

**Councillor Pepper – Portfolio Holder for the Environment & Green Issues;
Equalities
Council – 8 December 2020**

Environmental motions passed in Council October 8th 2020

Passed by every Council member

WATER RIVERS EAST.

UDC believes that it is an absolute necessity to join forces with WRE to safeguard a sustainable supply of water for the East of England that is already under threat and we have more housing growth expected in this region.

Water extraction and climate change has proven water sustainability is a serious issue. Groundwater levels in the South East are now at the lowest level ever recorded and Cambridgeshire's chalk streams remain at significant risk. We experienced a **record-breaking dry start to summer which exacerbated local concerns, with an estimated 40 per cent increase in water usage due to COVID-19 restrictions.**

Cllr Pavitt's detailed rivers and water motion clearly highlighted the need for Uttlesford to take urgent action to address this serious issue.

Water Resources East offers the opportunity to become a member with the intention of the membership meeting regularly and co-creating solutions. Working in partnership to safeguard a sustainable supply of water for the East of England, resilient to future challenges and enabling the area's communities, environment and economy to reach their full potential.

DEPOSIT RETURN SCHEME

The Council welcomes the Government's plan to introduce a Deposit Return Scheme to encourage increased recycling of glass, plastic bottles and cans. We acknowledge that Government is looking into setting up a Deposit Scheme in 2023, however we urge that this scheme can be look into as soon as possible. The Council also urges the Government to consider wider fiscal measures to ensure producers of ALL packaging, particularly 'on the go' products, make them reusable or readily recyclable through existing infrastructure.

Environmental campaign groups would prefer to see more efforts to reduce resource usage and a reduction in waste produced, like drinking all drank water from a reusable container filled from the tap would significantly reduce the amount of plastic waste produced.

There is a potential gap where existing difficult items such as take away drinks (coffee cups) and food packaging (sandwich wrappers) 'escapes' legislative intervention. UDC will encourage the Government to consider additional fiscal measures to help ensure consumers are encouraged to reuse their coffee cups or that take away and businesses use more sustainable packaging.

Packing manufacturers in the UK pay towards some funding of the recycling of package waste generated and provides some financial assistance to fund resource and waste management infrastructure which helps local authorities recycle. The plan to implement Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), that requires manufacturers, suppliers and

retailers to be held responsible for the full cost of recycling, reprocessing or disposing of their products at the end of their life, is more likely to encourage producers to improve environmental performance. We may see more reuse / refill schemes develop. This must also be considered to help towards important waste measures.

The average household in the UK produces more than a tonne of waste every year. That is a total of 31 million tonnes per year, the equivalent to the weight of three and a half million double-decker bus. Each family uses an average of 500 glass bottles and jars annually. Glass is 100% recyclable and can be used again and again. It is not known how long glass takes to break down, but it is so long that glass made in the Middle East over 3,000 years ago can still be found today. We produce and use twenty times more plastic today than we did 50 years ago Approximately 600,000 metric tons is generated from plastic bottles, We get through 5 billion drinks cans every year. Weight for weight, empty aluminium cans are worth 6 to 20 times more than any other used packaging material.

Lastly, more than **two million pieces of litter are dropped in the UK every day.** The **cost to the taxpayers for street cleaning is over £1 billion a year.**

This has increased during COVID, with a number of items like surgical mask and gloves been discarded. It is also a danger to wildlife and can spread the virus.

Please keep your community and environment clean and safe.

Environment & Green Issues update

We have two **draft** Climate documents (Interim Climate Planning Policy & Climate Local Strategy Action Plan), that will be ready for reviewing by everyone on our climate & ecology sub groups. These will be staggered, with the Interim Climate Planning Policy being emailed 1st (end of October early November), draft graphics & text for the Climate Strategy Action Plan (w/e 6th of October) and the complete document, including the tabled strategy (w/e 13th of November).

Discussions around climate projects and funding, are likely to take place in November because Mark Wilson (Climate/Energy Officer), is currently correlating our **draft *Climate Local Strategy and Action Plan***, which is due to be finalised in mid -November.

If anyone has any local flooding pictures, can you please forward them to Mark Wilson at mwilson@uttlesford.gov.uk. Thank you

We have money for a Climate Project Officer. Their primary role will be to project manage our group as well as coordinating our climate objectives.

We will work towards producing a detailed Biodiversity/Green strategy with maps that clearly outline the location of environmental areas of interest (eg endangered species/flora/special verges/ancient wood/grade 2 land & above.)

Gordon & Cllr Pepper will work closely with Linda Howells (Business Officer) and Cllr Reeve (portfolio holder for Investments), on creating local green employment opportunities and helping small businesses with green recovery options. A meeting was held in October with Neil Gaught's team about helping local SME businesses transition to sustainable futures at scale — ensuring they can mutually thrive in a very difficult and changing world.

<https://neilgaught.com/soi>

Transport update

As per Cllr Noble's request, Cllr Pepper emailed UDC's Cycling Champion Cllr Eke (portfolio holder for infrastructure), suggesting to get in contact with local cycling clubs to get an idea on their concerns around cycling in Uttlesford. Cllr Eke had been in contact with clubs in Saffron Walden. Cllr Pepper forwarded contact details of the cycling club based in Great Dunmow (Dunmow Velo).

Cllr Pepper received an email from Tracy Vickers (Head of Sustainable Transport – Essex County Council) stating, *“One of the challenges to our cycling aspirations is that we are reliant on external funding, and frustratingly cycling typically ‘scores’ badly for cost benefits against other modes. This is a nation-wide problem. It won’t discourage us and indeed we are considering an unsolicited bid to the DfT for funding to improve and grow our cycling network. Where appropriate, we will include Uttlesford in this.*

We will also continue to monitor funding and we will contact you once the criteria have been determined.

I am considering the need for a rural transport strategy for Essex and I would be very interested in your views on this”.

Cllr Pepper's response to her request was, *“Sustainability is key. However, as I have previously pointed out, living in a rural community is making this challenging. We lack electric car infrastructure. We are generally car dependent, with limited local job opportunities and public transport options (buses are infrequent and trains are expensive and crowded). Our roads are too dangerous for cycling (a local resident was killed on a bike ride last weekend). They are narrow, speed limits are too high and we have limited on street lighting.*

To make this viable, buses would need to be travelling through our village at peak times. Due to free transport for school pupils stopping at 16 years of age, buses would need to coincide with school hours (we don't have buses going through our village at peak times – the school bus travelling to Saffron Walden County High School was stopped and no bus going to or stopping outside HRS – Dunmow's Secondary School).

More on street lighting would make it safer for walking in the winter, as well as lowering speed limits and providing non- polluting buses for school pupils living 2 miles away (regardless of which is their closest school). More on street EV charging points near taxi ranks and in rural villages. E-bikes and E-scooters may also become the norm, providing there is good street lighting & accessibility.

*Ideally, all new developments, should have new cycling paths that join up with existing major cycling paths (**some are in poor condition – hence why we require essential funding**), to enable a safe mode of travel. Going to either major job hubs, bus routes and train stations. Houses should be fitted with EV charging points for electric cars”.*

Green Homes Grants

Homeowners and landlords in England can apply for a voucher towards the cost of installing energy efficient and low-carbon heating improvements to homes, which could help save up to £600 a year on energy bills.

The government will provide a voucher that covers up to two thirds of the cost of qualifying improvements to your home. The **maximum value of the voucher is £5,000**. You may be able to receive a higher level of subsidy if you are a homeowner and either you or a member of your household receives one of the qualifying means-tested benefits, covering 100% of the cost of the improvements. The maximum value of these vouchers is £10,000. Landlords cannot apply for the low-income part of the scheme.

Local Authorities will also be making support available for low income households in their local area through the Green Homes Grant: Local Authority Delivery. More information on participating Local Authorities will be made available on GOV.UK in due course.

<https://www.simpleenergyadvice.org.uk/pages/green-homes-grant>

Special verges

There are 46 Special Roadside Verges in Uttlesford district. UDC's Natural Science Officer, Sarah Keynon and colleagues at ECC and other district councils have compiled an up-to-date online map with the location of the verges across Uttlesford (and throughout Essex).

Cllr Pepper forwarded a letter to ECC about the special verge at Audley End regarding the toxic road surface and vehicles being damaged by going off the road due to the re-surfacing being made too high.

ECC said that the road surface was required because of signs that cars had previously gone off the road and damaged the verge. A meeting did take place in August, with two ECC Highway Officers, Sarah Keynon and Cllr Pepper. Sarah was satisfied that despite the toxic road surface being close to the important flora on the special verge, they had grown back and were thriving. It was agreed to wait until after the Winter to see whether any further action was necessary. ECC will however, look into eco-friendly road surface replacements.

The request for the footpath between the verge had come from Cllr Moran back in 2017, due to concerns raised by local residents about people crossing over the road from the carpark. A drop curb was suggested for better pedestrian movement so that mothers with pushchairs and disabled people could easily cross over the road. There were sticks either side of the verge therefore, a drop curve was made in the middle of the verge, where there had been obvious signs where people had previously trodden.

The drop curve would probably have to remain but it would be mentioned that the preferred option would be to remove it.

ECC were very apologetic regarding their error and they're now aware of its environmental value (in its entirety). We spoke about how we could ensure this doesn't happen again. When highways log in now, special verges do flag up and they're aware that they are a '**conservation area**' that should be protected. A UDC special verges information link and contact details have also been included.

TREE PLANTING SCHEME 2020 - 2021

As part of the District Council's climate change initiative, UDC are looking to increase tree cover on our open spaces. New tree planting is being proposed at Newton Green; the open space at Stortford Road.; and the open space at Lower Mill Field, Great Dunmow. The trees proposed to be planted at Newton Green are Common Hornbeam; at Stortford Road English

oak; and at Lower Mill Field Common May. The location of the proposed new trees is illustrated below.



Mill Field (Great Dunmow South and Barnston Ward)



Newton Green (Great Dunmow North Ward)



Stortford Road (Great Dunmow North Ward)

LATEST UPDATE FROM BEN SMEEDEN 14/10/20

Ben's received expressions of interest in participating in the scheme from the following parish and town councils:

Clavering;

Felsted;

Great Chesterford;

Great Dunmow;

Hadstock;

Langley;

Newport;

Saffron Walden;

Thaxted.

Planting proposals have been prepared in respect of a number of open spaces in UDC ownership. These are as follows:

Broomfield open space, Hatfield Heath;

Lower Mill Field open space, Gt. Dunmow;

Newton Green, Gt. Dunmow;

Stortford Road open space, Gt. Dunmow;

Magdalen Green, Thaxted;

Weaverhead Close open space, Thaxted.

The proposed tree planting on these open spaces has been specified as heavy stock, which is considered appropriate in the context of the locations. The **total number of trees proposed to be planted across these 6 sites is 85**. Consultation has been undertaken with local residents, respective parish councils, and the local ward members. The consultation has been subject to the oversight of the Cabinet Member for Housing, who has confirmed that she is content with the planting proposals and the consultation undertaken. The total cost of this planting has been costed at £14,097.58 which is a significant proportion of our £15,000 budget. Whilst this planting is not eligible for grant funding under the ECC Forrest Initiative, Ben's been able to secure a grant offer of £7,000 from County, subject to agreeing a memorandum of understanding. This helpful offer leaves Ben confident that we will be able supply trees to the emerging PC schemes within our budget for this year.

We are mindful that the total number of trees likely to be planted is presently looking to be relatively small. We only secured funding for tree planting in September. We can look into

other possible woodland sites that will form part of our biodiversity/green strategy. Ben is however, currently looking at woodland planting opportunities on UDC land, which would potentially be eligible for a 50% grant under the ECC Forest Initiative.

Can you please encourage your local parish and town councils to come forward with areas that may be suitable for treeplanting.

For further details of the scheme please contact UDC's Landscape Officer (bsmeeden@uttlesford.gov.uk).

Equalities update

Uttlesford District Council acknowledged Black History Month on UDC's FB on October 1st 2020 and Cllr Day (portfolio holder for Communities), shared it with 40 FB local users. A UDC Black History Month website followed, highlighting this important event.

To replace the proposed webinar (organizer lost a close member of their family), Cllr Pepper wrote an article about some of her hero/heroines quotes from the Black Community. This was sent to all councillors and can be viewed on UDC's Black History Month's website. <https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/bhm2020>.

Council members attended an Equalities Training course that outlined Uttlesford's diversity minority groups, as well as highlighting "The Equality Act 2010" and the different equality strands (referring to them as "protected characteristics" - Age, Disability, Gender reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and maternity, Race, Religion or belief, Sex & Sexual orientation).

Selected members of the public have all accepted an invitation to join an Independently chaired panel. They will help shape Community Listening Events, ensuring that council works towards a fully inclusive work and social environment and providing advice and guidance whenever possible.

The initial Community Listening Event has been delayed however, all parish and town councils will be notified when this event will take place.

Cllr Pepper