

Uttlesford Local Plan
Towards a Fresh Vision of the District
in 2033

Planning Policy Working Group
13 July 2015

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Following receipt of the report of the Planning Inspector on the previous submission Local Plan in December 2014, and subsequent withdrawal of the plan in January 2015, Uttlesford District Council has restarted the Local Plan formulation process, including reconsideration of the options for development. This includes reworking the vision set out in the withdrawn Local Plan, as set out in Appendix A.
- 1.2 A clear vision for the future of the District is a central requirement of the Local Plan. The national Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) explains that a vision is integral to the Local Plan:

What is the role of a Local Plan?

“National planning policy places Local Plans at the heart of the planning system, so it is essential that they are in place and kept up to date. Local Plans set out a vision and a framework for the future development of the area, addressing needs and opportunities in relation to housing, the economy, community facilities and infrastructure – as well as a basis for safeguarding the environment, adapting to climate change and securing good design. They are also a critical tool in guiding decisions about individual development proposals, as Local Plans (together with any neighbourhood plans that have been made) are the starting-point for considering whether applications can be approved. It is important for all areas to put an up to date plan in place to positively guide development decisions.

“National planning policy sets clear expectations as to how a Local Plan must be developed in order to be justified, effective, consistent with national policy and positively prepared to deliver sustainable development that meets local needs and national priorities.”

Source: Planning Practice Guidance, Local Plans, Paragraph 1

- 1.3 As the PPG makes clear, the vision needs to be shaped in the context of positive planning for development, as well as safeguarding the environment, adapting to climate change, and securing good design. This means that Local Plan vision statements need to be an integral part of the development strategy for the area they cover.
- 1.4 The process of preparing an agreed vision is one of the toughest challenges facing Local Plan-makers. This process is set out in the NPPF which states that *“A wide section of the community should be proactively engaged, so that Local Plans, as far as possible, reflect a collective vision and a set of agreed priorities for the sustainable development of the area, including those*

contained in any neighbourhood plans that have been made.” (National Planning Policy Framework Paragraph 155).

- 1.5 This is a huge challenge for plan-makers, given the many different interests and views of the residents and businesses. It is also a challenge for local residents and groups, who need to engage with the overall requirement to provide a positive “framework for future development of the area”.

2. The Vision and the Development Strategy

- 2.1 The framework for future development of an area includes the vision, the development strategy, and a suite of policies through which the former may be implemented. Through the Local Plan all three must be aligned.
- 2.2 The vision statement component of the Local Plan is often referred to as a ‘spatial vision’ because it sets out specific areas of development and restraint. The vision is usually closely linked to the Key Diagram and brief outline of the spatial development strategy in Local Plans, so that the spatial expression of the vision may be clearly represented and understood.
- 2.4 The production of a draft vision is only possible at the draft Local Plan stage, when the Council will set out its proposals for development of the area for the first time, including identification of specific development locations. Whilst some elements of the vision may appear relatively obvious at the outset, it is important that the vision should not be used to predetermine the development strategy before all the evidence has been assembled and considered.
- 2.5 At the same time, inputs from business and the community will be sought at intervals through the plan-making process. These inputs will be used to inform the development of both the vision and the plan overall, within the context of the requirements of national policy. The production of the vision is therefore an intrinsic part of the process of plan formulation.

3. Drafting the Content of the Local Plan Vision

- 3.1 The PPG indicates that the framework for development should include *“needs and opportunities in relation to housing, the economy, community facilities and infrastructure – as well as a basis for safeguarding the environment, adapting to climate change and securing good design.”*
- 3.2 In order to assist those with an interest in the Local Plan, and District Councillors in particular, some examples of vision statements extracted from Local Plans recently found sound are provided in Appendix B. It is helpful to identify themes which are picked up in these documents. However the examples set out here are not models to follow and no doubt it would be

possible to improve on them. It may be helpful to consider these examples alongside the Uttlesford Submission Local Plan Vision in Appendix A.

- 3.3 As far as possible Vision statements should avoid bland ‘anywhere’ statements because they should convey succinctly and clearly how places will look different at the end of the plan period, commonly in 15 years time.
- 3.4 Visions are intrinsically aspirational but it is important that these aspirations should be capable of being realised. Local Plans can be used to make the case for funding and investment over the long term, and a significant amount of work will be undertaken through the ongoing Infrastructure Delivery Programme to realise the vision. In East Cambs the contribution to the A142 and the A10 provide examples.
- 3.5 The vision needs to be positively worded to explain how residential and employment growth will be linked. It is not necessarily the case that for every house built there will be a suitable job provided in the immediate locality: this is not realistic in the specialised modern economy where jobs tend to cluster in areas attractive to employers, and many workers are prepared to travel significant distances. The vision should however identify the main locations where employment growth potential is recognised.
- 3.6 The vision should set out how the special qualities or character of the main settlements will be strengthened and conserved by development. The visions for the historic Roman cities of Chichester and Chester illustrate the dilemmas faced by those authorities in planning for significant amounts of development, and how they seek to address them.

4. Design Quality

- 4.1 The quality of design in the built environment is one of the main issues which the planning system seeks to address, and is often raised as an example of where the vision of development and the reality can diverge. Design quality refers not just to standards of architectural design of individual buildings but also to the inter-relationship between buildings, their setting, and the spaces between them.
- 4.2 A vision statement cannot in itself produce good design. This section seeks to set out the challenges and some of the mechanisms through which design may be addressed through the planning system.
- 4.3 Design is highly context-specific, but should not be considered simply a matter of taste and therefore subjective. Good design in place-making is advocated by the Design Council and others. There are various tools which

can be used to promote good design, including Design Review Panels¹ and the Building for Life standards (see Appendix B) as well as the adopted Essex Design Guide. National policy is clear that where there are clear cases of poor design then planning permission should be refused (NPPF paragraph 64).

- 4.4 However, notwithstanding examples of good practice and national requirements, there are intrinsic features of the development industry which make achieving good design very challenging.
- 4.5 Historically, towns and villages were usually built by local builders with an interest in their local area, building in small volumes using locally available building materials.
- 4.6 Today, residential development on larger sites in particular is characterised by volume housebuilders. The perception in some quarters may be that the principal concerns of such developers are their share price and other financial indices, and that they rarely employ local architects or use local materials, instead rolling out standard spec 'products' which may sell easily but provide little real choice, variety, or local distinctiveness. Recent changes to government guidance encourage Local Plans to provide opportunities for self-build in order to address such concerns.
- 4.7 Since the economic recession in 2008-9 there has been an increasing trend towards consolidation in the housebuilding industry, with many small builders going bust or selling up, and consolidation of a small number of increasingly large national companies.
- 4.8 In villages across the country development opportunities are usually characterised by small parcels of land which are unattractive to volume builders and can attract local builders. Such developments are however often characterised by large 4 and 5 bedroom houses which are unaffordable to local residents².
- 4.9 Multiple landownerships at large development sites in can result in the appointment of different developers for different parts of the site. This can cause disjointed masterplanning. It can also cause disputes between developers over the respective level of infrastructure contributions, thereby complicating Section 106 negotiations with the Local Planning Authority.
- 4.10 These features of the development industry, combined with the NPPF imperative to deliver more housing, often means that the requirement for

¹ See for example the Hertfordshire Design Review Panel including past reviews at: www.hertslink.org/buildingfutures/designreview/.

² The existing (2005) Uttlesford Local Plan (Policy H10: Housing Mix) seeks to address this concern. It requires that "all developments on sites of 0.1 hectares and above or of 3 or more dwellings will be required to include a significant proportion of market housing comprising small properties."

'good design' all too often slides into merely 'acceptable' designs which are capable of surviving a challenge at a planning appeal but achieve little more.

- 4.11 In terms of the Local Plan, where there are potential influences on design outcomes then these should be identified in the policy wording. Such policy requirements will benefit from engagement with Town and Parish Councils and feedback from others with local knowledge.
- 4.12 Developers should have an interest in actively pursuing good design because it should increase their chances of securing planning permission. The NPPF states that: *"applicants will be expected to work closely with those directly affected by their proposals to evolve designs that take account of the views of the community. Proposals that can demonstrate this in developing the design of the new development should be looked on more favourably."* (NPPF Paragraph 66). Whether such engagement is tokenistic or genuinely results in improved design quality will need to be factored into the planning balance in the context of decisions on individual planning applications.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Initial concepts for potential inclusion in a future vision will be explored at the Planning Policy Working Group on 13 July 2015. Members may wish to further consider potential inputs and submit comments by email to the Planning Policy Team at planningpolicy@uttlesford.gov.uk . Any comments received will be reported to a future meeting of the Planning Policy Working Group.
- 5.2 It is proposed that a broad range of views on the potential contents of the vision will be sought through a public consultation in the autumn. In order to ensure that the development context for the emerging vision is understood, consultation questions on the vision will be included alongside questions about the development strategy options and appraisal of alternatives. The contents of the consultation documents will be considered as part of a Working Group meeting prior to the consultation.
- 5.3 Work on infrastructure planning and delivery, together with work on the development strategy, will be carried out over the coming months and used to help inform and shape a draft vision which is both aspirational and realistic. The vision will then form part of a new draft Local Plan to be considered by the Council during 2016 prior to a further public consultation.

Appendices

Appendix A: Draft Vision from Uttlesford Submission Local Plan 2014 (withdrawn)

The District Vision

By 2031....

1. The district's high quality natural and historic environment will have been maintained and enhanced and the settlements will continue to be separate entities with green space between them.
2. The houses and facilities people need will be available and affordable locally, new sustainable housing developments will be distributed across the District.
3. The vitality and viability of our towns will have been maintained and enhanced and they will be safe, clean and attractive places. Facilities will exist for companies to grow and establish in Uttlesford.
4. There will be convenient, comfortable, safe and affordable alternatives to private transport, whether by bus or rail serving the settlements of Saffron Walden, Great Dunmow, Elsenham, Great Chesterford, Hatfield Heath, Newport, Stansted Mountfitchet, Takeley and Thaxted and the regional interchange centre of Stansted Airport.
5. The impact of Stansted Airport will have been minimised so that its presence is recognised as an asset to the District which attracts people to live, work and visit.

Appendix B: Examples of Local Plan Vision Statements

Example Vision 1: Chichester District Local Plan (Found Sound May 2015)

Vision for Places - The East-West Corridor

The emphasis will be upon consolidating and enhancing the role of Chichester city as the District's main centre, whilst also developing the role of key settlements to its east and west, most notably Southbourne, Westhampnett and Tangmere. This will help to relieve pressure on the city and take advantage of access to jobs and services to the east and west of the District. The focus will be upon creating communities with good access to a range of employment opportunities and affordable housing for young people and families to balance the ageing population.

Chichester city will maintain its special significance as an economic and cultural centre serving a wide catchment area beyond the District. The city's employment base will adapt and evolve from an emphasis on public administration, to a base which is more diverse and reflects its highly regarded professional services and cultural offer. The city will enhance its reputation as a University City and centre of excellence for higher and further education and the arts with a range of opportunities for business, shopping, leisure and entertainment. The economic contribution that students make to the city will be further enhanced as graduates choose to remain within Chichester and set up businesses or seek local jobs.

New sustainable neighbourhoods at Graylingwell Park and Roussillon Park, as well as other sites in the north of the city and around its fringe will provide homes, jobs and community facilities with good public transport, pedestrian and cycle links to other parts of the city. As an historic walled cathedral city dating back to Roman times, its rich cultural and architectural heritage will be conserved, enhanced and promoted together with the views and landscape value afforded by its setting.

Strategic development to the east and west of the city will seek to conserve and enhance the local distinctiveness, character and cohesion of existing settlements whilst recognising the important role of the city as the major focus for employment, shopping and leisure. This highly accessible transit corridor will be the focus for major new employment development, including large-scale horticulture. The relationship between the National Park and significant natural areas to the south, especially Chichester Harbour Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, will be carefully managed by maintaining and enhancing the countryside between settlements.

Southbourne and Tangmere will grow and develop their role as 'settlement hubs' by widening the range and improving the quality of public open space, leisure and community facilities for their respective local areas. For Southbourne, the aim is to enhance its existing range of local facilities, whilst also looking to further strengthen transport links east to Chichester and west to Havant and Portsmouth.

For Tangmere, the vision is to significantly enhance the village's range of facilities to the benefit of the local community through the development of new homes and workspace. At the same time, improved bus services and cycleways will provide

better connections to Chichester city and east to Barnham and the 'Five Villages' area in Arun District.

Example Vision 2: East Cambridgeshire District (Found Sound March 2015)

A spatial vision for East Cambridgeshire

In 2031, East Cambridgeshire will have maintained a high quality of life and retained its distinct identity as a predominantly rural area of villages and market towns, whilst accommodating the development of new homes and jobs. The district will have taken advantage of the economic vitality of the Cambridge sub-region, and have a diverse and thriving economy, with vibrant and attractive towns and villages which act as employment and service centres for their surrounding rural areas. More residents will have a high quality of life, with increased access to affordable housing, a wider range of local better skilled jobs, and good quality services and facilities.

The market towns of Ely, Soham and Littleport will be the focus for development. Ely, as the main centre in the district, will accommodate the most growth. More employment opportunities will be available, reducing out-commuting, increasing the jobs density ratio, and creating more balanced communities with a better level of self-containment. A mix of residential development will be delivered to meet local needs (including affordable housing), whilst ensuring necessary infrastructure and community facilities/services are in place to support growth.

In the wider countryside, appropriate small-scale development will be allowed where this meets local needs and supports the long-term sustainability of a settlement. The small part of the district which forms a suburb of Newmarket will support the overall development of Newmarket – as identified in the Forest Heath LDF. Wherever new housing is provided, it will respond to local needs and requirements as far as possible in terms of type, size and tenure. In addition, large developments will be of exemplar quality, and all new housing will be of high quality and well designed, ensuring that the distinctive character of the district's towns and villages is maintained and enhanced.

Communities will have improved social, recreational, health and educational facilities. The needs of elderly, young and lower-paid people will receive special attention. Existing vital community services will be retained⁹ and new infrastructure and services required to support growth will be delivered on time to meet the needs of new residents. The levels of crime and the fear of crime will have been further reduced.

Transport deficiencies will be tackled and accessibility improved. Priority will be given to major improvements to the A142 between Angel Drove and the Stuntney Causeway. Public bus services between market towns and villages will be improved (including to settlements in neighbouring areas), and the A10 will be developed as a high quality public transport corridor. Better cycling and pedestrian facilities and links will be provided, including segregated cycle routes along key routes linking towns and villages. Other infrastructure improvement projects required to support growth will also be delivered.

The overall diversity and quality of East Cambridgeshire's countryside and natural environment will have improved and the historic environment conserved and enhanced. There will be better access to the countryside and green spaces for local communities which helps to improve people's quality of life. The challenges presented by climate change will have been embraced, with new development being located and designed to minimise resource and energy use and reduce the risk of flooding. Renewable energy production will have increased, and a proportion of all energy will be created from local renewable sources such as bio-fuels, biomass, and wind power.

Example 3: South Somerset Local Plan (Found Sound January 2015)

The Vision for South Somerset in 2028

'South Somerset will be a thriving, attractive and affordable place to live and work in. It will be a far more sustainable place with more self-sufficient towns with much better public transport links within and between them, therefore more and better community facilities will be available in each of them. The move to a low carbon economy and low carbon living will have been secured together with adaptation to the changing climate of warmer, wetter winters and hotter, drier summers expressed through appropriate changes in the built form and enhanced green infrastructure.

The district will have grown in population with a larger Yeovil and expanded market towns based on economic, cultural and educational strengths. There will be continued protection of distinctive historic, urban and rural environments. The growth in population will be matched with growth in the economy in conjunction with the infrastructure provision needed to make this happen.

Residents will have greater opportunities to lead active and healthier lifestyles through greater access to open space and leisure opportunities and to facilities, services and jobs, without reliance on the car. The area will have a low crime rate and people will feel safe and happy in their environment.

New homes will be of the highest standard of design and locally distinctive. People can afford to either buy or rent and will want to live in these homes which can improve their quality of life, health and well-being. There will be economic growth in business and better wages will provide a more equitable standard of living and foster more socially inclusive communities throughout the district. Through promotion of the district, new inward investment will be attracted to South Somerset.

Yeovil will be the prime economic driver within the district and beyond, with a strong employment base and more high-tech and quality businesses. The town will have a better public transport network and be better linked to the district's Market Towns.

The town will be attractive for residents, workers, students and visitors. The workforce will be more highly skilled and motivated with improving higher education facilities including university level courses. Retailing will flourish in a thriving town centre which supports rather than competes with the role of the Market Towns. The night time economy in the town will flourish with quality social and leisure opportunities.

The Yeovil Sustainable Urban Extensions will be established and act as an exemplar of the benefits of more sustainable living with local job and service self-sufficiency, high quality design of buildings, a high level of attractive open space, leisure facilities and parkland. These aspirations are in accordance with the aims of Paragraph 52 of the NPPF which refers to large-scale extensions to settlements aiming to deliver on the principles of 'Garden Cities'.

South Somerset's Market Towns and Rural Centres will provide the basis of the thriving regenerated and diversified economy outside Yeovil. These places will have retained their distinctiveness and continue to provide a focus for their surrounding areas. They will have built upon their existing roles and functions and be thriving and vibrant places offering quality housing, job opportunities and a range of services to meet the needs of their communities and visitors and be more self-sufficient and with a better balance of jobs to dwellings.

The significant growth identified for Chard will have addressed physical constraints to growth, economic regeneration and prosperity and moved the town to a higher level of service provision with much improved facilities throughout the town and better job opportunities.

The growth proposed at the other Market Towns and Rural Centres will provide economic regeneration, better housing and, with the maintenance and enhancement of commercial and community services across the district, allowing better access for all. The mix of employment, housing and associated land uses in these places will promote greater settlement self-containment.

Villages and smaller settlements will be able to provide for local provision of jobs, facilities and the affordable housing that they need which brings benefits to the rural economy. Farm diversification, more diverse local employment opportunities and support for tourism, tourism accommodation and attractions will also support a better experience of rural living, as will the ability to live and work from home through improved broadband provision.

South Somerset will have retained a viable agricultural base with high quality local food production reducing the need for imports and food miles.

Commitment to reducing the impact of climate change will be demonstrated by achieving high quality design and by the wider application of reduced CO2 emission targets for new development. Sustainable new development within Yeovil Urban Village (Summerhouse Village) and within the Sustainable Urban Extensions will provide exemplar development to act as a driver for change and innovation in design and energy efficiency. Focus will be on economic and housing growth in the most sustainable locations, avoiding areas of high flood risk.'

Example 4: Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan (Found Sound December 2014 2015)

By 2030 Cheshire West and Chester will be a desirable and attractive place to live, work, learn and visit with vibrant towns and rural villages, reflecting the vision of the Sustainable Community Strategy.

Development will reflect the character of local areas, conserving, managing and enhancing the valuable natural and historical environments, resources and assets.

Chester will continue its development as a prosperous sub-regional employment location, shopping and international tourist destination. The city will be a key asset to the borough with a thriving business, retail and tourism economy and as a centre for learning. The setting and special character of Chester will be maintained.

Ellesmere Port will be a confident industrial area, a hub for high quality industries and technologies including the green energy and waste sector, attracting inward investment. Perceptions of the town will be enhanced as a result of improvements to the image of the town as a prosperous area.

Northwich will have a vibrant town centre based around the regeneration and development of new retail, leisure and housing development opportunities. The waterways and surrounding countryside will provide an important resource for the recreational needs of local residents and visitors.

Winsford will be integral to the improved prosperity of the borough particularly through development to meet the needs of local communities, whilst protecting the character of the Cheshire countryside and individual identity of rural settlements. The market towns and villages identified as key service centres will remain viable settlements and will fulfil their role and function in providing access to services and facilities for their local and surrounding communities.

Appendix C: Building for Life Standards

Source: www.builtforlifehomes.org

Integrating into the neighbourhood

1 Connections: *Does the scheme integrate into its surroundings by reinforcing existing connections and creating new ones, while also respecting existing buildings and land uses around the development site?*

2 Facilities and services: *Does the development provide (or is it close to) community facilities, such as shops, schools, workplaces, parks, play areas, pubs or cafes?*

3 Public transport: *Does the scheme have good access to public transport to help reduce car dependency?*

4 Meeting local housing requirements: *Does the development have a mix of housing types and tenures that suit local requirements?*

Creating a place

5 Character: *Does the scheme create a place with a locally inspired or otherwise distinctive character?*

6 Working with the site and its context: *Does the scheme take advantage of existing topography, landscape features (including water courses), wildlife habitats, existing buildings, site orientation and microclimates?*

7 Creating well defined streets and spaces: *Are buildings designed and positioned with landscaping to define and enhance streets and spaces and are buildings designed to turn street corners well?*

8 Easy to find your way around: *Is the scheme designed to make it easy to find your way around?*

Street & home

9 Streets for all: *Are streets designed in a way that encourage low vehicle speeds and allow them to function as social spaces?*

10 Car parking: *Is resident and visitor parking sufficient and well integrated so that it does not dominate the street?*

11 Public and private spaces: *Will public and private spaces be clearly defined and designed to be attractive, well managed and safe?*

12 External storage and amenity space: *Is there adequate external storage space for bins and recycling as well as vehicles and cycles?*