

Extraordinary Council Meeting on 16 November 2016

List of Public Speakers (in order of being registered)

1. William Brown on behalf of Hinxton Parish Council to make a statement and ask the following questions:

My questions relate to the possibility that Uttlesford DC might plan to develop a housing settlement on land north of Great Chesterford on the boundary with South Cambridgeshire (sites 08GtChe15 and 10GtChe15).

The background is that such a development would have severe implications for the S Cambs villages of Hinxton, Ickleton, Duxford and Whittlesford immediately down the River Cam.

According to the assessments on UDC's website, there is 'currently no capacity in the sewerage network for additional dwellings' and it would require a new connection that would be required to cross the M11/A11 to the Ickleton sewage works which would be likely to '... require extensive upgrades to accommodate the flows ...'. The assessment considers that 'A new settlement would increase the discharge of treated effluent to the River Cam thus warranting more stringent consent standards' (Source: UDC Water Cycle Study, 2010).

It is reported that: 'Development in this locality has the potential to increase the level of flood risk from the River Cam downstream by increasing water run-off' (Source: Uttlesford Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, 2008). The aforementioned villages immediately downstream are all already highly vulnerable to flooding.

The UDC website's assessment of the 'Landscape Character of the Uttlesford District' says of the River Cam valley, where the proposed settlement would be on high ground: 'The open skyline of the valley slopes is visually sensitive, with new development potentially being highly visible within panoramic inter and cross-valley views' (7.2.1). Such visibility would be particularly high for these S Cambs villages.

Given comparative employment opportunities and housing costs, a high proportion of householders in the proposed settlement would commute to work in Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire. There is no option to access the northbound M11 from Great Chesterford other than Junction 10 with the A505. Access to Junction 10 is via the A1301 to the A505 past Hinxton, or by local roads to the A505 through Ickleton and Duxford. The increased population in Great Chesterford would substantially increase the pressure of traffic on these access roads, which already suffer severe congestion.

My questions are:

Question (1): 'Given this background, how would Uttlesford DC propose to bear the costs and mitigate the damage that would be caused by the proposed Great Chesterford settlement to the villages of S Cambs immediately over the district boundary?'

Question (2): 'What evidence does the Uttlesford DC have that such a settlement would not primarily meet the housing needs of South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge, rather than those of Uttlesford District?'

2. Jackie Cheetham on behalf of Takeley Parish Council to make a statement and ask the following question:

'The headlines from the proposed new Local Plan indicate that yet again housing development is focused in the south of the district; including two 'new settlements'. We are being told that development in the north of the district is constrained by the influence of South Cambs. What does this mean? The evolving S Cambs Local Plan (the Examination is in progress) shows no major development proposals near the boundary with Uttlesford. There is no published objection from S Cambs about development constraints in the north of Uttlesford, nor could any be justified. In addition, given the all too well known problems at jtn 8 of the M11 in the south and the available capacity at jtn 9, will the Council please explain what evidence is available to demonstrate that the proposed allocations in the south of the district are sustainable, and why the north of the district is not?'

Takeley is still absorbing the substantial development allocated in the 2005 Local Plan: Takeley/Lt Canfield provided almost 20% its total. Now, in this new plan it, it appears that further development is to be allocated to Takeley - possibly up to 500 extra homes or more than 10% of extra new housing. How can this be justified when Takeley is well down the settlement hierarchy with few local services, education, employment etc. and poor transportation links? '

3. Ken McDonald from Stansted to make the following statement:

Good evening. My name is Ken McDonald. I have lived in Uttlesford for 35 years. I have no loyalty or leaning to any political party. I only wish to see Uttlesford develop a sound plan that passes inspection and does not destroy the character of our district. My comments relate to the Plan as a whole.

I hope you are aware that Uttlesford's Local Plan is founded on the Strategic Housing Market Assessment – the SHMA.

For more than a year I have been trying to draw attention to a number of significant deficiencies in the SHMA and also arguing that it has led to Uttlesford planning to build far more houses than it needs – perhaps four thousand too many.

The current draft plan seeks an increase in housing stock of 38% - more than a third - over just 22 years – far more than almost everywhere else in the country.

I have been unable to follow how key conclusions in the SHMA have been arrived at, most notably the number of houses needed in Uttlesford. I am a chartered accountant, familiar with analysing figures. Now, if I can't follow the calculations, I suspect most reasonable people (including planning inspectors) will also not be able to.

The SHMA's lack of audit trail, as it is called, echoes a fundamental reason for the failure of the 2014 plan– I'm sure none of us want to see another failure.

Sadly, the Council has failed to answer my criticisms of the SHMA, responding instead with reference to figures emanating from the failed 2014 Plan. In 2014 the same fundamental forecasting mistake was made - basing future need on an atypical base period – the period of exceptional "airport-related" house-building.

The Council's blind faith in the 2014 forecasts and failure to critically appraise the evidence that is being offered in support of this plan is a recipe for either another failed plan or, even worse, a thorough trashing of Uttlesford.

I was given hope by the recent announcement that independent consultants have been asked to review progress – something I have been seeking for many months.

I hope these new consultants will be asked to consider the weaknesses that have been identified in the SHMA which is the basis - the unsound basis for the new Plan.

Also, I hope the consultants will consider the case for a lower house-building target, based on longer-term trends and not just the exceptional period of airport-related housebuilding.

I hope they will be asked if a lower target, based on longer-term trends, might stand a reasonable chance of acceptance at the examination in public.

I have been told that the new consultants have not be asked to review the SHMA, but I hope you will ensure they do.

4. Richard Gilead from Saffron Walden to make the following statement:

Mr Chairman, Members of the Council. The Local Plan is supposed to be a plan for the future well-being and prosperity of our district. It should cover employment, transport, housing and the environment we all depend on. Air quality is a key factor in planning for a healthy future.

As recently as September, a cross-party group of MPs called the national air pollution problem a "public health emergency". At the beginning of this month, the government's plan for tackling the UK's air pollution crisis was judged as illegally poor in the high court. It is clear that not enough is being done.

And yet, here we are again with a plan to build hundreds of new houses on the wrong side of Saffron Walden, with no workable proposals to deal with all the traffic, even though pollution levels are already rising again.

The latest available Highways Assessment from 2014 predicted an average increase of 350% in peak queues at key junctions even with all the proposed mitigation measures in place and that's before all the extra houses now included in the plan.

The Council's own Air Quality Action Plan 2016 says, "... the growth of Saffron Walden and surrounding areas will lead to increased traffic using local roads, and improvements in emission quality of new vehicles may be insufficient to mitigate against increases in the levels of harmful pollutants emitted by the overall traffic fleet."

In other words, there is no real plan to tackle the traffic queues or the air quality problems which will worsen as a result of this unsustainable development plan. Nobody knows when, or even if, the Air Quality Management Area designation will ever be lifted from our town.

The Council should be meeting its legal obligation to consider the cumulative effect of development on air quality. But it also has an ethical responsibility to protect the health and well-being of all residents. Will UDC now take their responsibility seriously

and commit to control development so that pollution levels are brought within legal limits both now and for the foreseeable future?

5. Neil Gregory on behalf of Great Chesterford Parish Council (note: Mr Gregory may be delayed and has asked Moyra Tourlamain to speak in his absence)
6. Nick Buhaenko-Smith from Stebbing to make a statement
7. Paul Stuart-Turner from Saffron Walden to ask the following question:

Has it been made clear to national government that Saffron Walden is an exceptional case because the Audley End Estate blocks development to the West of the town and the key transport links and secondary school are on this side of town. Any development on the east of the town therefore creates severe congestion especially in the morning and evening rush hours?

I am not aware of many towns in Britain that face this unusual difficulty.

8. Alexander Armstrong from Great Dunmow to make a statement.
9. Moyra Tourlamain on behalf of Great Chesterford Parish Council to make a statement (depending on whether Mr Gregory has already made a statement – see 6 on list).
10. Anthony Gerard from Newport to make a statement and ask the following question (please note however that the question was not submitted by the deadline for questions to be accepted under the Access to Information Rules:

"Saffron Walden County High School and Helena Romanes School are effectively full and there is no likelihood of them expanding. Joyce Frankland is planned to take an extra year group but will then not expand further. Despite this ECC Education predict a net deficit of 130 secondary school places in Saffron Walden within 3 years.

1) If UDC's currently proposed spatial strategy is implemented, where will the additional children go to secondary school?

2) How has this been factored into the spatial strategy?

3) Where is UDC's education strategy for the next 15 years to support the Local Plan?"

11. Chris Audritt on behalf of Little Easton Parish Council to make a statement.
12. Louise Luke from Great Chesterford to make a statement and ask the following question:

Question: what steps are being taken to consider the environmental impact on S Cambridgeshire/Essex border of a new town approaching the size of Saffron Walden. e.g. improved sewage, water, improved transport facilities (buses, road capacity, M1 junction, rail capacity, station parking, cycle routes)

13. Elfreda Tealby-Watson to make a statement and ask the following questions:

Firstly, I would like to register my interest in speaking although I will only be able to confirm my attendance on Wednesday depending on work commitments.

Secondly, I would like to note formally to Council that as both as a resident and former Councillor myself I appreciate all efforts (and as per the motion public statements of support for) towards transparency in any Council discussion and decision making.

Thirdly, I would like to submit the following questions:

1. *In view of the wish for transparency*
 - a) *what efforts were made by the District Council and their elected members to publicise this extraordinary meeting to members of the public*
 - b) *What will happen if the time allotted for public speakers – 15 minutes – is insufficient to include all those wishing to speak*
 - c) *How will time be allocated between speakers registered to speak*

2. *Referencing comments regarding the need of many residents to travel outside Uttlesford for their employment (bullet 1) and then (bullet 3) the expected growth of the expanding high technology industries around Cambridge:*
 - a) *What steps will be taken beyond any statutory need to cooperate between authorities to establish potential developments, commercial or residential, outside Uttlesford boundaries that are under discussion but not yet in planning but which for the sake of best practice future proofing evidence should be considered with regarding to sustainability issues of traffic, water management and demographics*
 - b) *With reference to the comments regarding the M11 corridor and hi-tech industries, specifically what efforts are being made to establish the impact of developments under discussion for instance regarding Sanger and Smithson building proposals in South Cambridgeshire on the north of Uttlesford*
 - c) *What effort is now being made to publicise these possible South Cambridgeshire developments in the context of the proposal for the Chesterford site so that full and transparent evidence of any “pincer” development can be examined*
 - d) *What steps will be taken to gain demographic predictions or existing evidence of work destinations for Uttlesford residents across the district to support such statements regarding the increasing need/ tendency of residents to work outside the district*

3. *Generally, for proposed sites across the district what account is being made of the need for supporting infrastructure for new large scale developments versus entire new settlements for example examining factors. {NB A recent example of difficulties encountered in such infrastructure planning has been education e.g. noted publicly last year the unbalanced demand for school places throughout Uttlesford with over-subscription and under-subscription in different catchments, again with problems for parishes in the north of the district widely publicized}*

14. Richard Westbrook from Ashdon to make a statement.

15. Clive Hopewell from Great Chesterford to make a statement and ask the following questions (he has asked that the questions can be read out in his expected absence):

I would like to register my interest in the meeting on Wednesday evening but should I be unable to attend due to professional engagements then I wish the following points to be submitted:

1. *I believe there is great importance in keeping a green belt between Cambridge and Saffron Walden. We now have ribbon development from Sawston to Cambridge so to develop south of Sawston as proposed on the north Uttlesford site we would have risk developing urban sprawl to the boundaries of Saffron Walden itself. This comment is in response to the several mentions in the motion of workers travelling to or employment developments in South Cambridgeshire/ M11 border. Surely it is imperative that if we are trying to account for this we are in transparency discussions with those authorities to establish what is also being proposed for Cambridgeshire, Hertsfordshire and Suffolk to address those needs?*
2. *Re the motion commenting on the need for establishing the criteria on which sites are considered best for local plan developments, can Council clarify whether that process takes into account unbuilt developments which already have planning approval. Similarly, and in order to have a local plan that develops Uttlesford in a sustainable and balanced way across the District, appropriate to existing and historic built and rural environment and in anticipation of future factors, what evidence is being considered with regard to how many houses have been built/ approved per capita inhabitant ward-by-ward or parish-by-parish in the last 5 years? This would give an indication of the saturation levels per community to date, comparing e.g. village to town environments.*

Please note that Michael Culkin registered to speak on behalf of The Thaxted Society after the deadline but may be allowed to speak at the Chairman's discretion depending on the time available.