

Uttlesford Local Plan (Issues and Options) 2020-2021

First Consultation: Theme 5 Leisure, Culture and Healthy Lifestyles January 2021

Summary of online consultation – first four weeks

Introduction

The Community Stakeholder Forum discussed the theme on Wednesday 27 January and the theme was then open for comment.

Comments received by Wednesday 24 February are summarised below and common themes are shown in the diagram.

These comments will be presented back to the Community Stakeholder Forum on 10 March and the Local Plan Leadership Group (date to be confirmed).

Comments received after 24 February up to the close of consultation on 21 April 2021 will be brought together in a document summarising comments from all nine themes, the Council's response and how the issues raised in the comments will be reflected in the Draft Local Plan.

Between 27 January and 24 February 2021, 25 people responded to the theme.

What we have been told so far

The following is a summary of what people said about how existing places and new development support health and wellbeing.

To read all the representations in full please go to the [Consultation Portal](#).

What you have told us so far about . . .

How can existing places and new development support health and wellbeing?

Healthy lifestyles

How can we enable you to take more exercise, eat healthily and nurture mental wellbeing?

- Better support for day centres and community centres
- Provision for active travel
- Ensure all year round use of public spaces
- Put health and wellbeing at the heart of planning decisions
- Ensure facilities promised are delivered
- Further enable healthy eating
- Provision for people in need
- Design for mental wellbeing



How could open space be made more accessible or improved?

Leisure

- Expand and link up with existing open space networks
- Improve the Fitch Way
- Prioritise walking, pedestrians and improve paths
- Create cycle/walking/equestrian greenways
- Need for greater clarity on access
- Provide access to open space beyond footpaths on agricultural land
- Greater protection for open spaces
- A new nature reserve
- Permit exercise classes to operate free of charge in public green spaces
- Ensure developers deliver amenity space promised
- Provide more seating in public places



What buildings and spaces encourage a sense of community and help prevent social isolation?

- A mix of facilities for all
- Protection of existing community green spaces and creation of new ones
- A new country park
- Make health, wellbeing and a sense of community a priority for new development
- Address health and income inequalities



What types for sport, recreation and play facilities should we prioritise?

- Provision of facilities to suit different needs
- Address shortfalls and inadequacy

Culture



What arts and cultural facilities do you value? Does Uttlesford lack venues for culture, arts and adult education and if so what and where are they needed?

- Uttlesford is a beautiful, rural area with a rich historic and cultural heritage
- Saffron Screen & Hall are wonderful facilities but there is under-provision elsewhere in the District
- Over 50 voluntary organisations in Stansted, Mountfitchet Castle and Stansted Hall
- The non-conformist chapel in Thaxted is in need of repair and could act as a venue for Thaxted Festival
- Poor provision for theatre
- More performance and live music venues
- Important role of churches as a source of cultural and emotional support



Leisure

How could open space be made more accessible or improved?

Expand and link up with existing open space networks:

- Enhance and expand publicly accessible open space for ALL users - walkers, cyclists, equestrians and the less mobile.
- Create a traffic-free off-road network, linking the PROW network, other open spaces and plug gaps
- Not much wrong with the current set up. Take care not to damage what we have.
- Better interconnectivity may encourage pub use

Improvement of the Flitch Way:

- The western section is disconnected from the eastern section at Great Dunmow
- Connect and improve to be accessible to ordinary walkers and cyclists
- Reconnect the Flitch Way via a multi-user safe off-road bridleway through Dunmow
- It will enable HRS (Helena Romanes School) students to cycle and walk to school in safety when the school moves to Buttleys Lane
- Several sections are only accessible to those wearing hiking boots or mountain bikes
- Secure funding to surface the route and provide safe road crossings and a bridge over the River Chelmer
- Restore and convert buildings along the route for use as community areas, like the partially used space at Rayne Station

Prioritise walking, pedestrians and improve paths:

- Take walking and pedestrians seriously. Narrow, or missing, pavements and high traffic speeds make walking very unpleasant in some areas (e.g. Audley Road in Saffron Walden)
- Paths should be well maintained, and those closest to village centres to be safe for the elderly
- Create designated walks in every village. Start near toilet provision and include plenty of seating en route

Identify and create cycle/walking/equestrian greenways:

- The Local Plan should include explicit pedestrian and cycling route plans
- More bridleways
- Ensure provision for safe off-road routes for horse riders too. Equestrianism is the second largest contributor to the rural economy after agriculture. It contributes over £5 million to the Essex economy and supports many rural industries. It is enjoyed in particular by women and girls. Both these groups are poorly served by many of the sports facilities in Uttlesford.
- Cycle groups too tend to be predominantly male. Cyclists have had access to bridleways since 1968. The drive to create cycle tracks is a welcome contribution to the need for improved sustainable travel but where cycle tracks are created, they should include provision for horse riders

Need for greater clarity on access:

- Although Uttlesford has a large quantity of open space it is not clear how much is actually available for public enjoyment. I find that I never sure of the status of country paths on private or agricultural land. Finding a clear map for walks is a challenge
- Easily accessible maps (physical and online) of footpaths in the district and car parking on key walking routes

Provide access to open space beyond footpaths on agricultural land:

- Rural farming areas is fine for walking/jogging, provided public rights of way exist and paths are maintained. However, these facilities are insufficient – because disabled persons, and poorer persons who are time-poor are likely excluded from access
- Footways and bridleways provide the only open space

Greater protection for open spaces:

- Areas around existing towns and villages MUST have the added protection that is afforded by green belt status
- Residents must be given certainty that agriculture land they enjoy as part of their recreation is not going to be covered in houses. Ancient woodland, natural habitats MUST be protected for future generations. We will not have the opportunity to reverse decisions once construction is underway
- More and more green open spaces are being developed. These housing developments are large with houses very close together and not a tree in sight. Many fields that used to be enjoyed for a daily walk are now developed. Walking around a housing estate is depressing and not good for our wellbeing

A new nature reserve:

- Similar to Rye Meads in Hoddesdon, RSPB Fowlmere or Wicken Fen. Provision could be made within Easton Park and some stretches of the Chelmer

Permit exercise classes to operate free of charge/ nominal cost in public green spaces:

- Fees are prohibitive for bootcamp or exercise classes to operate on Saffron Common. It should be full of yoga, tai chi, classes for the elderly, circuit training etc which generate the best health returns when they are professionally led

Protect and enhance biodiversity:

- Gardens, allotments, wildlife are important factors in Uttlesford's leisure time. Watching deer roam, buzzards wheeling in the sky, yellow hammers darting around hedgerows, bats on a summers evening all contribute to rich diversity. Planning decisions must reflect & support this diversity

Ensure developers deliver amenity space promised:

- Holding developers to their original plans and proposals for amenity space through planning approval and conditions would be hugely benefit

More seating in public places:

- Benches are needed around the village on which to rest, sit and talk.
- There is a lack of covered spaces where people can meet safely and sit and chat
- A meeting circle with fixed seats at 2m intervals as a memorial to the pandemic

Need to protect Hatfield Forest:

- The National Trust (NT) owns and manages Hatfield Forest providing opportunity for informal recreation
- There are no public footpaths and there is a charge to park. The Forest cannot be considered as truly public. Evidence has shown that the increased use of the forest is damaging the designated/protected features
- Natural England has put the Forest at risk of losing its 'unfavourable, recovering condition' due to excessive impacts of footfall
- Natural and semi-natural greenspace in the district is predominately provided by Hatfield Forest. The Local Plan cannot rely on the existence of Hatfield Forest in

meeting requirements relating to the provision of open space and green infrastructure.

- The Council must prepare a robust and up to date evidence base including an Open Space Assessment of the quantity and quality of existing open space and future open space requirements, based on future housing provision, to inform a strategic solution to address the recreational pressure impacts to the designated site
- Future provision based upon existing provision (as recommended in the 2019 Open Space Study Standards Paper) is not an appropriate method of calculation as it does not take into consideration local circumstances
- The Council's evidence should identify shortfalls and pressure at existing sites
- Recreational pressure could be addressed through:
 1. Provision of alternative high quality natural/semi-natural greenspace on site for all new major residential developments.
 2. Provision of a destination site such as a new country park offering a multifunctional space with a range of facilities as an alternative to Hatfield Forest. This needs to be close enough to Hatfield Forest to divert pressure away from the Forest and delivered early in the plan period
 3. A contribution sought for monitoring and mitigation from new housing developments within an established Zone of Influence for the Forest
- These recommended measures are set out in the 'Hatfield Forest Visitor Survey and Impact Management Report 2018'

Incremental change:

- Radical new thinking is not required. Improve the public footpath network, maintain it better and make it more cohesive; advertise it far more clearly; Put money into improve current leisure facilities. But largely they are fine. People move here to be in the countryside, do not spoil it.

What buildings and open spaces encourage a sense of community and help prevent social isolation?

Provision of a mix of facilities:

- Green spaces, footpaths and access to the countryside should be considered as important as formal leisure facilities, gyms, swimming pools and formal play areas
- There are many types of buildings and open spaces that encourage a sense of community and help prevent social isolation: market stalls, streets of independent shops, pubs, interest groups that meet online or in-person, sports facilities, village halls, churches, playing fields and playgrounds, concert halls and music venues, museums, gardens. Community spirit relies on people having time to speak to neighbours, organise gatherings and have locations to meet and hold activities

Provision of facilities for all:

- More activities in the local community for young children/toddlers and parents
- Leisure centres/gymnasiums are important for all the community. Those who are older, fatter, or less fit should not be made to feel inferior

Protection of existing community green spaces and creation of new ones:

- Community green space, accessible for all, with seating & availability of refreshments, for gathering, socialising and events is lacking

- Existing community green spaces are precious; they allow diverse people to mix intergenerationally, socialise, sit down, relax and play
- Conflict exists between greedy developers/landowners who seek to develop housing on community open space, even well-used spaces
- Community land to grow food, fruits and vegetables etc helping the area become more self-sustainable. A place for people to come together, help out, volunteer and reduce our carbon footprint. Accessible to people of ages and from all walks of life. This would do wonders for people's mental health, give a sense of purpose and community spirit. Somewhere locals could plant trees, whether it be to celebrate a new joiner to this world, a bereavement, a birthday

Proposal for a new country park:

- The 2019 UDC Open Space Assessment Report identified that 75% of Natural & Semi-natural Open Space is provided by Hatfield Forest which is under severe threat from overuse. Alternative facilities are urgently needed
- Restoration of the medieval Easton Park and surrounding ancient woodlands is an ideal alternative within 5 kms. The intention of the Agreement of 1939 is to keep the Park as an open space and a nature sanctuary
- UDC has the responsibility to protect the park for the next 50 and 500 years
- The benefits of a large park have been demonstrated by the success of Hylands Park under the tenure of the Chelmsford City Council
- As a rural district, Uttlesford needs to promote, preserve and develop its rights of way as free accessible means for everyone to enjoy outdoor exercise, take pleasure in our countryside and connect with each other as a community
- It sits perfectly with the council's commitment to become carbon neutral by 2030

Make health, wellbeing and a sense of community a priority for new development:

- Conflict exists between development profit versus community need for green space, community space, and amenities. If our health and wellbeing are priorities, then the latter need must take precedence
- The 15-minute neighbourhood requires facilities that promote social cohesion, community activities and support for the lonely are within 15 minutes walk of the vast majority of Uttlesford residents
- Small developments should be encouraged to be "communities" rather than just potential building sites

Address health and income inequalities:

- Stark health inequalities (TCPA & Marmot reviews 2010 & 2020) afflict the poorest harshly, including BAME and disabled groups. Poverty is on the rise in Uttlesford, as evidenced by our busy Food Bank
- Offer all benefit-claimants free-of-charge access to UDC's Lord Butler Leisure Centre and free parking at Uttlesford owned car-parking facilities

Specific places:

- Thaxted park could be enhanced to get the most out of it for all ages
- Stansted: Bloor site - static play structures were installed 12 months ago in the Children's play area, but they are still under water and unusable. Trees have still not been planted nor a footbridge into Pennington Lane

What types for sport, recreation and play facilities should the Local Plan prioritise?

Provision of facilities to suit different needs:

- There need to activities appropriate to the demographics of the local population. Families with young children will probably make use of playgrounds, many adults would value gym facilities and access to team sports, while the older generation might want the social contact and lighter exercise of bowls clubs or golf
- Providing a wide range of activities aimed at teenagers could be difficult in small rural communities, they may benefit from more centralised activities based around schools
- It seems that swimming, rugby, hockey, badminton, squash, gymnastics and bowling in general are not well catered for. Further analysis may be required to establish demand, if additional facilities were to be provided

Address shortfalls and inadequacy:

- We are desperately short of sports facilities. Play spaces need upgrading. Too many developments pay lip services to play needs and sports. Plans need to be tougher on green space provision being usable
- Stansted: Existing facilities are totally inadequate. Stansted needs more recreation space, a football pitch, a cycle track. It has well used skatepark, tennis and bowling facilities. Stansted has 3 allotment sites - these are fully taken up

Culture

Arts and cultural facilities people value

Overall:

- Saffron Screen and Saffron Hall are wonderful facilities but there is definitely an under-provision elsewhere in the district
- For the size of population there are a surprising number of museums in the District. It is mainly Saffron Walden museum that gets any publicity. There needs to be a properly co-ordinated tourist information service for the District as a whole
- Uttlesford is as a place to enjoy leisure, culture and a healthy lifestyle. A beautiful, rural area with a rich historic and cultural heritage. The key question is whether planned developments preserve and improve the well-being of residents or damage it. Unfortunately, there is little evidence that recent developments have contributed to a better quality of life for us all

Stansted:

- There are still some 50 voluntary organisations in the village e.g. the History Society etc.
- Mountfitchet Castle which is a commercial venue which caters for school group visits
- Stansted Hall - The Arthur Findlay College which is the headquarters of the Spiritual Movement and which offers facilities unequalled anywhere in the world in the Spiritualist movement as a residential centre for the study of Spiritualist philosophy and religious practice

Thaxted:

- The wonderful non-conformist 'chapel' is in need of major repairs and a new use. It would make an excellent local theatre and opera venue allied to the Thaxted Festival

Does Uttlesford lack venues for culture, arts and adult education and if so what and where are they needed?

- Saffron Walden has a magnificent concert hall but poor provision for theatre. The Town Hall is unsatisfactory in many ways, although the Fairycroft team do brilliantly to make it work for musicals, but a flexible, theatrical space for amateur performing arts is needed
- Uttlesford, particularly the southern area, would benefit from some additional cultural facilities similar to the South Mill Arts centre (formally Rhodes Arts Complex), Bishop Stortford, and a place to develop arts and craft skills similar to Parndon Mill in Harlow
- More live music venues etc, but practicalities especially transport, make it difficult
- We need more performance spaces, including music venues, theatres and cinemas, close to town centres. More public art would be great (sculpture trails?) and affordable galleries for local artists (even our library is too expensive for printmakers to exhibit in due to minimum commission per item). Perhaps vacant retail space can be repurposed? It is great to see arts courses going on in the area to encourage active participation. Clubs and societies need public buildings for meetings at affordable prices. We have many village halls which are ideal for this but fewer venues in towns in relation to their populations
- Insufficient attention is paid to the role of the church as a centre of community. Every village has one and they are often a source of cultural and emotional support. There is a danger of creating vast areas of housing without a communal heart
- Most organised cultural activities rely on individuals and groups having the time and skills to make an event happen. They can be supported by the district and parish councils through funding and smoothing the path through red tape which can make events rather difficult to arrange
- Stansted: No cultural venues in Stansted. Events can use a small number of halls
- Given that each rural community cannot have a full range of social, leisure and cultural activities close at hand, transport becomes critical to allow access to those activities. Ideally this should be public transport and it needs to provide services at times that fit with demand. This is especially true for older age groups living in the more remote areas who will be discouraged from using private vehicles during winter evenings on unlit and winding rural roads
- Developers renege on their promises to create community facilities of one sort or another. What can UDC do to improve matters?

Healthy lifestyles

How can we enable you to take more exercise, eat healthily and nurture mental wellbeing?

Better support for day centres and community centres:

- Continued support of Day Centres is crucial to the wellbeing and health of the elderly and other vulnerable groups. They are surely cost effective in terms of reducing the mental health impacts of loneliness
- The community acquisition of the Railway Arms provides an example of how a pub can become the hub of a community with mother and toddler groups, repair shops, a sensory garden, games for children and teenagers, community events and celebrations, book clubs... UDC should support such community projects where pubs

are liable to closure around all the villages of Uttlesford as a way of promoting health and wellbeing

- Churches and church halls could be designed as flexible spaces for use every day of the week, as the Baptist Church is in Saffron Walden. Grants should assist them to become energy efficient or to support the removal of pews to create flexible spaces

Provision for active travel:

- Improve the footpath network by developing a proper strategy which considers where people might want to go and might be persuaded to walk instead of driving
- Providing alternatives to car use for school runs, shopping and commuting, including cycle lanes and safe pedestrian routes. Current provision is woeful
- There is a pressing need for greater connectivity within the network of public rights of way in Uttlesford through the creation of new multi-user tracks (bridleways) to encourage residents and visitors to walk, cycle, ride and drive horses both to promote mental and physical health and to encourage sustainable travel to work and school
- A well-connected recreational network is vital so that ALL users can enjoy - including equestrians
- The district relies on the countryside and PROW network of footpaths for allowing people to get out walking, however many of these footpaths are in a very poor state and are virtually impassable during the winter months
- A 'country path' in Dunmow is used by developers as part of their 'selling strategy' as a walking cycling route, but has had little investment and is now suffering as a result of this and increased footfall. It is flooded and boggy in parts and does not encourage walking for any but the surest footed

Ensure all year round use of public spaces:

- The local park in Dunmow is a quagmire during the winter due to increased footfall and does not have a continual path network thus making it virtually impossible to cross with a pushchair or young children
- New developments must be made to contribute to the existing open spaces to improve and sustain them for the increased usage, and also provide additional open space that is suitable for year round use with suitably surfaced paths/tracks

Put health and wellbeing at the heart of planning decisions:

- If development can only be achieved at the expense of poor air quality, dangerous roads, an unhealthy sedentary lifestyle and unsustainable energy usage in contravention of the UK's commitment to achieving net zero, it should not happen
- This means no developments until there are much better public transport links to where people work, meaning frequent and affordable bus and cycle links to train stations to Cambridge and London
- Developments must be required to have ground source heat pumps instead of carbon-emitting boilers, solar panels instead of cheap roofing, a frequent bus route and/or cycle lane within easy reach and preferably be built on brownfield not greenfield sites
- Large houses identical in size and style are built close to each other in strict rows are adverse to health and wellbeing. Much better care must be taken in design, layout and space in such developments of the rate of, mental illness is not to rise. Look at the design in Uttlesford already there. Use that as a model. Look at the nature of the place you want to develop. Don't allow these monstrous new developments. Mental illness and other related, problems will soar if development continues in this way. If

you want to create unified communities, you need very small diverse homes to compliment not overwhelm what is already there.

Ensure facilities promised are delivered:

- Where developers are required to provide amenities such as tree planting, playgrounds, playing fields and so on these should be put in place before building commences
- Any developer reneging on commitments, or planting trees that subsequently die (for example) should not be allowed to develop any more housing in the district until remedied.

Further enable healthy eating:

- Markets with fresh fruit and veg, fish are a positive attraction. Saffron Walden market is outstanding, Dunmow and Thaxted provide opportunities to buy and eat well. Encourage a market 'offer' in other centres e.g. Stansted, Felsted, Newport
- Encourage farmer's markets or farm shops
- Events like Fete de la Musique combine arts, food and retail for residents and visitors
- Allocate allotments in new developments where demand can outstrip supply
- Healthy eating and eating less meat is linked to climate change. Uttlesford does not appear to have any vegetarian or vegan restaurants
- Child-obesity is rising – are fast-food outlets restricted near schools?

Provision for people in need:

- Can schools have more funding to offer poorer school children: breakfast clubs, milk at breaks & affordable nutritious healthy school lunches, run non-for-profit but for the benefit of seeing children grow up healthy?
- Poverty may leave parents no time or money to feed their children well. As a society we should ensure that all children get good nutritious food while in school
- Covid19 mental health children's crisis: can schools receive funding for a mental health specialist to share across a group of schools? All children would benefit.
- UDC Wellbeing Index: an Index could show the level of our wellbeing resources in parishes, to help identify what's missing. Perhaps this can be done by looking at Health & Wellbeing Plans prepared by parishes
- The TCPA presentation identified that loneliness, poor diet, poor quality homes, and poor environments damage our communities. These issues hurt poorer people most. Unemployment and poverty are rising; working poor may earn under £10/hour. The local plan should facilitate healthy lifestyles
- Encourage employers to pay workers at least their appropriate minimum wage, and preferably a more generous living wage

Design for mental wellbeing:

- There are two key elements – decent living conditions and social contact
- Housing mix should therefore be carefully considered in the Local Plan.
- At the lower end of the affordability scale provide more smaller, affordable units, but with gardens, which are a great mental stimulus
- Social contact will come about through the formation of local interest groups. They require facilities to meet so there needs to be a strategy for community buildings. Most villages have one but they are often not very inviting!

Place specific:

Stansted:

- Good range of services but little room for expansion of village centre
- Organisations offer health walks. There is the Romeera Centre and 3 allotment sites
- Not much open space, culture or leisure facilities for its size
- Residents travel to Bishop's Stortford because it is nearer
- Little provision for team sports
- A football pitch and cycle track/ Safe cycle lanes are needed
- No open space in Foresthall Park and nothing west of B1383
- Footways and bridleways provide the only open space.
- Benches are needed around the village on which to rest, sit and talk
- There are no public WCs.

It is acknowledged that Uttlesford is already ahead of the rest of the county in being a place where people are more prosperous, tend to have a good lifestyle, better health and employment.

Other considerations

Request to consider Neighbourhood Plans (NP):

- Felsted NP
- Thaxted NP

[NB Great Dunmow also has a made Neighbourhood Plan]