

Councillor Neil Hargreaves,

Portfolio Holder for Finance and the Economy

Report for Council 23 April 2024

Economic Recovery Fund

Of the £1million budgeted for post covid recovery support from the council's commercial income, the final £660k was spent or allocated during the last financial year, thus completing the operation of this fund. Appended are some recent examples of some of this activity.

Government funding

UDC bid for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the Rural England Prosperity Fund. UDC's grant allocations for this are attached. Note that the REPF is still in progress as applications are on a rolling basis and officers call meetings as needed working with myself to decide the allocations.

The government has hired consultants Technopolis and IPSOS to assess the effectiveness of their grant schemes and we met with them recently. Of the local authorities from across the country selected to take part, UDC was the first to participate. As well as our officers, attendees included from Uttlesford Foodbank and the NHS. The consultants road tested their review process with us and we gave feed back on that as well as our own experience of the funds. While all funding is welcome and it is a Corporate Plan policy to apply for everything which may be successful, it was pointed out that it doesn't touch the huge cuts in local authority funding and other cuts in public realm funding. As noted in the budget papers UDC has already found £2m in economies and has budgeted to find another £7m. Members will have seen the report put in our pigeon holes by Citizens Advice which makes difficult reading. A similar picture is available from the Food bank.

Car parking charge increases

These have been implemented except for Catons Lane and London Road as these await installation of machines. There is a brief delay on the Sunday alteration for the Faircroft car park as Waitrose wanted a 3 hour limit retained to ensure turnover so a revised scheme for Sundays is being agreed.

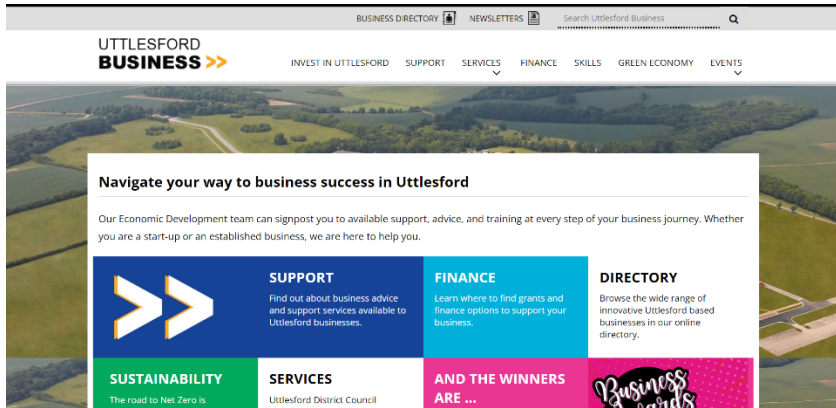
NEPP

I attended the NEPP board meeting at Harlow in March. Their finances have improved and the 24/25 budget shows a return to surplus, which will allow the reserves deficit to be recovered. The minutes and reports are published on the NEPP website. They have their team of Civil Enforcement Officers at full strength – it had been well below that for some time. My inbox of complaints has changed from 'why is there no enforcement ' to complaints about parking contraventions being enforced.

Economic Recovery Fund - Year 3

1. New Business Website

This year we launched a new website. This was developed with the UDC website team who did a tremendous job making it easy to navigate and attractive. The website is kept up to date by the Economic Development team with funding, support initiatives and events.



2. Business Grants and support initiatives

2.1 The Growth and Increased Productivity fund

A match funded grant of up to £5,000 to SME's ready to grow their business.

We are Bare Beauty, Saffron Walden

We are Bare Beauty received a Growth and Productivity grant of £4,750, which was used towards their state of the art Pelvipower machine.

Business owner Deborah Imrie said "we like to move with the times and provide the best technology that you would normally only find in London."



Takeley Chiropractor

Takeley Chiropractor continues to grow and provide additional job opportunities after receiving a Growth and Productivity grant of £3,630. This was used to purchase office equipment, a reception desk, PC's and contribute towards another chiropractic

bench. The addition of the bench has enabled extra time for a second practitioner to work and created a new job opportunity for a receptionist. Owner Scott Benham said “the grant has enabled us to employ an additional member of staff and grow the business”



The Coach and Horse pub, Newport

The Coach and Horses pub, Newport received a Growth and Productivity grant of £5,000 which was used towards a new combination oven. The combination oven has improved the service and efficiency of the kitchen and is a fantastic support for the chef and staff.

Owner, Jon Luis said “without the grant we couldn’t buy the oven and create the efficiency in the kitchen”



2.2 High Street Premises Enhancement Scheme

This provided a match funded grant of up to £5,000 to improve the external appearance of town and village centre properties.

Wardrobe, Great Dunmow

Wardrobe received a High Street Premises Enhancement grant of £2,800 to improve the structure and safety of the building. Not only did this enhance the look of the High Street but also maintained a sophisticated look to match the business brand.

Business owner Nikki Anthony said “we would have struggled to complete the much-needed work without the support of the grant, this is an old building and grants like this greatly assist with completing, repairing and improving the image of the High Street.”



2.3 Digital Boost Week

In November UDC held its third annual Digital Boost Week. Online ‘Lunch and Learn’ sessions were held on a variety of different subjects such as website search engine optimisation, making the most of LinkedIn to generate sales leads, how ‘green’ is your website and digital marketing tools for businesses.

£40,000 was allocated to the Digital Boost grant which provided match funding of up to £2,500. The grant was oversubscribed within 48 hours.

Law Salons, Saffron Walden

Law Salons received £2,500 from the Digital Boost Grant. Part of the grant was used to help train an apprentice in digital marketing to run the salon’s social media channels and run their website inhouse rather than employing an external agency.

2.4 Eco-October

In October we launched the Low Carbon Workplace Grant with a series of webinars helping small businesses become more sustainable.

The Grant offered match funding of up to £5,000. Energy efficient lighting has been the most popular use for the grant.

1-2-1 consultancies were offered to 10 SME’s interested in what steps they could take to help reduce their carbon footprint.

Overall there has been a luke warm reception to green initiatives.

3. Start-ups and Young Entrepreneurs

We put a big focus into supporting budding entrepreneurs and early-stage businesses in 2023-24.

3.1 Start-up September

Our Start-up September campaign was very successful with 44 residents signing up to the Rebel Business online training program.

Testimonials:

“Wow Uttlesford! I had no idea local council supported local businesses. This says a lot about Uttlesford as a council; you obviously care! Also I think it’s unusual for a council to engage a Rebel organisation! Thank you so much for your support.”

“Thank you very much for allowing entrepreneurs to take a big jump and reach our dream business ideas without being trapped and put off for life with huge debts.”

“Just a big thank you as being able to attend this course made me realise its never too late to do new things, and has both given me the courage and empowered me to run my own business. It has reignited a long lost spark.”

3.2 Webinars and peer networks

Alongside the training course we held a series of well attended webinars and offered a peer network programme run by business support providers, The Consortium, with three cohorts of entrepreneurs and early-stage businesses.

3.3 Young Entrepreneurs

We have worked in partnership with Saffron Walden Town Council and Essex County Council to support Young Entrepreneurs. In January we held a well-attended panel discussion and networking event to launch the Young Traders market being held at Saffron Walden town hall.

Seed funding of £100 was offered to Uttlesford residents attending the market to help them develop their business idea.



3.4 Start-up Grants

25 entrepreneurs and early-stage businesses have benefitted from the Start-up Grants, part funded by UKSPF and the Economic Recovery Fund.

This is a match funded grant of up to £2,500.

Neon Leo, Saffron Walden

This sustainable business opened a shop with the support of the business start-up grant of £2,500 and the High Street Enhancement fund of £1,512. The funding helped set up their website and rebrand the shop into their unique style and identity.

Owner Abigail North said “we couldn’t have achieved this without the support of the grants, our thoughts are always towards sustainability, independent and local. The experience we give our customers is very important to us, we like to help women push their boundaries and are more likely to step outside of their comfort zone when they are renting preloved clothes”.



AG Fitness, Wendens Ambo

AG Fitness received a business start-up grant of £1,655, which was used to purchase new equipment for their gym.

Owner Andrew Eastwood said “without the grant we would not have been able to purchase new modern equipment. The grant has enabled us to buy high end spec items that will last a lot longer than the second hand equipment they were having to consider. This matches the high end professional look and standard that our business provides”



4 Upskilling local businesses in digital marketing

We have offered a variety of sessions to upskill business owners in digital marketing.

Working with Harrison Cantel, from HCreative (winner of the Uttlesford Business Rising Star Award 2023) and James Garrett, from HNE Media (winner of the Uttlesford Marketing Champion Award 2024)



5 Events

5.1 Ambitious Women in Essex

We have worked in partnership with Essex County Council to support women in business with a series of networking events, including a very popular panel discussion as part of Start-up September aimed at female entrepreneurs.



5.2 Uttlesford Business Breakfast

The annual business breakfast took place at the Novotel Hotel at London Stansted Airport. Alongside a delicious breakfast attendees took part in 3 mini workshops on sustainability, funding opportunities and digital marketing.



5.3 Uttlesford Business Awards

This year's awards, held at Saffron Hall, attracted almost 200 people. Winners were announced in 13 categories.



6 Discover Uttlesford

6.1 Website

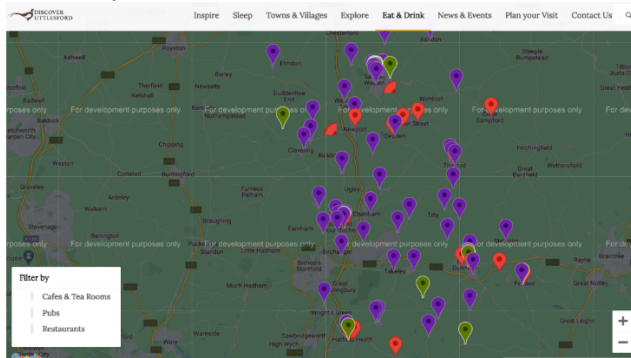
Discover Uttlesford has continued to grow in popularity and recognition.

We have seen a large increase in website users:

01/03/22 – 28/02/23 – total users 13,000

01/03/23 – 29/02/24 – total users 36,000

This year we have added new maps to the website to make it easy for users to find hospitality, accommodation and attractions.



6.2 Social Media

Our social media presence has also increased:

Facebook 2.3k followers

Instagram 1.5k followers

Stakeholders are increasingly engaging with us and many are donating days out to allow us to run 'give aways' on the social channels.



6.3 The Discover Uttlesford app

The app is also proving popular.

In December 2023 there were in excess of 3,500 unique weekly visitors to the app. Digital trails have been added to the app allowing users to follow a trail around Saffron Walden, Thaxted and Great Dunmow. Stansted Mountfitchet will be added shortly.

UKSPF and REPG Grant Lists

Year 1 UKSPF

| | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Buffy Bus | Playbus | £5,000 |
| Uttlesford Citizens Advice | Digital Access Points | £16,940 |
| Dig It Community Allotment | Plot to Plate sessions | £7,147 |
| Mind In West Essex | Community Kitchen | £2,328 |
| SW Community Shed | Digital Router | £6,599 |
| Touchpoint | Refridgerated van | £24,500 |
| UCAN | Community Responder | £14,808 |
| UDC | Business Start up grants | £31,000 |
| | | £108,322 |

Year 2 UKSPF

| | | |
|--|---|-----------------|
| Fairycroft House Arts and Media Centre | Voluntary sector grants officer | £18,540 |
| Fairycroft House Arts and Media Centre | Homework Club | £12,860 |
| Homestart | Stronger Together parenting | £24,565 |
| Mind in West Essex | Parenting Classes | £21,469 |
| Mind in West Essex | Creative minds | £2,500 |
| St Clare Hospice | Bereavement Café | £9,431 |
| Saffron Walden Town Council | Start up and young entrepreneurs market project | £33,500 |
| Touchpoint | Establishment of community radio station | £7,646 |
| TouchPoint | Crafton Green Refurbishment | £35,000 |
| NWES | West Essex Business Support Programme | £24,000 |
| | | £189,511 |

Year 1 REPF (2023/24)

| | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Saffron Hall Trust | New lighting system | £15,000 |
| Fairycroft House Arts and Media Centre | Display cases for a heritage display | £9,000 |
| Active Spring Company | Installation of solar panels | £24,116 |
| Hatters Farm | New attraction at Halloween event | £11,512 |
| Saffron Walden Town Council | Seating area at Jubilee Gardens | £15,000 |
| SW rugby club | Solar panels | £27,201 |
| Little Canfield Village Hall | Solar panels | £16,500 |
| High Easter Village Hall | Solar panels | £15,000 |
| Stansted Tennis Club | LED floodlights | £17,760 |
| Widdington Village Hall | Retrofit of building | £7,910 |
| | | £158,999 |

Year 2 REPF (2024/25) AGREED SPEND

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|---------------------------|--|----------|
| Bailey Hills | Visitors centre and winery | £150,000 |
| Pepples Farm | Glamping facilities | £83,200 |
| Julian Shoolheifer Ltd | Enlargement and reconfiguration of workshop | £25,000 |
| Stevens Farm | New business units | £40,000 |
| Lilys Farm | New business units | £150,000 |
| 5m books | Ebook for sustainable farming | £49,556 |
| Porters Hall | Conversion of dovecote to accommodation | £144,165 |
| | | £641,921 |