

Annual Ugley Parish Meeting
Minutes of the Annual Ugley Parish Meeting,
held at 7.00pm on 31 March 2025 in the Village Hall

Present:

Cllr. Nick Shutes (Chair) and Mrs. Louise Johnson (Parish Clerk)

Members of the Public:

Cllr. Matthew Francis, Cllr. Clayton Powter, Cllr. Johathan and County Cllr. Ray Gooding

1. Welcome.

2. Apologies for Absence.

Cllr. Roger Pryor and Cllr. Elizabeth Reay.

3. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2024 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

4. District Cllr. Janice Loughlin's report.

Cllr. Loughlin's report attached.

5. Ugley Parish Council's Chair, Nick Shutes report.

Chair's Report – March 2025

Once again Highways and Planning have been major issues for the Parish Council.

Highways

Uncoordinated closures of local roads have caused problems with increased volumes of traffic through the village, and in particular Ugley Green. The ongoing closure of Grove Hill in Stansted has led to Ugley Green becoming an unofficial diversion route.

Large numbers of HGVs continue to transport excavated soil from building sites in Bishop's Stortford for disposal at the chalk quarry outside Newport.

Potholes continue to be a problem, and some rural lanes are becoming structurally damaged by lack of maintenance.

We are awaiting Patmore End Road becoming a 'Quiet Lane' in the new financial year.

Planning

Two of the largest planning applications for housing in the Parish have been approved in the past year. Applications to develop the land to the rear of The Chequers pub have been refused by Uttlesford on several occasions in the past, but approval for 13 dwellings have now been granted by the Planning Inspectorate.

An application for 16 houses on land around the Village Hall was made direct to the Planning Inspectorate, which is allowed while Uttlesford Planning Department is in special measures. This application was also approved.

Other notable approvals were for one replacement property on the side of Newlands Cottage, and one new property in Fieldgate Lane.

People

I would like to record the sad death in May of long time Parish Councillor and former Vice Chairman David Cross. David's wife Brenda also died last year.

I would like to thank Ray Gooding for keeping us informed of issues at Essex County Council, and Janice Loughlin likewise for Uttlesford District Council, and in particular the slow progress with the Local Plan.

We await to find out over the coming months how the new unitary authorities will develop.

Finally, I would like to thank Louise Johnson for running the Parish Council so efficiently.

County Council

6. Essex County Councillor's Report - Cllr. Ray Gooding.

The government announcement of an extra £8.3bn over 11-years for highway authorities. Essex County Council is set to receive £121 million of Government funding for road repairs and resurfacing between now and 2034. The funding has been reallocated to Local Authorities across England from the HS2 scheme. The new funding will ensure there is financial support for road repairs until 2034.

ECC are in the top quarter of county councils for delivering road maintenance.

ECC are in the top tier for providing the best children's care for the third year in a row.

The development and building of the first railway station on the Great Eastern mainline in more than 100 years is now underway at Beaulieu in Chelmsford.

Works began at the site near the Boreham Interchange in January 2023.

It is expected the work will be completed and the station open by the end of 2025.

The new station and connected transport links will play a significant role in transforming travel in Chelmsford and the surrounding areas. The new station is due to be opened by King Charles.

The Government has announced plans for the biggest reorganisation of local government in England in over 50 years. District and County Councils will be abolished and replaced with unitary authorities. A new single body, known as a Strategic Authority, will be established, led by a directly elected mayor. The first Mayoral election will take place in May 2026. Government have agreed to the postponement of the local county elections due in May this year. Some people see this as anti-democratic. If the same status quo is maintained, they can carry on with the same trajectory. It is likely that Uttlesford will form a unitary authority with Harlow and Epping Forest.

There are some good points and some bad points about devolution.

The council reform will go ahead with or without the cooperation of councils and councillors. Cllr. Gooding said it was a "fait accompli".

7. Finance Report Louise Johnson.

Ugley Parish Council started the financial year 2024/2025 with £8,233. Added to this was the precept of £7,500 plus a £500 payment from UDC. Ugley Parish Council gave £500 to the Village Hall to help with repairs and a further £500 to St. Peter's Church to help with ground maintenance. The main spend of the year was wages for the Parish Clerk followed by village grass cutting. In all a total of £8,710 was paid out during the year. This made the balance at the end of the year £7,523.

The meeting finished at 7.35pm.

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S REPORT. 2025.

COUNCIL TAX: This year Uttlesford raised by 2.99%. This will mean a rise from £176.84 to £182.02 for Band D properties.

To maximise home occupation within the district the council will charge a council tax premium on second homes from April 1st this year. The impact is likely to be small as there are currently 180 homes that have been identified as second homes.

All bands and charges may be found on the council's website.

GARDEN WASTE: The cost has risen from £50 to £65. There was no increase last year as it was decided to defer payment due to the lack of waste collections. Unfortunately, this was caused by human error and caused a lot of disruption and generated many complaints.

LOCAL PLAN: The Local Plan, which runs from 2021-2041, was submitted to the Secretary of State, for independent examination, on the 18th December last year. All comments on the regulation 19 consultation were processed and forwarded with the Local Plan. Hopefully, a decision will be made on its acceptability by summer this year.

The identified housing need for the district is for at least 13,500. The plan has an approximate 9% buffer bringing the number to 14,741. The plan needs to ensure that government requirements are met.

Stort Valley has no allocations in the local plan but may be open to speculative development. I voted against the Local Plan as I am very concerned that the affordable housing quota dropped from 40% to 35%.

NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK (NPPF) Last December the government revised the NPPF. One of the most controversial aspects was the grey belt. The government made it clear that previously used land e.g., brownfield sites, should be prioritised wherever possible but brownfield development wouldn't be enough to meet housing need.

Grey belt land is defined as green belt which makes a limited contribution to the green belt's purpose. Green belt land is defined as land that serves a specific planning purpose in terms of preserving openness and preventing urban sprawl. Development on the green belt will not be considered inappropriate when it is on sustainable grey belt land and would not fundamentally undermine the function of the green belt.

The solar Farm at Wickham Hall was the first solar farm to be granted planning permission on green belt land in Uttlesford. It won on appeal. The UDC planning officer and I spoke against the development at the appeal which took place virtually on TEAMS.

THE PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE BILL was introduced to Parliament on 11th March. It means that measures to speed up planning decisions to boost house building and remove what they see as 'unnecessary blockers and challenges to the delivery of vital developments such as roads, railway lines and windfarms. The Government is aiming to build 1.5 million new homes over 5 years at a rate of 300,00 homes annually.

PLANNING COMMITTEES. A national scheme of delegation will be introduced to set out which types of planning applications should be determined by officers and which should go

to committee. The size of Planning Committees will be controlled by banning large and unwieldy committees to encourage good debate.

Training will be mandatory for planning committee members.

Councils will be able to set their own planning fees which will allow them to cover their costs and will be reinvested back into the system. I don't know how this would work in a Unitary Authority.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION/DEVOLUTION: The government, rightly or wrongly, believes that reorganising and simplifying councils can drive economic growth and deliver better public services. Essex County Council and other councils will cease to exist and will be replaced by a unitary authority and elections for a Mayor of Essex will be held in May 2026. An extraordinary meeting of Uttlesford District Council will take place on Wednesday 19th March to consider the report regarding the submission of initial proposals to Government on Local Government Reform. It will be interesting to see the outcome of any vote. 10 out of the 15 political leaders in Essex favour a five-council proposal which is due to be sent to government by 21st March.

Councillors across the county were due to discuss this proposal but Westminster will ultimately make the final decision. The Conservative leaders of Harlow, Braintree, Epping and Essex did not back the five-council model and neither did Thurrock's Labour leader. The five new councils in Essex would be unitary authorities. Each unitary authority would govern between 320,000 to 500,000 people and would have an estimated 60-90 elected members which the Essex plan says will ultimately cut down the number of councillors across the county. Many existing councillors, myself included, are concerned that the trust built up and a local councillor's knowledge of the area they represent, especially in rural settings, will be diminished. 60-90 councillors representing such a huge number of residents may not be able to give as much time to case work, which is often confidential, as they do at present.

Elections to the new councils are expected to take place in April 2027 and they will take over from existing councils in April 2028.

As you will be aware the local elections this year were cancelled. A motion was put to full council at Uttlesford district council on 25th February calling upon all 5 UDC County Councillors to resign. The vote was cross party. The motion was carried – 20 for, 8 against and 3 abstentions. Resignations did NOT take place and the motion was not honoured. This was seen by many to be undemocratic the justification being that the cancellation supposedly allows local authorities to focus on developing the reorganisation plans. Elections for the first Greater Essex Mayor, representing 1.8 million people, are planned for 2026.

The role of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioners will cease to exist and their roles taken on by the new Mayor.

We will be hearing a lot more on Local Government Reform in the coming months and years.

Cllr Janice Loughlin
Member for Stort Valley.