

As a member of the public, I want to talk about the Sport England comments to the consultation.

In 2012 Uttlesford commissioned Tony Ploszajski to write an Open Space, Sport Facility and Playing Pitch Strategy. My colleague, Gill Haigh and I, wrote to Uttlesford stating that the document was not fit for purpose.

In 2015 the Planning Department employed Tony to up-date this document. Again Gill and I stated that this re-jigged document didn't take into account new Government initiatives regarding physical activity and sport.

The document needed to be "ticked off" by local sports organisations and so Saffron Walden Organisation for Sports was formed.

The chair, Mr. Derek Jones, apparently held talks with Sport England and, as long as the title was changed to a "Sports Facilities Development Strategy", we were told it was now acceptable to Sport England, a major funder for physical activities and sports organisations.

The amended document went before Cabinet in February 2016 and the recommendation was "to adopt the Sports Strategy into the Local Plan evidence base, as a material planning consideration and as a Sports Strategy for the District".

It was further stated that "The document has been subject to consultation with (amongst others) Sport England" and "Sport's governing bodies have approved the final version of the document"

Consequently the "Sports Strategy" was approved by Cabinet and full Council.

In light of the Sport England comments in the recent consultation, I e-mailed Sport England for clarification last month. Mr Warren, the Planning Manager, replied:

"I can confirm that Sport England has not been supportive of (or signed off) Uttlesford District Council's sports facility strategy as set out in our response to the local plan."

So you may think that a Sports Strategy is a document of little consequence in the vast pile of paperwork you have to consider but it should feed into the

Health and Wellbeing Strategy, the Economic Strategy, the Transport Strategy and, most importantly, the design and layout of all the proposed housing,

What are the consequences of not having a valid Sports Strategy:

Firstly, the Inspector will raise the lack of an approved Sports Strategy at Examination.

Secondly, no local physical activity or sports organisations can apply successfully to Sport England for funding as we don't have a sound evidence base of need.

Thirdly, housing developers will argue that they are under no obligation to provide physical activity venues as again there is no robust evidence of need. This will be particularly felt in the proposed garden settlements, but even now opportunities for physical activity space are being lost in the new housing developments around Saffron Walden.

In the light of the Sport England comments - firstly, why were members of the Saffron Walden Organisation for Sports and UDC Councillors led to believe that the Sports Strategy, produced at considerable cost to the Council, had Sport England approval ?

Secondly, what is the Council going to do about the current situation ?