

2. Spatial Portrait, Vision and Objectives

Introduction

- 2.1 This section sets out the spatial portrait of Uttlesford, the vision we have for the future of the area and the objectives we will follow to achieve that vision.
- 2.2 The spatial portrait describes where we are now; it gives an overview of Uttlesford's characteristics and the opportunities and challenges that arise from those characteristics.
- 2.3 The vision describes what we want for the District in the future and how we see the District will develop and move forward. The objectives set out how we will achieve our vision and provide specific direction to the policies of this Local Plan.

About Uttlesford

- 2.4 Uttlesford is a large rural District in ~~north-west~~North West Essex covering approximately 250 square miles. The District includes two market towns that serve extensive rural hinterlands and has 56 parishes. A number of larger villages also provide services to their surrounding catchment areas. The District has a total population of 86,200¹ people.
- 2.5 The two major settlements, Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow, are market towns with town centres providing a range of services to an extensive rural catchment area. These towns provide vital facilities for the District such as schools, health services and nearly all the District's food shopping needs. They are also important cultural and leisure destinations for the District and beyond. There are a number of larger villages: Stansted Mountfitchet, Thaxted, Elsenham, Great Chesterford, Hatfield Heath, Newport and Takeley. Stansted Mountfitchet and Thaxted provide local centres, while the other villages also provide a range of services to the surrounding rural areas. There are a large number of smaller villages which mainly provide services for their local communities. Smaller hamlets, groups of cottages and isolated homes and farmsteads are scattered across the District. About 70% of the District's population live in the villages and countryside outside Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow.
- 2.6 Beyond the District the nearest towns are Bishop's Stortford and Braintree which both lie close to the District's southern boundaries, whilst Cambridge and Chelmsford are also accessible and provide a greater range of services. Further afield is London with good transport links to the District by both road and rail. The south west of the District includes the outer edge of the Metropolitan Green Belt around Bishop's Stortford. London Stansted Airport is located in the south of the District surrounded by a designated Countryside Protection Zone.
- 2.7 The 2011 Census ² indicates that the average age of the District's population is 40 and nearly 30% of the population is within the 45-64 age group; this is a larger percentage than that for England overall which is 25%. The proportion of older people is similar to the national average. During the plan period the number of older people in the District

¹ Office of National Statistics Population Mid-Year Estimate 2016 (NOMIS) Key Statistics from 2011 Census. Available at:

<https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=2422&p=0>

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is expected to rise and the ratio of working age to older people is expected to fall. The number of people aged 65 and over living alone in Uttlesford is also expected to rise. The proportion of Uttlesford's population from black and minority ethnic groups is 3%, substantially lower than the England figure of 15% (2011 Census). The population of the District is becoming more diverse over time. There are also a small number of people from travelling communities in the District.

- 2.8** The distinct rural character of the District with its attractive and historic market towns and villages is widely recognised. The District is characterised by more than twenty distinct and often sensitive landscapes punctuated by historic settlements, protected lanes, and historic parks and gardens. The quality of the cultural heritage in the District is high with around 3,700 Listed Buildings, 36 Conservation Areas and seven Registered Parks and Gardens, as well as 73 Scheduled Monuments and more than 4,000 records of archaeological sites and finds in the District. The District is also important in terms of biodiversity and nature conservation. It has a significant proportion of ancient woodland including the Hatfield Forest which is an important remnant of a medieval forest. The District has two National Nature Reserves, 12 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and 281 Local Wildlife Sites as well as more than 100 designated Special Roadside Verges which are important for their ecological value.
- 2.9** Due to the rural nature and history of Uttlesford there are relatively few previously developed and brownfield sites within the District.
- 2.10** The District is central to the London Stansted Cambridge Corridor economic growth area and in particular the importance of London Stansted Airport and its role within the South Cambridgeshire research and bio-technology cluster focused on Chesterford Research Park. The District continues to attract inward investment, both from within the region and internationally. With the District's locational advantages, significant potential exists to attract more investment into the District assuming that sites are available. The District is also a highly productive arable farming area with most of the agricultural land classified as Grade 2 (very good) with the rest forming Grade 3 (good to moderate). Pastureland is not extensive but it does exist in the river valleys and although not the best and most versatile land it is important to the character and biodiversity of the District.
- 2.11** Many traditional rural jobs no longer exist and residents increasingly travel to work. There is one major employment centre in the south of the District at London Stansted Airport. Chesterford Research Park is also a key employment area in the north. Other employment is focused on smaller industrial estates or premises in Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow.
- 2.12** Unemployment in the District is lower than the national average (1.4% for the District compared with 3.8% for England). Jobs in manufacturing have declined but with the growth of London Stansted Airport there has been an increase in jobs in transport and communication. On average residents travel much further to work than is the norm and residents' qualifications and earnings are generally higher than average. There is a link between the high level of out commuting and associated high incomes with residents commuting considerable distances to highly paid jobs elsewhere, particularly London. Most of the District's residents (68.4%) commute beyond its boundaries, often to many distant employment centres, reflecting their strong offer and the high level of skills in the District.
- 2.13** House prices in Uttlesford are significantly above both the Essex and the national

averages and have increased by 21% since 2011. The average house price in Uttlesford is £355,000 (Quarter 3, 2016). The average gross annual earnings in the District in 2016 ~~are indicated as being~~ were £36,274. This means that the average house price is about 10 times higher than the average earnings. There are about 876 households on the housing waiting list in the District. This situation is affected by the proximity to London and commuting patterns. Uttlesford lies within the West Essex and East Hertfordshire Housing Market Area. Whilst it is also part of two other sub-market housing areas - the northern part of the District lies within the Cambridge sub-market area and the south eastern edge of the District is within the Chelmsford sub-market area - the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) 2015 concluded that this represents the most appropriate 'best fit' for Uttlesford.

- 2.14** There is a clear link between social deprivation, economic conditions and poor health. As a District, Uttlesford has very low levels of social deprivation compared to most areas. Compared to Essex as a whole, residents of Uttlesford are more likely to be in managerial and professional occupations, own their own homes and are less likely to be in receipt of means-tested benefits. Despite the relatively affluent position of many in the District there are pockets of deprivation as a result of rural isolation and lack of access to services and facilities, particularly for the elderly.
- 2.15** Due to the rural nature of the District, car ownership levels are high and public transport is limited. Travel to work is heavily car based at 71% of trips, with journeys by train and by foot around 10% each. Levels of cycling and bus journey are negligible. Carbon dioxide emissions in the District are relatively high compared to other Districts in Essex. Road transport is a major contributor to this and it is exacerbated by the presence of the M11 motorway in the area. The District has a limited transport network with the best infrastructure along the M11 and A120 corridors and rail links to London and Cambridge. Transport connections in the District are focused on the M11, A120 and train stations on its western and southern edges. The M11 J8 interchange is a key junction in the District providing access to London Stansted Airport and the M11 and A120 transport corridors. The B184 forms an important north/ south spine for the District connecting its two largest settlements. In the rest of the District the highway network and transport connections in general are very limited. Consequently, accessibility to services and facilities is an issue across the District as a whole with just over one third of residents being within 15 minutes of an employment or retail site and 50% being within 15 minutes of a GP. Whilst over 80% of the population live within 30 minutes of a primary school, only 60% live within 30 minutes of a secondary school.
- 2.16** Saffron Walden has an historic street pattern and a one way system for some of its main roads. In May 2012 the District Council declared an ~~Area~~Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) to include major road junctions in Saffron Walden based on the annual mean for nitrogen dioxide not being met at the Debden Road/ London Road junction and the Thaxted Road/ East Street junction. Central Saffron Walden continues to be designated as an AQMA.
- 2.17** It is clear from this spatial portrait of Uttlesford District that there is a need to focus new development in locations where there are opportunities to reduce travel between homes, jobs and services and facilities and where there are alternatives to using the car. A strategy based on these principles will reduce the overall environmental impact whilst helping to meet local housing and employment needs.

The Spatial Vision

2.18 The Spatial Vision is a vision of where we want to be. Our vision for Uttlesford is working together for the well-being of our community and to protect and enhance the unique character of the District.

The Spatial Vision

By 2033, Uttlesford will continue to be one of the most desirable places to live and work in the UK.

Uttlesford will be a place where residents choose to live, where communities thrive, are healthy and safe, jobs and services are well connected, places have character and communities create and feel a 'pride of place'. A district of communities where the quality of life is high will be achieved by harnessing the benefits of new smart technology and promoting a healthy, safe and secure environment, with well-designed new development, sufficient housing and jobs with a good range of facilities.

The diversity and quality of Uttlesford's countryside and natural environment will be safeguarded and the historic environment conserved and enhanced. There will be better access to the countryside and green spaces for local communities which will improve people's quality of life and health. The challenges presented by climate change will have been embraced, with new development being located and designed to minimise resource and energy use and reduce the risk of flooding.

New development will be focused on the towns and larger villages with three new garden communities being built within the District. West of Braintree – jointly planned with Braintree District Council; Easton Park, and North Uttlesford Garden Communities. These new garden communities will be exemplars of 21st Century living providing well designed homes, high quality employment, services and facilities to meet the needs of residents and businesses. The new communities will be designed to support a high quality of life for all and create healthy, safe and vibrant places for living and working.

New housing will have responded to local needs with a range of different types, sizes and tenures of houses with a significant proportion being affordable. Housing will be of high quality, with excellent accessibility and well designed for whole life living, ensuring that the distinctive character of the District's towns and villages will be maintained and enhanced. This will have been supported by extensive community engagement and the production of Neighbourhood Plans.

The District will continue to thrive as a successful balanced local economy. The vitality and viability of the towns and villages will be maintained and enhanced and they will be safe, clean and attractive places. Facilities will allow new businesses to thrive, especially in the research and development sectors, and in the tourism sector. London Stansted Airport will form a pivotal part of the highly successful London Stansted Cambridge Corridor; the environmental impact of London Stansted Airport will be effectively managed.

Necessary infrastructure—and, community facilities and services will be in place to support growth. High-speed reliable broadband will be accessible for all homes and businesses.

There will be convenient, comfortable, safe and affordable environmentally sustainable alternatives to the use of the car, with improvements to strategic transport routes providing fast and reliable connections to London, London Stansted Airport, Cambridge and beyond.

Spatial Objectives

2.19 To ensure our vision is achieved, the following ten Spatial Objectives have been identified and provide specific direction to the policies of the Local Plan. These objectives are grouped under three themes which align with the Uttlesford District Council Corporate Plan ~~2017-2018-2021-2022~~:

Theme 1 – Promote Thriving, Safe and Healthy Communities

Objective 1a – Meeting the Need for New Homes

To deliver housing for Uttlesford ~~District~~ and to make sure that the housing being provided creates balanced communities by:

- Delivering sustainable, safe, attractive and healthy places to live while meeting local housing needs in terms of type and tenure including affordable housing and housing for people with specific accommodation needs.

Objective 1b – Protecting and Supporting Rural Communities

To protect and support the village and rural communities beyond the market towns to ensure they thrive and remain vital by:

- Supporting rural diversification and rural employment opportunities including those related to agriculture, horticulture and forestry.

Objective 1c – Thriving Safe Communities

To reduce the need to travel, shorten travel distances and make sustainable travel a priority by:

- Locating development so that the use of sustainable travel modes such as public transport, cycling and walking can be maximised whilst recognising the continuing role that the car has in meeting transport and accessibility needs in the rural area; and
- Facilitating the provision of sustainable smart travel solutions.

Objective 1d – Infrastructure

To protect and enhance existing local services by:

- Ensuring that new and enhanced infrastructure is provided in a timely and sustainable manner to enable the needs of people and business to be met in relation to social, physical and green infrastructure including education, health, open space, sport and cultural facilities.

Objective 1e – High Quality Design

To achieve high quality design throughout ~~the~~ Uttlesford District that takes account of local character and heritage and provides a safe, healthy and attractive place for residents, visitors and businesses. This objective will be achieved by:

- Ensuring high quality design solutions, promoting best practice and celebrating success;
- Ensuring appropriate design and application of smart technology solutions; and
- Involving citizens in effective consultation.

Theme 2 – Support Sustainable Business Growth

Objective 2a – Enabling Growth and Investment

To strengthen the local economy by:

- Enabling the growth of existing and new employers through the provision of suitable land and premises in sustainable locations to meet the anticipated needs and aspirations of businesses including providing opportunities for employment growth related to London Stansted Airport.

Objective 2b – Supporting the Market Towns

To support and enhance the role of Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow as important retail and service centres by:

- Supporting the provision of a wide range of services and facilities for ~~the~~ Uttlesford District whilst conserving and enhancing the historic character of the town centres.

Objective 2c – London Stansted Airport

To accommodate development by:

- Utilising the permitted capacity of the existing runway and provide for the maximum number of connecting journeys by air passengers and workers to be made by public transport; and
- Ensuring that appropriate surface access infrastructure and service capacity will be provided without impacting on capacity to meet the demands of other network users, and enabling local residents to access its rail bus and coach services.

Theme 3 – Protect and Enhance Heritage and Character

Objective 3a – Safeguarding Uttlesford's Distinctive Character and Environment

To conserve and enhance the locally distinctive and historic character of Uttlesford by:

- Conserving and enhancing the market towns and rural settlements and their settings

within Uttlesford and retaining the separation between settlements;

- Conserving and enhancing the natural environment and varied landscape character, reflecting the ecological and landscape sensitivity of the District;
- Conserving and enhancing the District's heritage assets and their settings;
- Maintaining and protecting the Metropolitan Green Belt by only allowing inappropriate development in very special circumstances in accordance with government advice;
- Conserving high grade soils; and
- Ensuring that growth is accommodated in ways that reflect the character of the District by promoting appropriate spatial patterns of development.

Objective 3b – Climate Change and Use of Resources

To minimise demand for resources and mitigate and adapt to climate change by:

- Promoting sustainable design and construction in all development; Encouraging renewable energy production in appropriate locations;
- Maintaining or improving water quality throughout the district;
- Ensuring development is located and designed to be resilient to future climate change and the risk of flooding; and
- Ensuring new development promotes the use of sustainable travel.

2.20 The next section sets out the Spatial Strategy and gives the scale and distribution of development across the District.