

Dedham Parish Council Response to Consultation on CBC Local Plan

1. Introduction

The Local Plan Report is in excess of 200 pages and covers a wide range of strategic and policy issues which are the subject of consultation. It is impossible for a small Parish Council to get together a detailed response on all the issues covered in the new Plan but there are some significant points that we wish to make which are detailed below.

2. General Comments

- The prime focus of the new Plan appears to be to facilitate increased housing development in the areas of Colchester, Tendring and Braintree. All these areas have already seen major growth under current and previous plans. Whilst it is clear that such growth has some inbuilt capacity to generate further growth, it is not understood why the further growth now proposed for this region could not be shared more proportionally with other parts of the country where it might also be aligned with the generation of employment and skills to create more viable communities.
- The totality of the proposals as currently defined will significantly increase the footfall of population and development right on our Parish Boundaries which will in turn encourage both Dedham and The Vale to be an increasing lung for residents subject to more intensive housing. Whilst we greatly value the benefits of living and working in Dedham and are more than willing to share our facilities with those outside the Parish, we must point out the pressures this places on the Parish, in terms of services and facilities. The funding methodology currently applied provides no additional compensation to the Village to help support the increasing number of visitors to The Vale and the focus on Tourism, Leisure, Culture and Heritage (policy DM5) is considered mainly from the perspective of agreeing acceptable locations for visitor accommodation and leisure and sports activities rather than giving real support to the areas receiving the tourism. The current infrastructure in Dedham is at breaking point on summer bank holiday weekends and it is to consider increases in housing development in the region without adequately making provision for the recreational needs of the increased population. Dedham wants to have a vibrant local economy and be a successful hub for the pursuit of countryside activities but it does not want to develop into a giant car park with the attendant increase in emission levels this would produce in such a sensitive area. We need an innovative solution to this problem which we cannot currently see in the new Local Plan.

Having identified the need for growth, and the necessary targets, the new Plan has properly identified the various other strategies that will be required to support this. Such strategies cover such things as the local economy, Transport and Communications Infrastructure, Employment and Education, Health and Well Being and many Environmental issues.

- Our concern about all of these are that current experience has been that the quality and quantity of maintenance and development of existing structures and services across all these areas are in many cases already totally inadequate. For example, the mobile phone signal in the centre of Dedham - a major tourist area for the region - is deplorable; the local Hospital is in Special Measures with the prospect of an amalgamation with Ipswich potentially requiring residents to travel further for some specialist treatment; the local GP Practices, already severely stretched, will struggle to cope with additional demand; the sewerage and drainage infrastructure for the village is inadequate to support existing development; the maintenance of highways and footways within the village is extremely poor and requests for a quieter surface for the busy A12 road remain to be addressed. As a village we believe that improvement across all these areas is necessary **before** commitments are made to increase

the local population and add to our housing stock. It is wholly unrealistic to expect developers to bear the burden of these costs which they will seek to minimise at every opportunity.

- We are disappointed that the Plan does not appear to contain any proposals to rationalise some of the levels of Local Government that manage all these processes to improve costs and standards of delivery across the board. As a Parish we believe we could deliver better quality local services in some areas if some of the resource currently allocated to county and borough level were allocated to the Parish. We believe this would be more cost-effective and would also seek to empower local democracy.
- In the general policies on page 29 there is no consideration of security and safety in the home. With the massive reduction in police manpower and coming changes to the fire and rescue service this should have been part of the consideration of the sustainability considerations with education and the NHS provision. For example: 'Addressing Safety and Security Needs' – to ensure people feel safe in their homes, communities and leisure environments, consideration will be given to developing fire safety and policing policies with the appropriate authorities. For example, the Crime Commission for Essex has committed £100,000 to 'locally focused community safety hubs'. Will these be able to service the rural communities identified in the plan?
- Dedham welcomes the support that is given in the Plan to the on-going protection of the AONB and notes (Policy ENV4) "that applications for major development within or in close proximity to the Dedham Vale AONB will be refused unless in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated that the development is "in the public interest". Whilst the Parish Council is willing to support some development of smaller homes, for either starter or downsizing purposes, on the boundary of the AONB, we would not seek to demonstrate that such development would 'be in the public interest' and therefore be agreed within the AONB.

3. Comments on Housing Development Proposals for Dedham

Dedham Parish Council (DPC) appreciates that there is a requirement to increase housing stock nationally and that we in Dedham need to ensure that we have sufficient stock for our resident's needs. The current site under development at Saunders Field will deliver the element of affordable housing identified in our housing needs survey. To enable this, the site has also provided large executive homes. The total number of homes under construction is sixteen with nine being affordable.

As part of this consultation exercise DPC has gathered the views of residents from various sources and this is evidenced in Appendix 1.

'The Heath' has been identified by Colchester Borough Council (CBC) as the area for development sites. There is real and genuine concern from residents about the sewerage and surface water capability of this area. This is not new, or brought about by climate change; for many years' residents have had to put up with sewerage backing up into toilets and indeed overflowing into gardens; the land is clay and surface water does not drain away, leading to flooding around the Meade area Coggeshall Road and Long Road East. Due to the lack of adequate infrastructure the sewerage issues not only appear on The Heath but also further down the system at several places towards the sports ground. The complete system needs upgrading from The Heath down to the village. We recognise the inclusion of words in the plan "adequate wastewater treatment and sewerage infrastructure capacity in the catchment area"; however, the lack of action by Anglia Water to address the problems over recent years provides no confidence that this plan will deliver any improvement. The view is that absolutely no build permissions should be given for The Heath given these issues, as adding more homes will only increase the load on an already overloaded and inadequate system.

DPC recognises that the housing stock in Dedham is highly geared towards large detached houses which leave gaps in our built environment for starter homes and downsizing homes; this is supported by residents and is evidenced in Appendix 1.

DPC has been clear and public on its criteria for development, sharing this with residents and CBC. There is resolute opinion amongst residents, and a key part of the DPC criteria, that building within the AONB should not be permitted. DPC is also aware that sites adjacent to the AONB are afforded protection. Of the proposed sites, two are firmly in the AONB and one is adjacent.

The suggestion of three sites provides an excess of land for building to meet the style of housing needed and only encourages the building of large detached houses, something evidently the village does not need.

DPC supports CBC's rejection of The Heath sites that have not been successful at the initial assessment stage. Of those that have made it to this stage DPC has the following comments:

- Site 243 has been subject to a previous planning appeal, application number COL/95/1021 (1996), the application was dismissed at appeal on the basis that "the application would irrevocably harm the open character and appearance of the site and this part of Dedham Vale AONB and CCA" - the Parish Council fails to see why this conclusion from the representative of the Secretary of State should be changed.
- Site 091 is firmly rejected by residents on the basis of its biodiversity and difficult and potentially dangerous access; this is supported by DPC.
- Site 213 is outside the AONB, but afforded some protection being adjacent to the AONB.

If CBC is insistent on building on The Heath and can guarantee a solution to the sewerage and drainage issues, DPC believes that site 213 could comfortably support the building of starter homes if the majority of homes were 2 bed and the remainder being 1 and 3 bed and built to a creative design that will provide parking and garden space. The design of these homes should be such that they do not lend themselves to future extension in size. Only with a firm commitment to deliver an agreed plan of this kind will the Parish Council give its support to this site.

This still leaves a gap in our housing need for downsizing homes that will allow our older residents to move from the larger housing stock to properties with less land and within walking distance of the village centre. DPC considers this to be a priority and whilst plots have not yet been volunteered, greater effort should be directed at identifying possibilities. DPC would support the use of the remaining CBC allocation for this purpose.

If downsizing options do not prove deliverable and CBC considers that delivery of the remaining numbers is essential then DPC would like to see other sites that were volunteered and were outside of The Heath envelope, revisited as possible options for development.

DPC recognises that there has been a proposal that the development boundaries within the Parish should be changed on the basis of sustainability. This effectively removes the hamlets of Bargate Lane and Lamb Corner from further development, thus leaving The Heath as the only option. DPC fails to understand or agree the logic:

- Footways are equally available from all sites into the village centre.
- Bus stops are equally available at Lamb Corner.
- The Local School in the Centre of the Village has a number of pupils that arrive by car; most of the access to the School is via The Heath. Development here would add considerably to existing congestion whereas development within the Hamlets would have a more limited impact.
- The report suggests the Heath as being better placed because it has limited services and facilities; it has the same as Lamb Corner and Bargate Lane. There are no facilities and all look to the village centre.
- Access to secondary schools is equal for all sites

Conclusion

DPC recognises the need for housing stock.

Dedham needs starter homes and downsizing homes.

Dedham Heath and the sewerage system further down the infrastructure has serious capacity issues that need funding and resolving.

Dedham Heath has surface water problems due to the clay soil. SuDS cannot manage the loading. Adding further houses to this system is not tenable.

If CBC is resolved to build on The Heath and on areas afforded AONB protection, then DPC would only consider this on one site to deliver starter homes.

DPC sees the delivery of downsizing homes within walkable distance of the village centre as our next priority; The Heath is not suitable for this type of housing.

If identifying a suitable downsizing build location in the village centre proves impossible and CBC still requires delivery of the quota, then DPC would like to work with CBC and consider other volunteered sites outside of The Heath area.

Any attempt by a developer, at a later stage in the process, to build larger homes than those identified as required by DPC will be firmly opposed.

DPC does not support the development boundary review conclusion.

DPC would welcome further discussion with CBC on options moving forward.