



APPLICATION RESEARCH

Countryside Dwellings in Uttlesford, April to July 2026

Prepared by Mo Al-Ghorairy
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Every application referenced is a matter of public record, available on Uttlesford District Council's planning portal. Decisions and quotations are taken from the Council's own decision notices and officer reports.

Uttlesford District Council adopted its Local Plan 2021-2041 in April 2026. This note records what the Council has actually been deciding on **small new-build residential applications of one to four dwellings** since that date, and what separates the approvals from the refusals.

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Why the scope is narrow

This research was carried out for a client considering **one to four houses on a single countryside site**, so the search was built around that question and nothing else. It is published because other developers looking at schemes of a similar size in this district may find it useful, not because it is a complete picture of how Uttlesford is deciding housing applications.

Two things follow. Larger schemes, affordable-led schemes, allocated sites and applications at the Key Settlements and Local Rural Centres were all outside the search and are not represented here. And a fuller read of the Council's current appetite would need a wider search covering every approved residential application, not only the small countryside ones.

1. What was searched

Authority	Uttlesford District Council
Decision date range	1 April to 26 July 2026, that is, post-adoption only
Application types	Full, Outline, Permission in Principle, Details Following Outline
Scheme size	1 to 4 new dwellings
Excluded	Schemes involving demolition, conversion, or change of use

The window starts at adoption deliberately. Decisions before April 2026 were made under the 2005 Local Plan, whose housing policies had long been found out of date, and are a poor guide to how the Council is deciding applications now.

Every result page of every filtered set was read. **160 decisions were reviewed and 28 matched.**

2. The headline

Nineteen refused. Nine approved.

The split is not explained by scale. Larger schemes at the more sustainable settlements were approved during the same period, including nine self-build bungalows at one Smaller Village, nine dwellings at a Larger Village, twenty at a Local Rural Centre and fifty-two at a Local Rural Centre. Meanwhile single dwellings in the countryside were being refused.

3. The policy position

Three provisions do most of the work.

Core Policy 3 (Settlement Hierarchy) places each settlement in a tier. At Smaller Villages, only limited infill development within the **existing built area** may be appropriate. Land outside those built areas is **Open Countryside**, where development "will not be permitted unless specifically supported by other relevant policies as set out in the Development Plan or national policy".

Development Policy 1 (New Dwellings in the Open Countryside) is a closed list of five exceptions: optimal viable use of a heritage asset; re-use of a redundant or disused building without substantial reconstruction; one-for-one replacement of an existing dwelling; subdivision of an existing residential building; or an individual dwelling of exceptional, truly outstanding design.

Core Policy 19 and Table 8.2 set a housing requirement for each settlement. Several parishes carry a figure of **zero** for the entire plan period.

Against that, the Council's own officer reports state a **five year housing land supply of 4.77 years** including a 20% buffer, and a **Housing Delivery Test result of 69%**. NPPF footnote 8(b) therefore applies, the housing policies are out of date, and the presumption in favour of sustainable development at paragraph 11(d) is engaged. Officers say so expressly rather than contesting it.

4. What actually separates approval from refusal

Not the housing land supply shortfall. It is engaged in every case in this sample and decided none of them on its own. In one refusal the officer set out the 4.77 years and the 69% result, accepted that the presumption was engaged, and refused two dwellings anyway, describing the contribution as "limited" with no affordable housing and no identified local need.

Not self or custom build status. In one refusal, Core Policy 58, which supports self and custom build, appears as a **reason for refusal** alongside Core Policy 3 and Development Policy 1. In an approval, the officer held that because the scheme

conflicted with Core Policy 3 and Development Policy 1, "the proposed development would also conflict with Core Policy 58". Support for self-build is conditional on consistency with the rest of the plan; it does not travel independently of the spatial strategy.

Not previously developed land. One officer report records that the site "does not comprise previously developed land in a manner that would justify redevelopment". The district contains no Green Belt, and Development Policy 1's exceptions do not include previously developed land, so the status does little work here.

Two things did separate them.

Enclosure by built form

The most instructive decision in the sample is an approval where the officer found **against** the scheme on every development plan test and granted permission anyway. The site was held to be outside the built area, in Open Countryside, in conflict with Core Policy 3; each of the five Development Policy 1 exceptions was worked through and rejected; and Core Policy 58 fell with them.

What carried it was an extant permission for two dwellings on the adjoining land, which meant the site "would be enclosed to the north and south by built development, **thus qualifying as an infill opportunity**". The same officer states that without it, the site "is not a typical infill opportunity".

A non-car option an officer will call genuine

In the same report, the lane is described as "a rural lane with no footpaths" and walking and cycling were judged "highly unlikely". The site still passed, because a bus stop 800 metres away, an eleven minute walk, amounted to "a genuine mode of sustainable transport".

By contrast, the two refusals closest on their facts both carry a second reason directed at exactly this: a "rural and poorly accessible location, remote from services, facilities and public transport", contrary to Core Policies 26 and 28.

5. The pattern in the approvals

Of the nine approvals in the 1 to 4 band, the ones examined in full each had something the refusals did not:

- **A fallback position.** Two rested on extant or lapsed permissions for a dwelling on the same plot. In one, the officer treated the proposal as seeking to "complete and regularise a form of residential development that has previously

been accepted on this site", and expressly did **not** examine sustainability or isolation because of it.

- **A site judged to be within the built area.** One was held to be "bound by built development on all sides" and therefore inside the built area of a Smaller Village, notwithstanding that the Local Plan "does not provide a defined development limit" there and relies on "the subjective nature of whether a site is in the 'built' area".
- **An agricultural tie.** One carries a condition restricting occupation to a person employed in agriculture, granted "solely to meet an essential agricultural need".

6. The clearest signal in the sample

Every scheme set aside under the demolition-and-conversion exclusion had been **approved**: barn and outbuilding conversions, replacement dwellings, and redevelopment of former commercial buildings, across at least ten decisions in the same window.

Development Policy 1 permits re-use of a redundant building and one-for-one replacement. A conversion walks through an open door. A new plot on undeveloped land has to argue its way in through the tilted balance, and in this sample it usually failed.

For anyone searching for sites in this district, a redundant building is worth considerably more than an equivalent area of open land.

7. What this does not tell you

The window is four months. Starting at adoption is deliberate and defensible, but it is short, and decisions issued in April and May were made on applications submitted well before the new plan existed. A pattern drawn from four months of decisions is an indication, not a settled position, and it should be re-tested as the post-adoption sample grows.

The scope is one to four dwellings, in the countryside, new build only.

Conversions, replacement dwellings, larger schemes and sites at the more sustainable settlements were all excluded by design, for the reason set out at the top. Anyone wanting a fuller read of the Council's appetite would need a wider search covering all approved residential applications.

The reading is partial. Six officer reports were read in full out of twenty-eight matches. The remaining twenty-two are counted from the decision recorded on

the portal, not from the reasoning. Four Permission in Principle applications fell in the window but showed an unresolved status on the portal and are excluded from the totals.

Nothing here is a substitute for reading the officer report on a site you are actually pursuing, and none of it is planning advice.