

Item 156/16 – report (c) Colchester Local Plan

The recent public Exhibition in Dedham regarding the Local Plan focused principally on proposed housing development within the Parish and the recent meeting of DPC's Strategic Development Advisory Group also concentrated primarily on this. Our proposed response is the subject of a separate report (a) which, if agreed to be necessary, can be amended following public consultation at this meeting. This report (c) is a short draft response to other elements of the Local Plan.

The Report itself is in excess of 200 pages and covers a wide range of strategic and policy issues which are also out for consultation. It is impossible for a small Parish Council to get together a detailed response to all the issues covered in the new Plan but there are some significant points that we wish to make which are detailed below. Any resident can also make personal comments on the proposals directly to CBC; the deadline for which is **16th September**.

- The prime focus of the new Plan appears to be 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 Village 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 simply irresponsible 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 and the maintenance of highways and footways within the village is extremely poor. 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'.
- 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.

Councillors or members of the public are welcome to comment on the above draft response and to suggest other topics that might be discussed for inclusion.