

Joint Statement on Uttlesford Local Plan
Stansted Mountfitchet Parish Council (SMPC)
Stansted Mountfitchet Neighbourhood Plan Strategy Group (SMNPSG)

We note the recommendation to withdraw the Uttlesford Local Plan at the Extraordinary Council Meeting (ECM) next week and wish to make the following statement to all District Councillors in advance of the ECM. We are utterly exasperated with UDC's failure to progress its Local Plan over the last 13 years. A Local Plan process which started in 2007 has meandered through various iterations for more than a decade and we now find ourselves faced with a proposal to start all over again. We do need to be confident in UDC's ability to see its Local Plan to fruition, but, having taken so much time, and a great deal of money, it would be ludicrous to withdraw the Plan now and open us up to more speculative, ad hoc developments. The plan needs to be reviewed not started again.

The January 2020 Inspectors' Letter indicates that continuation of the current Local Plan with necessary amendments is likely to be problematic and we therefore understand why the report to the ECM recommends withdrawing the Local Plan and starting again. However, to reiterate, the joint view of both our groups is that this would lead to speculative development over a longer period of time and ultimately greater housing numbers across the key settlements with inadequate infrastructure and an irreversible impact on the environment.

For the last 5 years we have been developing the Stansted Mountfitchet Neighbourhood Plan (NP) and we intend to bring this forward for public consultation within the next few months. We have tried throughout this 5-year period to ensure that our NP complies with the emerging Local Plan (as required by planning legislation). We do not wish our draft NP to become obsolete due to the shifting position on UDC's draft Local Plan as we believe it to be representative of what is viable, sustainable and appropriate for Stansted Mountfitchet, albeit, as stated in need of review – perhaps two Garden Communities and not three.

We urge UDC to get a grip on the Local Plan process. We understand why you are considering starting again but we do not understand how this new process will yield a new spatial strategy. Surely all the options have been considered already during the last 13 years? We therefore urge UDC to review all the existing evidence as quickly and to amend and update the existing spatial strategy rather than unnecessarily starting again with a blank slate. As stated, the longer you leave it, incremental development will increase and require larger developments which are not sustainable and incur additional cost to residents.

Meanwhile the lack of 5-year land supply (2.68 years as at October 2019) means that all Uttlesford settlements (including Stansted Mountfitchet) will be subject to inappropriate speculative planning applications (we anticipate the first of these for 168 homes in Stansted Mountfitchet next month from Bloor Homes). By the time this next iteration of the Local Plan is approved, much damage will have been done to the rural character of our District.

In the 13 years of Local Plan development Stansted has accepted around 1,000 new homes, increasing the village population from around 6,000 to around 9,000. Given this 50% increase in population over that time period (with no discernible infrastructure improvements), there will be precious little local support for any new Local Plan proposals for further housing development in Stansted Mountfitchet.

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