

Write to Saffron Reporter, 54 High Street, Saffron Walden, Essex CB10 1EE or e-mail editor@saffronwalden-reporter.co.uk

We need credible plan

I NOTE with interest the letter from Councillors Ketteridge and Rolfe, defending the consultation over housing and the Draft Local Plan.

In it, they state that an inspector will expect a plan that is credible – in numbers, profile and community development. And yet in the same letter they state that ‘some details are only explicit in a planning application.’ On the information we’ve been given so far, it seems to me that they are abdicating their role as planners. Unless we are provided with details of how the proposed new housing will be integrated into our community the plan will certainly not be credible.

We need to know answers to our questions about how the extra traffic will be accommodated, which schools will be enlarged, how the health service will cope, and whether there is adequate capacity in the water supply and sewage treatment plants. These are not matters that will wait for the developer!

Local plans developed elsewhere in the country have made good transport links the fundamental criteria for development. In Hertfordshire, the planners assessed a number of factors and found transport to be more important than any other factor in deciding on a sustainable Local Plan.

If we cannot persuade the Government that we don’t need thousands of houses to meet our local needs, then we should at least make an attempt to integrate them properly into our communities.

Mike Hibbs

Saffron Walden Town Councillor

It’s a free-for-all

AS leader of the opposition Liberal Democrat group on Uttlesford District Council, I want to comment on recent letters relating to the Conservative administration’s proposed Local Plan.

Serious problems have arisen because the council’s Conservative cabinet were forced to put this plan together in a hurry because they have had to abandon their proposed Option 4 for a new town in Elsenham. This option was introduced without consultation, officer support nor expert reports.

Consequently, a number of insurmountable problems such as transport issues and a lack of other infrastructure such as water supply and drainage, together with sustained opposition from residents and the Lib Dems, forced the Conservatives to back down on Elsenham, a plan which evidence has shown is simply not sensible or deliverable. If the Lib Dems had been in control of the council, we would have embarked on a staged, considered and transparent consultation process with communities to formulate a plan based on maximum consensus. We would have taken proper account of transport concerns and made evidence-based decisions.

The council’s ruling Conservatives have not been able to follow this path because of the amount of time wasted stubbornly defending the failed Option 4. This has resulted in a failure to work with communities to deliver an evidence-based plan over the past five years and has now left Uttlesford residents on the wrong end of a planning

‘free-for-all’.

**Cllr David Morson
Leader of Uttlesford Liberal Democrats**

UDC needs a clean-up

THE public disapproves of corporate fat cats in banks and evasive politicians at all levels of government. Their secretive culture is not acceptable. Uttlesford’s planning controversy is a local example of organisations acting outside expected standards.

In Stansted we have just witnessed an example of planning at its worst. People don’t believe what they are being told; nor do I. The seriousness of this situation for the council cannot be underestimated.

Since September 2007, when the council was bounced by politics into adopting a new-town strategy for future housing, the council has been living with deception. The decision to adopt a new town at Elsenham/Henham was misguided. The responsible councillors now seem to be trying to switch horses without losing face.

Another false thread was the claim by at least one senior councillor that the need for extra homes was no more than a creation of the last government; that with a change of government the need would evaporate.

They even fought elections on this claim.

That is, until we got a new, coalition government that also told the truth like the last one: for many years far too few homes have been built.

Instead of coming clean with the public, Uttlesford began a clandestine exercise. A year ago the council began

behind the scenes to encourage some specially selected landowners to submit premature planning applications to plug the second hole they had created by their dithering – a short-term supply of housing land.

In Stansted the district council enticed one owner of employment land on Cambridge Road to apply to build what the developer called “an exclusive enclave” of homes. In so doing, Uttlesford threatened the future vitality of our town centre. It actually destroyed jobs. Despite desperate attempts by the “planning establishment” to get quick approval for this proposal, the council’s own planning committee twice in the two months rightly threw out the application.

Few of us knew what had been going on behind the scenes. No one at Uttlesford told the public during two consultations this year that some sites had already been given at least an amber light.

I don’t know how the latest set of proposals for building sites across the district was derived. I was even threatened with disciplinary action for speaking out about this lack of transparency. The culture at Uttlesford is rooted in secrecy and authoritarianism.

Uttlesford should now be honest and open about what has been going on; admit its mistakes; rebuild trust with the people whom they are supposed to represent. Start an evidence-based approach to planning.

Only by taking the residents of Uttlesford with them can the council hope to produce a credible and trusted local plan for the next 15 years. Royal

Bank of Scotland said last week that it is cleaning-up its past. Will UDC follow RBS’s lead?

**Cllr Alan Dean
Member for Stansted South
Uttlesford District Council**

Policies opposed

FROM the front page of your edition of August 2 it seems pretty clear that Uttlesford District Council has failed in explaining adequately to residents the reasons for the policies behind its emerging Draft Local Plan.

Meanwhile, in answer to Mr Dadd’s letter in the same edition, may I remind him that on the Cambridge side of the border we conducted a very successful campaign to stop a proposed new town at Hanley Grange.

The Hanley Grange site is adjacent to the proposed Stumps Cross development and has just been ruled out of contention by South Cambridgeshire District Council as it moves toward its own Local Plan.

The Stumps Cross site has all the same drawbacks as Hanley Grange and is therefore likely to be vigorously opposed.

In addition, when I attended a roadshow last winter at Great Chesterford, the number of red stickers placed on a map of the proposed development showed that residents are almost unanimously opposed as well.

**Tim Stone
Cambridgeshire County Councillor
Duxford Division
Church Lane
Whittlesford**

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