

Duty to Cooperate Meeting with Natural England
16 October 2020

Present

Natural England

Jonathan Bustard: Case Work Manager West Anglia Team

Lynne Collins: Biodiversity Net Gain Senior Advisor

Heather Reed: National Net Gain Advisor

Uttlesford District Council

Stephen Miles: Planning Policy Manager

Sarah Nicholas: Senior Planning Officer

Joanna Hill: Planning Policy Officer

1. New Local Plan

Stephen Miles gave an update on the preparation of the new Local Plan. The Issues and Options stage consultation will be starting end of October/early November and run until about April 2021. It will cover a range of themes and engage with the public on what the issues are relating to that theme.

The consultation is based around the meetings of a Community Stakeholder Forum and questions to the public rather than a consultation document. It is aimed at the community and residents and is trying to reach people who would not normally respond to local plan consultations.

It is appreciated that this form of consultation may be more difficult for organisations such as Natural England to respond to. Responses to the themes will be welcomed and further meetings can be arranged to discuss specific issues in more detail.

Jonathan Bustard thought that Natural England might find it easier to respond to specific themes. It was agreed that any cross cutting issues can be picked up towards the end of the consultation.

Action: UDC to supply details of themes and timetable.
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2. Appropriate Evidence base to support the Local Plan.

UDC sought advice from NE on assessing sites submitted through the call for sites process and evidence to be used in allocating sites.

Natural England made the following suggestions.

- Impact Risk Zones to SSSI: layer available on 'magic' website with shapefiles to download. These can be used as an initial screening.
- Open Space and Green Infrastructure: NE consider that there is a shortfall in natural and semi natural green space which then results in an over reliance on Hatfield Forest. Data from the 2020 Essex Green Infrastructure Project or an Uttlesford GI strategy should be considered. UDC noted that it has an up to date Open Space assessment and strategy.
- Air quality: With specific reference to air quality resulting from Stansted Airport.
- Local Wildlife Sites: UDC are looking into reviewing the LoWS.
- Priority Habitats: Priority Habitats Inventory are available on magic website. The National Habitat Network offers opportunity mapping of areas for restoration and linking together.
- Water quality and Agricultural land value

Action:

NE to send details of National Habitat Network.

NE to send examples of best practice of Green Infrastructure Strategies.

3. Hatfield Forest Mitigation Strategy

No progress had been made by either NE or UDC since the last meeting.

The National Trust have identified the work done on visitor surveys, impact management report, and zone of influence. They are working on the cost of the mitigation strategy (Strategic Access management Measures (SAMM)). The final version is awaiting sign off by NE.

The National Trust have detailed the cost of the mitigation package but there is no reference to a tariff.

Jonathan Bustard suggested that the calculation of the tariff based on the scale of development in the withdrawn Local Plan is the best estimate available.

UDC concerned that a tariff is fair and proportionate to developments.

Action: NE to clarify if a tariff has been estimated.

4. Environment Bill

Royal Accent estimated spring/summer 2021 followed by a 2-year period to implement Biodiversity net gain. Areas still to be clarified include biodiversity net gain metric, biodiversity credits, biodiversity gain site register and covenant agreements covering management of sites.

UDC are still unclear how Nature Recovery Networks will work in Uttlesford. Unsure whether these will be developed at District level or more strategically. UDC is unclear how new or improved habitats will be delivered other than through development which may need to take place near to existing habitats, creating wildlife corridors between habitats.

Action: NE to provide examples of best practice.

5. Planning White Paper

NE and UDC will each be responding to the White Paper.

UDC have responded to the proposed changes to the current planning system and the methodology for calculating housing need which would see the figure for Uttlesford increase from about 715 to 1230.

6. Any other business

It was agreed that further meetings would be arranged either during or towards the end of the Issues and Options Consultation.