



UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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24 January 2024

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing &
Communities
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Mr Gove

Section 15 Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 Re: Uttlesford District Council Local Development Scheme

I refer to your letter of 19 December 2023 and your direction under s15(8)(b) of the above Act. In your letter you direct that Uttlesford District Council revise its Local Development Scheme (LDS) within 12 weeks.

In terms of background, the council adopted its current local plan in 2005. The council submitted replacement local plans for examination in 2014 and 2019 however, in both cases Planning Inspectors recommended they be withdrawn. Since 2020, the council has been working on a new draft local plan. We held a public consultation on 'Issues and Options' in spring 2021 and a 'Regulation 18' consultation at the end of 2023.

The council's initial LDS was revised in July 2022, October 2022 and more recently, in October 2023 with the timetable amended each time. Section 15 of the Act allows for, and thus anticipates, revisions to an LDS. In each case the changes to the timetable have allowed for development opportunities to be explored, robust evidence to be prepared, and the council's spatial strategy improved and tailored to best achieve the district's development needs.

When revising the LDS in 2022 and 2023 the council was still considering various options in terms of the spatial strategy intended to form the basis of the emerging local plan. Now, the council has a far more settled position in terms of our spatial strategy. The strategy is published and whilst we can expect various changes between now and Regulation 19, we do not consider that there will be fundamental change to the strategy. This significantly reduces the prospect of further slippage against our timetable. Previous timetable slippage was also, in-part, a result of a lack of staffing resource and reliance on short term contracted staff. The council has made significant progress in this respect. We have attracted high calibre, permanent staff by working with Public Practice and using direct recruitment campaigns. This further reduces the prospect of slippage.

To further de-risk the process, council officers have been liaising with our retained legal counsel on a regular basis in order to identify possible issues early on. Officers also met with your Officials following receipt of your letter. Your Officials have offered to arrange an 'advisory visit' by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) in order that PAS can act as a critical friend and further highlight any potential issues in order that they can be addressed ahead of the submission of the plan. This is now in-train.

The recent changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), and other planning-related announcements, will not affect our ability to achieve the published timetable. Indeed, the council welcomes the measures set out in paragraph 226 of the new NPPF with regards to having to demonstrate a four-year, rather than five-year, housing land supply once Regulation 18 or 19 stage is reached with both a policies map and proposed allocations. We look forward to taking advantage of this provision by meeting our timetable and publishing a Regulation 19 plan with policies map and proposed allocations this summer.

At the council's Cabinet meeting of 16 October 2023, Cabinet voted to agree our October 2023 LDS timetable which is challenging but achievable. Cabinet noted that in the absence of an up-to-date local plan planning decision-making had been difficult and that only by having a new local plan can the council plan sustainably for the future and secure the necessary infrastructure needed to support development. We are aware of the government's intention to make changes to the approach to plan-making and that transitional arrangements have been set out giving councils until June 2025 to submit plans under the current system. The council is on track to submit its local plan for examination December 2024; six months ahead of the transitional arrangements ending. We envisage that the local plan will then be adopted in early 2026. This is set out in our October 2023 LDS, which we have reviewed following your letter.

As stated above, the first significant step in achieving this timetable has been met successfully with our draft Regulation 18 Plan produced, agreed for consultation by majority vote at Council, and published for consultation on 3 November 2023. As required under S15 of the Act, the draft plan will provide full and effective coverage both geographically and with regard to subject matter, to Uttlesford district. It seeks to meet our housing need in full. It is a 'full draft' plan, which has allowed our residents and third parties to make detailed and meaningful responses and will enable the council to move swiftly to Regulation 19 publication and then on to submission.

I attach the latest version of Uttlesford's LDS. A copy can also be found at <https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/4969/Local-Development-Scheme>. I also attach a copy of our local plan project plan which sets out the detailed programme of work going forward.

I trust that this demonstrates the council's commitment and capability in performing against the current LDS timetable and getting a plan in place under the current system.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any further information.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Petrina Lees
Leader
Uttlesford District Council

Att: (1)UDC LDS & (2)Local Plan Project Plan

