## Uttlesford Local Plan (Issues and Options) 2020-2021

## First Consultation: Theme 6 Biodiversity February 2021, additional comments 14 May 2021

### Introduction

The Community Stakeholder Forum discussed the theme on Wednesday 10 February and the theme was then open for comment.

Comments received by Wednesday 10 March are summarised below and common themes are shown in the diagram.

These comments will be presented back to the Community Stakeholder Forum on 24th March and Local Plan Leadership Group on a date to be confirmed.

Comments received after 10 March up to the close of consultation on 21 April 2021 will be brought together in a document summarising comments from all nine themes, the Council's response and how the issues raised in the comments will be reflected in the Draft Local Plan.

Between 10 February and 10 March 2021, 20 people, WildThaxted, a major developer's representative and a Parish Council responded to the theme.

The general feel for topic can be expressed in one respondent's quote from the Dasgupta Review : *"Our economies, livelihoods and well-being all depend on our most precious asset: Nature" such that we need to "Change our measures of economic success to guide us on a more sustainable path".*

### What we have been told so far

The following is a summary of what people said about how we can create and enhance natural assets and biodiversity across the district.

To read all the representations in full please go to the Consultation Portal.

# What you have told us so far about…

## Biodiversity – principal topics

1) Environmental legislation
2) Developer obligations: Biodiversity targets and net value enhancement
3) Local Plan policy and site designations
4) Restoring and enhancing biodiversity
5) Road verges
6) Stewardship and agricultural land practice
7) Access to Open Space and Green Infrastructure

8) Creation of Parkland
9) Flooding and Water Control
10) Tree Planting
11) Engaging Farmers and Landowners
12) Parish Councils and Neighbourhood Plans
13) Education, Advice, Support Services
14) Solar farms
15) Light pollution

# Biodiversity: What you have told us so far

UTTLESFORD LOCAL PLAN
Towards Net Zero Carbon

## 1 The value of biodiversity to our quality of life

**How can we protect and improve our green and natural spaces?**

Local plan policy designations of valued and protected areas; negotiate with developers over enhancing areas, creating networks using existing valued places; work with parish councils on biodiversity action plans

## 2 The role of biodiversity in addressing climate change

**How can careful land management of the countryside and in villages and towns encourage biodiversity?**

Protection of soils and extensive tree planting to help capture carbon; creation of multi-functional areas that incorporate biodiversity like SUDs; require stewardship agreements for new developments; negotiate with farmers over land management balance with nature

## 3 Thinking strategically across the district and beyond, as well as local initiatives

**Which sites should be protected? And how can we join up nature sites?**

Strategic sites e.g. Hatfield Forest, Easton Park and local sites as in Elsenham, Thaxted. Undertake district –wide survey to plot areas of biodiversity value and quality. Identify potential corridors and networks through nature recovery networks and Plans working with expert agencies and the community, for implementation through the development process

## 4 How we can use the Local Plan to manage, protect, enhance our natural assets

**How should the Local Plan require provision for nature in new development proposals?**

Developers to provide climate change and biodiversity action plans, enforceable through plan policy with long-term endowment to a community land management or stewardship organisation; areas to be identified through survey and community input over site/ecology/habitat details and designated for protection or enhancement; for new larger areas such as creation of parks, biodiversity with tree planting and water management must be co-objectives with public access required by sec106.

# Biodiversity and Our Natural Assets

UTTLESFORD LOCAL PLAN
Towards Net Zero Carbon

## Supporting ecosystems

**Where is the use and management of land and water creating pressure and how should we address it?**

Pressure is deriving from public access to insufficient open space around settlements and Hatfield Forest; and in the north because of the frailty of the ecosystem in river valley areas especially Upper Cam. Development should be away from these areas, safeguard protected zones and create alternative public park.

## Woodland creation and tree planting

**How can we encourage extensive tree planting in the district? Where is it best located. Should it be encouraged in gardens, streets, parks?**

Tree planting to be required of developers with correct species and location, both along streets and in SUDs or open areas; local community initiatives to green up verges and villages


1 Oxlip 2 Crested Cow-wheat 3 Sulphur Clover 4 Lesser Calamint

## Enhanced wildlife and nature networks on agricultural land

**How can we encourage a net gain in biodiversity whilst protecting agriculture?**

Establish land owner and farmer agreements over land management practices with controlled new public access and regular monitoring; small temporary solar farms to increase viability of farm holdings but must include rich underplanting to encourage wildlife

## Increasing biodiversity by introducing more species

**How can we create and enhance natural assets and biodiversity across the district?**

Undertake District-wide/cross-border survey to prepare biodiversity strategy for places and linkages of value and potential; secure developer funding or input to these proposals; work locally through neighbourhood plans and parish councils on local designations and funding opportunities.

**1) Environmental legislation**

The excellent presentation by Andrew Lovett highlighted key issues in the context of pending changes in legislation before the local plan is finalised:

- NPPF and the Environment Bill,
- Changing political scene e.g. Prime Minister's 10 Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution (notably Protecting our Natural Environment).
- Environment Bill and Local Nature Recovery Strategies/Environmental Land Management Scheme

**2) Developer Obligations: Biodiversity targets and net value enhancement**

- Supportive of the role that biodiversity has in reducing the environmental impact of developments and mitigating climate change, with integration of green spaces, nature, and wildlife into new developments,

- Slow down the approval of new developments to protect land; and insist that large scale development schemes include green areas, paths for walking and reduce concrete over green spaces

- The best way to maintain biodiversity is to restrict development to brownfield sites

- Encourage developers to regard biodiversity seriously not tokenistic e.g. allotment, benches, a few trees, with any grassed area treated as a contribution to "green space" even if it is unsuitable as natural habitat, therefore incentivise the provision of high quality green infrastructure, improve biodiversity and integrating properly green infrastructure including parks, playing fields, woodlands and gardens, sustainable drainage features and planting alongside roads and streets. Its multiple benefits include a strong sense of place, water management, reduce flood risk, and mitigate the overall impact of development and enhance biodiversity.

- Classify green space according to its biodiversity value in new planning applications with weighting attached to its quality

- Ecological reports must be prepared by truly independent experts and cover the total impact on soils, water sources, animals, and plants. Developers or their ecology consultants should be required to use the Biodiversity Net Gain Metric Calculator available via Natural England (published August 2020) or explain why it is inappropriate in their case.

- Developers should be required to match building acreage with woodland acreage, owned and managed by local communities

- Developers must give consideration of movement of wildlife and wildlife corridors, hedgehogs ('hedgehog highway' linking gardens with appropriately sized fencing holes.), shrews, birds etc which move between gardens; incorporate ponds for fishing, stocked with British species; tank rainwater run-off

- Require Developers to include more greenery in landscape proposals e.g. green walls, green roofs, hedges, double native tree cover with mandated policy on the amount of greenery so there is a net gain and extended to ALL development of whatever size

- Role of Master Planning to ensure connectivity between habitats, presence of existing natural resources with a presumption of protection made for them and clarity over definition of a "net gain" in biodiversity; biodiversity enhancement and net gain should be delivered in conjunction with development
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- Suggests developer contribution fund to enhance biodiversity e.g. use a carbon offset calculation and enhance to minimum 10%

- Devise accreditation scheme for developers to achieve BNG standards; Create BNG and 'habitat credit' areas for developers to contribute to

- Require developers to include biodiversity fully in Master Plans and integrate in new settlements; huge potential to achieve BNG working with developer where there is loss of relatively sterile arable land to potentially biodiversity-rich open space and habitat creation

**3) Local Plan policy and site designations**

- Supportive of Uttlesford's approach to create and enhance natural assets through strategic policies within the Local Plan, and as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework, to ensure environmental objectives are delivered to meet the needs of new and existing communities and future generations. Biodiversity is a key issue for the Local Plan.

- A multifunctional approach should be used by Uttlesford District Council towards biodiversity and green infrastructure to deliver enhanced biodiversity, nature improvements whilst also providing benefits to sustainable development e.g. SUDS pond for drainage, wildlife habitat and an attractive outlook and amenity space. Use planning policy to secure and mandate this multi-functional green space within and beyond development sites e.g. homes to be within 0.5 km of a quality green space.

- Strategy- There needs to be a team tasked at creating a proactive and restorative 'big plan' up front and in advance of development proposals, identifying all aspects of nature from hedgerows to overgrown alleyway, wasteland, existing corridors, hedgehog routes, frog crossings and deer crossways. This will also help to achieve a 10% net gain in biodiversity overall.

- Councils should adopt rewilding policies and identify suitable sites for increasing biodiversity

- The Local Plan must specify how biodiversity targets will be measured and differentiate between poor quality green space and high value habitats; encourage use of Essex Biodiversity Validation Checklist , updated in light of user feedback and changes to biodiversity legislation and policy; must establish rekaubke baselines

- Encourage small rural industries e.g. using coppiced timbers

- The Local Plan should identify new sites for nature reserves, parklands, and pathways that could form natural highways

- To preserve and protect as much of the existing environment as possible e.g. Hatfield Forest and ancient woodland, Chalky Meadow and Mosscotts Meadow in Thaxted following local community documentation surveys. Need proper management plan for Hatfield Forests

- BNG should be a firm local Plan policy and should be strengthened in supplementary guidance with wildlife site allocations; LPA to seek greater powers to enforce biodiversity targets

- Uttlesford has a paucity of designated wildlife sites, with nearest Essex Wildlife Trust Nature Discovery Centre 30 miles away from Thaxted, and no bird hide on any nature reserve site within the District. Identify sites of importance and designate them in the Local Plan with policies on sensitivity and capacity to absorb development.

- Well-connected to other green spaces and networks. By ensuring that landscape areas and green spaces connect to the existing network of green infrastructure elements (e.g. waterways and wildlife corridors) at a strategic and local level allows for a joined up and complementary approach to both nature and development.

- Stop building on farmland and Stop the expansion of Stansted

- Designate sites where biodiversity can be enhanced with tree planting, nest areas etc as part of the development; stewardship arrangements should be part of the planning requirements

- Develop Nature Recovery Networks
- Welcomes Call f or Green Sites too
- Prioritise brownfield development
- Review how to calculate ‘amenity’, what it comprises and means
- Importance of Local Plan to reflect and implement other national legislation
- Local Nature Recovery Strategy should be prepared
- Welcomes encouragement to include ponds as an excellent habitat for wildlife
- Should have policy on habitat connectivity
- if there is no available land for BNG on the development site then developers should contribute to or provided off-site BNG

**4) Restoring and enhancing biodiversity**

- Restore habitats for species once common in our areas e.g. suitable for Yellow Hammers, Hedgehogs and Great Crested Newts, and develop ecological corridors to join up existing spaces, allowing wildlife, pollinator friendly planting, vertebrates, small mammals and birds to move and expand their habitats, 500m wide and to include farmland and hedgerows.
- Establish new areas of woodland managed to provide income e.g. coppicing and contribute to carbon sequestration
- Plant wildflowers along verges and boundaries, and create meadows; protect Scarlet Malachite Beetle in Clavering
- Must protect and enhance Hatfield Forest and accommodate visitors and wildlife/trees, very important natural and amenity asset
- Developers should identify how to enhance biodiversity and include a plan for each site

- Geodiversity should be considered. It is an integral part of the natural environment (variety of rocks, fossils, minerals, landforms and soil, natural processes that shape the landscape). The importance of geodiversity as an integral part of nature conservation and the planning system is reflected in The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), and in legislation – Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 and Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Designate Local Geological Sites (LoGS), equivalent to Local Wildlife Sites

**5) Road verges**

- Cross-boundary working on nature with adjoining authorities e.g. major roads can be crossed by tunnels
- Wildflower planting on verges within Highways adopting appropriate management practices, as well as along private roads
- Broaden the protected verges initiative. ECC to formulate specific policies as to how they should manage their verges with a view to improving habitat quality
- Plantlife has been campaigning for the preservation of wildflowers on verges and Council could ask for volunteers
- Maintain verges with biodiversity as an objective

**6) Stewardship and (agricultural) land practice**

- Sustainable stewardship practices should be encouraged in respect of trees, hedgerows, field margins, wildlife cover, ponds.
- Farmland to adopt sustainable practices with high proportion of Natural Green Infrastructure, mandated through planning or government policy using best scientific research to advice.
- Developers should finance and set up experienced land management company with adequate funding and not expect the residents' management company to be responsible. Should be agreed pre-construction.
- Proper land maintenance essential to avoid failed systems with flooding on the site or neighbouring ones, damage to habitats.
- Keep as much undisturbed topsoil as possible, be seeded with appropriate wildflowers rather than turf and managed accordingly

- Protect the unique chalkland landscape and hills

- Key factor is land management and major concern around arable farming impact in biodiversity; encourage land management as part of development proposal

- Farmers should be helped to explore other methods such as permaculture

- Council should encourage more farmers' markets for local produce

**7) Access to Open Space and creation of Green Infrastructure**

- Shortage of open space in Uttlesford, (UDC Open Space Assessment Report, February 2019 and Essex Green Infrastructure Strategy of 2020), with heavy dependence on Hatfield Forest and hence advocate the preservation and restoration of Easton Park for the wellbeing of local communities

- Variable distribution of publicly open space with more Green Infrastructure in the south such as woodlands and grass than in the north with more agriculture, shown in the ANGST standard (Accessible Natural Greenspace).

- Public Rights of Way give poor access to GI for disabled and people with reduced ability to walk far (e.g. poorer, key or shift workers). So, in areas below the ANGST benchmark of 4, UDC should prioritise the development of a local park, with green spaces, flower meadows, and access to nature accessible for all to enjoy; importance of accessible greenspace

- Use cemeteries and courtyards for wildflower meadows, road edges, public land

- Enhance footpath access;  enhance green space quality and access.

**8) Creation of Parkland**

- Support the idea to create a park on the proposed Easton Park 'new town' site and in any case its restoration for the wellbeing of local communities.  It is an ancient medieval park, one of the largest in Essex with presumed 1939 planning agreement to protect it. Easton Park is encircled by ancient woodlands, High Wood, Stone Hall, The Lays, The Gardens of Easton Lodge and the Conservation Area

which together provide a wildlife habitat and open space with potential for the Essex Forest Initiative, The Queen's Green Canopy initiative to mark the Platinum Jubilee, and flagship for Uttlesford and Essex.

- Identifying land in the Local Plan for the creation of another public park in Uttlesford to relieve the pressure on Hatfield Forest.

- The Lawton Review stresses the need for 'more and bigger sites to be protected for nature conservation' as the most effective way to protect biodiversity but relatively few opportunities for larger sites.

- Create new open space for wellbeing and envelop the 15minute access principles

**9) Flooding and Water Control**

- Requirement for a proactive (not reactive) drainage and flood management plan in all new and existing developments to counter regular flooding of many roads and villages due to blocked drains. Likely to get worse because of weakening Gulf stream and stormier British winters.

- New developments to have Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) mandated in planning policy. Must be built exactly to design and maintained for the life of the development by an appropriate body clearly responsible, funded and committed (see (6) above)

- Depletion of the River Cam biodiversity because of pollution from sewage discharge by water companies (work done by CURAT, raising awareness of the continually reducing water levels in the upper River Cam chalk stream)
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- Consider rainwater and greywater use with inadequate water supply and pressure of more housing; water companies should be stricter and people educated over water as a scare resource; pressure of more housing on an inadequate water supply means rainwater and greywater use should be considered and used by developers

- Natural water management by storing water in woodland and flood plains to release a constant, significant flow e.g. alongside the railway when entering Newport from the south; should undertake a feasibility study by experts in suitable locations

- Porous hardstanding and grasscrete to permit water seepage and plant growth

- Safeguard aquifer with no further extraction

**10) Tree Planting and Hedgerows**

- All developments to include significant tree and hedge planting programmes and to ensure that their planting and ongoing management are properly enforced. Developers should be required to include a plan to enhance the biodiversity to include replacement X2 of any removed trees or hedges

- Should require a proper management plan and adequate resourcing to be made available to maintain tree planting

- Tree planting must be in the right places, with the right trees so as not to be detrimental to productive farmland. Impact of deer culling? Retain trees on development sites

- Engage Essex Forest Initiative to increase planting across sectors; woodland planting must include a management plan; help communities choose right tees

- Maintain distance from Ancient Woodland like Alsa Wood Elsenham and Hatfield Forest is under extreme pressure but still UDC allows development along its boundary; must protect ancient woodlands and encourage new tree planting

- UDC to explore using LIDAR tool as a project to map of trees and hedgerows as presented by the speaker. Necessary where developers might chop trees down prior to planning permission. Need, from a biodiversity (and Climate Emergency) viewpoint, to preserve mature trees which are proven to cleanse air of $CO_2$

- Encourage hedge layering to promote biodiversity, encourage skills and inhibit damaging hare coursing

- Hedges should be the boundaries on new developments (including schools) along with unmown areas and no pesticides, native and mature species, permitting wildlife corridors, all as a planning requirement

- explore using LIDAR to map Uttlesford trees and hedgerows, and then apply for TPOs to protect our mature large trees and hedgerows

**11) Engaging Farmers and Landowners**

- As custodians of land they must be supported and work in partnership if we are to hope to increase biodiversity because agricultural actions have a big impact on biodiversity such as 2m boundary strips.

- Need clarity on who owns green infrastructure in Uttlesford and whether it is publicly accessible. Footpaths are not always well signposted, and woodland is often kept private.

- The Plan should be led through the farming community to advance biodiversity and commercial viability, possibly with incentives; Major opportunity to work with farmers and landowners Master Plan in new settlements or large extensions

- ELMS will help to balance land management practice

- Fundamental importance of soil to biodiversity, sequestration, habitat for insects, butterflies, calculate in BNG, added to new gardens

- Campaign to encourage organic farming

- Assist with developing biodiversity enhancement plans to improve woodland and other habitats

**12) Parish Councils and Neighbourhood Plans**

- Neighbourhood Plans should include a register of natural assets and policies on protection and enhancement of local resources.

- Engagement role for local people and nature groups in maintaining and monitoring progress.

- Every Parish to have a biodiversity action plan and ensure they are executed. They would undertake a nature audit identifying important sites using local wildlife enthusiasts looking for opportunities to enhance, protect or amalgamate sites. Works could be undertaken as a part of a policy linked to s.106 obligations

- Reintroduce incentives for *'Town in Bloom'* activities encouraging pollinators

- Ref Made Neighbourhood Plan (https://www.felsted-pc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/Felsted-NP.pdf), which was a major project spanning several years

- Must take on board Neighbourhood Plan designations

- Great Dunmow Neighbourhood Plan identifies a wildlife corridor along the Chelmer Valley proposes inclusion of habitat enhancement measures including the reversion of arable land to grassland beneath, tree planting and hedgerow

**13) Education, Advice, Support Services**

- Engage with an organisation like Plantlife, (https://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk) or WildEast who is influential among farmers (https://www.wildeast.co.uk)

- Educate all residents and anyone working within UDC area on value of biodiversity, use campaigns, education, competitions; advice on green roofs, vertical planting, suitable trees etc ; increase awareness of value of biodiversity and importance of countryside access

- Annual wildlife garden competition

- all members of our communities must engage, work together, and agree courses of action

**14) Solar farms**

- Should only be allowed if they enhance biodiversity and treated as temporary solutions with solar panels designed to be removable in future; Consider impact on biodiversity and agriculture, and screen to reduce impact

- Solar farms and their competition with food production could be alleviated with perimeter trees and hedgerows, wildflower planting between panels to benefit insect diversification and bird life and reduce carbon emissions so long as the scheme is properly managed.

- Stop 'planting' solar panels on agricultural land but should be mandatory on all new housing and all commercial property.

**15) Light pollution**

- Reduce excessive light pollution by reducing the output of lamp standards; LEDs can be turned down with no detrimental effects on public safety

- Exclusion of all non-essential external lighting; ensure development does not add to light pollution

**COMMENTS MADE DURING COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDER EVENT 10TH FEBRUARY 2021**

- The approach to biodiversity through planning can appear to be anthropomorphic and relate to impact from Human perspectives e.g. access to the countryside and to green infrastructure, when humans are responsible for ecological destruction
- The Environment Bill will require biodiversity net gain (BNG) but this needs to be implemented, monitored, and managed to ensure the biodiversity quality is maintained.
- How to measure BNG – this is being researched by Government. The Environment Bill gives opportunity to creating a larger space at landscape scale. Can we nudge the require above the legally imposed 10% BNG?
- The quality and characteristics of soil are most important since it is the starting point for biodiversity. We should look at how to consider the soil in terms of improvement and protection; the BNG percentage gain required should address soil too. Developers should re-use topsoil and not sell it off.
- The role of soils in carbon sequestration should be acknowledged.
- Solar farms –a mixed response: adverse impact on landscape to the protection of soils and promotion of grassland management
- The role of insects should be acknowledged particularly flying insects.
- Roadside verges could be re-wilded.
- Planers should set a target to wild a percentage of cemeteries, say 25% of their area
- Must protect the chalk upland rivers and their water quality. Developers must not adversely impact the aquifer.
- Developers' ecological reports should be checked for local accuracy.
- People and biodiversity should be planned together and in harmony. Planning polices will offer significant opportunities, and for engaging of organisations such as wildlife trust, RSPB, National Trust
- Can we create recreation space and access to green infrastructure that also accommodates biodiversity?
- Ancient woodland should be protected as should individual trees. There is a mapping tool which can identify trees and hedgerows.
- Trees should be protected apart from tree preservation order and in Conservation Areas. The amenity value in a TPO should be assessed to include biodiversity value.
- Government is developing a metric to measure biodiversity net gain.
- Footpaths and open spaces can become overused, so it is important to plan for new ones, especially a large park. There is opportunity to connect footpaths as well as green infrastructure networks
- How can green infrastructure be scored to evaluate the quality of different elements?
- There is an opportunity for green skills to be encouraged in relation to the design, creation, and management of places with high biodiversity value.
- The impact, use and need for footpaths, green space and trees has been a common concern among forum meetings