



RESPONSE OF THE COUNCIL TO PLANNING APPLICATION 230625: LAND TO THE EAST OF, NAYLAND ROAD, GREAT HORKESELEY

1. Great Horkesley Parish Council reaffirms its support for the development of the land around Great Horkesley Manor as identified in the adopted Colchester Local Plan, specifically Policy SS7, and in the planning application under consideration.

1.1 Within the justification for Policy SS7, section 6.168 states:

Infrastructure in the village is at capacity and will need to be improved / enhanced to support any new development. Requirements include new allotments, enhanced community buildings and a new scout hut. Improvements will also be sought to the A134 between the village and North Colchester to promote walking and cycling and to improve accessibility to services and facilities in Myland.

2. Housing numbers

2.1 Citing the under-delivery of affordable housing elsewhere in the Borough is not a valid argument for increasing the number of dwellings proposed for this site from 80 to 100. Making up the deficit in affordable housing elsewhere would only be achieved by delivering on this site more than the 30% required by the Local Plan, which incidentally the Parish Council would oppose.

3. Highways

3.1 Encouraging safe cycling to Trinity School, Chesterwell and beyond

3.1.1 The Council remains adamant that if the site is now to receive consent for 100 homes instead of the 80 specified in the Local Plan and previously proposed by the current applicant, the quid pro quo must be the delivery of the complete cycle link between the site and the existing off-carriageway cycle facilities in Chesterwell ("North Colchester") and thus to the new Trinity secondary school which children living in the new homes are most likely to attend.

3.1.2 The applicant's own Transport Assessment identifies within its text and more conveniently at Figure 1 some of the additional facilities in North Colchester which are within comfortable cycling distance of the Manor site, many of which will be even easier to access once the new road between Chesterwell and Boxted Road through the Leaf Living development is complete. Beyond the area covered by Figure 1 but still within easy cycling distance lie North Station, Colchester Hospital, Highwoods Country Park and many more facilities.

3.1.3 The Council is clear that an off-carriageway cycle link between the village and all that North Colchester has to offer would be seen as a significant positive by potential purchasers of the new homes, so it would be in the developer's own interest to provide it.

3.1.4 The feasibility of providing the link is considered and confirmed in the Transport Assessment (same consultant, same agent and same landowner) which supported the previous 80-house outline application. Whilst curiously it has been omitted from the current Transport Assessment, it is simply a statement of fact and remains valid.

3.2 Cycling and walking facilities within the village

3.2.1 The Council feels that the extent of the changes proposed for the A134 footway between Keelers Way and Coach Road is not clearly set out in the application. Whilst enhancement of the footway is supported because it would be used by residents of the new development walking to village destinations, the Council is **strongly opposed** to any systematic clearance of trees and other vegetation which would expose back garden fences of homes in Manor Close. The northern limit of the formal cycle link should be the proposed Tiger crossing. The Council notes that there has been some improvement in the proposed A134 pedestrian reservations close to the site access but is disappointed that these still fall short of the pedestrian priority crossing previously advocated by the Council.

3.3 Cycle and walking links to the development site

3.3.1 The Council welcomes the provision of the controlled A134 crossing near the Half Butt Inn, though it notes that the corresponding links to the housing areas of the new development have been omitted from the Masterplan. It also notes that the cycle link between the north-eastern corner of the site and Ivy Lodge Road, one of the few features of the Barratt David Wilson Homes proposal to which the Council was able to give enthusiastic support, has been omitted from the Masterplan. It should be reinstated.

3.3.2 The Council was pleased to note that the Stage One road safety audit supported its own view that there will be a need to provide a pedestrian link between the development site and the southbound A134 bus-stop north of Coach Road, either through the site itself or to the new junction giving access to the site. This is missing from the current proposal and should be added.

4. Community facilities

4.1 It is informative to revisit the process which led to the requirements (ii) and (iv) of Policy SS7: the provision of allotments and of a new scout hut with parking.

4.2 The parish council elected in 1995 was determined to create in Great Horkesley the community spirit evident in other north Colchester villages. To this end, in partnership with Colchester Borough Council, it produced a questionnaire-based Village Appraisal which was adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance in March 1998. During this process it became clear that whilst Great Horkesley residents were as likely as anyone else to be involved in social activities, they tended to do so in other villages because facilities in Great Horkesley were either non-existent or in a very poor state. Adults had allotments in West Bergholt and Mile End whilst significant numbers of teenagers belonged to Scout groups in Langham and West Bergholt. Whilst other identified measures to support community development were consequently introduced through the development of Tile House Farm, allotments and a new Scout HQ were not.

4.3 The Council notes with dismay that rather than conforming to the policy requirements as was the case with the 80-house outline application, the applicant is now proposing only that land should be made available – within the area which is to enter the public domain anyway! Putting it another way, the need for community development will be exacerbated by the addition of several hundred new residents to the existing local population but the agreed measures to address that need are no longer on offer.

4.4 The Council must also point out that the original need for allotments was identified at a time when back gardens were generally much larger than is now the case, so a modern development can be expected to generate a greater need. Putting 100 dwellings on a site originally intended for 80 would presumably be achieved in part by reducing the size of private gardens, increasing the need for allotments even further.

4.5 The applicant will be aware that the community engagement exercise run prior to the submission of the 80-house application revealed that many local residents favoured the provision of outdoor fitness equipment within a fitness trail within the proposed development. There is no reason to believe that this is no longer the case – indeed, the increase in working from home has probably made it more popular – so it should be provided.

5. The Design and Access Statement & Masterplan

5.1.1 The Council is uncertain of the purpose of this document within an “all matters reserved” application. There is much in it which is worthy of support, but the same was true of the corresponding document which formed part of the 80-house outline application, a document which was not sufficiently respected by the first 100-house proposal for the site. A member of the public present at the parish council meeting at which the current application was considered was heard to describe it as “window dressing”, a view which garnered much support.

5.1.2 The Council considers that the Masterplan should be redrafted and consulted upon in a separate process so that it contains fewer possibilities and more firm proposals which could then be considered as part of the application and be included in the consent, were one to be granted. In other words, in order to reduce conflict with the local community at the reserved matters stage, the current application should cease to be “all matters reserved”.

5.1.3 Nevertheless, the Council resolved that it would address those matters covered by the DAS & Masterplan which are likely to have the greatest impact on existing residents: densities within the site and boundary treatments.

5.2 Site Layout

5.2.1 The Council’s support for a 100-house proposal for this site – 25% greater than the Local Plan allocation agreed by the applicant – is contingent upon it being demonstrated that there would be no more adverse impact on existing residents than would be the case if 80 houses were built. Successive iterations of the BDWH proposal transferred ever more dwellings to the northern end of the site from the southern end, to the extent that their last proposal was for twice as many in the north as in the south. Ensuring the privacy and security of Ivy Lodge Road residents thus became ever more difficult: BDWH acknowledged the need and gave undertakings to those residents but the promised measures did not appear in the detail of their proposals.

5.2.2 The Council acknowledges that within a 100-house development there will be various housing types and tenures and that this will result in varying housing density across the site. However, in designing the layout the need to provide privacy, security and freedom from noise nuisance for

existing residents should be **paramount**. The Council is aware that these matters are covered by adopted planning policies but the applicant has identified that this edge-of-countryside site offers opportunities not available in more urban settings. One of those opportunities is to respect the needs of existing residents – whether on Ivy Lodge Road or Nayland Road – to a greater extent than required by those policies. That opportunity must be seized.

5.2.3 The Council remains of the view that the children’s play area within the site should be located wherever the need is likely to be greatest. This means that if at the reserved matters stage it emerges that there is a preponderance of houses with smaller private gardens at the north end of the development, the play area should be located on the more northerly open space. This would be in line with the view previously expressed by the applicant’s agent that the play area should be near the allotments to facilitate general family use of the facilities. This would then point to the provision of the outdoor fitness equipment on the southern open space.

5.2.4 The Council is concerned that the willow plantation to the east of the site, the presence of which has at every stage from the call-for-sites exercise onwards been regarded as essential to the screening of the development from the open countryside, is not within the application site boundary. It is therefore unclear how an obligation to maintain the plantation would be imposed on the applicant, let alone at the reserved matters stage and beyond. This issue must be resolved before outline consent is granted. The Council has previously indicated its willingness to accept ownership of the plantation and enter into an agreement regarding its maintenance; that remains the case.

6. Financial Viability Assessment

6.1 A critique of this document was not attempted by the Council since it does not have the necessary resources and experience. That said, paragraph 2.5 was considered at the public meeting and is quoted here for convenience:

At the time of writing this report England is entering a cost-of-living crisis and facing substantial economic turmoil and uncertainty in the markets. Emerging from its third national lockdown with no imminent sign of the pandemic ending. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic continue with materials shortages and unprecedented price rises which have had a significant impact on sites in the past year months [sic] and look set to continue into the winter. The impact on production and sales rates should not be underestimated. We have made the specific special assumption in our work that sales, construction, profit and interest are at pre pandemic, and pre cost of living crisis levels. As such our assessments are more optimistic [sic] than they could be. Market analysts are now reporting a significant downturn in new homes sales with no expectations of the performance of the market in 2020 being repeated.

(On hearing this read aloud at the Council meeting on 24th April, one member of the public was heard to ask “What planet are they living on?”)

6.2 The style of this paragraph with its references to “economic turmoil” and a “cost-of-living crisis” would be more appropriate to the propaganda of an opposition political party. It is clearly out of date and would have been so even on 24th November 2022 when it was prepared. For example, on that date NHS hospitals were already reporting that the anticipated winter surge of Covid-19 cases had not occurred and that influenza was more likely to be the predominant illness of the winter, as it had been before the pandemic lockdown. The paragraph contains various opinions which ought to be presented as facts, with references to support them. No justification is given for the use of the 2020 performance of the market as a baseline.

6.3 The Council accepts that financial viability can be a factor in determining a planning application. Unfortunately for the applicant, the paragraph quoted strongly suggests that this particular assessment of financial viability is far from firmly rooted in the reality of the present. The Council believes that the planning authority should regard it as unreliable and afford it little if any weight.

7. Summary

The Council has no choice but to recommend to the planning authority that in its current form application 230625 Land to the East of, Nayland Road be rejected. It does so because:

- It proposes without valid justification building 100 homes on a site identified in the Local Plan as being appropriate for 80;
- There is no proposal to provide a cycle link to national standards between the application site and Trinity School, Chesterwell and urban Colchester;
- There is no proposal for allotments;
- There is no proposal for a new Scout and Guide HQ;
- There is no scope to provide enforceable undertakings to protect the amenity of existing residents whose property adjoins the site.

8. Future process

The Council is aware that there will be negotiations between the applicant and the planning authority to explore whether the deficiencies of the application, prominent among which is its failure to conform to the Adopted Local Plan, can be overcome. The Council anticipates that these negotiations will include exploration of the extent to which the requirements of Policy SS7 can realistically be delivered by development of the application site. Since this will have a direct impact on life in Great Horkesley, the Council formally requests that it should be consulted before any agreement is reached on either setting aside any element of Policy SS7 or other adopted policies intended to promote community and leisure activities within the village.