

Councillor Louise Pepper

Portfolio Holder for Environment and Green Issues; Equalities

Full Council report – 21 March 2023

Equalities March 2023 update

- EqHIA – The final of a series of Equality Health Impact Assessment workshops are to be delivered to senior officers will go ahead on 27th March 2023, this will enable them to become critical friends to colleagues completing the EqHIA alongside any new or changes to UDC activity, a policy, strategy, procedure, project, new or change in service, initiative or other.
Session aims:
 - To have an understanding of the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty.
 - To understand better which groups are protected from discrimination and what types of behaviour are unlawful.
 - To develop an awareness of Equality Analysis as a tool for promoting equality, tackling discrimination, and fostering good relations.
 - To have a better understanding of the different issues and stages of the Equality Analysis process.
 - To develop some practical skills in how to use Equality Analysis within the organisation.
- Essex Equality Network
 - The development of an Essex Equalities Hub/Centre of Excellence by the Essex Equalities & Partnerships team ECC – I have volunteered to be part of the development group and have a follow up conversation with an EEC colleague on 10th March 2023.

International Women's Day 8th March 2023



- Communities, Health & Wellbeing Team celebrated 2023 theme #EmbraceEquity (picture attached) this will feature in the staff newsletter.
- Staff Wellbeing Conference – A proposal has gone to the HR Manager to introduce the newly accredited Menopause Mentors at the June Staff Wellbeing Conference, along with a guest speaker to talk about Menopause Health and the hire of MenoVests from Over The Bloody Moon - MenoVest™ is a powerful tool designed to develop allyship and cultivate conversation in the workplace around menopause. Created for men to experience menopausal hot flushes (alongside

brain fog, anxiety, and sometimes headaches and dizziness) its profound impact is felt in a matter of minutes. The purchase of Menopause Ally pins from Over The Bloody Moon for those who have completed their accreditation.

Environment & Green Issues March 2023 update

Cllr Pepper had the opportunity to speak to Cllr Peter Schwier (deputy of ECC), after the Go Green Business awards, regarding the importance of working together on a joint County Council Climate & Biodiversity strategy. We both agreed (given the complexity and scale), it is an ominous task trying to achieve local carbon & biodiversity goals and targets. A lot of people feel overwhelmed with information. We need to investigate easy digestible solutions to address key objectives, including having the right information on our websites for the community to view. She also asked whether he could have a word to central government on more media climate coverage (like their **help for households**' advertisement), which reaches a far wider audience and making insulation a key priority (rather than heat pumps). **Fabric first.**

Go Green Business Awards - In collaboration with the Economic & Business team, Cllr Pepper **announced the Go Green 2022/23 business awards** at Little Easton Manor on Monday 6th March 2023. The three categories were environmental impact, reduction of single use plastics and energy saving.

Zero Carbon Communities Grant Fund of **£300K (£150k for 2023 & £150k for 2024)**, was launched last year with the aim of supporting community groups in Uttlesford to take action on Carbon Emission Reduction, Biodiversity Restoration and Enhancement & Community Engagement in Climate Change. This will go to Cabinet on March 16th and the publication of funding awarded will be March 17th. Grant funding will be released on March 20th onwards. If you weren't successful this time around, you might be successful in the next round of funding (due to commence at the end of August 2023). UDC will host another webinar to assist with these applications.

AIR QUALITY & TRANSPORT

Surface transport is responsible for 70% of our carbon emissions as a district.

UDC conducted an **Active Travel Survey** to assist with developing a new **Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP)**. For example, new safe crossings, new cycle lanes or slower traffic speeds, to identify projects that can be delivered to transform active travel provision in the local area. **LCWIP Consultants have already commenced work**, that should be completed in July of this year. They will work in parallel with Steve Essex who is conducting the **Flich Way Cycle Study**, which is a proposal to investigation options for cycle links between the Flich Way and the south side of Bishop's Stortford, Stansted Airport and Start Hill.

Cllr Pepper pointed out at Scrutiny and to the **LCWIP** consultants, **Uttlesford is largely car dependent. We don't have a genuine choice of travel. Both of our largest towns don't have railway stations.** ECC have put on more buses that have a £2 deal up until June of this year, but they are largely empty. With all the house building going on, **NPPF 9. Promoting sustainable transport - Paragraph 105. The planning system should actively manage patterns of growth in support of these objectives. Significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes.**

The control of these KEY objectives (also reviewing maintenance costs, in particular cycle lanes), lie with ECC and Highways.

Essex County Highways Panel have allocated funding for the 'Great Chesterford to Saffron Walden Cycleway' (design), and for 'Thaxted Road, Saffron Walden - New footway'. The Highways panel are also due to deliver a feasibility study for several Saffron Walden cycle schemes arising from requests submitted by the

Saffron Walden Town Council.

Dialogue has commenced with the Strategic Highways Team and the Council Planning team, to explore how we can best influence the pre-application planning stage for housing developments, with the objective that Council expectations for **active travel infrastructure needs are made clear to developers at the outset**. Dialogue is ongoing about how to influence and inform other planning process, **including Section 106 agreements**. There is **currently a lack of assurance that existing mechanisms can deliver the active travel infrastructure that is needed in the district**.

Further work is needed by the Climate Change, Lead Officer working with Planning Officers, to fully scope out the different active travel actions.

Cllr Pepper has spoken to several key people from ECC, in relation to this (Cllr Peter Schwier (deputy of ECC) and David Sprunt (ECC Principal Transportation & Infrastructure Planner). This is something UDC needs to actively address now, starting with linking our key cycle paths to key employment hubs and railway stations (prioritise Great Dunmow & Saffron Walden), despite our rural constraints. We need to be engaging with all key stakeholders (Flitch Way Action Group, LCWIP consultants, ECC, Stansted Airport & East Herts council). She pointed out to Cllr Schwier; *“Even though we took Stansted Airport to court, we weren’t disputing flying, only airport expansion. There is a future for the aviation industry [Another boost for green aviation as largest hydrogen fuel cell aircraft takes flight - AirQualityNews](#) and we should be working together.”* This partnership can create a joined-up active travel option for the community. She also mentioned that we need to review s106 contributions differently, by **creating good connectivity within the district** (**joined-up** cycle lanes, footpaths [that are user friendly for wheelchairs, pushchairs & mobility scooters], with adequate conservation friendly sensor lighting, community electric car sharing schemes and community EV (including on-street) charging points).

The Flitch Way cycle path is a safe cycling option for the south (during the summer months). However, it doesn’t currently link up to our **nearest railway** and **largest employment hub - Stansted Airport** (an ECC transport policy). A solution must be found, and this means engaging with the airport to make this happen. 220,000 people live within two miles of the cycle lane and Stansted Airport has 12,000 employees that are within one mile. Approximately 1,000 of the airport’s employees live in Bishop’s Stortford. A route connecting the two places has been proposed in at least four strategy documents since 2000 but has not yet materialised. Cllr Pepper also noted that Stansted Airport’s travel survey said that employee’s travelling to work by car, had increased. She has asked whether UDC’s STACC representative, could please mention these facts at the next meeting and promote/encourage this objective to be investigated as a key sustainable choice of travel, to assist with their 2038 net zero goal.

Climate Change Committee’s recommendations - Limiting traffic growth. Electric vehicles must not be the sole focus, with action also needed on demand and modal shift.

Cycling - Clear policy and guidance is required to **embed the shift to active travel** seen throughout the pandemic. Targets have been set and initial funding allocated for increasing walking and cycling. Electric bikes could have a valuable role in supporting an increase in cycling. The pandemic saw an increase in participation in cycling. Policy will need to build upon this to meet the target of **doubling cycling by 2025**.

New Active Travel planning requirement - The Department for Transport has now confirmed that from 1st June 2023, local planning authorities outside of London (where TfL and Borough policy and guidance will still apply) will be required to consult Active Travel England (ATE) on planning applications.

ATE has an ambitious target of 50% of trips in towns and cities being walked, wheeled, or cycled by 2030. To help implement this, in January, the DfT announced that £32.9 million of funding was to be made available for local authorities to train engineers and planners to conduct high-quality engagement and consultation sessions with local communities.

DEFRA AQ government grant £517,124 - To deliver a novel **Market Town Clean Air initiative** in Saffron Walden (consisting of a range of pilot schemes viability of **e-bike hire** and **electric vehicle car clubs** in the town and **improve awareness** and **change behaviour**) The first meeting of the Clean Air project Stakeholders was in February this year with various stakeholders. Residents, businesses, and all communities will be consulted via stakeholder surveys and focus groups on their interest in bike hire schemes, zero emission deliveries and e car clubs. The later will potentially be a model that can be rolled out to other parts of the district

and be the exemplar for the rest of the country.

BIODIVERSITY

The UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world.

The UK needs to urgently cut down their carbon footprint and overseas imports, by **growing and selling more locally produced food**. Selling more locally produced food in local areas could help to reduce the copious amounts of plastic you find in supermarket fruit & veg packaging and would also reduce their overall profits by providing some local competition. Locally grown food tastes better and is more nutritious. We also need to be cutting down on our meat production and eating more plant base food. This objective also coincides with the current UK shortage of several fruit and vegetables on supermarket shelves.

Small scale market farming - Cllr Pepper will be focusing this month, on what steps the farming industry can take to address the climate and biodiversity emergency. Cllr Reeve mentioned as part of UDC's business and economic plan, that they would be looking into promoting empty farm sheds as one possibility, where new local agricultural businesses could evolve.

Cllr Pepper has recommended the following to Cllr Reeve and the Business & Economic team: -

Countryfile featured a small 2-acre market garden, with an inspiring small agricultural business called **Middle Ground Growers (MGG)**. They produce ecologically grown food (on a small manageable scale), to sell to local communities. They started supplying their veg to a whole food shop however, they have launched a veg box scheme and they now deliver weekly to around 200 families and to 10 local outlets.

Middle Ground Growers

<https://g.co/kgs/nb9A3q>

Innovative farming solutions - Cllr Pepper also recommended watching a programme on an eco-farm in Nottinghamshire that provides several examples of how diverse a farm can become, if you have adequate funding, land, and ideas. They run an organic farm that includes growing fruit trees and small hold leasing. They had several small business units that offer Botox treatments, a hairdresser, new kitchens, a café, man's shed, a well-being centre run by a charity, bikes to ride and local walks.

It gives you some idea on the potential for farms in Uttlesford and the prospect of small businesses units and other sustainable employment opportunities for local people.

Episode 5

FarmEco: Amanda discovers a Nottinghamshire eco-farm that's the beating heart of a local community

<https://www.channel4.com/programmes/amanda-owens-farming-lives>

ENERGY

Housing energy use is responsible for 18% of our carbon emissions as a district.

External government funding £1,268,000 for low-income families has encountered challenges and was hit by delays by our consortiums (the Energy Hub for **LAD2 £249k** & Warmworks for **LAD3 £919k**), not only in the scheme commencing but also **barriers with retrofit assessments and available supply chain** (the County are all competing for the same objective). **There was also a short timeframe to implement the funding**. Approximately 37% of measures have been installed to date. Essexwide consortium have assured UDC, that **they continue to work to grow the supply chain**, with further installers coming on board. They **now have 80 retrofit assessors**. UDC have released some funding to Uttlesford CAB, who had resource available to deliver focused promotion of the scheme to eligible residents by the end of December 2022. The Sustainable Warmth (LAD3/HUG1) government grant scheme finishes in March 2023. **UDC have bid for funding via consortium for the HUG2 Scheme which will run from April 2023 to March 2025**. Focus remains targeting low income/fuel poverty

homes, with off-gas grid for heating.

N.B Someone mentioned to Cllr Schwier, at the Go Green awards, there was only government energy efficiency funding for low-income families. Cllr Pepper mentioned in her closing speech, the government had announced a three-year scheme to provide up to £15,000 for middle-income households that will start in April 2023. However, she hasn't heard anything since but maybe the Chancellor Jeremy Hunt will announce this scheme, at his next budget (due on **15 March 2023**).

Save on energy bills and cut carbon emissions with solar panel group-buying scheme.



Solar Together Essex is an Essex County Council backed scheme that helps buyers through the process of purchasing high-quality solar panels.

It offers lower prices than the open market using trusted suppliers, and is an ideal way to cut future electricity bills and carbon emissions by using clean energy.

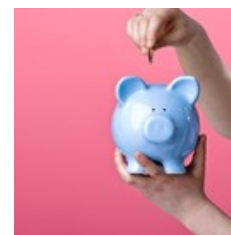
Register at Solar Together Essex by 10th March, without obligation, for a personal recommendation. [Group-buying for solar | Essex County Council](#)

solartogether.co.uk

Cost of living support

Many of us are worrying about the rise in living costs.

Our cost of living booklet [COST OF LIVING BOOKLET_FINAL.pdf - Google Drive](#) brings together information about the support on offer for Uttlesford residents – from financial assistance and debt advice, helping with utility costs to making your home more energy-efficient.



Warm Homes Essex, Warm Homes Fund and Ways to save energy in your home

[Check your tariff - Uttlesford District Council](#)

WASTE

Important changes to your recycling centres



From Monday 13 March, you will need to book a slot to visit an Essex County Council recycling centre to dispose of your household waste.

The booking system is designed to help to reduce queues, manage congestion both in and around the sites.

The booking system is not applicable to Blue Badge holders, or for pedestrians who bring their waste on foot.

Get more information [Recycling centre bookings \(loveessex.org\)](http://loveessex.org)

Garden waste weekend skip service

Our garden waste weekend skip service collects from different locations around the district.

If you cannot easily get to the Recycling Centre for Household Waste, some parish councils have asked us to provide weekend drop-off points for garden waste. These are at various locations and times.

You should contact your parish council if you need any further details.

Find out more about our garden waste service [Garden waste weekend skip service - Uttlesford District Council](#)



Love Essex – 1) What a waste video [What a Waste - YouTube](#) **2)** Waste Action Week 2023 [Food Waste Action Week 2023 | Love Food Hate Waste](#) **3)** Create a meal plan [Meal planning \(loveessex.org\)](#)

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

Cllr Pepper is working on a pdf [Towards Zero Carbon – Sustainable Communities document](#), alongside Cllr Evans to explore key sustainable planning policies and making sure Developers demonstrate the path that their proposals take towards achieving net-zero carbon by 2030 (UDC's target), and working towards this in response to planning law, and also to the [guidance set out in the NPPF](#) and [Planning Policy Guidance](#). This will link in with our [Interim Climate Planning Policy Document](#) policies that will form part of the **Local Plan policies, which will have climate change mitigation and adaptation at its core.**

Cllr Pepper has requested the following Water Efficiency policies to be included in our Local Plan. [Water abstraction is Uttlesford's greatest concern.](#) Chalk streams are both rare and sensitive. The East is also one of the driest parts of the UK. Efficient use of Water Resources requires development to minimise the use of mains water by incorporating water saving measures and equipment; **grey water recycling** and natural filtration measures and designing new residential development to meet a target of 110 litres or less per head per day. Re-using grey water (the wastewater from baths, showers, and washbasins) can save up to 18,000 litres of water a year for each person, or a third of daily household water use. Where possible, **harvested rainwater** should be substituted for mains water. It can be used for flushing toilets (unless harvested from a green roof), watering plants/ gardens, topping up garden ponds and wetland habitats, and for general cleaning tasks such as car washing. In the simplest form, **water butts** and **rainwater collection tanks** can be used to capture rain for reuse in a low-cost way. **SuDS (sustainable drainage systems)**, to manage surface water run-off.

Cllr Pepper also stated that she does not support Biodiversity Offsetting (please see comments below, in her letter to the Forestry Commission).

Cllr Pepper attended a TCPA climate planning guidance webinar, which highlighted that money lenders are no longer lending mortgages in flood risk areas and insurers are thinking very hard about the future shape of their industry because of the risk generated. To view this webinar please see attached link: <https://tcpa.org.uk/resources/webinar-climate-guide-launch-2023/>. The new edition of the TCPA climate guide is available here. [The Climate Crisis – a guide for local authorities on planning for climate change \(tcpa.org.uk\)](#). They also mentioned Natural England's green infrastructure tool which is worthwhile investigating. <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/GreenInfrastructure/Home.aspx>

Check the long-term flood risk for an area in England <https://www.gov.uk/check-long-term-flood-risk>

Climate change: Warming could raise UK flood damage bill by 20% <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-64866058>

Cllr Pepper mentioned how **hemp was now being used for insulation**. The urban design Officer said he could mention it in the design code, unfortunately though, we will be very unlikely to be able to mandate use of it. We can suggest it as a material and show some examples of how it could be used

<https://www.indinature.co/news/2021-04-housewarming-hemp-insulation-renfrewshire-council-social-housing>.
Hemspan, spoke at the Go Green awards and are based in Cambridge <https://hemspan.com/>.

LOBBYING

Cllr Pepper emailed Kemi Badenoch to say that Conservative Environmental Network member, Derek Thomas MP, has become the latest supporter of the Climate & Ecology Bill, joining a growing list of 160+ cross-party MP's and Peers.

To mark Derek's support for the CE Bill, Zero Hour has produced a video (see below) exploring the Conservative MP's vision and his work in the St Ives constituency to address climate and nature issues.

In this video, Derek discusses embracing opportunities to develop skills—bringing green jobs to the area—and how the CE Bill can bring this about. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPEMGT4tbJ8>.

Cllr Pepper asked for Kemi's support on a CE Bill.

Cllr Pepper has emailed the Forestry Commission and stated the following:

“At COP15, the UK has committed a target to protect 30% of nature on Earth by 2030. The National Trust is aiming to plant and establish 20 million trees by 2030 to benefit people and nature and the Government has committed to increasing tree planting rates across the UK to 30,000 hectares per year by 2024. Do you have a joint working tree strategy partnership with Central Government, Natural England, the National Trust, and the Woodland Trust, to achieve a similar long term tree management and tree planting goal?”

*Despite having some environmental planning protection, ancient woodland is still under threat of destruction or deterioration from development. Developers are still chopping down trees and hedgerows to build houses or roadways <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-northamptonshire-64734051> and still get planning approval to destroy ancient woodland. When Owen Patterson was the environmental minister in 2014, he suggested that ancient woodland could be destroyed as long as 100 trees were planted elsewhere for every one that was felled. HS2 Ltd are planning to plant new trees and translocate woodland soils for the creation of new woods. They are completely missing the ecological point of veteran trees and the accumulated cultural meaning of old woods. These are woodlands have been an integral part of the local landscape and fabric of life for centuries. Older trees play a vital role in absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. **One tree absorbs 1 ton of carbon dioxide by the time it reaches 40 years**. One ton of CO2 is a lot. During a climate and biodiversity crisis, how can building new roadways, railways and developments, **STILL** be considered a greater priority, rather than protecting them from destruction? <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/news/new-report-hs2-got-it-wrong>*

The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. Enforcement on many fronts has been severely lacking and could be argued, has partly led to nature's decline. We need to protect our most valued environmental assets, with more robust tree planning, monitoring and management policy. I would also like to see key woodland bodies joining forces and making sure these precious ecosystems receive the protection they deserve.”

Making effective use of land NPPF - 120. Planning policies and decisions should: *b) recognise that some **undeveloped land can perform many functions**, such as for wildlife, recreation, flood risk mitigation, cooling/shading, carbon storage or food production.*

What will 2023 mean for climate change and nature? <https://news.sky.com/video/what-will-2023-mean-for-climate-change-and-nature-12772436>

Thank you,
Cllr Pepper

