

## **NEW Growth Option 5: Development of a new settlement at Chelmer Mead, near Little Dunmow, with limited development in the towns and villages**

This new option, put forward by Chater Homes, seeks to create a new settlement of up to 3,000 homes at Chelmer Mead, near Little Dunmow. The accompanying Masterplan shows the possible parcels of land which could be used to accommodate new homes, shops and community facilities, a Country Park, golf course, secondary school site, sports facilities, new cycle and footpaths and road improvements.

Four public exhibitions were held in December 2007, at Henham, Great Dunmow, Felsted and Elsenham, to present these proposals to both members of the public and key stakeholders. The findings of these exhibitions are contained in the accompanying 'Public Exhibition Summary', prepared by Green Issues Communications. Comments received will continue to shape the proposal to ensure that local concerns and issues are addressed and planned for. Chater Homes have been overt in presenting these proposals and in doing so have welcomed feedback from both supporters and objectors. The proposals seek to create a balanced community, through not only delivering a mix of housing types, but also by providing facilities and infrastructure that will benefit new and existing residents in the area.

The background behind how these proposals were formed is detailed below. This is followed by an in-depth look at the key aspects of the scheme.

### Strategic Location

Chelmer Mead has been put forward as a location for strategic growth in order to meet a notable proportion of the district's new housing requirement. The land occupies a pivotal location in what is essentially the most important part of the A120 corridor in strategic planning terms.

The western section of the Essex A120 corridor is the area that is affected greatest by the proximity of Stansted Airport and the M11. Great Dunmow and Little Dunmow sit centrally within this section, midway between Bishop's Stortford/Stansted and Braintree. Historically, the land also sits at the crossroads of the east-west Roman road, and the north-south routes which link Thaxted and the rural areas to the north with Chelmsford to the south.

Along with Bishop's Stortford, which is a much larger settlement, Great Dunmow is the only town of significant size that is in close proximity to Stansted Airport, and benefits from the fact that it is not adversely affected by noise from air traffic from either the existing or proposed runways.

### Opportunities for New/Expanded Settlements in the Dunmow Area

The Draft East of England Plan identified the development of a new village in the Great Dunmow area as an alternative to urban extensions to the town itself. Looking at the wider landscape character and settlement pattern of the surrounding area, it was considered that opportunities do exist to provide a new or more likely expanded settlement in the immediate hinterland to the town, which would enable new housing to be provided which protects the character and setting of the town itself.

The settlement pattern in the rural areas beyond the main towns in North Essex is characterised by two main types of village (as shown below) - loose-knit groups such as the Sailings, Stebbing, and the Eastons, and tighter more 'urban' villages such as Rayne, Great Notley and Takeley. The latter tend to be those where post-war development has resulted in new housing estates.

To the south of the old A120, settlements have tended to concentrate on the main lines of communication, being the routes between Braintree and Chelmsford, Great Dunmow and Chelmsford, and Bishop's Stortford and Chelmsford. To the north of the old A120, lines of communication are not the dominant feature of settlement distribution, and the small groupings of hamlets tend to be dispersed more generally in relation to river corridors than road corridors.

As a consequence, the character of the settlement pattern north of the old A120 very much represents 'unspoilt' or historic Essex. The loose groupings of villages and clusters of hamlets have not been influenced unduly by modern growth, and have not been affected by major new communication routes. They nestle into an open countryside made up of a series of ridges and river valleys, much as they have done for centuries. This is the special and unique character of most of Uttlesford.

South of the old A120, however, the countryside is more heavily dominated by the key transport connections, and growth has been directed towards these routes. The significant improvements to the A120 and A131 routes, coupled with major new development in the Braintree area, give the countryside south of the old A120 more the character of 'modern Essex'.

Looking at the wider landscape character of the Dunmow area, it can be seen that there are a number of areas that would be particularly sensitive to new development, such as the river valleys and plateau areas north of the A120 and along the Chelmer River, but equally there are opportunities in areas such as Little Dunmow to accommodate new development in areas of much less sensitivity. This is discussed further in the landscape sub-section.

Therefore, in principle, it is considered that the existing settlement pattern would enable a new or expanded 'village' to be provided. However, any such development would need to be of sufficient scale for it to function properly as a community, with integral facilities for everyday needs such as education, shopping, services, leisure and so on. An expanded existing settlement is most likely to achieve the necessary 'critical mass' to support a wide range of services.

#### Opportunity at Chelmer Mead, near Little Dunmow/Oakwood Park

It is submitted that Chelmer Mead, near Little Dunmow and Oakwood Park, provides an ideal location for new settlement. Such a scheme would be within walking and cycling distance of Great Dunmow, but also far enough away to protect the setting of the town. The new settlement would achieve a 'critical mass' of population, capable of delivering a more sustainable community, whilst maintaining the individuality of the existing villages.

Such a development could provide a substantial number of new homes and associated facilities within the plan period. This would make a meaningful contribution to the requirements for new homes in the district, in a manner that minimises the environmental and social impact, whilst delivering enhanced public transport services and significant new opportunities for leisure and recreation in the Dunmow area.

In essence the proposals would form a new settlement, which along with the existing communities of Little Dunmow and Oakwood Park would create a cluster of settlements, similar to other clusters in the sub-region, as referred to previously.

Guidance produced by the Town & Country Planning Association / DCLG (2007) on *Best Practice in Urban Extensions and New Settlements* identifies that a cluster of settlements needs to be a sufficient size to be regarded as a sustainable community. Paragraph 8.4.5 sets out that:

*"A place needs to be large enough to support a secondary school.  
This means that the number of homes will be in the range 4,000-*

*5,000 at least. The reasoning is that a community that cannot provide for its children through to adulthood is not sustainable, and that the quality of community life is impoverished if older children do not participate because they are sent elsewhere each day."*

The guidance goes on to contend that secondary school catchments can be used as a basic building block when planning the size of a new settlement. The Chelmer Mead proposal of up to 3,000 new homes, combined with the existing settlements at Little Dunmow, Oakwood Park and Felsted would achieve the 'critical mass' of 4,000 homes, as specified by the Town & Country Planning Association.

Development on previously developed land has created an 'anomaly' at Oakwood Park. This 850 home development lies between Felsted and Little Dunmow, but has no clear relationship to either of these settlements. It is not a 'village' in its own right, nor is it clearly allied to any other village. It is too small to be a self-sustaining community. Further growth in this area offers the opportunity in our view for a larger community comprising a cluster of two or three settlements in the Little Dunmow/Oakwood Park area. This would provide a more sustainable cluster than that existing and it could produce a population that could sustain a new secondary school.

Oakwood Park and Little Dunmow are currently lacking in facilities. However, the provision of new homes in the area would mean that a greater range of facilities could be supported. Settlements such as Takeley, Thaxted, Newport and Elsenham have relatively small populations, ranging from around 1,800 to 2,300, yet all have a range of basic facilities. All have a shop and/or a post office, a primary school and a pub/restaurant and some have a doctor's surgery, a dentist's surgery, a secondary school, a library and a community centre. Therefore, an expanded cluster of settlements in accordance with the proposals could reasonably support a wide range of facilities, benefiting both new and existing residents. In particular the communities in this area are likely to be deficient in accessible green public open space, so the delivery of new homes provides a vehicle to redress this deficiency.

### Landscape

A detailed landscape character assessment has been undertaken using the Living Landscapes methodology, which is widely recognised by Natural England and local authorities as being a sound basis for assessment. This has indicated that the Chelmer Mead Study Area lies in a landscape character area (LCA) P2 which has capacity to accommodate change.

The Chelmer Mead Study Area lies in the southern tip of LCA P2 which forms a southern edge of the plateau between the Chelmer river valley and Stebbing Brook valley. This part of LCA P2 has been subject to relatively recent agricultural change as well as the construction of the new A120 which bisects the Chelmer Mead area resulting in the removal of field boundaries and the creation of a relatively large-scale semi-denuded landscape between the former A120 and northern edge of Little Dunmow village. In addition, the construction of new housing on the former sugar beet factory at Oakwood immediately to the southeast of Little Dunmow village has also resulted in a landscape change.

These factors together mean that this part of LCA P2 probably has a greater capacity to accommodate the landscape change associated with proposed housing than other parts of LCA P2. Although the landscape character assessment did not seek to subdivide landscape character areas, it can be assumed that the landscape to the north of Little Dunmow village as far as the old A120 (Stane Street), has a higher capacity to accommodate change than LCA P2 as a whole.

### Safeguarding Existing Settlements

The detailed study of the area to the east of Great Dunmow, including Little Dunmow, indicates that there is scope to accommodate new development in the vicinity of Little Dunmow village. Clearly, any new development would have to be carefully designed to safeguard the character of the existing settlement which has a southerly and south-westerly outlook. Although the scene would undeniably be different, new housing and community facilities could be accommodated in these areas in such a manner that would effectively tie in with or relate to the new Oakwood Park development. It could therefore create a more sustainable and unified new settlement cluster that would be associated with, but lie separate from, the historic core of Little Dunmow.

No substantial planting would be necessary to provide a barrier between Chelmer Mead and Little Dunmow. Adequate visual baffles and vegetation already exist, nonetheless, in 5 to 10 years it would be possible to establish new woodland copses and areas of planting, particularly to the north adjacent to the new A120, and northeast overlooking the Stebbing valley, which would provide a very useful contribution to the wider landscape and enfold parts of the proposed Chelmer Mead housing.

### Country Park and Golf Course

Currently there is a lack of accessible green public open space in the wider Dunmow area. The opportunity to create a substantial country park along the River Chelmer, upstream to Great Dunmow, would address this deficiency and provide very significant benefits, both to the existing residents of Great Dunmow, Oakwood Park, Felsted and Little Dunmow, as well as inhabitants of Chelmer Mead.

The Country Park could be created and be available within 2 to 3 years. The area would predominantly be set to pasture, which would restore the traditional valley character and thereby significantly improve the quality of this part of the Special Landscape Area. The Country Park would represent a substantial planning and landscape gain associated with the Chelmer Mead development.

It is understood that Great Dunmow Town Council owns an area of land comprising 24 hectares which abuts the land controlled by Chater Homes. It has been mooted that this land might be used for a 9-hole golf course or as part of a country park. Chater Homes have suggested that they could provide additional land to potentially offer an 18-hole golf course in addition to a Country Park.

It is proposed that the Country Park would include a network of both existing and new cycle routes and footpaths (see Masterplan). These would not only provide residents with a greater variety of possible means of travel within the area, but would also promote the use of the Country Park by those living nearby.

### Neighbourhood Centre

The proposal at Chelmer Mead would provide a neighbourhood centre, complete with shops and community facilities. The delivery of these facilities would be made viable by the critical mass of people present in the wider settlement cluster, comprising Chelmer Mead, Little Dunmow and Oakwood Park.

This provision would benefit both new and existing residents alike and help promote more sustainable travel patterns and sustainable living. There may also be scope to deliver a small quantity of office space at this centre, to provide for a modest proportion of the employment needs of the area.

### Reserved School Site

As shown on the accompanying Masterplan, a substantially sized site has been reserved at Chelmer Mead for the provision of educational facilities. If up to 3,000 new homes were delivered in the area, then a 'critical mass' of people could be achieved to support a new secondary school at the site. As identified earlier in these representations the Town & Country Planning Association consider the provision of a secondary school as key to the delivery of sustainable communities. This site would also be capable of accommodating a new primary school.

These educational facilities would be situated opposite the neighbourhood centre and adjacent to a new relief road and 'by-pass' to Little Dunmow. This should both promote sustainable transport patterns and help to ease any new congestion, caused by the development. Educational facilities provided at this site would be available to new and existing residents in the area.

### Public Transport and Highways Access

The Chelmer Mead area, in close proximity to Great Dunmow and Little Dunmow, is also a key location for delivering a high quality public transport system along the A120 and A130. The scheme would include an efficient, rapid bus service linking the site to employment locations and rail interchanges within Bishop's Stortford, Stansted, Great Dunmow, Braintree and Chelmsford.

The Core Strategy (paragraph 6.47) identifies that "a new settlement at Elsenham has the benefit of being able to focus on Elsenham railway station and be served by a frequent bus service". However, it is understood that there is no further capacity on this rail line during peak periods. Substantial committed development at Harlow will add to the capacity problems currently experienced. A journey to work at Stansted Airport would not be direct but involve a change of train at Stansted Mountfitchet. In addition it is anticipated that future rail improvements will focus on Harlow and Stansted, ahead of Elsenham. Any improvements to the station at Elsenham are unlikely to be completed before 2021, at the very earliest. Services from the railway station at Elsenham will therefore be largely unattractive to residents of a new settlement in that vicinity and will not be used by them to any great extent.

The existing bus services in Elsenham are also poor with effectively only one orbital route. The existing routes in Elsenham serve only Stansted and Bishops Stortford via constrained roads - resulting in lengthy journey times. The provision of a more frequent service would be costly and face significant problems in implementation. Given the poor quality roads, congestion and long journey times, even a more frequent bus service is unlikely to be attractive to new residents in Elsenham and as such is unlikely to succeed. In Chelmer Mead, however, there is the real potential to build on the existing 7 bus routes in the vicinity of the site, which have direct bus services to significant areas of employment such as Stansted, Braintree and Chelmsford.

The land identified for development at Elsenham straddles the railway line with the majority of the land lying to the east of the line. There are limited opportunities, for both vehicles and pedestrians, to cross the line and as such the railway acts as a barrier severing the majority of land from the town.

In contrast to Elsenham, the Chelmer Mead development would have significantly increased choice with regard to rail travel being located to avail of services from Bishop's Stortford, Braintree, Chelmsford and the planned new railway station at Beaulieu Park. The future planned park and ride services for Chelmsford will further improve links to Little Dunmow.

The diagram above shows the strategic location of the Dunmow area in the context of the sub-region. A key feature is the potential ease of access to the surrounding larger towns from the area. The situation of Chelmer Mead on the eastern margin of Great Dunmow enables the site to take advantage of both the east/west strategic link to Braintree/Stansted and the southeast link to Chelmsford and beyond. In contrast Elsenham is wholly reliant on the Bishop's Stortford link, which is already understood to be at capacity.

Despite the close proximity of Elsenham to the M11, the nearest motorway junction is some considerable distance (4 miles) from the development site. To make matters worse the local roads in and around Elsenham are narrow, limited in capacity and unsuitable for substantial bus movements. For these reasons there would be considerable hurdles to overcome to provide a high quality public transport system as part of a new settlement in this area.

It should also be noted that proposals at Beaulieu Park are now advancing at a considerable rate and the scheme is planned to include a new railway station. This transport node would be in closer proximity to Chelmer Mead than Elsenham and would provide substantial additional rail capacity to London and other towns in the region. A new settlement at Chelmer Mead could include a high speed bus link to this new station.

### Alternative Options

Should the Council decide not to pursue a scheme at Chelmer Mead of up to 3,000 homes, then it would be possible to take forward a reduced scheme of around 1,000 new homes on this land (please see alternative Masterplan). Such a proposal could supplement the delivery of new homes elsewhere in the district and cumulatively meet the housing requirement placed on the council.

It should be noted that a reduced scheme at Chelmer Mead would deliver a smaller level of facilities and infrastructure than the full proposal. However, as shown on the alternative Masterplan, the 1,000 home option would still provide the Country Park and recreation facilities, albeit possibly in association with other operators.

### Summary

The purpose of this representation is to promote this opportunity for a new settlement at Chelmer Mead, near Little Dunmow, on land where Chater Homes has control. The land could accommodate: up to 3,000 new homes; a neighbourhood centre (with shops and community facilities); Country Park and 18 hole golf course; a new secondary school and transport improvements, including relief road and an extended network of cycle routes and footpaths.

It is envisaged that the broad concept would be:

- To create a new community, which would form part of a settlement cluster together with Oakwood Park, where the everyday requirements for residents in terms of local shops, education, services and facilities are met within the area itself;
- To link the village via a fast, efficient, and quality bus service to the main employment/service locations and rail interchanges within the A120 corridor and surrounding area. This would include enhanced strategic express bus services along the old A120 corridor to provide a truly high quality public transport alternative and an enhanced network of local bus services to provide a reliable alternative to the car;

- To protect the character and enhance the landscape setting of Great Dunmow itself by ensuring that whilst the new settlement cluster has easy access to the town, it is visually and physically distinct;
- To increase significantly access to leisure and recreation facilities for existing and new residents in the area including potentially a riverside walk, major Country Park and 18 hole golf course;
- To provide for the additional school spaces required, by offering a reserved school site, capable of accommodating a new secondary school and/or primary school, if appropriate;
- To retain and safeguard the core of the existing village of Little Dunmow as a separate entity;
- To make the existing development at Oakwood Park more sustainable by increasing the range of facilities and services available in the area, and integrating Oakwood Park with the wider settlement cluster through improved pedestrian and cycle links;
- To minimise the impact of the development on the adjoining community of Felsted via sensitive siting, design, and management of traffic;
- To create a network of safe cycle and pedestrian links both within the development to link the schools, neighbourhood centre and residential neighbourhoods, as well as beyond the development to link into Flich Way, Great Dunmow and adjoining countryside;
- To create a network of open spaces adjoining the existing village of Little Dunmow to help protect the setting of the original village and provide local opportunities for sport and recreation.

At this stage of the process, the details of the proposals have not been fixed. Public exhibitions have been carried out at various venues across the district, incorporating key stakeholders and members of the public. The indicative Masterplan shows one possible solution, but is flexible and can be adjusted to meet the needs and concerns of the public and key stakeholders as appropriate, at the detailed stage. However, it should be recognised that these proposals are capable of providing a high quality, sustainable development which is deliverable within the Plan period.

Should the Council choose not to pursue a scheme of up to 3,000 homes at Chelmer Mead, then a smaller proposal of around 1,000 or 1,500 homes could be taken forward on part of this land. However, this type of reduced scheme would likely incorporate a smaller level of facilities and infrastructure.