

Stop Little Dunmow Expansion

Background – the context

Local context

Uttlesford District Council is required in order to meet Government housing targets for increased housing in the East of England by providing a minimum of 8000 new homes in the district between 2001 and 2021. It has chosen to increase this to a minimum of 9,666 new homes in the district by the year 2024.

Since some 5,500 have either already been built, have planning permission or are allocated for development it means sites need to be identified for 4,200 additional new homes.

As part of and key to the process of determining the best means of meeting the Government's housing requirements, Uttlesford District Council has published for public consultation (from Friday 30 November 2007 until Friday 11 January 2008) a document know as the Core Strategy. This document features four options to deliver the required housing growth.

National and Regional contexts

Planning Policy Supplement 1 sets out the main aims to deliver sustainable development through planning by:

- Making suitable land available for development in line with economic, social and environmental objectives to improve people's quality of life
- Contributing to sustainable development
- Protecting and enhancing the natural and historic environment, the quality and character of the countryside and existing communities
- Ensuring high quality development through good and exclusive design and the efficient use of resources
- Ensuring that development supports existing communities and contributes to the creation of safe, sustainable, liveable and mixed communities with good access to jobs and key services for all members of the community.

Regional policy is set out in the Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England. This is due to be adopted early in 2008 after the final consultation, launched on 23 October 2007, where the Secretary of State has confirmed that a minimum of 8000 homes are required by 2021 in Uttlesford.

The Options

Option 1 - Distributing development between the district's three main settlements of Saffron Walden (1600 homes), Great Dunmow (2130 homes) and Stansted Mountfitchet (470 homes).

Option 2 - Distributing development across the three main settlements of Saffron Walden (1200 homes), Great Dunmow (1000 homes) and Stansted Mountfitchet (30 homes) plus Newport (200 homes), Elsenham (750 homes), Thaxted (60 homes), Great Chesterford (80 homes) and Little Canfield/Takeley (750 homes) and 130 homes in other villages.

Option 3 - As Option 2, but with significantly less development at Little Canfield/Takeley (60 homes instead of 750 homes) and a significant increase at Elsenham as the start of a new settlement (1440 homes instead of 750 homes).

Option 4 - Creating a new settlement north east of Elsenham (3000 homes) plus 750 dwellings in larger towns, and 250 dwellings in villages.

At the Environment Committee on the 4 September members approved Option 4 as the Council's preferred spatial strategy.

The Dismissed Options

The Core Strategy expressly dismissed the following options:

1. All development to take place in the villages

Distributing all the development within villages would not support the local economy, which is based around the larger settlements. It would be costly and difficult to ensure adequate infrastructure

2. All development to take place in the A120 corridor (east to west across the district incorporating extensions to existing developments at Oakwood Park, Priors Green, Woodlands Park and on the edge of Great Dunmow and Bishop's Stortford).

Distributing development in settlements along the A120 corridor or the West Anglia rail corridor would have a detrimental effect on the historic character of the district and the settlements in those corridors. The scale and distribution of the development would not support the local economy or enable the provision of infrastructure as well as other options

3. All development to take place in the West Anglia rail corridor (north to south through the district with a significant development north of Stansted Mountfitchet plus smaller developments on the edge of Elsenham, Newport and Great Chesterford).

Distributing development in settlements along the A120 corridor or the West Anglia rail corridor would have a detrimental effect on the historic character of the district and the settlements in those corridors. The scale and distribution of the development would not support the local economy or enable the provision of infrastructure as well as other options

4. All development to take place in Saffron Walden, or Great Dunmow, or Stansted Mountfitchet.

Directing development to one of the district's three main settlements would have a significant detrimental impact on the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the town. It would concentrate resources in one town to the detriment of the rest of the district.

The Council further state in the Core Strategy that options for new settlements in locations other than Elsenham are not being pursued.

The general benefits of a new settlement would apply in other locations but Elsenham has clear advantages because it is close to nearby centres for employment, shopping and leisure which can be reached by public transport and where there is future potential to improve services and provide more capacity. Elsenham is well located to meet local employment and affordable housing needs arising from the District.

Alternative Options - Chelmer Mead?

The Core Strategy is a draft document. During the consultation period to 11th January 2008 alternative options to the four put forward by the Council can be proposed. **The Council has expressly confirmed that it will consider these before publishing its final Core Strategy for consideration by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.** The Council has further stated that any alternative option put forward should explain how it meets the objectives set out in the Core Strategy.

Chater Homes has through its appointed consultants, Green Issues, made it known at this late stage in the consultation process that it proposes to submit such an alternative proposal.

Notwithstanding the objectives of the Core Strategy, the dismissed option of all development along the A120 corridor and the express statement in the Core Strategy that options for new settlements in locations other than Elsenham will not be pursued, Green Issues is seeking to promote a scheme for the construction of 3,000 houses in Little Dunmow named Chelmer Mead.

A word about Green Issues

Green Issues is a highly sophisticated politicised consultancy firm based in London, Reading, Manchester, Cardiff and Newcastle. It prides itself on its ability to apply its knowledge of the planning process to increase the chances of planning success for its developer clients. An extract from its own website shows its approach to planning:

- Firstly, local research to determine the political views, key movers and shakers and the history of political support for development in the area.
- Finding out exactly what the local MPs have said on development
- MPs' majorities were carefully studied as were previous local and general election statistics from the area.
- This was used to devise the future political composition of the area (rising up until the 2020s)
- Secondly, a survey was drawn up consisting of relevant questions (importantly this **did not** identify the client).
- Green Issues' specialist communications staff undertook the survey via the telephone speaking to councillors at the County and District level, scoring a hit rate of around 90%.
- Having spoken to 26 councillors and a local MP, a report was drawn up also taking into account the undercover research that had already been taken.

To date it has played lip service to community consultation having arranged a series of exhibitions on short or no notice during working hours over the Christmas period. At those exhibitions Green Issues' representatives appeared ill prepared and showed a lack of local knowledge or appreciation of rural communities although perhaps this is not surprising given its office locations and its stated approach to planning.

Our response to the Chelmer Mead Settlement Proposal

We believe the Chelmer Mead new settlement proposal is a speculative, opportunistic and poorly thought out scheme which is inconsistent with and fails to meet the objectives set out in the Core Strategy and the key drivers of policy, overall spatial strategy and regional transport strategy objectives contained in the draft East of England Plan which is due to be adopted early in 2008.

In particular the proposed scheme is inconsistent with the following objectives:

- *To preserve, conserve and, where possible, enhance the locally distinctive character of the market towns and rural settlements and their settings within Uttlesford, and to retain the separation between settlements.*

Little Dunmow is a small historic village details of which are mentioned in the Domesday Book (1086). The village retains its own distinct identity and is a conservation area with many listed buildings. The famous Dunmow Flitch Trials originated in Little Dunmow and the original Flitch Chair resides within the historic church which formed part of a much larger Priory established in 1104. The local distinctiveness and historic character of Little Dunmow, Felsted and Great Dunmow would be destroyed and the attractive countryside settings of Great Dunmow and Felsted seriously damaged by the Chelmer Mead proposal. The man made environment of a country park with Pitch and Putt and a hotel would create an un-natural landscape, which fails to respect the intrinsic qualities of the countryside which forms the attractive setting to Little and Great Dunmow; furthermore it is not required.

- *To support a local economy which retains and encourages growth of existing and new employers by providing enough land and premises of the right type and in sustainable locations that will meet the anticipated needs and aspirations of businesses.*

The Chelmer Mead scheme provides no employment opportunities as a 100% housing scheme whilst numerous other sites in the district offer potential mixed use development.

- *To reduce the need to travel by car.*

The scheme is effectively a dormitory settlement, providing neither employment opportunities nor is it within reasonable walking or cycling distance of local employment opportunities or other main services at Great Dunmow.

Furthermore, the scheme is poorly related to public transport connections with access to the rail network some considerable distance away.

As such the scheme would result in increased reliance on car travel exacerbating out-commuting.

- *To protect, conserve and, where possible, enhance the varied landscape character within Uttlesford reflecting landscape sensitivity and promoting local distinctiveness and an understanding of the historical significance of landscape features.*

Existing countryside, its habitats, agricultural, cultural and visual qualities will be destroyed and a man-made country park further scars the countryside rather than enhancing it. The natural habitat for badgers, foxes, deer, numerous birds

including kingfishers and herons would be replaced with man made paths and benches and further erode the high quality farmland and countryside.

- *To protect and improve existing cycle routes and footpaths.*

The scheme does not provide any meaningful contribution in this respect. The area already benefits from a network of well-maintained footpaths and cycle paths the rural character of which would be destroyed by the Chelmer Mead development proposal.

- *To plan for provision of infrastructure that will allow for people to access social, educational, health, employment, recreational, green space and cultural facilities within the district*

The Chelmer Mead scheme does not offer any of these infrastructure provisions other than to replace countryside with country park rather it attempts to rely on community facilities already required to be provided as part of the Oakwood Park development which facilities would be unable to support the additional needs of 3,000 families.

- *To support high quality new development and improvements to the public realm that respects, preserves and enhances the historic nature of the town centres of Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow and supports their function as important local retail centres within the District*

The proposed development would not only swamp the defined important historic settlements of Little Dunmow, Felsted and Barnston but Great Dunmow would lose its distinct character as a market town and become part of ribbon development, against the policies that seek to maintain separation between communities, as recently decided by the Secretary of State when rejecting proposed coalescence of Oakwood Park with Felsted.

What to do (if you do object)

Green Issues have sought to implement a strategy which gives us as a community little time to voice our concerns or make representations but it is clear that is what we must do if we are not to face the prospect of living in the midst of a building site for the next 20 years.

How to submit your comments (to Uttlesford District Council NOT GREEN ISSUES)

Write a letter to Uttlesford District Council to be sent either by post to The Policy Team, Uttlesford District Council, Council Offices, London Road, Saffron Walden CB11 4ER or emailed to planning@uttlesford.gov.uk.

We have prepared a letter of representation which we propose to send to the Council which is available on request. Whilst your own words are best, given the short time afforded to us by Chater's and Green Issues' exploitation of the planning process, we have prepared also a pro forma letter which can be used to make your views known.

To be considered "duly made" and included in reports of the consultation, comments must be received by Uttlesford District Council by Friday 11th January 2008.

And after 11th January

The Council will consider all duly made representations received by 11th January. It is the intention that these will be discussed at the Environment Committee on 11 March 2008. The Council will then prepare its Core Strategy for approval by Full Council on 22 April 2008 for submission to the Secretary of State in May 2008.

24 December 2007

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