

Councillor John Evans,
Portfolio Holder for Planning and the Local Plan
Full Council, 7 December 2021

General – East of England LGA Peer Review – Planning Functions

This Review has been previously reported upon and early steps have already been taken by the Administration and Officers to act upon its eight recommendations and Council might wish to familiarize itself with the first report of those actions as received by Scrutiny Committee on 22 November 2021. Further updates will be provided in coming months.

Local Plan

In September and October, the Local Plan Leadership Group started to receive the first pieces of evidence being prepared to inform the emerging Local Plan. This includes the draft interim findings of the Retail Study; phase 1 of the Landscape Sensitivity work; and phase 1 of the Heritage Sensitivity work. Further evidence is expected during November on employment, retail, landscape and flooding among other topics.

The group has also endorsed a local version of the national Building for a Healthy Life document to inform planning decisions in the district. This assessment tool will be used to help raise design quality of new development in the district. Furthermore, the group has considered a report on the proposed arrangements for reporting the draft Regulation 18 Local Plan to members for formal consideration. This final report resulted in the building in of two additional stages in the timetable: an extra LPLG meeting to review the reasonable alternative development options prior to their evaluation; and a series of member briefings and site visits. These extra steps still allow the Council to submit a Local Plan to the government in the summer of 2023.

The Council has also undertaken a technical consultation on the sites submitted to the call for sites with Town and Parish Councils and the promoters of the sites. The purpose of this consultation was to review the plotted site boundaries and to fact check the results from the desktop analysis. The consultation closed on 29 November.

Development Management

The DM Team is still receiving a high level of planning applications. This is not unique to Uttlesford and the trend throughout most Local Planning Authorities is a large surge of planning applications submitted during the current period. These applications in Uttlesford are a combination of large-scale planning applications, and specific application for householder alterations.

Significant strategic sites, specifically at Woodside Way, Great Dunmow, are finally being delivered. This has included some particular infrastructure and technical planning applications, which have been delivered in a timely way through the now established Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) route. Not only will this enhance the Council's delivery of housing, but on this specific site it will also enable the delivery of specific infrastructure including sports pitches, a community centre and a primary school. These features were also all envisaged within the Great Dunmow Neighbourhood Plan.

The Planning Committee has now an established hybrid approach which is working well, although challenging, as the Committee is still required to work under COVID restrictions

On the appeal front, Council has been successful in defending before PINS Inspectors its refusal of significant development proposals in Stansted (Pennington Lane), Stebbing (Bran End) and Elsenham (Bedwell Road).

Planning Enforcement is now recovering from the extended periods of lockdown and a work programme through to Spring 2021 has been established. During this recent period, Enforcement Officers were unable to visit sites and consequently a backlog of cases for investigation have developed. The team is getting to these sites and matters are progressing on these cases. This backlog also extends to some Section 106 Infrastructure matters, where there has been an unavoidable delay in the transfer of public open spaces to parish and town councils. Due to restrictions both in terms of Council Officer operations and the furloughing of personnel within the development companies the resolution of some issues has been delayed. It has taken some time for that element of work type to recover but progress is being and will continue to be made in this area.