response to questions from Members, the Strategic Director of Planning said: -

- The Inspectors had prompted the schedule of MMs which they felt would need to be implemented for the Local Plan to move forward. The consultation on these modifications were to receive an outside opinion on the changes.
- Following discussion at the hearing, the Inspectors felt the heritage constraints at Thaxted could be overcome, while the education issue could not.

- The changes outlined in the MMs had been agreed as much as they could be without consultation during the inspection process. The Inspectors would put forward their final wording on the MMs following the results of the consultation.
- At the examination the inspector said the Council needed to add a 20% buffer to its projected five-year housing supply numbers due to the most recent housing delivery test results which compared the build figures to build targets from the previous three years, although the most recent published figures covered 2021 to 2023. 2021 had poor build figures due to the pandemic, with delivery falling under 85% of the target. The 20% buffer was based on these figures; however, the updated figures were due to come out early in 2026 which would hopefully allow the buffer to be lowered to 5% before adoption of the Plan. The Inspector considered the Council had to adopt the 20% buffer as a safety net at the current time.
- He met regularly with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change and the Portfolio Holder for Planning. At their last meeting they had agreed to commission work on a renewable energy strategy for the district which would sit below the Local Plan.
- A review of the District's Green Belt land was not required as part of the local plan process since there were enough sites outside of Green Belt land to meet the District's housing needs.
- During the Local Plan process, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published which introduced the prospect of Grey Belt land. Grey Belt Land was not relevant to the Plan as it was examined under the 2023 NPPF rules, however it had become relevant from a Development Management point of view. He was commissioning a Green Belt Character Assessment review to assess the land around Stansted, Birchanger and Hatfield Broad Oak. The assessment could then be used as evidence when considering applications and would hopefully reveal which parts of Uttlesford's Green Belt land might fall into the Grey Belt category.
- The Local Plan would have weight at Planning Committee meetings after the final letter approving the plan was received from the Inspector, which was expected in December 2025.
- If Grey Belt land met the right criteria it could be developed.
- He would rarely recommend Planning Committee to refuse an application on prematurity grounds as this rarely held up at appeal.
- Were eligible Grey Belt land to be identified, the Local Plan's allocations would remain. Any allocation received following the implementation of the Plan would need to take this into account.
- The Inspector had identified green spaces in the Stansted site location on the maps depicting it in case the space needed to be moved; however, the total amount of space would remain the same. The Senior Planning Policy Officer clarified that the greenspaces were retained in the policy;

the illustrated maps had been amended for flexibility, but the policy itself had not changed.

- The new housing requirements would become applicable from the date of adoption of the Local Plan, but previous site allocations in old Neighbourhood Plans would remain. The Local Plan added to these plans.
- The requirements of each site that would need to be met by developers consisted of the wording in each template and did not have to follow the map as long as the criteria were met.
- Officers would attend the Parish Forum on 29 September 2025 and speak on the Plan.
- Regarding Local Government Reorganisation (LGR); when Uttlesford would be replaced by a unitary authority, the Local Plan would remain a statutory local plan for the area of that authority formerly known as Uttlesford until it was replaced by a new unitary plan. The Council was looking to leave a good policy in place for the residents of Uttlesford that would continue under the new authority, along with the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) which would collect money for parish councils.
- The specific wording of MM30 was suggested by the Inspector.
- The amendments to MM29 were common wording in planning and provided flexibility to Biodiversity Net Gain as no policy should prevent development coming forward by making it unviable.

In response to a question from a member regarding schools, the Senior Planning Policy Officer said: -

- The structure of the Local Plan was based on instruction from Essex County Council (ECC) as the education authority. In the case of Forest Hall in Stansted, it was unclear whether there was a need for expansion and therefore the land had been safeguarded in case it was needed in future. However, the Inspector had said there wasn't enough justification for this policy and recommended removal.

Members discussed the following points: -

- The Plan's green policies.
- The energy standards detailed in the Local Plan.
- From March 2026 the Council would know which authorities it would merge with to form the new unitary authority. It seemed that LGR would not affect the Local Plan. With a new plan in place, it was unlikely the new authority would look to develop a new plan immediately as there would be other extensive and immediate work to do.
- Braintree District Council were in the process of reviewing their Local Plan.

The meeting ended at 8.00pm.