Committee:	Extraordinary Council	**Date**: Wednesday, 25 March 2026
Title:	Uttlesford Local Plan 2021 – 2041: Inspectors' Final Report, Main Modifications, and Adoption	
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr John Evans, Cabinet Member for Planning	
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Summary

1. The Council, as the local planning authority, has a statutory duty to maintain an up-to-date local plan. The current, adopted plan dates from 2005 and is considered out of date. Once adopted, the new Uttlesford Local Plan will become the Council's statutory planning document setting out how new development will be planned and managed in the district. It will provide the legal and policy framework for deciding planning applications. As such, the local plan is one of the Council's most important and influential documents.

2. The plan-making process commenced in 2020/21 with 'issues and options' work and a call-for-sites. The Council produced a draft plan in 2023, which was subject to public engagement and Regulation 18 consultation that year. A number of revisions were made following consultation and a Regulation 19 version produced and consulted on in the second half of 2024. This was then submitted to the Secretary of State / Planning Inspectorate and an Examination in Public (EiP) was held in 2025. Following EiP hearings, Main Modifications (MMs) were made to the plan, and these too were subject to public consultation in September to October 2025.

3. On 16 January 2026 the examining Inspectors wrote to the Council with their final report and recommendation (see last Annexe). The Inspectors' report concludes that,

   "with the recommended main modifications…the Uttlesford Local Plan 2021-2041 satisfies the requirements referred to in Section 20(5)(a) of the 2004 Act and is sound." (emphasis added)

4. Throughout the examination process, the Council has worked positively with the Inspectors, participants and other stakeholders to identify and consider possible amendments necessary to ensure the overall soundness of the new Local Plan. These are set out in the body of the Inspectors' Report and in appendices to this report. The Local Plan Panel (LPP) and Cabinet has reviewed them and it is recommended that the Council adopts the local Plan as amended by the MMs identified by the Inspectors. The MMs do not detract from the plan's overall strategy and effectiveness.

5. The new Local Plan (attached as Annexe 1), once adopted, will support the delivery of sustainable development in Uttlesford, help the Council address the climate change and bio-diversity emergency, maximise opportunities for new infrastructure, provide a comprehensive suite of new policies for planning decision-making, and provide a means for addressing the district's housing (including affordable housing) needs.

6. Once adopted, the Local Plan will immediately form part of the statutory development plan for Uttlesford.

Recommendations

9. **That Council:**

   (i) Notes the content and scope of the Inspectors' Final Report dated 16 January, including the Main Modifications (appendix to the Inspectors' Report).

   (ii) Adopts and formally publishes the Uttlesford Local Plan (2021-2041), as amended by the main modifications set out in the Inspectors' Final Report.

   (iii) Publishes the Adoption Statement and Sustainability Appraisal adoption statement along with the Local Plan, in accordance with regulations 26 and 35 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

   (iv) Delegates the correction of any further minor typing or formatting errors going forward to the Strategic Director of Planning and Cabinet Member for Planning as required.

   (v) Expresses the Council's thanks to the Inspectors, and the Examination Programme Officer for their positive approach throughout the examination process.

Financial Implications

10. There are financial implications associated with the preparation of the Local Plan and for the Council once the Plan is adopted. These fall within the Planning Budget.

11. There would be financial implications associated with delaying adoption or not agreeing with the Inspectors' Main Modifications. This would likely require significant additional budget.

Background Papers

12. All iterations of the Local Plan, examination documents, and evidence base documents can be found online at: The new Local Plan - Uttlesford District Council.

Impact

Communication / Consultation	The Plan meets the statutory requirements for consultation, which are set out in the 2004 Act and the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended) (the 2012 Regulations).
Community safety	Considered but no issues raised.
Equalities	An Equality Impact Assessment was prepared as part of the Plans' Sustainability Appraisal and the Plan itself includes policies for accessible and adaptable dwellings, accommodation for gypsies and travellers, and sustainable design policies. These policies benefit people with protected characteristics.
Health & Safety	Considered but no issues raised.
Human Rights	See above – under Equalities.
Sustainability	The Draft Plan has numerous positive implications for sustainability. It seeks to support sustainable development by promoting development in accessible locations that maximise opportunities for using sustainable modes of travel, and sets out policies to support sustainable development, such as relating to climate change, flooding, and biodiversity. It has been informed by a Sustainability Appraisal.
Ward-specific Impacts	Affects all wards
Workforce / Workplace	Within existing workforce resources.

Situation

Background and Context

13. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 is primary legislation that provides the basis for the plan-led system in England. It is supported by secondary legislation, including the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended). This legislation sets out the main legal and procedural requirements that councils must meet when preparing their local plan, including the key stages, Regulation 18, Regulation 19 etc. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that local plans should be underpinned by relevant and up-to-date evidence. It states that they should be reviewed at least once every five years and should take into account changing circumstances affecting the area, or any relevant changes in national policy.

14. The NPPF sets out the 'tests of soundness' against which local plans are considered at their examination in public. A local plan can only be adopted if it is found 'sound'. Plans are 'sound' if they are:

- Positively prepared – providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the areas objectively assessed needs; and is informed by agreements with other authorities, so that unmet need from neighbouring areas is accommodated where it is practical to do so and is consistent with achieving sustainable development.

- Justified – an appropriate strategy, considering the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence.

- Effective – deliverable over the plan period, and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as evidenced by statements of common ground; and

- Consistent with national policy – enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in the NPPF and other statements of national planning policy, where relevant.

15. The current Uttlesford Local Plan was adopted in 2005 and is demonstrably out-of-date. It is one of the oldest adopted plans in England. In December 2023 the Secretary of State wrote to the Council, noting the age of the plan, the withdrawal of earlier attempts at adopting a plan, and setting out his intervention powers under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

16. There are a number of implications for the Council in not having an up-to-date plan. In the extreme, the Secretary of State can take over plan-making entirely and prepare a plan for the Council. The practical, day-to-day implications are evident in terms of decision-making. The NPPF makes clear that the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' should apply 'where there are no relevant plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date'. This has been the case at Uttlesford now for some time. As such, the district has seen an increased level of speculative development coming forward. Indeed, as can been seen in

Table 4.2 of the Plan, more than 9,000 homes have been built or committed since 2021. This is far more than the Plan proposes for the remainder of the plan-period (up to 2041).

17. In the absence of an up-to-date Local Plan, the Council has had less control or consideration over infrastructure delivery. Officers estimate there is currently an infrastructure funding gap of £200 - £212 million in the district. The new Local Plan will help maximise infrastructure, and the development of a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to support the Plan will also assist in reducing this gap.

Transitional Arrangements

18. The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 introduces a new plan-making system. The NPPF and Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) set out the transitional arrangements in place for advanced plans (of which the new Uttlesford Local Plan is one), to be brought forward under the Town & Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (now known as the 'legacy system').

19. The Council was fortunate to have submitted its plan before the deadline by which plans could be submitted under the 'legacy system'. This enabled the Plan to be examined under the December 2023 version of the NPPF, and against the housing need calculations from that time. If the Plan is not adopted, the Council may well have to start afresh, planning for a higher housing figure under the new system.

Preparation of the Uttlesford Local Plan

20. The new Uttlesford Local Plan will become the Council's key statutory planning document and set out how new development will be planned and managed across the district. It will provide the legal and policy framework for deciding planning applications.

21. In developing the Plan, strategic steer was taken from the Council's Corporate Plan (2023-2028), with oversight and input from the cross-party Member working group, the Local Plan Panel (LPP).

22. The Council published its current Local Development Scheme (LDS) in October 2023, which updated earlier versions. The LDS sets out the key stages of plan preparation and is a requirement under the 2004 Act. Progress against the LDS timetable was regularly reviewed by the Council's Scrutiny Committee throughout the process.

23. Work on the Local Plan commenced with a public consultation on an 'Issues and Options' paper between November 2020 and April 2021. Between January and April 2021, the Council carried out a 'call for sites' to identify land with potential for allocation in the Local Plan. These sites were later assessed for inclusion within the Plan.

24. In 2023 the Council produced a Regulation 18 (first) draft of the Local Plan itself. This was subject to public consultation between October and December 2023, which included public exhibitions and publicity. More than 1700 interested parties responded, which amounted to more than 4,200 individual comments. These were published in March 2024. The LPP reviewed the response to the consultation and held a series of workshops and public meetings throughout 2024 in order to consider various elements of the Plan.

25. A number of changes were made to the Plan following the Regulation 18 consultation. A Regulation 19 version of the Plan was produced, and following full Council approval in July 2024, it was published for a Regulation 19 consultation between August and October 2024. The purpose of the Regulation 19 consultation was to seek comments and opinions on the legal compliance and soundness of the new Plan. Further public exhibitions were held. These attracted approximately 350 residents and interested parties. Briefings were also given to Parish and Town Council colleagues. These were well-attended. The Regulation 19 consultation attracted just over 500 respondents who made around 2,000 individual comments. Their representations were published and submitted along with the Plan, its sustainability appraisal, habitat regulations assessment, technical evidence, and other supporting documents to the Secretary of State / Planning Inspectorate on 18 December 2024.

26. Throughout the period above, Council officers had been engaging with neighbouring councils and other key stakeholders in accordance with the Duty to Cooperate under S33a of the 2004 Act. Statements of Common Ground (SoCG) were agreed with key stakeholders. These were all published online.

27. In January 2025, the Council received notice of the two Inspectors appointed to examine the plan. Officers responded to a number of the Inspectors' written questions in writing in early 2025 and then prepared written notes in response to the Inspectors 'Matters, Issues, and Questions' (or MIQs). The MIQs set out the issues that the Inspectors intended to explore at the Examination in Public (EiP) hearings. The hearings commenced on 10 June 2025 and were attended by more than 100 interested persons. A dedicated examination website was set up throughout the process and all documentation was published on it. The site was managed by an independent Examination Programme Officer, who was also responsible for the administration of the EiP hearings and acted as a contact point for the Inspectors.

28. On 31 July 2025, shortly after the hearings concluded, the Inspectors issued the Council with a 'Post-Hearing Note'. This set out their thoughts on a number of issues and asked for a schedule of main modifications (MMs) to the Plan to be drawn up. An MM is an amendment to a local plan that is necessary to make the plan legally compliant and / or sound. Officers produced a schedule of MMs and published it for public consultation between 15 September and 27 October 2025. A total of 79 interested parties submitted a response. More information on the MMs is set out in paragraph 36 below.

The Inspectors' Proposed Main Modifications (MMs)

29. The Inspectors' Post-Hearing Note set out their position on the likely MMs required to make the Local Plan legally compliant and sound. It is common for MMs to be introduced during the course of an examination. They come forward as a result of comments made on consultation (at Regulation 19 or in response to the Inspectors' Matters, Issues and Questions); from Statements of Common Ground with key stakeholders; discussions during the hearings; and in some cases, are prompted by the Inspectors. Their purpose is to ensure that the local plan meets the tests of soundness. Alongside the MMs, the Council published a list of 'Additional Modifications'. These are more minor changes that address typographic, grammatical, and factual errors, and modifications to the Local Plan's Policy Map. They are not of substance and do not relate to the soundness test.

30. On 24 September 2025, the LPP met to consider the MMs. Key MMs were reviewed and discussed.

31. A number of MMs were proposed to ensure that the Plan is positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy. The Plan's Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment were updated to take account of the MMs. The MM schedule is attached in the appendices to, and discussed within, the Inspectors' Final Report (attached as Annexe 10) and key MMs are summarised below.

The Inspectors' Final Report

32. The Inspectors' Final Report, received on 16 January 2026, sets out their consideration and conclusions on the legal compliance and soundness of the new Local Plan. It confirms that the Plan has been prepared in accordance with the legal requirements set out under the Town and Country Planning Regulations 2012 and that it has been prepared, published and consulted upon in accordance with Regulations 18 and 19. It states that the Uttlesford Local Plan 2021-2041 provides an appropriate basis for the planning of the District of Uttlesford, provided that a number of main modifications (MMs) are made to it.

Final Main Modifications

33. The Inspectors took account of the consultation responses on the MMs in coming to their conclusions and made some further amendments to their detailed wording, adding consequential modifications where necessary for consistency or clarity. None of the amendments significantly alter the content of the modifications as published for consultation The full list of MMs required to the Plan are set out in Annexe 5, and the Inspectors summarise them thus,

- *Adding new Core Policy 2a requiring a Local Plan review in the event of there being an inadequate housing supply 6 months after adoption*
- *Amending Core Policy 6a to ensure delivery of the housing requirement at Newport if not brought forward in a neighbourhood plan*

- *Deleting Core Policy 8 safeguarding land for a future section of link road south of Saffron Walden*
- *Simplifying Core Policy 11 on London Stansted Airport to use a single designation based on the airport's operational area*
- *Deleting Core Policy 18 safeguarding land for expansion of Forest Hall Secondary School at Stansted Mountfitchet*
- *Clarifying the position on constraints and development potential at Thaxted*
- *Adding new Core Policy 32a about aerodrome safeguarding*
- *Changing Core Policy 38 to clarify when Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) and Strategic Access Management Measures (SAMM) apply to development within the Essex Coast and Hatfield Forest zones of influence*
- *Modifying requirements for wheelchair accessible housing to accord with the evidence base*
- *Adding flexibility to Core Policy 40 where biodiversity net gain would impact viability*
- *Adding a housing trajectory*
- *A number of other modifications to ensure that the Plan is positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy.*

34. MM3 is one of the most significant MMs and drew much discussion during the EiP. During the EiP, the Council could not demonstrate a full five-year housing land supply (5YHLS) due to the mandatory application of a 20% buffer arising from the most recently published Housing Delivery Test (HDT) results. Although it was recognised Uttlesford's housing delivery is strong and it is likely that a five-year supply could be demonstrated shortly after adoption, national policy requires Inspectors to rely on the current published MHCLG data (which is from 2023). MM3 therefore introduces a targeted early Local Plan review mechanism, to ensure the housing land supply issue is addressed promptly post-adoption in the event a full 5YHLS cannot be demonstrated.

35. More recent work on the HDT shows that Uttlesford has exceeded requirements in the last three years to 2025 (108% delivery) and thus a 20% buffer will not be necessary. MHCLG has advised it will likely publish the latest figures (2023, 2024, and 2025) later this year. Once it does, it is expected the MM3 requirement will fall away.

36. Other MMs of note can be summarised as,

- MM5, which requires the Council to step in and plan for housing in Newport if housing sites are not brought forward via a neighbourhood plan within two years of adoption of the Local Plan (Newport PC is currently advancing its neighbourhood plan);
- MM7 deletes Core Policy 8 which sought to safeguard land south of Saffron Walden for a future link road (the road is not needed to deliver the Local Plan growth);
- MM12 inserts a new requirement that protects the Takeley Mobile Home Park (which is considered a positive addition and was supported at the hearings);

- MM14 deletes Core Policy 18 which had sought to safeguard land to expand Forest Hall School in Stansted Mountfitchet as Inspectors did not consider it necessary;
- MM15 clarifies there is no scope for strategic scale development at Thaxted under this Local Plan;
- MM22 and MM49 concern Aerodrome safeguarding and the addition of a new policy, 32a, to clearly safeguard Stansted, Duxford and Carver Barracks airfields, using CAA safeguarding zones.
- MM10 and MM21 concerns airport parking and simplify Core Policy 11 and update Core Policy 31 to help better manage and prevent off-airport parking.
- MM37 reduces the required proportion of wheelchair-accessible (M4(3)) homes on major residential schemes to 5% of market housing and 10% of affordable housing, which is less than the Plan originally proposed;
- MM40, requires the Council to prepare a Gypsy & Traveller DPD (which is already in hand);
- MM43 adds a new, Core Policy 64a, on Registered Parks and Gardens to to help ensure their effective conservation;
- MM44 strengthens Core Policy 66 by requiring Health Impact Assessments for a wider range of developments, promoting early engagement on health issues;
- MM51 clarifies that contributions may be sought for improvement of the Flitch Way from strategic development at Takeley and;
- MM63 updates the Countryside Protection Zone (CPZ) to exclude the functional water-management ponds south of the airport.

37. The full list of MMs can be found in the Annexe. The cross-party LPP considered these at its meeting of 12 February 2026 and recommended that the Plan be progressed in accordance with the MMs. The Cabinet did the same at its meeting on 17 February 2026.

Key Policy Positions Largely Unchanged

38. The Inspectors' report acknowledges the Plan's ambitious approach to climate change, and supports the Council's proposals (Core Policy 22) which will contribute to significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. Although the Plan departs from Ministerial advice (i.e. it demands higher standards than imposed nationally), the Inspectors considered the Council had justified this with evidence.

39. Similarly, the Council's chalk stream and water evidence was considered to justify a 90 l/p/d water standard to help mitigate against the level of water stress in the region. The Inspectors were satisfied that the Council had justified a higher standard than is imposed nationally. In this vein, the Inspectors also accepted evidence that there are locally specific circumstances that justify setting a biodiversity net gain target above the 10% required by the Environment Act 2021. The Local Plan requires 20%, although the Inspectors tempered this by adding that a lower level could be accepted if viability evidence supports doing so.

40. The Council's robust evidence base stood up to scrutiny generally and has enabled the high development standards contained within the final version of the Plan. It has received positive feedback from environmental industry experts.

Policies Map

41. The Plan comes with a policies map, which was subject to MMs. This is included as Annexe 6. Individual settlement maps are at Annexe 7. As well as a 'hard copy', an interactive online version will be available soon after adoption.

Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)

42. In paragraph 17-19 of the Inspectors' Report it is noted that the Council integrated an Equality Impact Assessment within the SA Report, that the Plan includes policies to benefit people with protected characteristics, and ultimately that the PSED is met.

Duty to Cooperate (DtC)

43. Section 33A of the 2004 Act places a duty on Local Planning Authorities to engage constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis in the preparation of local plans. The Inspector's report, at paragraphs 20-22 sets out how, and confirms that, Uttlesford's DtC requirement has been met.

Consultation Requirements

44. The Inspectors found that the Plan and process complies with all relevant legal requirements, included in the 2004 Act (as amended) and the 2012 Regulations (Inspectors' Report paragraphs 24-27).

Sustainability Appraisal (SA)

45. The SA was undertaken at the requisite points throughout the preparation and examination of the Plan, informing the iterative plan-making process. The Inspectors consider that the SA considered an appropriate range of alternative options and that the Plan's ultimate proposals reflect the overall best performing option.

Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

46. Paragraphs 33 to 37 of the Inspectors' Report notes that a HRA supported the Plan and the Main Modifications and that no adverse effects were identified to important sites with Natural England agreeing with the conclusion. The Plan (and MMs) is legally compliant with the Habitats Regulations.

Other Legal Requirements

47. At paragraphs 38-42 of their report, the Inspectors conclude that the Plan includes policies for addressing the strategic priorities in Uttlesford; that the strategic policies ensure new housing and employment growth are accompanied by supporting infrastructure and environmental protections; and contributes to the mitigation of, and adaptation to climate change. They conclude all legal requirements are met.

Soundness

48. The Inspector's Report outlines how the Plan deals with specific issues of soundness and sets out how they have taken into account all of the representations, the written evidence and that presented at the examination hearings. 11 Soundness issues are discussed in the Inspectors' Report. The spatial strategy (how the Plan proposed to meet housing needs; its settlement hierarchy etc) was considered and it was concluded "*that the vision, objectives and spatial strategy of the Plan are positively prepared, justified and effective, and will enable the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with national planning policy*".

49. The housing allocations in the north area strategy (including Saffron Walden), the south area strategy (including Dunmow and Takeley), and the Stansted Mountfitchet and Elsenham Area Strategy were all found to be positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy. As was the approach to development in Thaxted and the Rural Area Strategy.

50. Subject to MMs, policies on climate change, transport, the environment, economy & retail, and building healthy and sustainable communities were all found sound, and the approach to local plan monitoring was found sound.

51. The Inspectors identified a number of deficiencies in respect of soundness, which means that they could not recommend it for adoption as submitted in December 2024. However, they conclude that with the recommended main modifications (see Annexe), the Uttlesford Local Plan 2021-2041 satisfies the requirements referred to in Section 20(5)(a) of the 2004 Act and is sound.

Conclusions

52. The National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) states that following examination and the significant process of engaging communities and other interests "it is to be expected that the authority will proceed quickly with adopting a plan that has been found sound." The Uttlesford Local Plan 2021-2041, as modified, has been found sound and should now be adopted.

53. The adoption of the Plan will support robust planning decision making, help prevent speculative development, see significantly higher standards and better quality development, increase the Council's ability to protect the natural environment and heritage, and help deliver essential infrastructure in the district. It will also mean the Council meets its statutory duty to provide an up-to-date development plan.

54. The recommendation, set out in full at paragraph 9 above, is that the Plan be formally adopted.

Alternatives

55. The Council can only adopt the Plan in strict accordance with the recommendations made by the Inspectors (along with any 'additional modifications' that do not materially affect the Plan). It cannot now propose further MMs. The only alternative to adopting the Local Plan is to withdraw it. A withdrawal would mean the plan-making process would have to start again. The Secretary of State also has powers to direct the Council to consider adopting the Plan under s27 of the 2004 Act.

Implementation of the Plan

56. Once adopted the Plan will become a statutory development plan document immediately and all planning decisions thereafter made with regard to it. The 2005 Local Plan would be superseded.

57. Copies of the Plan, the adoption statement, and the Sustainability Appraisal would be made publicly available (online, in local libraries, and at the Council Offices) in line with regulations 26 and 35 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. A copy of the Adoption Statement must also be sent to the Secretary of State and anyone else who has asked to be notified of its adoption.

Local Government Reorganisation

58. When the council merges into a new unitary council, the adopted Local Plan of the former district will be "saved". It will continue to apply to its original geographic area until it is replaced.

Risk Analysis

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Failure to adopt the plan may result in government intervention and continued speculative development in the meantime.	1 – the Plan has been found sound.	4 - Lack of an adopted leading to potentially unacceptable development.	Members have been provided with this detailed report and all relevant documentation.

Annexe 1: The Uttlesford Local Plan 2021-2041
Annexe 2-4: Local plan appendices, Site Development Templates appendices, local plan map, and detailed area maps
Annexe 5-7: The Schedule of Main Modifications, Policy Map modifications, and Additional Modifications
Annexe 8-9: Formal adoption and SA adoption statements
Annexe 10: Final Inspectors' Report and Recommendations