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## Councillor defects to residents' campaign Protest group to take on Tories

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A new political group is emerging to fight for control of Uttlesford District Council – and a former Conservative councillor is among those leading the charge after turning his back on the “toxic” Tories.

In a move echoing that of Clacton MP Douglas Carswell, who defected from the Conservatives to UKIP, Councillor Keith Mackman has sworn his allegiance to a new group which has emerged from protest organisation WeAreResidents.org.

And he expects other councillors will be quick to follow.

Speaking exclusively to the Reporter, Cllr Mackman, pictured, said: “The Conservative brand in the local area is toxic and I would try to persuade people to vote for me, regardless of any party I represent.

“The colour of my rosette is irrelevant. I would rather be the single member of a group whose views I respect and endorse than be part of the current Conservative group.”

The Dunmow South representative was suspended from Uttlesford's Conservative group for six months earlier this year after he publicly disagreed with a number of decisions



made by the party.

Now he says those issues, which include his opposition to the emerging Local Plan, have contributed to his decision to join a residents-backed political group.

He said: “I have not left the group, the group has left me and I do not think I will be the only one.

“I am disappointed it has come to this but I am relieved I can do what I think is right.

“My hope for next May is to be part of a group that forms part of a coalition and repairs the damage brought to the district over the past couple of years.”

His new group, which is expected to be officially launched next week, will set out to act on behalf of the residents in Uttlesford.

Chairman of WeAreResidents.org, Dan Starr, said he was excited to welcome Cllr Mackman on board.

He said: “Cllr Mackman is independently-minded and has shown himself to be an outstanding advocate for his constituents and residents across Uttlesford.

“He has worked diligently on the planning committee to hold people to account and even supported residents' causes in the High Court.

“The current Tory-controlled UDC have trampled all over residents' wishes as they've incompetently forced through national party policies that have traded our long-term legacy and quality of life for short-term, cash-grabbing and political gain.

“The current national political agenda shows that people are sick of being ignored and they demand to be heard. In Uttlesford, that means electing non-party-political candidates in 2015. We look forward to being able to announce more residents' candidates in due course.”

The leader of UDC, Cllr Howard Rolfe, said: “Cllr Mackman has made his decision. It's a bit like what we have seen with UKIP, people chose to go to another party, and that is their choice.”

He added: “Over the years he has been a good Conservative supporter.”



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