



The Hundred Parishes

An introductory article about LOCAL PLANNING

In September 2017, The Hundred Parishes Society responded to Uttlesford District Council's draft local plan. More than half of the Hundred Parishes area lies within Uttlesford. The response is repeated below. Uttlesford's draft plan was subsequently abandoned and as at September 2023 there is no replacement draft. However, the Society's response may offer some useful guidance towards future plans or responses:

"The Hundred Parishes Society is a registered charity whose aims include advancing awareness of the character and history of The Hundred Parishes and promoting the conservation, protection and improvement of the area's physical and natural environment, especially its features of historic, architectural and wildlife interest. The Hundred Parishes area includes most of Uttlesford. It is to a large extent an area that Oliver Rackham¹ has called Ancient Countryside, with its winding lanes, village greens and ancient hedgerows and woods. It is also an area that is exceptionally rich in listed buildings, around half dating back to before 1700.

Whilst we regard it as essential that the character of The Hundred Parishes should be preserved, we recognise that it is a living community and that it must continue to evolve to serve the needs of its residents. The plan should recognise that Uttlesford and adjoining districts have a shared responsibility to preserve the special character of the wider area known as The Hundred Parishes.

The draft Plan claims that, over the period of the Plan, it is necessary to add thousands more homes, in addition to what has already been built or approved. Given the lack of clear evidence, the choice of an exceptional period of growth as a base, the failure to consider alternative forecasting options and the absence of audit trails demonstrating how the "need" has been calculated, we are not convinced that further houses are needed before 2032 in addition to those already approved.

If additional houses really are needed, then new, discrete "Garden Communities" seem to be a valid way forward, at least in principle. Robust adoption of Garden City principles should ensure that such new communities are fit to live in, whilst clear separation from existing communities, rather than swamping them with substantial bolt-on residential estates, should allow those established communities to evolve at a manageable pace and to retain their historic characteristics. Some of the proposed Garden Communities and other proposed developments seem to fit into the "bolt-on" category rather than being discrete. They also smack of residential estates rather than fulfilling the Garden City aims of self-sufficiency and minimising the need to travel.

¹ Oliver Rackham, OBE, was an academic at Cambridge University. His extensive research and published literature on the history of the British countryside in general and woodlands in particular laid the foundation for current thinking about the definition and management of ancient woodland.

The practice over recent years of building large residential estates close to historic settlements has undermined the special characteristics of some settlements in Uttlesford and the Hundred Parishes, to the disadvantage of established residents and without giving new residents the kind of physical and cultural environment that the majority of Uttlesford residents still enjoy.

All developments, whether Garden Communities or bolt-ons, should be sensitive and sympathetic to their natural and historic environment. With sensitive planning, it should be possible to continue the process of evolution, enhancing our environment and creating heritage for the future. High priority should be given to working with, respecting and, where possible, enhancing the historic environment, especially historic settlements, conservation areas and areas of ancient countryside.

In the interest of preserving the character of Uttlesford and the Hundred Parishes, we urge the Council to oppose any further expansion beyond the existing authorised limits at Stansted Airport. We encourage the Council to promote alternative employment opportunities throughout the district, in particular to draw on the high level of skills of its residents

The Council should encourage and facilitate exploration, appreciation and enjoyment of the area through the provision of information about features of historic, architectural and wildlife interest and by encouraging maintenance and use of Public Rights of Way. Any new development should respect and, where possible, enhance such amenities and the provision of information, encouraging residents and visitors to use public transport, to cycle and to walk, and also to appreciate and treasure their heritage and the surrounding countryside."

While this submission to Uttlesford District Council was made several years ago, it still represents the views of the Society's trustees.

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Any comments or suggestions for improvement may be submitted by using the Feedback form on the website. The website has many short articles on various aspects of The Hundred Parishes, as well as introductions to individual parishes and to a number of local celebrities, and an extensive What's On section. More than a hundred walk route descriptions can be freely downloaded, with each of the hundred parishes featuring in at least one walk.