

LETTERS

Have your say: Write to 54 High Street Saffron Walden CB10 1EE or email editor@dunmow-broadcast.co.uk



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4. Dunmow Town Team blazing a trail to success

Tweet of the week

"I followed Father Christmas on his sleigh last night.... No, I wasn't dreaming.... #Christmas #Dunmow"

@DiMauro

Stop arguing and work together

There needs to be a constructive relationship between the various housing campaign groups and the Conservatives at Uttlesford in order for us to have any success in getting the right result for the community overall.

The housing argument has descended into a row between various councillors and groups and as a result nothing is being achieved to actually get the housing numbers reduced and that's what we really need.

We need a body made up of district councillors, town and parish councillors, members of the campaign groups from the towns and villages around the district and our MP. This should also be done in partnership with neighbouring districts who are all going through this same painful process.

The sole objective of this group should be to lobby the relevant ministers to allow councils to both decide their own housing numbers/need and to be able to restart and review their local plans and without the threat of mass development going ahead as a result of the delay. The council has recently been criticised by local campaign groups and the Liberal Democrats (who already resigned from the housing debate some time ago at Uttlesford) for allocating the majority of the additional homes to a single site in Elsenham. This is something many of the same people had previously been supportive of (in fact a much larger settlement).

We need to stop arguing over the sites and the plan and start working together constructively to get the numbers reduced to levels we believe will be sustainable for Uttlesford.

If these homes weren't allocated to a single site in Elsenham, they will go to the bigger settlements such as Saffron Walden. Presently, simply saying "no" to new housing is not an option for any of us.

Cllr David-James Sadler
Uttlesford District Councillor

Frailty and futility of the Local Plan

As a parent and having previously taught in schools that supported significant numbers of families in need, I've become very interested in the debate on appropriate housing provision in the town.

I am concerned that those families in housing need will get lost in the political arguments for and against mass development as a whole.

UDC has constantly referred to the number of 1,600 on the housing waiting lists in Uttlesford as a reason to green light more housing as a whole, when the truth is that there are half the number.

The actual figure on the list is 754 families in band A-D, i.e. those who are not adequately housed, and of those, 638 have an Uttlesford connection. UDC hasn't provided the details of those specific settlements that are most in need, which is surely essential to make sure that we build the right houses in the right places!

Not having a plan is Lib Dems' best policy

I note the recent suggestion of a local Liberal Democrat that I should intervene to make Uttlesford District Council think again about its housing proposals (*Reporter*, page 3 Nov 28).

It strikes me that the council has been thinking about this issue non-stop for the last eight years, first under Lib Dem control and more recently with Conservative leadership. Funny thing, but I don't remember the Lib Dems getting so far as having a finalised plan which we could all stand back and applaud for its sensitivity and far-sightedness.

Agreeing on a plan is, of course, when the trouble begins. As soon as people see their village or their town being allocated more houses than they feel they want they – quite understandably – resist. That is where the Lib Dems come in. The affected community will quickly discover that the Lib Dems are on their side.

Maybe the council after consultation has a change of heart and the finger then points in another direction. With a crunching of gears and a squeal of brakes the Lib Dem protest wagon will roll up to make common cause. Not having a plan is undoubtedly the Lib Dems' best policy. No-one



need be offended. They become everyone's sympathetic friend. Stick with condemning Plan A whatever Plan A happens to be. Don't be so foolish as to offer a Plan B, because that would actually mean having to say where 4,000, 6,000, 8,000 or 10,000 houses should be put. That might just prove controversial. Perhaps I am being a bit unfair. In reality I have to admit that the Lib Dems do have an alternative plan. You see, it's the next plan, the one

just round the corner, the one that 'thinking again' will produce. How blind we all are not to recognise it. After all it is just a matter of going back to the drawing board.

Before long it will be staring you in the face. Strange though that the Lib Dems have given us no hint as to what shape, let alone content, it might have. One wonders how long they can hide.

I tried in 2008 to help the council by holding an informal meeting of parish and town councils. All bar two were represented. On a private and non-committed basis the largest number of voluntary bids for new housing reached around 2,100. This is way below estimated need for the next 20 years.

No amount of thinking again can reduce the serious nature of the decision that the council has to take. In the meantime planning applications whether in conformity or conflict with the draft local plan will have to be processed.

It really would help if the Lib Dems would tell young people who aspire to own or rent a home in the district where they may expect to find one. A spoonful of bi-partisanship might help lasting decisions to be made.

Sir Alan Haselhurst MP
Saffron Walden constituency

This all proves both the frailty and the futility of the Local Plan – affordable housing that supports our local families that are most in need, must be strategically targeted to the areas that specifically require it. Furthermore, I am disappointed that UDC has appeared to mislead residents with incorrect numbers and worse still, appear to be using housing need as a tool for political leverage in order to justify generic mass development.

Now is the time to make sure that, as a community, we have representatives that are transparent with all the information, that support the actual housing needs of local families and have the strength to demand the best deal possible from developers and landowners.

Jen Beaton
Families spokesperson
WeAreResidents.org

Pledging a lot but delivering nothing

I was interested to read the letter from John Lodge in your paper last week (*'They don't know where to put houses'*).

During his county council election campaign earlier this year, Mr Lodge pledged to "take the party politics out of local politics". He is now talking about an alternative administration.

Dress it up how you like but that sounds like WeAreResidents which in itself is a "party". The problem being that it is a single issue party that appears oblivious to other key services and activities essential to a robust community.

Mr Lodge has pledged a lot but delivered nothing. Whatever

happened to the temporary Thaxted Road traffic light rebate that he promised? Road surfaces are already deteriorating in and around Saffron Walden and winter has barely started.

Worse than that, Mr Lodge is trying to claim credit for projects that were underway long before he got involved, his meddling at County Hall is now working against the Saffron Walden area.

And what of planning? Build the houses in Elsenham said Mr Lodge during his campaign and when a proposal is put forward he calls it "omnishambles". The new organisation, UUR, that Mr Lodge's WAR party is affiliated to, oppose house building everywhere which is a popular political slogan but leaves Uttlesford exposed to unlimited, unwanted development on a calamitous scale.

Paul Draper
Bury Water Lane
Newport

Help us to help those on their own

If you're feeling lonely, you're not alone. Independent Age is here to help.

With the festive season upon us, it's time to start buying presents for friends and family, decorate the tree, and plan that all important Christmas day with loved ones. But in the excitement, it's all too easy to forget those older people who will be home alone this Christmas.

As we get older, life throws many things our way which can make us feel less connected and lonely. We may start to lose our circle of friends or our life partner, or have

family far away who have busy lives. Or perhaps mobility problems mean we simply can't get out and about as much as we would like.

If this sounds familiar, it may help to know you're not alone. Around a million older people in the UK are chronically lonely, and nearly half of older people throughout the country consider the telly to be their best friend. It shouldn't be this way, and we aim to change this.

Independent Age is a growing charity which empowers older people across the UK and Ireland through the 'A B C' of advice, befriending and campaigning. Supported by our invaluable network of around 1,500 volunteers we are able to provide face-to-face befriending to those who would like it. Our volunteers are carefully selected and go through all the checks you would expect. We try to match our volunteers to the person they visit so it's a source of satisfaction, enjoyment and laughter for both. And our volunteers can provide visits as often and for as long as they are needed.

If you feel uncomfortable with the idea of someone visiting your home, we also offer friendship on the phone, or you may like to join one of our telephone discussion groups. We are currently trying to extend our help to people living in and around the area so if you, or someone you know, could use a friendly face, or a listening ear, then get in touch. For information on receiving a volunteer or volunteering opportunities, contact me on 020 8502 1082 or jacqui.ward@independentage.org

Jacqui Ward
Area manager
Independent Age