

Saffron Walden Area Parish Meeting Held on Monday 20 June 2022, 7pm at Wendens Ambo Village Hall

Present: Saffron Walden Town Council, Chrishall Parish Council, Littlebury Parish Council and Wendens Ambo Parish Council

Officers in attendance: Peter Holt and Sue Hayden

1 Welcome and introductions

Peter Holt welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the reason these meetings were taken place in County areas.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Minutes from the previous meeting held on Zoom on 23 March, to which all Parish Councils were invited, were made available at the meeting.

3 Local Plan

Peter Holt said that it was recognised that it was in the best interests of everyone to have an adopted Local Plan, without one the titled balance favoured the applicant. This was the third attempted so it needed to be right.

The Government had set Uttlesford's target at just over 14,000 houses which equated to around 700 over a 20-year period, built in equal slices over that time. He said we needed to learn lessons from the last failed plans. It needed to be evidence based and not politically led. It was recognised that some development failed, so an additional 20% needed to be identified.

Mr Holt had recently sent out the timetable to Town and Parish Councils which showed key milestones. It was expected that once it was submitted to the inspector a decision would be made within 12 months. It would then go to Full Council for adoption.

Mr Holt said that he was aware that he had not stuck to the original timetable, this had been his decision in part because he didn't feel the Plan was put together sufficiently. Also, another site had come forward after the call for sites, which better

met some of the objectives. Even after the call for sites had finished it was good practice to continue dialogue with landowners to see if any situations changed. With the addition of this new site, which may deliver a large settlement, and in turn could mean sites further down the list may fall from the matrix.

The new Director of Planning was starting next week, and his first four weeks would be looking at the timetable and seeing if it were achievable. Mr Holt said they would write again to the Town and Parish Councils in the next 5 – 6 weeks with any amendments to the timetable, however, he did not anticipate it would change too much.

- Q The last Plan had over relied on three garden communities which delivered towards the end of the 20 years. Developers only build at a rate they can sell and most delay starting until they had sold enough properties. Mr Holt said there would not be three large developments as this was, in part, what had been turned down – with smaller developments it caused a pressure on villages as it does not add any infrastructure. Mr Holt agreed saying they Uttlesford already had a historic infrastructure deficit of utilities, schools, GP surgeries.
- Q Are the Planning Inspectors chosen from the local Area? – Don't think so it is just the luck of the draw who we get.
- Q In the previous failed Plan there were a lot of good policies, could these be adopted? The Local Plan would have more policies and hopefully of higher quality.
- Q Given the delay with the Local Plan would you consider diverting resources to developing Neighbourhood Plans? – Mr Holt said unfortunately the Council does not have a lot of unused resources for this.
- Q Why are Neighbourhood Plans valuable? Are they worth the time and effort it takes to produce them? They are expensive to produce and within six months of them being completed they already need updating. Mr Holt suggest that at a future meeting Towns and Parishes who had already had their NHP adopted could do a presentation, this was welcomed.
- Q With a large development, say 2,000 to 3,000 houses what facilities could you expect? Mr Holt said there was a gearing for primary schools, but it was in the region of 5,000 houses for a new secondary school. The figures for new GP practices are more complex. With the addition of 17,000 plus 20% new houses in the district it would equate to an increase of 50% in the population of Uttlesford.

- Q Section 106 Agreements always seemed to fall short. GP surgeries can be built but they need to be run. Doctors tend to be freelanced and work part time as they carry out private work.
- Q If we have a new town, we need the secondary school built before housing. How are you going to ensure developer fulfil their obligations? Mr Holt said with a Local Plan the Council would have a greater say.
- Q Enforcement at UDC was not working effectively enough, developers were getting away with lots. Mr Holt said that it was recognised that Enforcement needed more resources and to do it better.
- Q Planning need to look at nature of development and physical layout, look at Great Chesterford the two developments were stand alone with no services on the edge of the village with a busy road to cross to get to the local primary school.

The following items were added by Saffron Walden Town Council

4 **Shared Prosperity Fund**

Mrs Courtney said there was a stake holders meeting which Town and Parish Councils had not invited to. She said they had been informed that the district is getting one million pounds through this scheme, however, projects needed to be with Linda Howells by 1 July. Mr Holt explained that under the fund there were 41 headings, at the stakeholder's event, which he said he should have invited town and parishes to attend and apologised for not doing so, had agreed on 6 to 8 headings which had been e-mailed out. However, if other projects came up under the other headings these could be put forward. By 1 August we needed to have our priorities ready with them adding up to million pounds.

- Q How will the schemes be prioritised? Not sure, it depends on what comes forward.
- Q One scheme had been looking at high tech jobs for young people – Mrs Holloway said there was a real shortage of trade people locally rather than high tech jobs. Mr Holt agreed that there was no chain supply in electric car chargers or air source heating.

5 **Planning update on designation**

UDC were in special measures as the percentage overturned at appeal was too high. Any development with over 10 houses can now choose if they use UDC or go straight to the Planning Inspector. Only two developers had gone directly to the Planning Inspectors, so this had not had as big an impact as anticipated. Mr Holt said he knew from the peer review the issues and had been working through the action plan and improving services. He said that designation was on a rolling two years, so already knew we are above 10% for the next period therefore, likely to remain in special measure for at least two years.

Q Are you still in short staffed in planning? Yes.

Mr Holt said that he was aware there was mixed views on UDC using Place Services for its conservation areas. Although he wanted someone with local knowledge, having a small team has a single point of failure. Could look at permanent staff and using Place Services for pinch point.

6 **Committee Process**

Mrs Courtney said that recent changes to reports going to committees had a knock-on effect. Mr Holt apologised for these unintentional consequences. He said that he wanted reports to be more robust and go through due process for consistency.

7 **The UK Government's Nationality and Borders Bill**

SWTC had written to Priti Patel regarding the unfair treatment of refugees under this Bill. Miss Hayden agreed to send this round to other Town and Parish Council and ask them to contact Mrs Courtney if they wished to raise a joint concern.