

CABINET held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on TUESDAY, 17 FEBRUARY 2026 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor P Lees (Chair)
Councillors J Evans and N Hargreaves

Officers in attendance: D Hermitage (Strategic Director of Planning), P Holt (Chief Executive) and A Webb (Strategic Director of Finance, Commercialisation and Corporate Services)

Also present: Councillors R Gooding (Leader of the Conservative Group) and G Sell (Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group); Councillor J Cheetham (Takeley Parish Council), T Colocasidou, A Evans, H Ferris and J Johnson (Public Speakers)

CAB82 PUBLIC SPEAKING

Dr Johnson, Mrs Evans, Mr Colocasidou, Ms Ferris and Councillor J Cheetham (Takeley Parish Council) addressed Cabinet as public speakers. Summaries of their statements have been appended to these minutes.

CAB83 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies were received from Councillors Coote, Sutton and Reeve.

Apologies were also received from Councillor Gregory as Chair of the Scrutiny Committee.

CAB84 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2026 were approved as a correct record.

CAB85 QUESTIONS OR STATEMENTS FROM NON-EXECUTIVE MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL (STANDING ITEM)

Councillor Sell said he wanted to put on record that the Liberal Democrat Group were unhappy with the Local Plan proposals on Takeley. In regards to the Budget, he said he had argued against the car parking charges because he believed there were alternatives. He said that no alternative options had been presented to the portfolio holder for consideration.

CAB86 CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES (STANDING ITEM)

The Leader confirmed that Councillor Gregory had given his apologies to this meeting and there was no report to consider on this occasion.

CAB87 REPORT OF DELEGATED DECISIONS TAKEN BY CABINET MEMBERS (STANDING ITEM)

Cabinet noted the following delegated decisions since the previous meeting:

- [Response to letter from the Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness regarding Elections May 2026](#) published 7 January 2026
- [Contract Award: Decarbonisation and energy efficiency measures to City Electrical Factors \(CEF\)](#) published on 29 January 2026
- [Contract Award: Installation of decarbonisation and energy efficiency measures to Aspect Group Services Limited](#) published on 29 January 2026
- [North Essex Parking Partnership Joint Committee Extension](#) published on 30 January 2026

CAB88 UTTLESFORD LOCAL PLAN 2021 - 2041: INSPECTORS' FINAL REPORT, MAIN MODIFICATIONS, AND ADOPTION

Councillor Evans spoke to the 'Uttlesford Local Plan 2021 - 2041: Inspectors' Final Report, Main Modifications, and Adoption' paper and said that the matter had been extensively covered at the Local Plan Panel (LPP) meeting the previous week. He said that LPP had been asked whether to commend the Local Plan to Cabinet and Council and panel members had agreed it was suitable to proceed, though there was brief debate about the meaning of "commend." He said that while the administration was not jubilatory about the plan, a Local Plan was essential given that no plan had existed since 2005. He noted that the Planning Inspectorate had found the plan sound and compliant and he proposed recommending the Local Plan to Council for approval at the extraordinary meeting on 25 March.

Councillor Hargreaves seconded the proposal.

Councillor Gooding said he commended the work undertaken and noted that at the Local Plan Panel there was general acceptance that perfection was unlikely, but adoption was the best way forward despite some losers in the process. He said he had sympathy for Takeley residents who would be impacted by the plan. He raised concerns about the security of 6% of greenbelt land within Uttlesford, noting the importance of the metropolitan greenbelt for preventing over development.

Councillor Sell thanked Councillor Evans and officers for their hard work. He said that he and the Local Plan Panel chair were veterans of the previous local plan twenty years ago, and that the intervening period had been damaging for the district. He said he shared concerns about the impact on Takeley and clarified

that he preferred "recommend" rather than "commend," as he appreciated the Local Plan would not be welcomed by all residents. However, he acknowledged that members had gone so far in creating a Local Plan that returning to square one was not viable.

Councillor Hargreaves said he fully supported the plan and praised the hard work involved. He said that the previous Local Plan had been very well written but it was now time to move on.

The Leader said she wanted it noted that there had been no deals with political parties or politicisation of the plan and highlighted that it would have been politically illogical to choose Takeley for allocation, given that three administration councillors represented that area.

The Leader moved to a vote, which was unanimously approved by Cabinet.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet:

- (i) Notes the content and scope of the Inspectors' Final Report dated 16 January, including the Main Modifications (appendix to the Inspectors' Report).
- (ii) Recommends that Council adopts and formally publishes the Uttlesford Local Plan (2021-2041), as amended by the main modifications set out in the Inspectors' Final Report.
- (iii) Recommends that Council publishes an 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) That authority be delegated to the Strategic Director of Planning, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning, to make any final minor amendments to the Local Plan, in order to correct any grammatical, or formatting corrections, identified prior to publishing.
- (v) Express the Council's thanks to the Inspectors, and the Examination Programme Officer for their positive approach throughout the examination process.

CAB89 CIL AND SPD UPDATE

Councillor Evans spoke to the CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) and SPD (Supplementary Planning Document) update report.

The Strategic Director of Planning said the council has identified a £200 million financial gap between current social infrastructure provision and what should be available for residents. CIL and other funding mechanisms were needed to help close this gap. He said that the CIL consultation received only 21 responses, which was not unusual as developers rather than residents tended to respond to such consultations. He added that amendments had been made based on feedback received, although the charges remained unchanged.

In response to a question from Councillor Sell regarding Section 106 agreements running in parallel with CIL, the Strategic Director of Planning said both mechanisms would operate side-by-side; CIL would provide flat-rate contributions to a general pot, while Section 106 agreements would address site-specific requirements such as new road junctions.

Councillor Hargreaves seconded the proposal.

Cabinet approved the proposal unanimously.

RESOLVED that Cabinet notes the progress made to date and continues to delegate any procedural matters in the lead-up to adoption of CIL and the SPD to the Strategic Director of Planning in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning.

CAB90 **BSR INSPECTION OF BUILDING CONTROL**

Councillor Evans spoke to the report regarding the Health and Safety Executive's Building Safety Regulator (BSR) inspection of the Council's Building Control Service and proposed approval of the recommendations set-out in the agenda papers. He said the inspection had resulted in an action plan with five required improvements, one of which had been completed and the fifth would be completed in the near future.

The Leader seconded the proposal.

The Strategic Director of Planning said that the inspection was carried out by the HSE as the building safety regulator, a new function resulting from the Grenfell Inquiry. He said the remaining actions related to strengthening monitoring of live building control projects through a new proactive approach, which would be automated through software to reduce resource requirements. The Council would respond to the regulator by 28 February, confirming progress made and requesting confirmation that no further action was required. He said that none of the required actions related to building safety itself, only to internal procedures.

Councillor Gooding expressed support for the proposal but raised concerns about the growing requirements for building control personnel. He asked whether the Council had set aside adequate funding for professional development of staff, given that building control requirements would likely increase in future.

Councillor Evans praised the quality of the Council's building control staff, noting they were among the best in Essex. He highlighted that the team included two apprentices being trained at no cost to the taxpayer.

The Strategic Director of Planning said that the building control team undertook both statutory work and commercial work. The additional commercial work generated income beyond normal levels, which was reinvested back into the team. This additional revenue had funded the recruitment and training of two apprentices, demonstrating good financial management and staff development.

The Leader took the proposal to a vote, which was unanimously approved by Cabinet.

RESOLVED to note the measures set out in the Action Plan attached to the report and endorse its submission to the BSR by 28 February 2026.

CAB91 **CORPORATE PLAN**

The Leader presented the report regarding the Corporate Plan and said that it had already been discussed by the Scrutiny Committee. She said no issues had been raised and all dates present in the report were correct. She proposed recommending the Corporate Plan to Full Council for approval.

Councillor Hargreaves seconded the proposal.

Councillor Sell said that the Corporate Plan had been significantly improved as a working document and that it had been discussed at Scrutiny Committee many times.

Councillor Gooding said he had been present at Scrutiny and agreed with the improvements made to the Corporate Plan.

The proposal was approved by Cabinet unanimously.

RESOLVED that the Corporate Plan 2023-2028 is recommended to Council for approval.

CAB92 **BUDGET 2026/27**

Councillor Hargreaves presented the report regarding the Budget 2026/27 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2026/27 to 2030/31. He said that the government's figures issued in early autumn appeared "fairly grim" but improved figures were issued in December, requiring officers to completely rework the budget. Furthermore, he said that just over a week before the meeting, the government issued a further change which had proved disadvantageous to the Council, removing £1 million annually from the Council's funding going forward. He highlighted a number of points throughout the report, including that the Council would maintain reserves through the medium-term financial plan period. He said the fair funding review showed external funding falling from £10.8 million to £4.2 million by 2030. However, the investment portfolio would generate approximately £7 million in usable revenue over five years.

In regards to council tax, he said a 2.99% increase had been proposed. He noted that since the administration had taken office, council tax had only increased at half the rate of inflation.

In regards to car parking, he said there was evidence that footfall in Saffron Walden had increased 13% year-on-year after the 2024 parking charge increase, better than the national average decrease of 2.5%. He cited research

from three companies stating that parking charges did not directly influence high street success. He provided details on season tickets and said flexible and residential options would also be available.

He concluded on housing rents and said that a 4.8% increase had been approved by government, increasing average rents by £6.22 per week. He proposed approval of the recommendations set-out in the report.

Councillor Evans seconded the proposal.

Councillor Gooding raised concerns about reliance on discretionary income sources like car parking charges, noting that there would be a tipping point where increased parking prices would deter usage.

On car parking, Councillor Sell said he agreed with Councillor Hargreaves regarding Saffron Walden and its attractions, but it was a different matter for other settlements in the district. He said he was concerned about successive parking increases, first in 2024 and now again, when the council had waited nine years for the previous increase. He highlighted the impact on commuters and provided the example of an NHS dental clinic in Stansted, where all but one staff member commuted by car from outside Stansted. He said the increase would significantly impact people working in the district, many of whom were not high earners.

In regards to housing rents, Councillor Sell noted the Office of Budget Responsibility had forecasted 2.5% inflation for 2026, while the council's tenant rent increase was above this. He questioned this in light of successive maintenance contractors letting down tenants.

The Strategic Director of Finance, Commercialisation and Corporate Services asked members to note paragraphs 68 to 70 in the report. He said it was extremely important to highlight the information set-out in paragraph 70, which stated that should Local Government Reorganisation be delayed or cancelled, the future ability of the council to operate would be in doubt, as the available reserves which were currently underpinning the budget would have been exhausted and a significant scaling back of council services would be required to enable the council to operate within its available resources.

The Leader thanked the Strategic Director of Finance, Commercialisation and Corporate Services and the Director of Finance for their hard-work and trusted expertise on financial matters.

The Chief Executive said he had already had discussions regarding adding the delay of LGR vesting day to the risk register. He said the changes to the Government's position on postponed local elections was a case in point and demonstrated the uncertainty local government was operating in.

The Leader took the Budget proposals to a vote. Cabinet unanimously approved the proposals to be recommended to full Council.

RESOLVED to recommend to Council the following:

- i. The key assumptions as set out at paragraphs 31 - 38 of the main report.
- ii. the Medium Term Financial Plan 2026/27 to 2030/31 on page 11 of the main report.
- iii. the council tax increase of 2.99% council tax for 2026/27. The Band D equivalent (for Uttlesford's share of the bill) would be £187.46, which would be an increase of £5.44 as set out on page 17 of the main report.
- iv. the provisional council taxbase of 41,402.4 and the continued assumption of a maximum increase in the council tax of 2.99% over the lifetime of the Medium Term Financial Plan to 2030/31 as set out on page 18 of the main report.
- v. the Council Tax requirement for 2026/27 of £7.761m as set out on page 18 of the main report.
- vi. the General Fund budget as detailed on page 21 of the Budget Report.
- vii. to increase the HRA rent by the maximum allowed of 1% above CPI, which is an increase of 4.8% for 2026/27. The average increase in HRA weekly rents would be £6.22, leading to an average weekly rent payable by council tenants of £135.83 as set out on page 29 of the main report.
- viii. the housing service charge increases (General Fund and HRA) in line with inflation plus 1% as per rents.
- ix. the Housing Revenue Account Budget 5 year budget as set out on page 32.
- x. to delegate to the Section 151 Officer to increase the Capital budget to match the 30 Year HRA Programme once it is approved to enable the delivery of new homes in the HRA.
- xi. the Capital Strategy 2026/27 to 2030/31 as set out on pages 33-43 of the main report.
- xii. to approve the Capital Programme 2026/27 to 2030/31 detailed on pages 44- 47 of the main report.
- xiii. the section 25 report set out on pages 49 - 55 when considering the budget for 2026/27.
- xiv. the further proposal to increase Garden Waste subscriptions by £5 in 2027/28 as part of the Blueprint Uttlesford 2.0 programme to support the MTFP on page 20.
- xv. the fees and charges schedule as set out in Appendix C
- xvi. the Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2026/27 as set out in Appendix D
- xvii. the Minimum Revenue Provision Statement 2026/27 as set out in Appendix E.
- xviii. the commercial strategy of 2026/27 as set out in in Appendix F.
- xix. the Ethical Investment Policy as set out in Appendix G.
- xx. the revenue growth bids as detailed at Appendix H.
- xxi. the savings proposals as detailed at Appendix I.

The Leader said the last item on the agenda contained restricted information as the financial business affairs of the Authority were to be discussed. She proposed exclusion of the public and press due to consideration of reports containing exempt information within the meaning of section 100I and paragraph 3 of part 1 of Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972.

Councillor Hargreaves seconded the proposal.

In response to a question from Councillor Sell regarding a problem with accessing the Part 2 report, the Democratic Services Manager said system access had been provided to him but he would ascertain the issue and resolve. The Chief Executive confirmed that an outline of the report would be provided in private session.

RESOLVED to exclude the public and press due to consideration of reports containing exempt information within the meaning of section 100I and paragraph 3 of part 1 of Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972.

CAB94 **MANOR ROAD ACQUISITION**

The Leader outlined the report regarding the acquisition of a property in Manor Road, Stansted Mountfitchet. She proposed approval of the recommendations set-out in the report to acquire the 2-bedroom flat in Manor Road, undertake void works and let it as general needs accommodation.

Councillor Hargreaves seconded the proposal.

Cabinet agreed with the proposal unanimously.

RESOLVED to acquire the 2-bedroom flat in Manor Road, Stansted as set-out in the report, undertake void works and let it as general needs accommodation.

The meeting was closed at 8.40pm.

Summary of Public Speakers' Statements to Cabinet: 17 February 2026

Dr. J Johnson

Dr. Johnson expressed serious concerns about the local plan, particularly regarding damage to the Takeley community. She argued that the plan facilitated speculative development rather than reducing it, citing Essex Council's sale of farmland options to developers. She highlighted Natural England's concerns about air quality impacts on Hatfield Forest, specifically regarding NOx concentrations and nitrogen deposition affecting sensitive species. She said it was not right that the Council had commissioned their own air quality assessment that contradicted Natural England's findings. She said that the air quality issue represented a significant constraint and questioned the interpretation of what constituted "significant" environmental damage in light of net zero targets.

Mr. T Colocasidou (speaking on behalf of Takeley Street Action Group)

Mr. Colocasidou said he was speaking on behalf of local residents and Takeley Street Action Group. He said he acknowledged that the plan had been examined by inspectors, but emphasised that the land north of Taylor's Farm was a highly sensitive allocation located behind established homes and opposite Hatfield Forest. His primary concern was road access, noting that the B1256, a residential village road used by families and schoolchildren, was currently the expected access route. He argued that a development of this scale should connect to the strategic road network (the A120) rather than routing through residential areas. He called for strategic access to the A120 to be treated as essential, rather than leaving access decisions to future planning applications when the development principle had already been established.

Mrs. A Evans

Mrs Evans raised multiple infrastructure concerns about the land north of Taylor's Farm allocation. She noted that the development template specified wastewater discharge to Bishops Stortford treatment plant, but residents had not been listened to regarding feasibility. She said that the planning application proposed discharge to Takeley Wastewater Treatment Works instead, which was already running at capacity with significant environmental issues. She said that connecting the industrial estate to Takeley Treatment Works would severely impact the planned 1,500 housing allocation for Takeley. She also criticised the council for not adequately considering alternative sites like Stansted Northside, where infrastructure already existed and no residential dwellings would be affected. She estimated the industrial site could generate 4,000 to 12,000 daily vehicle movements, creating gridlock given Hatfield Forest and Stansted Airport's expansion. She said the site has significant constraints but was "pushed" into the plan, and urged removal of this allocation.

Ms. H Ferris (Chair of Saffron Walden BID)

Ms. Ferris said she spoke on behalf of levy-paying businesses regarding the proposed parking charge increases, which had been previously raised just two

years ago. She outlined the pressures on town centre businesses, including post-pandemic recovery challenges, rising wage bills, and energy costs. She said parking was not simply a revenue mechanism but directly affected the commercial ability to employ staff and remain competitive. She noted that season tickets were a condition of employment for many workers, and small independents frequently subsidised staff parking. She said the Saffron Walden BID gathered 282 responses in a short timeframe, showing that an overwhelming majority would reduce their time in town or stop visiting if charges increased again. She highlighted unintended consequences from previous increases, including antisocial parking, pressure on residential streets, and disabled bay misuse. She cited comparable towns (Ely, Braintree, Bury St Edmunds) with lower or free parking and suggested a number of proposals, such as phased increases over a longer period of time, capped season ticket rates, short-stay free periods, and the publication of impact data from previous increases, before further rises were implemented.

Councillor J Cheetham (on behalf of Takeley Parish Council and residents)

Councillor Cheetham said she was concerned that speculative development would continue post-adoption of the new Local Plan due to shortfalls in the district's five-year housing supply. She urged the Council to calculate and release next year's housing data as soon as possible to strengthen protections. She said that Takeley faced more housing and industrial growth than anywhere else in the district and identified traffic congestion on the B1256 between Great Dunmow and the M11 as the biggest potential impact on Takeley. She noted that the Local Plan included safeguarded land for new routes to relieve pressure on local roads, including potential for a new access road from the A120 to the land north of Taylor's Farm industrial site.

She requested that Cabinet members instructed officers to urgently carry out a feasibility study for a new A120 access to the industrial site and report findings by October 2026 at the latest. She said this would give certainty that development could proceed in the safest way and would provide planning committee members with complete information for future decisions.

In response, Councillor Evans thanked all Local Plan speakers and said that a feasibility study for a potential new access road from the A120 to the land north of Taylor's Farm industrial site had been commissioned. He said the study would likely be completed before Easter 2026, rather than the October 2026 date suggested. He said this work originated from Councillor Colletta and Councillor Driscoll's earlier involvement and assured Councillor Cheetham that he would correspond with residents and council colleagues once further news became available. He said it was his intention to write to the Local Plan public speakers after the meeting and proposed that the correspondence be added to the meeting's record [*to be uploaded to the relevant webpage once received*].