

Statement from Cllr Lees: Requisition for an Extraordinary Council Meeting

17 January 2024

The meeting was called for “the Council to discuss the Leader’s proposed response to the letter received from the Rt Hon Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities dated 19th December 2023. The purpose of the meeting is for the Leader to present her proposed response and to answer questions on the proposed response. The meeting to be held before any response is sent.”

Response matters to consider:

- The Secretary of State’s Intervention Letter of 19th December 2023, in which he required that the authority sends him within 12 weeks our timetable for the Local Plan delivery, known as our Local Development Scheme (LDS).
- The Council had already published and agreed this LDS providing that timetable on 16th October 2023.
- The authority is currently on schedule to deliver against this timetable, with the Draft Local Plan having been approved by full Council on 30th October 2023, and the public consultation period having closed on 18th December 2023, the day before his letter, and exactly on the published schedule. Regular and supportive meetings have been held between Department officials and our council officers. Therefore, the intervention letter was a surprise.
- That for most of the 19 years the Secretary of State refers to in his letter in which he notes “the poor progress your authority has made towards adopting a plan” Uttlesford District Council was run by Conservative administrations, including in its Cabinet the current Leader of the Conservative opposition, Cllr Susan Barker, who was the portfolio holder responsible for both failed Plans, and who has requisitioned this extraordinary Council meeting.
- That the last plan submitted under Cllr Barker’s responsibility was rejected by the Inspectors in their letter of 10th January 2020 including the words *‘Unfortunately, despite the additional evidence that has been submitted during the examination and all that we have now read and heard in the examination, including the suggested main modifications to the plan (ED41) put forward by the Council, we have significant concerns in relation to the soundness of the plan’*. Their paragraph 113 summarised fifteen ‘main concerns’.
- That the current draft Local Plan is evidence based, and has been prepared without any behind-the-scenes political fixes that owe more to advancing local party-political interests than to best serving the interests of all residents of the district.

- That the planning system is weighted in favour of developers, with the majority of applications being approved. The government, instead of seeking to create even more planning permissions on top of the many thousands of unbuilt ones this council, and many others, already have, should be strongly requested to introduce measures requiring much faster construction of the housing already permitted, which councils currently have no power to do.
- That the government should again be requested follow the lead of the Scottish Government and Welsh Assembly and abolish Right to Buy, and notes that the last year 300,000 houses were built was 1979, just before mass social house building was effectively ended by the Housing Act 1980. There are 1.3 million households waiting for social housing. Source Table 600, as at March 2023: [Live tables on rents, lettings and tenancies - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/live-tables-on-rents-lettings-and-tenancies), and showing an increase of 150,000 over three years. Councils are the required providers of social housing but are powerless to build on any scale. Government measures to promote this would be most welcome.
- That the 13680 new housing number required by the DLUHC which Uttlesford must allocate in its Local Plan bears no relation to the infrastructure constraints and challenges in the district, such as the scarcity of water, grossly inadequate sewerage systems polluting our chalk streams, pressure on roads, a motorway which bypasses the district, no rail service to the largest settlements, insufficient NHS GP and dentistry provision, no A&E hospital, no full police station or tertiary education, medieval settlements and constraining topographies and valued landscapes.
- That notwithstanding all this, Uttlesford's draft Local Plan is a genuine, sincere and professional effort to balance the constraints, none of which the council is directly responsible for, or can mandate or fund their resolution, or largely require developers and landowners to fund, and to take back control of planning for our locally-accountable, cross-party Planning Committee.

The proposed draft letter is attached and has been published with the agenda.