

Uttlesford Planning Policy Working Group meeting 23 May 2018
Statement and Questions by Ken McDonald, FCA, of Stansted Mountfitchet

I have been speaking to this group for two and a half years. Based on my previous experience, I have no doubt that I shall be ignored again today. But I have to try.

In December 2015, I questioned the SHMA and this group declined to adopt it. In April this year, Mike Young spoke about the Hardisty Jones employment report and this group “noted” the report although several of your questions remained unanswered.

I have come, yet again, to complain that this Local Plan is based on unsound foundations and little but hearsay.

Where is the evidence, the calculations and the audit trail that arrive at Uttlesford’s highly exceptional housebuilding target? Can any of you demonstrate how the number was arrived at?

Similarly, will you come clean and tell us how you arrived at the jobs forecast? Specifically, how do you square this forecast against retaining the airport planning limit of 35mppa and against more recent job forecasts by Stansted Airport?

Will you tell us what testing you did of these figures, especially in the face of challenges to the housing need figures from two or three chartered accountants and the airport’s recent forecast of 13,200 jobs in 2028 to service 35mppa¹. I think you have assumed around 19,000, but it is not clear.

These fundamental building blocks, these foundations for the local plan, are far from robust yet you have chosen not to satisfy yourselves on these questions or to demonstrate why you think your base numbers are sound. You have simply ignored the challenges and moved on. For the last two years, the frailties of the foundations have been ignored while you have continued to build upon this ill-considered base.

It’s as if the main issue has been the colour of the tiles in the bathroom. I wonder where you councillors will be when the tiler shows up. I can just imagine him saying “I’m not keen to tile over that crack – has this house got any foundations?” Nor, sadly, do I expect to see many of you when the planning inspector is about and officers are being hung out to dry.

Houses and jobs are the two most fundamental elements for a local plan, yet in Uttlesford both are unclear and shrouded in mystery, with no joined-up supporting evidence. So, not for the first time, I ask you two basic questions that go to the heart of your plan:

Firstly, will you reveal how the so-called “housing need” for Uttlesford has been calculated? I do mean calculated, with an audit trail that any reasonable person may be able to follow, not vague assumptions based on hearsay arguments and pleas not to derail the process.

Secondly, will you reveal - clearly - what you have assumed regarding Stansted Airport’s passenger throughput, its total employment numbers, and the number of jobs there that will provide employment for Uttlesford residents? As a point of information, may I say that in its latest employment survey the airport found that only 18% of employees lived in Uttlesford. At the last PPWG meeting various, higher percentages were banded about.

¹ Application UTT/18/0460/FUL, Environmental Statement 1, Table 11.10