

Uttlesford District Council Autumn 2021

Council Spending – have your say!

Uttlesford District Council budget consultation for the financial year 2022-2023

During the period from 30 September to Sunday 17 October 2021, Uttlesford District Council sought the views of residents, partners and those who work within the district as it began the process of setting the spending budget for the 2022-23 financial year. 167 responses were received.

Each year the Government tells councils the maximum by which they are allowed to raise Council Tax, which for 2021-22 was either 1.99% or £5.00 per year. Consequently, for the 2021-22 financial year, for the Councillors for Uttlesford District Council made the decision to approve a £5 per year increase for the district council portion of the Council Tax bill. For the 2022-23 financial year a public consultation was conducted to seek residents' views on the headline budget priorities.

Most of the questions posed in this budget consultation sought comparable feedback from those asked in previous years and the results will inform the setting of the council's budget for the financial year April 2022 – March 2023.

The consultation concentrated on asking for residents' views on the priorities for council spending and the prerogatives for the future resourcing of specific service areas. An open text box was provided for respondents to express their views if they felt a different priority should be set by the council. Feedback was also sought from residents regarding whether the Council Tax precept for Uttlesford District Council represented 'Value for money'.

With the goal of obtaining feedback from those who live and work in the area, this year's budget consultation sought the views of the council's stakeholders (residents, workers, businesses, town and parish councils, Fire and Police). When setting the survey, it was hoped that those taking part in this survey would represent a broad cross-section of those who live and work in Uttlesford. The final two sections of the online questionnaire asked participants to identify in which capacity they were responding as well as questions where respondents could provide some optional profiling information about themselves.

Priorities

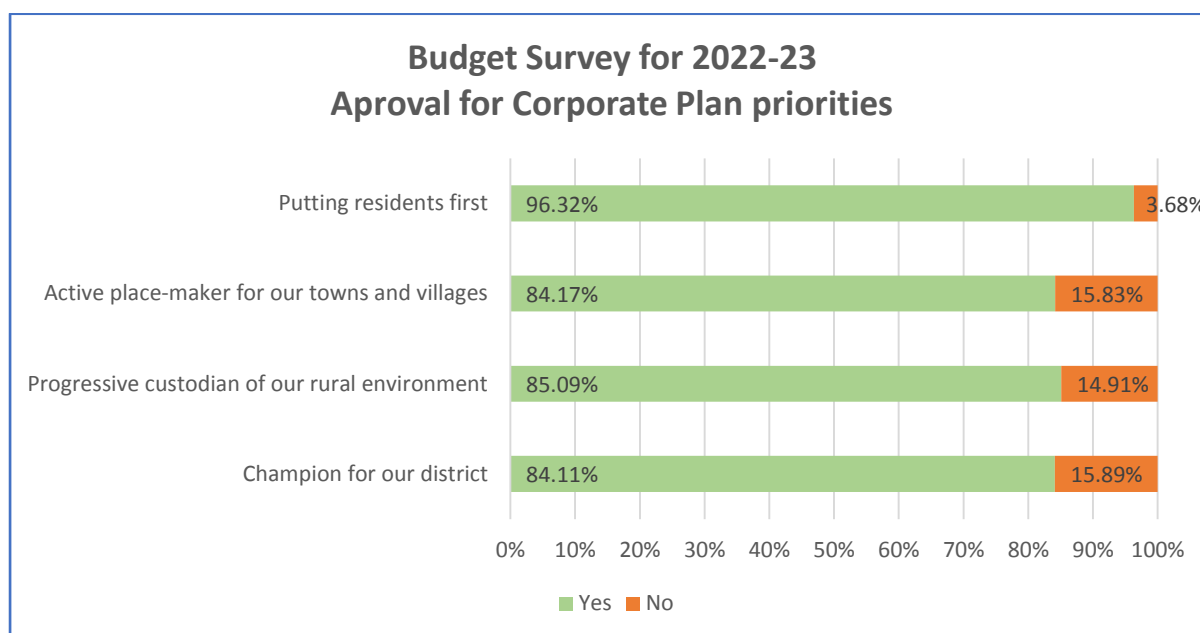
At a meeting of Full Council on 23 February 2021, a new Corporate Plan for 2021-25 was adopted which included a vision for the council 'Making Uttlesford the best place to live, work and play'. The plan has four priorities:

- Putting residents first
- Active place-maker for our towns and villages
- Progressive custodian of our rural environment
- Champion for our district

The first question for the consultation asked participants if the four priorities for the new Corporate Plan “are the right ones” for 2022-2023.

Each of the four stated priorities were approved by over eight out of ten people who answered this question. “Putting residents first” had the highest level of agreement by over 96% of participants who had an opinion selecting this priority.

The chart below illustrates the comparative percentage of responses from those who showed their opinion on this question by selecting a “Yes” or “No” response.



Value for money

Respondents were reminded that Uttlesford District Council currently keeps £162 of the average £1,885 paid in Council Tax by an Uttlesford household based on Band D property Council Tax 2021/22. The rest goes to Essex County Council, Essex Police Fire and Crime Commissioner and Parish/Town Councils. Bearing this in mind, Question 3 of the survey asked respondents if they agreed that the district council provides value for money. The table below shows the cross section of responses.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
28	55	38	26	17	3
16.80%	32.90%	22.80%	15.60%	10.20%	1.80%

By discounting the responses of those who either “Don’t know” or “Neither agree nor disagree” the headline response to this question shows that nearly two thirds (66%) of those participating either “strongly agree” or “Tend to agree” that the district council provides value for money.

“Statutory” and “Discretionary” services

Survey participants were asked to assign a level of importance to a list of “Statutory” services provided by the council, ranging from “Very important” to “Not important at all” as well as the option to select “Don’t know”. Similarly, those taking part in this year’s survey were asked to assign levels of importance to a separate a list of “Discretionary” services.

To enable the participants to make an informed selection, for each of the listed services, the questionnaire stated how much of the annual Council Tax the overarching service area (e.g. Revenues and Benefits) cost an average Band D household per year.

However, to enable a comparison of services and to determine which of those listed which were viewed as the most important as potential spending priorities, the data was analysed using rated scores where more weight is given if a service area is selected as “Very important” and a reduced weight for those selected as “Not important at all”. Those with no opinion (“Don’t know”) were not included in the calculation.

Using this method the two tables below show the three most selected services and the lowest scoring services.

Level of importance	Statutory service area
Highest level of importance	Refuse and recycling collection (97%)
Second highest level of importance	Action to develop cleaner neighbourhoods (included in Environmental Health and Licensing) 91%
Third highest level of importance	Planning policy including new Local Plan and Determining planning and building control applications (included in Building Control) each scored 87%
Lowest level of importance	Taxi licensing, liquor and gambling premises licensing (included in Environmental Health and Licensing) 62%

Level of importance	Non Statutory service area
Highest level of importance	Maintaining amenity areas, such as grass cutting and general maintenance of various areas of council-owned land. 82%
Second highest level of importance	Communicating with the public (included in Partnerships and Communities) 79%
Third highest level of importance	Community safety activities to support the work of the Community Safety Partnership with the police and others. 77%
Lowest level of importance	Ward member grants (included in Partnerships and Communities) 56%

Literal responses

Following Question 1, which asked survey participants to indicate their views regarding the four main priorities identified in the council's Corporate Plan, consultees were invited to submit a literal comment if they believed that a different priority should be focused on by the district council. 54 literal responses were received.

Concerns about overdevelopment, infrastructure (particularly roads) and protection of the rural areas of the district were the topics most frequently expressed.

Q2. If you think there is a different priority that the council should be focusing on, please explain:

These are fine words but your existing policies make similar statements. Experience shows that Officers do not uphold your Constitution or policies equally or fairly.

Look after the less well off with more money and greater respect Overhaul the dreadful service levels provided by District Council staff

No evidence to date of 'outstanding levels of transparency and accountability'. So enter drop this objective or fund compliance officers to challenge the elected representatives.

Protect the green belt. Don't build on green belt land, however laudable some progressive affordable homes scheme might be presented. It is wrong.

Action on climate change is far too broad a phrase to have any discernible meaning. If it means making our lives more difficult by slavishly following the current politically correct fashion by introducing anti-motorist punitive measures I would be against it on principle. If on the other hand it means promoting sensible measures such as better recycling, improving infrastructure and preventing developers ruining the district by building over high quality farmland I would be very much in favour of it. Uttlesford is the jewel in Essex's crown but is in danger of being wrecked by overdevelopment. I realise that this is largely due to reckless government policies but the District council must hold the line if it is really putting residents first i.e. the current residents as opposed to loads of newcomers with no allegiance to the area who will soon be arriving in droves.

The custodian of rural environment has to include protecting our rural areas from large housing developments. These are unwanted by the vast majority of residents.

Where does consideration of infrastructure feature ? Roads and other. Health services and education. Etc. Appreciate that these may be the main responsibility of other organisations but UDC should have a view and strategy to partner to success. Is this what is meant by the rather vague "champion for our district" ? In times of challenge joined up thinking is definitely required.

Disabled housing needs ...

Efficiency with council tax spending. Transparency and openness with the priorities. Avoiding waste of money. The council should not be abused by campaign groups getting their hands on the council finances to fight democratic national policy. Supporting business and housing, not opposing it. The most important thing for anyone is to be able to go to work and come home to a warm and safe home with food in the fridge.

The council should have a better planning department for road repairs. It seems its all or nothing, more than three temporary traffic light systems set up choking the traffic of the town or no temporary lights anywhere. This could be better planned to stop the traffic jams that they cause. No-one appears to check the quality of the road repairs or remarking. On the Little Walden Road there is a stretch of road where two lorries of busses cannot pass each other as the road appears too narrow. However, if you scrape the mud and debris out of the road you find the hidden curb stone and you find another white line down the side of the road. There is about 10 inches in the width of the road hidden under years of lack of road cleaning and maintenance. Poor management.

Who came up with 'Active place-maker'? Someone swallowed a thesaurus! You state 'Deliver local government with outstanding levels of transparency and accountability' yet you don't use plain English. Please consider consulting with http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/ before proceeding too far
VFM from all suppliers and especially council departments Scrap Town councils - waste of money. What does UDC actually do? Sod all for businesses, just let developers do what the **** they want
Emphasis on making sure developers actually carry out the improvements that are in their planning obligations.
Preserving the unique villages in Uttlesford. Don't let it turn into another over populated area like Chelmsford
Honesty, clarity and openness in decision making. Not claiming to be open and honest and then hiding the truth from council taxpayers and residents as you currently do!
LET US DECIDE WHERE NEW HOUSING SHOULD TAKE PLACE AND NOT ON GREEN BELT
Fix streets pothole, some of them are destroying residents cars. Stop new houses from being built, they're ruining our rural community.
Protecting the district and its infrastructure and character from the consequences of over development. Retaining as much green and recreational space as possible within the towns such as the playing fields of what was The Friends School in Saffron Walden. Once gone never regained.
More proactive and visible policing.
More affordable homes, studio apartments, one bedroom flats, but with discounts for NHS staff on the Help to Buy scheme. I get the impression you do not realise how poor people are.
I believe more of the speeding checks could be done haven't seen them out in Debden for a while.
Greater protection of rural environments from traffic - not just pollution, but overuse, noise and nuisance too.
Ensuring that thousands of houses are not built in our towns and villages where there is no infrastructure to cope. Also any homes built need to be truly affordable for local people - not large executive houses or bought by landlords to rent out.
Sounds good but will you keep to it?
Provide SAFE crossing places for our children. We see children hovering beside busy roads near the common, at the end of Castle street, at the end of Little Walden Road. A serious accident is surely only a matter of time. Safe crossing - zebra and/or pelican crossings - need to be installed as a matter of urgency. Please don't wait until we have a tragedy.
The rate of building of new homes cutting down trees, concreting over large areas of countryside and destroying the habitat of many animals and birds seems completely the opposite of what we should be doing. I understand that people need homes but at a time when some Europeans are leaving/have left following Brexit are we sure that the scale of the building countryside is necessary or desirable. Should we not pause for a while and stop allowing developers planning permission on such a massive scale.
Ensure infrastructure support for any new residential building developments around Saffron Walden to include schools, doctors and retail units with a view to keeping any more polluting traffic out of the town centre. There should also be better care of the pavements to clean up rubbish and remove weeds.
'Active place-maker' and 'Champion' are vague words that need to be rephrased into something more specific

Weekly recycling collections and energy efficient home grants
Complete the rollout of fibre broadband in thaxted. We had months of disruption for gigaclear to only cable the main road leaving hundreds of properties without high speed Internet.
Improve road infrastructure
Improvement
The priority must be total transparency from Council to residents ensuring local exemplary democracy. Such transparency may also assist in the electorate understanding of the political and commercial interests of Councillors in their decision making.
yes collecting council tax from property that owe tax and not been collected mainly a warehouse that owes thousands
Some of the groupings above include elements I could support, but also ones that I do not believe need specific/particular focus on. Context is needed for Questions 4-9. For example, why can't the FULL costs of food standards, private water supplies (presumably policing of both?), taxi licensing and building control/planning applications etc etc not be recouped from the direct beneficiaries (the property/land owners, taxi drivers, food outlets etc). I see little reason for that to form part of the standard Council Tax payment (in the same way you manage council housing to be self-funding).
A D C B
it all reads very well . HOWEVER could you please Actually deliver on what they preach . make officials accountable to deliver . Cease hiding behind Bureaucratic processes that slow you down to a snails pace . Where is the neighbourhood plan , scrapped . where are the electric car plug ins ?? very few . why spend millions against local jobs ie stansted airport . as a few examples . PLEASE WORK FOR YOUR SALARY . instead of finding excuses to do nothing .Amazed what is spent on Building and planning per household , professionals are milking it !!
The priority headlines are fine but you need to ensure that there is 'meat on the bones'...
Traffic congestion. More Schools both primary and secondary. More dr surgery's
No more mansions m
I think that being custodian of our rural environment should be second on the list. We must stop this continual building in our villages. By doing this we will keep our village status and not become small towns.
Most of the above is gobbledygook. How much is this survey costing ?
Make climate emergency a top priority in every work stream
Under Custodian of our rural environment, the good maintenance of the existing structure and facilities is currently very poor eg road sweeping, gulley emptying, litter collection, neglected road signs and more, poor pavement maintenance
You should be reducing the council tax given the number of houses that you insist on allowing to be built
not a different priority but it should be considered and included. Pathways along main roads need to be cleared for pedestrian safety. They are a mess. Safety for cyclists. Cycle pathways for families to enjoy. Stop Lorries from squeezing through small roads and causing chaos. Green waste should not be charged for. Bigger bins for recycling
Put climate and ecological emergency at the heart of everything you do. Don't just pay lip-service. Ensure that ALL UDC staff and councillors are constantly reminded / trained and made aware that it is their responsibility. That includes the Planning department!
Housing

Putting infrastructure into the areas where new affordable housing is being built or has been built. We need more Doctors surgeries, more schools and better water and sewerage management
Protect our historic towns and villages from the blight of poor modern development
Controlling the finances to recover the 2.5m lost on pointless fight with airport
Safety should be mentioned more strongly, with a priority to addressing men's violence against women. Otherwise these priorities are well balanced.
You have mentioned health service but not social services - the district council should take a much bigger role in social services, not just by giving grants to the voluntary sector. I agree with other aspects of championing the district but don't think you should prioritise health above social services - other bodies have statutory responsibilities for health services.
The climate crisis which if not dealt with render useless other plans: people's well being, economy, the future are all dependent on reversing biodiversity loss and temperature rises.