



DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S REPORT: AGM MAY 2021

This has been a most extraordinary and challenging year for all of us in one way or another. UDC had to meet the challenge of redeploying staff to their homes to work whilst maintaining council services. Initially as you will remember all Council meetings were cancelled until May when we started meeting over Zoom. This became the platform that we conducted Full Council, committees and working groups by, for the rest of 2020 and up to May 7th this year.

Throughout this year Officers have adapted to the needs of the Council and the District . They have provided support via information or financial help through a variety of schemes and initiatives. The Housing team have helped those that have unfortunately lost their accommodation this year because of Covid 19 related financial or other difficulties. Amongst other financial help and advice residents have been able to seek guidance about their Council Tax if they experienced financial challenges throughout this past year. Throughout this year the Council has provided the business community with advice and, access to loans and grants, business support information and help for their employees or the self -employed.

As an administration we have earmarked £1m over three years for a Covid high street & business recovery programmes.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank the officers and operatives of our waste collection teams who operated throughout last year with management and staff from other areas of council volunteering to join them at times to keep the service going. I think you will agree it was always a little bit of normality seeing them and I think for some of our more vulnerable residents sometimes perhaps the only person they saw some days.

THE NEW LOCAL PLAN

As you will remember a Local Plan is the key document which helps us to develop this district, over the coming decades, so that we have the right facilities and infrastructure in place to support the community and to grow the local economy. This is something that I firmly believe should be completed with diligence and evidence so that it will be accepted by the Government Inspectors and not fail as the previous two have done. To that end the first consultation has now closed as has the 'Call for Sites' The first Consultation took the format of nine different themes each one launched at the Community Stake Holder Forum

<https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/Consultation-and-the-Community-Stakeholder-Forum>

All submissions made under the 'call for sites' will be assessed under the same specific criteria, relevant to the submission. We are hoping that specifically 'green sites' will be submitted which may have benefits in terms of accessible open space, biodiversity gains and/or carbon absorption. <https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/LP-Sites>

Stansted Planning Appeal

At this point in time we await the outcome of the 3 Planning Inspectors decision from the Hearing that started in January. All the information from the appeal can be found at:

<https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/airport-appeal>

COUNCIL INVESTMENTS AND FINANCE

Like other local authorities, the council has had to look at new ways in which to generate income, as a result of the ongoing reductions in funding it receives from central government. Last year, the medium-term outlook identified an annual shortfall of £4.85m in the council's budget by 2024/25.

With limitations and restrictions on its ability to generate sufficient funding from sources such as council tax, business rates and fees and charges, the council is developing a £300m portfolio of commercial property assets.

Acquisitions have been taking place throughout the year and this has resulted in additional income that has enabled the council to put some additional resource into important initiatives. This includes £1m over three years to support the climate change agenda, £1m for Covid high street and business recovery programmes, and £450,000 over three years towards sports facilities.

The council will continue to fund further investment at Chesterford Research Park, 50% of which was acquired by the council in 2017. It will also continue to look for further opportunities for investment locally, although suitable opportunities in the area are limited which is why some investments are outside the district.

Every investment opportunity follows a due diligence and governance process. This includes consideration by an Investment Board, which has two independent members. The final decision is ultimately taken by all councillors at a meeting of Full Council.

Further details about the investments can be found in the council's [Commercial Strategy 2021-25](https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/5250/Plans-policies-and-strategies). At <https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/5250/Plans-policies-and-strategies>

As I said at the beginning of this report it has been an extraordinary and challenging year for all of us. It has been a pleasure meeting you all if only virtually and being of some little service. I will close in remembering how much Alan Storah enjoyed representing you and know that the next person will do also and wish them well in their role.

Best wishes Sandi Merifield