

Uttlesford Local Plan (Issues and Options) 2020-2021

First Consultation: Theme 9 Creating new places and communities (March 2021)

Introduction

The Community Stakeholder Forum discussed the theme on Wednesday 24 March 2021 and the theme was then open for comment.

Between 24 March and 21 April 2021, 91 people and organisations responded to the theme.

What we have been told about the theme of Creating new places and communities

The following is a summary of what people said in response to the questions: What should new development look like, what should it contain and where should it be located?

To read all the representations in full, please go to the [Consultation Portal](#).

Note: Some representations include site-specific detail in support of a separate submission associated with the call for sites. Only higher level comments are included in this summary, with detailed justification for individual sites being considered as part of the site assessment process.

What you have told us about...

What should new development look like, what should it contain and where should it be located?



What it should look like...



- Rural design guidance required
- Large sites should have bespoke masterplanning and design codes
- Housing designs should be varied
- Densities should range from low in villages and rural areas, to high in towns
- Medium densities would allow for future growth
- Parking requirements should be increased so streets are not dominated by cars
- Materials are the priority

What it should contain...



- Any new communities should have services and infrastructure needed to be self-supporting
- Infrastructure should be provided first
- Green spaces and transport corridors
- Sustainable buildings and drainage
- Employment opportunities
- Community services and facilities
- Excellent walking and cycling routes
- Fast public transport to other places
- The district needs a new country park
- A mix of housing for all parts of the community

Where it should be located...



- Brownfield land should be prioritised
- Holistic new settlements applying 15-minute neighbourhood principles
- Sympathetic development within and adjacent existing settlements
- Village clusters e.g. VeloCity concept
- Make use of existing infrastructure
- Connected to public transport hubs
- Connections to Cambridge, science parks, Stansted Airport, Chelmsford and London
- Balanced across the district
- A mix of locations likely to be required
- Protection for countryside and green belt

What should new developments look like?

- New housing should be varied in appearance
- Development density should vary from high in the towns to low in villages and rural areas
- Minimum parking requirements should be increased to ensure streets on new developments are not dominated by cars
- Housing densities should be reduced to ensure designs are compatible with the villages and rural areas
- A rural design guide should be prepared for the district, to highlight traditional designs and layouts as well as describe how contemporary developments could be added sympathetically
- A medium density should be applied, with the possibility of growth in later years
- New settlements and settlement extensions should comprise carefully designed higher densities, to limit urban sprawl and pollution while still providing a high quality of life
- In terms of appearance, materials should be the priority
- While The Essex Design Guide provides a benchmark, each strategic housing site should have its own masterplanning principles, parameter plans and design codes

What should new developments contain?

- New communities need to be self-sufficient, including all key facilities, and should provide real benefits to the district e.g. through capturing land values to fund infrastructure.
- One way to link ideas on climate change, homes and biodiversity would be to build carbon-negative buildings in ‘woodland communities’.
- New communities should be compact and varied, incorporating the mix of land uses found within the district’s successful villages
- Facilities for recreational exercise should be within easy walking distance
- Easy access to doctor’s surgeries and shops should be provided, including parking within walking distance
- The 15-minute neighbourhood concept would work well in urban areas, while the VeloCity concept is likely to be unsustainable and unworkable
- Any new town must receive new/upgraded infrastructure early, including road improvements, GP surgery, schools, shops and parks
- There should be mix of size and cost of housing, supported by a renewed Council House building programme
- After analysing what housing is needed and where, a strategy should be adopted to provide affordable housing for existing communities
- Wherever new housing is proposed, infrastructure is important. The Council must improve on its collection and use of money secured through Section 106 agreements.
- Essential requirements for a new settlement include: mixed housing (e.g. first-time buyers, downsizers), landscaping, tree planting, wildlife corridors, flood risk (including surface runoff), water supply, green building technologies
- Key facilities (e.g. GP surgeries) should be provided by larger developers in their masterplans, rather than relying on incremental funding from Section 106 agreements
- New settlements should be self-sustaining and linked to existing transport infrastructure (which could be improved with funding), with around 3,000 homes, public space, a mix of housing and light industry
- Major developments should include employment provision and new homes should provide a home office area
- Community health and wellbeing should be put first
- New homes should mostly be modestly sized, with the potential to extend if needed

- Green corridors should provide easy walking and cycling between housing and a central retail hub
- Primary schools and housing should be co-located to encourage a sense of community
- External transport connections should be similar to the Cambridge Autonomous Metro
- Houses should be supplied with heat from area ground source heat pumps
- New places should incorporate many of the features covered in the previous themes: green homes, open spaces for recreation, varied housing, shopping and industrial areas
- Affordable housing should be particularly close to transport and schools, as they will tend to be occupied by younger couples
- Housing for older people should be close to shops and open spaces
- It is important to emulate the Garden City principles
- The district requires a new country park, as highlighted by the severe recent pressure on Hatfield Forest
- A viable public transport system is required, which is suited to a rural area e.g. on-demand buses
- Activities for young people, in addition to sport facilities, need to be provided
- Adoption of a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) should be explored at an early stage, to enable a broader range of development sizes (smaller developments made feasible in social infrastructure terms) and better integrate new and existing developments
- New, safe cycling routes should be formed to connect historic villages
- Green spaces should be provided, which are high quality and large enough for events to be planned
- As more jobs become automated and more people work from home, facilities for exercise and community activities should be prioritised
- Younger people should have the chance to either own or rent a property near family
- Developments should maximise solar power opportunities by incorporating roof-mounted panels
- Development should incorporate sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) to prevent surface water flooding issues
- Affordable housing should be provided on medium and large sites only
- Community sports facilities should be provided in accordance with the relatively up-to-date Playing Pitch Strategy and Indoor & Built Facilities Strategy
- Local recycling facilities are required

Where should new developments be located?

- The idea of ‘village clusters’ or even ‘town-village hybrid clusters’ is worth exploring but would require detailed travel analysis and a commitment by the Council to join up the fragmented land ownerships which will likely result from the call for sites.
- If commuting behaviours persist, new communities should be located close to transport hubs or the employment destinations in Cambridgeshire and East Hertfordshire. Expensive properties could be built close to commuter routes, which could then fund affordable homes close to employment sites in the district.
- Assuming we are locked into the scale of housing development suggested, new developments should be built where there is close access to the M11 and public transport links, be designed according to the 20-minute neighbourhood model and be traditional in style.
- The green belt must be protected
- Town centres are undergoing significant change and could provide opportunities for a mixture of housing development and community leisure facilities
- Selecting the location of major developments will always be controversial so clear and transparent reasoning is required.

- By the time the plan is adopted, the south-west corner of the district will be extensively developed by speculative developers. The plan should protect existing communities from further development and direct new development towards the north of the district, where it can take advantage of existing rail links, the proposed Cambridge Autonomous Metro, the proposed East-West Rail project and close proximity to the Cambridge Biomedical Campus.
- Brownfield sites should be identified and utilised, including those containing offices which may no longer be used due to significant changes to working practices prompted by the pandemic
- Recent Uttlesford and national experience shows that Garden Communities take many years to deliver and can therefore only be relied upon for the next Local Plan, post 2030s. The emerging Local Plan can only deliver housing by expanding existing settlements.
- Urban sprawl and the loss of agricultural land should be avoided
- Rail access should be prioritised over road access, although an over-reliance should not be placed on cycling – for example, it is not a realistic option for elderly people
- New housing development along the A120 would only be appropriate if a suitable public transport option is provided e.g. railway, guided shuttle bus or similar
- The most appropriate locations for development would be on the M11/railway corridor. At the southern end, development would have access to the employment opportunities at Stansted Airport, Harlow and London. At the northern end, Cambridge and perhaps an expanded Chesterford Research Park.
- Most of the east of the district would be inappropriate for development due to its poor access to transport hubs
- The land around Birchanger should be considered for development. While in the green belt, the location is highly sustainable and the landscape quality has already been compromised. To compensate, land of a higher value could be preserved elsewhere.
- It is unlikely that the VeloCity model of village clusters would yield any more than a small contribution to the overall housing needs for the plan period
- The cycleways connecting village clusters would need to be funded and provided at the right time, and would need to be safe and shorter than two miles to present a realistic option
- It would be difficult, in practice, to ensure that each village within a cluster receives a particular key service/facility
- Growth should be focused on towns and urban areas, which are better suited to walking and cycling than in spaced-out villages
- New development in existing settlements should not usually exceed around a dozen houses
- Rail accounts for only 10% of journeys to work in Uttlesford, even in villages with a station. It is therefore unlikely that new communities would be able to increase this percentage significantly.
- The Garden Community proposals in the withdrawn Local Plan did not fail ‘in principle’ so the issues could be overcome with better coordination between promoters and the Council
- The new Local Plan needs a better balance between new settlements and meaningful allocations in the existing main towns
- New development should be split between major new developments and proportionately-expanded towns and villages
- If one new town were to be proposed, the Great Chesterford area would be most suitable. It could take advantage of employment centres to the north and relieve pressure on Saffron Walden, whereas Stansted Airport’s employment centre can already draw on Great Dunmow and Bishop’s Stortford.

- Strict village envelopes should be relaxed so that well-considered schemes in hamlets – e.g. close to road junctions, no loss of agricultural land, suited to home working (including fibre broadband) – can be supported
- If Saffron Walden is expanded, it should be rebalanced by concentrating development in the north. This would have relatively close proximity to the town centre, which could be accessed by paths rather than direct road access. Recreation facilities and a school could be located close to Bridge End Gardens and a bypass of Littlebury could connect the town to the B1383.
- Productive agricultural land should be preserved to reduce the UK's reliance on food imports
- Before building new communities, there must be a clear vision or purpose. Possible purposes could be: science park, airport, direct London commuting, sustainability flagship, forest community, hospital/health, VeloCity, start-up business hub, secondary education flagship.
- The significant growth required must be supported by adequate transport infrastructure – a new railway line (Stansted Airport – Little Easton parish – Braintree via restored line on Flitch Way) rather than a bus service or Rapid Transit System. This could support forest communities, a cycling network based on the Flitch Way, commuting to London and Cambridge, wildlife corridors and extending the benefits associated with East-West Rail.
- The fragmented expansion of Elsenham must stop. A separate, self-supporting VeloCity-style village could be built nearby, to the east of a new east-west railway.
- There is potential for a VeloCity village cluster involving Widdington, Debden, Newport, Wicken Bonhunt, Quendon and Rickling
- The unique and historic character of places should be protected by utilising brownfield land and redundant buildings for new homes
- The VeloCity concept is both highly relevant to Uttlesford and supportive of village regeneration – restrictive planning has led to congestion, ageing populations, unhealthy living and car dependency, high house prices and social isolation.
- Access to rail travel is not essential for the VeloCity concept to succeed – clusters can be supported by mini buses, cycleways and small rural businesses
- New development within existing settlements should be prioritised, supported by some development on the edges. New settlements would satisfy government requirements at the expense of residents.
- Easton Park offers an exceptional opportunity to provide a country park for the benefit of future generations
- It is clear from the series of interrelated consultation themes that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution, and that various solutions will need to be tailored to each part of the district. These could include the VeloCity 'village cluster' or 15-minute neighbourhood ideas.
- Large-scale development should only take place in self-sufficient new settlements, rather than disproportionate sprawling extensions of existing settlements
- Increased housing must be linked to increased jobs, to avoid exacerbating the current out-commuting trend
- New settlements and large-scale urban extensions should be prioritised because they can be planned more holistically. Extending villages tends to harm their character, miss opportunities to use brownfield land (tends to be located elsewhere), exacerbate the reliance on car travel and put a strain on existing facilities.
- New homes could be accommodated in the south-west of Saffron Walden, either side of the B1052. Adding a full-exit junction to the M11 J9 would mean there would be no additional traffic through the town centre.
- The VeloCity concept is more suitable for Uttlesford than the 15-minute neighbourhood, which is more suited to urban environments

- The locations for new development should be prioritised as follows: 1. Brownfield sites; 2. Within existing settlements (e.g. VeloCity model); 3. Edge of settlements; 4. New settlements (if still required)
- If new settlements are required, the Council must look wider than the sites put forward by landowners so it can ensure the best and most sustainable locations are selected
- Site assessment criteria for new settlements should: focus on existing rather than proposed transport infrastructure; prevent coalescence with existing settlements; remove/adapt sites with clear heritage constraints; focus on meeting needs in the plan period and not beyond due to uncertainties; adopt a maximum size of 4-5,000 homes (ECC requirement for a secondary school)
- A new settlement could be built near Chesterford Research Park due to its employment opportunities, proximity to Cambridge and the opportunity to attract tech businesses and colleges specialising in tech/bio subjects
- Smaller new communities of up to 1,000 homes could be located on part of the previous Elsenham site, or between Widdington and Cutlers Green if a public transport service is provided
- Sites should be selected according to both walking and public transport travel times
- There are no suitable sites for new settlements in the district, with the possible exception of Carver Barracks if it becomes available
- Sympathetic growth containing well-mixed housing (including social and retirement housing) could improve existing settlements, whereas new settlements would harm the rural character of the district and become commuter dormitories
- While the limited train route means the VeloCity concept is not entirely appropriate, the idea of conducting a movement analysis would help identify where village clusters would work
- Rural areas are likely to rely on private cars unless there are major improvements in transport infrastructure. As a minimum, bus routes should better connect places and electric vehicle charging points should be provided.
- There is a need to allocate sufficient small- and medium-sized sites to address short- to medium-term housing requirements. Their lower infrastructure requirements means housing can be delivered more quickly.
- Developments should be small, built within existing communities and spread evenly so no one area has a large-scale development
- Local businesses should be supported through the provision of homes above shops and offices in town centres
- A new Garden Community of medium density and following the 20-minute neighbourhood model is preferred because it would allow the current identity of Uttlesford to be retained, compared with the alternative of sprawling developments
- The Local Plan should prioritise developments in existing, sustainable settlements to ensure quick delivery, match jobs to homes, reduce travel times by dispersing housing, ensure affordable housing is provided across the district and generally support the vitality of existing settlements
- The edges of existing settlements are valuable for the character of the settlements and their rural setting, and should therefore be protected from urban sprawl and preserved for nature and recreation
- New settlements are clearly required to meet housing needs but they should be sited close to existing major road and rail links, and provided with all appropriate infrastructure to allow them to function properly
- The VeloCity concept could be adapted and applied to the whole district – for example, by inviting parishes to suggest potential cycle routes that would establish links to key services/facilities
- The Local Plan could support existing village clusters which possess and share key services and facilities – for example, providing hourly bus services between villages, their nearest town and a railway station

- New settlements take a long time to deliver so, where suitable brownfield sites (e.g. Carver Barracks) are identified or locations close to a railway station, plans should be drawn up in good time
- Stansted Mountfitchet should be elevated in the settlement hierarchy and apportioned a greater share of development, owing to its comparatively good range of services/facilities and its mainline train station
- The Countryside Protection Zone should be protected
- New development should not be located within 1km of a Site of Special Scientific Interest or, due to pollution, Stansted Airport
- Should a new settlement be built on the northern boundary of the district, a combined pedestrian/cycle/bus link to the new public transport interchange at the A11/Babraham will be required, at the beginning, to establish sustainable transport patterns
- The use of greenfield land should be a last resort, behind the use of brownfield land and higher density urban extensions
- The Garden Community approach has revealed significant practical issues, including an over-reliance on car travel
- Any new development must have easy access to Class A roads
- The VeloCity approach could play a part in delivering new housing, combining with digital infrastructure to support the growing trend for home working and modern cottage industries
- New housing should be spread evenly across all villages, excluding those that have already been developed recently. New housing, including a reasonable proportion of low-cost homes, can energise existing communities and Parish Councils should work with residents to allocate sufficient sites to meet the needs determined by the District Council.
- It is expected that the Council will be able to meet its housing requirements within its administrative boundary
- The Garden Community idea provides a good way forward but should be applied to one of the existing new developments in progress, rather than using more greenfield land
- Insufficient reference has been made to the use of brownfield land, which should be prioritised
- The North-South rail corridor should be the focus for growth because it is the only sustainable transport route
- While a self-supporting settlement would be ideal, in practice most job opportunities for Uttlesford residents are in London, Cambridge, Saffron Walden, Chelmsford and Stansted Airport
- The preferred development strategy should seek to reduce travel and support sustainable travel options, and in doing so consider the interaction with Greater Cambridge as described in the recent net zero carbon evidence for the Greater Cambridge Local Plan
- The preferred development strategy should be compatible with addressing the climate agenda. In selecting an option, it should be noted that evidence for the Greater Cambridge Local Plan has revealed that the smallest size of new settlement that could be considered to be sustainable is 4,500 homes
- Hatfield Heath could accommodate some development if the Green Belt boundaries are relaxed
- Opportunities should be taken to make existing settlements more sustainable by providing services and facilities that are lacking
- Great Canfield should remain in the lowest settlement category, suitable only for minimal development in accordance with the Village Design Statement
- There should be strict protection of the countryside beyond allocated sites
- Examples of successful farm diversification include: self-catering accommodation and barns rented by small businesses

- Town centres should be supported by changes of use from retail to community, leisure and food and drink
- Garden Communities face a real risk of becoming car-dependent dormitory settlements
- Taking into account the increased desirability for walking and cycling and emphasis on home working (associated with the pandemic), there should be greater focus on links to existing settlements than to train stations
- Thaxted has a well-established high street, which can be supported by further housing development. It has established links to other settlements and an excellent range of services and facilities.
- Great Chesterford has excellent connectivity to wider retail and employment centres. The Council should maximise the opportunity for such settlements to play a greater role in delivering sustainable growth in the first half of the plan period.
- New settlements underpinned by concepts such as the '20-minute neighbourhood' could deliver high quality, sustainable and healthy places that support the move towards net zero carbon
- Chrishall should be in the lowest category of settlement in the hierarchy, suitable only for limited development
- Bearing in mind the option of adding new development within existing settlements is unlikely to deliver substantial numbers of new homes and that new settlements have a long lead-in time, it is likely that the majority of new housing allocated in the Local Plan will need to be in extensions to existing settlements
- Garden City principles and other similar concepts can be applied to existing settlements as well as new ones
- The District Council offices could be converted to flats, essential services relocated to the Town Hall and officers relocated to work from home

General/Other comments

- Regard should be had to the Felsted Neighbourhood Plan
- The number and types of homes needed in Uttlesford depend on the source of demand – people already within the area have different needs to those coming from elsewhere. Different community types and locations may be needed to satisfy these different needs.
- The district's main towns are reaching the limits of expansion – issues such as traffic volumes, infrastructure deficiencies and extended walking distances to key facilities from edge-of-town developments.
- The government's indicative minimum housing requirement is too high, being detrimental to the district's character, agricultural productivity and stretched infrastructure.
- The Local Plan must reflect the government's COP26 commitments in full
- Infrastructure should be provided before housing
- There is a strong case for Uttlesford to adopt a lower housing requirement than that indicated by the government, which only provides a figure as a starting point. Local planning authorities must determine the final figure, reflecting local circumstances and constraints.
- Roads need to be better maintained than they are currently
- Climate change will exacerbate existing water shortages in the region, which need to be better understood before committing to the scale of housing growth suggested
- Taking into account the indicative minimum housing requirement, no or very limited development is not an option
- Development in Thaxted should comply with the Thaxted Neighbourhood Plan
- Strategic planning requires a shift due to changing pressures – population growth will peak in 20-30 years and the pandemic has reduced demand for city centre retail and office space

- Equestrians must be involved in decisions affecting road safety, cycleway provision and the linkage of fragmented rights of way. References to ‘walking and cycling’ routes should be updated to ‘multi-user routes’ to avoid discrimination, and Uttlesford/Essex policy should be developed in accordance with the principles in the ‘Equestrians in Hampshire’ document.
- There must be clarity on the housing requirements for areas with a Neighbourhood Plan in place. For example, recent planning permissions have directed 150 more homes to Felsted than are allocated in its Neighbourhood Plan.
- New development should address the priorities highlighted by previous themes
- Where there is no Neighbourhood Plan, the starting point should be to consult with local councils on the appropriate housing provision and requirements for supporting infrastructure, while preventing coalescence between settlements so as to preserve their unique character
- The housing requirement should be revised upwards to take account of strong economic growth in the London-Stansted-Cambridge Corridor and increased affordable housing needs
- It is not clear how this consultation process will inform the Local Plan, and officers should have spent their time more usefully elsewhere to ensure timely submission of the plan e.g. through issuing the call for sites earlier
- The starting point should be to address the lessons learned from previous Local Plan Inspectors e.g. infrastructure requirements, landscape harm
- Travel plans should be more comprehensive, to establish sustainable commuting patterns
- Despite the anticipated transition to electric cars, a shift to alternative modes is still required to avoid pollution associated with tyres
- The greatest jobs potential will be associated with scientific workers and carers for the growing elderly population
- The Council should consider viability very closely, learning from previous experience and its own analysis rather than that of developers
- Solar farms should be limited in number and, if detrimental to agricultural productivity, should include other productive methods in-keeping with a rural community e.g. sheep grazing, biodiversity
- Ongoing liaison with Essex County Council will be necessary to address various issues, including infrastructure provision and climate action
- The Council should resist the government’s housing figure. More people means more disturbance and destruction.
- Insufficient reference has been made to viability (not just “delivery”), which was proven to be a critical issue with the withdrawn Local Plan
- Planning departments require additional funding to support delivery of the large number of houses required
- Councils should be able to acquire land at low cost and use the uplift in land values to fund affordable homes and infrastructure
- The nine consultation themes share strong shared elements with the seven Big Themes for the Greater Cambridge Local Plan, to which regard should be had
- In setting a minimum housing requirement, regard must be had to meeting unmet needs in neighbouring areas
- The proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework require that, where larger-scale developments such as new settlements are proposed, the Local Plan vision should have a time horizon of 30 years rather than 15
- It is important to note that the housing requirement is a minimum, not a maximum, number
- Permitted development rights are overly relaxing development controls, and the Council should press Government to address this

- New conservation areas should be designated in Chrishall, with Article 4 directions used to remove permitted development rights
- Important open and green spaces should be identified and protected
- Highway verges offer an opportunity to enhance biodiversity
- Ground source heat pumps could be installed under agricultural land, to provide for local heat requirements
- The Local Plan should facilitate development by small developers