

Timeline of meetings

Meeting	Date	PAS Commentary on the context of the discussions relating to the ULP process
LDF Management Group	2007	No comments on ULP of relevance
Policy choices and options for growth summary of representations received and recommendations	Jul-07	No comments on ULP of relevance
Policy choices and options for growth assessment of growth options	Aug-07	<p>The task of setting out options and impacts is not easy. However, it appears an unnecessarily complicated means of setting this out. Options are described as ‘the best against some things, but not others’. It is difficult to see how Option 3 is taken forward in the matrix. It is described as ‘growth split over a hierarchy of settlements and the start of new settlement’. Yet although ‘growth split over a hierarchy’ is assessed (Option 2) and ‘new settlement’ is assessed in the matrix, there doesn’t appear to be a specific option combining the two. At best, this is very confusing. At worst it’s a process failure. SA is an essential part of the evidence base, and must be used to assess and explain why options are chosen, and why they are rejected.</p>
LDF Management Group	Aug-07	No comments on ULP of relevance
Environment Committee	Sep-07	<p>This appears to start with a false premise, namely that there is enough information now to determine the preferred option. Elsenham was named as a potential location for 750 houses under Option 2 (West of Elsenham), and for 1,440 houses under Option 3 (North East of Elsenham) ‘as the start of a new settlement of at least 3,000 homes’.</p> <p>If taken at face value then, the Council resolved to insert a new option into the consultation, albeit one presented ‘without any rationale’, and also moved to approve this as the preferred spatial strategy. This appears to contradict an evidence-based approach. That said, the option to develop ‘at least 3,000 homes’ North East of Elsenham was part of option 3.</p>
Scrutiny	Oct-07	<p>This appears to show that there was continued pressure to have more explanation of the decision to include Elsenham as the preferred option for the plan. In voting not to take this back to Full Council the way was cleared to continue. There is little doubt that at the least there would have been further discussion prior to making the decision on the preferred option. Whilst this may have led to short term delay, given what followed and the evidence that supported the ‘dispersal’, it would have meant a speedier arrival at the eventual (initial) preferred option. There is little that could be done to alter the subsequent changes once the latest population projections came out, which led to the return to some more development around Elsenham.</p>

Environment Committee	Oct-07	Although rejected, this motion suggests that some Members were aware that not all the evidence was available to make the decision to select a preferred option. Certainly not the option that was chosen, as it did not have the same level of assessment as the other 3.
Preferred Options Consultation	Nov-07	The rationale appears to be that putting most of the growth in one place allows the infrastructure to come along at the same time/in advance. However, it is also acknowledged that any benefits of development at other centres would be lost, notably affordable housing, by having it all in one new settlement. The mitigation required to make a new settlement work, does not appear to have been considered as an option to help deliver sites elsewhere. The lack of capacity at the school in Saffron Walden for example appears as an ultimate constraint, rather than something which could be mitigated. It therefore seems as though the same considerations have not been applied equally to assess each option.
Local Development Framework Task Group	May-08	Some of this language suggests that not all the work required to assess option 4 has actually been done. This means the Council has chosen a preferred option in advance of knowing the impact and sustainability of it. I believe it is this approach which comes back to bite them later on, when the decision to go for 'dispersal' rather than concentrate in a new settlement, is made.
LDF Task Group	Sep-08	This effectively highlights that the work on Option 4 had not been done before the decision was made to take it forward. There are also signs that all is not well in terms of the consultation on various issues.
Environment Committee	Nov-08	Further evidence that Option 4 was not supported by evidence. The sentence that 'the Council had been required to put forward a preferred option for consultation' simply suggests that the decision to go out to preferred option was flawed, and should not have been taken at that time.
LDF Working Group	Jul-09	This serves to highlight Member awareness of affordability issues in Uttlesford. The decision made later not to adjust for market signals seems out of kilter with this discussion, and many subsequent ones.
LDF Working Group	Aug-09	This simply highlights an awareness of the need to plan expediently. However, there is no substitute for an evidence-led plan. The Council had created more work for itself in putting forward an option which required evidence after the event.
LDF Working Group	Nov-09	Again, it appears as though decisions are being made in advance of detailed evidence. The preferred option does not appear to include Elsenham.
Extraordinary Environment Committee	Nov-09	This decision appears to suggest that all other options are now back in play, although the Elsenham option has been refined to clarify where the rest of the development will go. This additional consultation would not have been necessary if the work to support Elsenham had been carried out prior to the original preferred option being chosen. This adds delay and cost. It also adds a layer of confusion. Note that there are still some

		technical studies to carry out/finalise. It is not the case that absolutely everything should be lined up and available prior to consultation, but key evidence must be ready. It is unclear that this is the case at this time.
LDF Working Group	Jul-10	There is a realisation that the single settlement option is unpopular. However, the statement that capacity should drive scale of growth is now clearly not NPPF compliant. At the time, such thinking may have been more common. The ranking of various factors really ought to have been settled as part of a visioning exercise, along with setting of sustainability objectives, long before this point. Such an exercise would have been referred to here to remind Members how they had got to this point.
LDF Working Group	Aug-10	<p>Whilst a lot of the language here is very much current thinking, there are clearly some areas of major concern. The mandate to drive down the number is clearly contrary to NPPF. Although this was not even in draft at the time, I think it shows the prevailing political desire was always going to make decisions on housing numbers difficult.</p> <p>There is also the clash between this wish and that of making affordable housing a top council priority. In the absence of grant funding, only market housing can deliver high levels of affordable housing. Whilst some councillors appear to lament this, it is nevertheless a fact.</p> <p>A perhaps unintended consequence of the accepted motion is the notion that by adopting smaller numbers, difficult decisions can disappear. It introduces the idea that policy should drive numbers rather than evidence.</p>
Environment Committee	Sep-10	The mandate is clear. However, it is apparent that the consultation has been ongoing and also perhaps confusing to many. All of which has led to the realisation that the single settlement option is not apparently supported by evidence to deliver council objectives. The idea that only a reduction in numbers can make it go away is somewhat strange.
LDF Working Group	Feb-11	It seems officers did not feel confident in putting forward a more robust case for a higher figure (based on what we now know to be a more conventional way of looking at the projections), at worst, they did not know what the proper response was. Either way, it is not clear from this that they had come up with a truly robust figure, as there are some assumptions which appear 'dodgy'. These seem to stem from the mandate to drive the number down. At least they moved away from zero-net migration.
Environment Committee	Mar-11	Clearly some councillors were aware this was not necessarily the right figure. Whilst it was also correct to say that the NPPF could be taken on board as and when it came out, if there was a draft at this stage, it should have been treated seriously.
LDF Working Group	Jul-11	The quote from the DHoP is very disappointing. Using language such as 'forcing councils to provide for housing' really should not come out from an officer. However, merely 4 months after one councillor questioned whether the NPPF would have an impact, it is clear that it has.

Cabinet Meeting	Aug-11	Once again this is a realisation that the proposed figure does not take account of inward migration and is not apparently compliant with emerging national policy.
LDF Working Group	Sep-11	This is a side note on the fact they looked at the green belt and suggested there was no scope to warrant a change. This decision was probably right at the time, given that at this point they did not know what the revised housing requirement was likely to be.
LDF Working Group	Oct-11	Officers now mention the methodology is unsound and so the figure has to be revised. This could have been said earlier, when initial discussions about a new figure were being held. The national policy may not have been in place but the direction of travel may have been.
Cabinet Meeting	Dec-11	This is a further piece of the narrative that affordable housing is a key council priority. Once again, this was not borne out when considering potential 'market signals'.
Cabinet Meeting	Dec-11	Over a year after suggesting they needed to review the housing requirement, the council consults on a range of distribution of sites but does not consult on a new requirement. The statement from the Leader that the 'ground rules had changed and were continuing to change' is perhaps to some extent true, but the council has been aware of the task at hand for over a year and has failed to come up with a number, or range of numbers.
Scrutiny Committee	Apr-12	Decision taken on a scenario to support a new housing requirement, apparently balancing the economic needs with housing.
Scrutiny Committee	May-12	Hints that the consultation has not been well carried out, or has led to criticism from some quarters. The scenario most favoured is now dispersal, which was one of the original scenarios back in 2007. Finally, with all the evidence behind it, an option of dispersal is seen to be the best.
Scrutiny Committee	May-12	This shows some good responses to some parochial points being made, namely that there is a wider process, a body of evidence and some tough decisions to be made. The link to infrastructure is made. It clarifies the hierarchy of settlements as a driver for the distribution.
Cabinet Meeting	May-12	The reduction in housing number immediately made the choice of a single settlement option less sustainable. My initial thought is, how do you demonstrate that 900 houses equals the tipping point? Or is that the 'economic growth' factor is the driver?
Cabinet Meeting	May-12	Note, previous justification for Elsenham was that all the infrastructure could be provided. It is now for precisely that reason that the option is not seen to be deliverable.
LDF Working Group	Jul-12	Members now question the ability of the chosen strategy to deliver the infrastructure required. Apparently, only now are consultants being commissioned to look at this. This does not seem and surely cannot be right.

LDF Working Group	Aug-12	Just to note they feel the plan is broadly NPPF compliant
LDF Working Group	Sep-12	At the time, using RSS was still acceptable (ie pre-Hunston)
LDF Working Group	Oct-12	Shows the time lag between new information coming out and being treated in the plan. May not need to be reflected, just a statement of where they were at relative to new evidence.
LDF Working Group	Nov-12	New evidence was being taken into account and the sensible approach of apparently not waiting until all new projections from the Census had been finalised, noting the length of time it would be before these were ready. A good decision! However, it is not clear that the advice about the lifespan of the plan was correct, from officers. That said, it has not been a major issue nationally. However, whether linked to this or not, there is already more comment about reinstating the single settlement option.
Cabinet Meeting	Dec-12	One of the slightly off-topic points about affordable housing being recognised as a still-large issue. Conflicting with the later point about not seeking to increase the number at all to respond to market signals.
LDF Working Group	Feb-13	Ad hoc, reactive response to a plan consultation rather than the proactive, ongoing discussions that are supposed to be held. Early warning about the Duty?
LDF Working Group	Mar-13	Revising the SCI highlighted potential areas for improvement in communicating with Parishes, although officers disagreed. N Herts plan consultation again highlights potentially slightly ad hoc way of dealing with 'cooperation'. It may be that the 'monitor progress and review as necessary' is sufficient. But it may also explain why the Inspector raised DtC and said 'only just'.
LDF Working Group	Jun-13	Continued feedback on lack of trust between public and council over local plan.
Local Plan Working Group	Aug-13	This shows that there were questions raised about the timeframe of the plan. At the time, the decision was deferred until advice had been sought. On the duty to cooperate it appears as though the cross boundary impacts are being looked at. With regard to East Herts the statement about 'ongoing discussions' is helpful, but there does not appear to be Member involvement.
Cabinet Meeting	Sep-13	Clarification the relationship between the Local Plan Working Group and Cabinet.

Local Plan Working Group	Oct-13	This meeting confirmed what the new numbers should be and what the plan period is. It's interesting to note the highways comments, in particular that there is no consideration (even at this stage) of any of the potential growth from the as-yet unpublished plans in the area (Harlow and East Herts to name but two). If, as reported, 'meetings were regularly held with neighbouring authorities', this is a positive. But the Inspector raised the issue of engagement with HE. This is not reported and must have been less 'regular'.
Local Plan Working Group	Nov-13	The redistribution of the numbers confirms a slight hybrid of existing dispersal and more concentration in one place (Elsenham). However, it is not immediately apparent what the difference between options A and C is? The proposed sites are SHLAA sites and so have been in the public domain. It would have been important to be very clear why these were the chosen sites.
Cabinet Meeting	Nov-13	Realisation that the Council had to run with new numbers (the ones that went into the examined plan) based on the latest evidence. That was a good decision. However, some worrying language around the selection of the strategy for delivery. Is it 'continued dispersal' or is it 'as you are, plus Elsenham'?
Local Plan Working Group	Feb-14	Duty to cooperate with neighbouring authorities is being formalised and an MoU being drawn up. The only potential concern would be how they demonstrated the working to this point?
Scrutiny Committee	Feb-14	Just the 'admission' that driving down the numbers was a 'mistake'.
Cabinet Meeting	Mar-14	Ongoing concern about water capacity for Elsenham. It also shows that most of the houses are planned there for the end of the 20 year plan period. This is interesting as it shows that Elsenham is clearly not deliverable in the short term. If that was always the case then it shows that it was never a deliverable option when the plan period was much shorter and one could question its' inclusion at that early stage once again.
Local Plan Working Group	Mar-14	This highlights further issues with Elsenham not having a developed evidence base relative to other sites.
Council Meeting	Apr-14	Indications of a diversity of opinions, many references to a lack of trust and transparency, and of course, more criticism about the reappearance of Elsenham. It would appear that the process isn't flawed overall. If the council chooses to make decisions at cabinet and committee, as advised by a working group, that is a reasonable way forward. There were many representations from individuals minuted, they are clearly emotional statements but they do show the general feeling of mistrust. The Council will still have to consider how it moves forward. Perhaps most telling is the statement that this is the first time the plan has appeared before Council.