



GREAT BARDFIELD PARISH COUNCIL



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Essex Village of the Year 2009

Inspector Mr Roger Clews
North Essex Authorities
Joint Strategic (Section 1) Plan

3 December 2017

Dear Mr Clews

Statement of Objection to the Plans for Community Garden Villages

Great Bardfield is a village of 1300 residents situated less than 4 miles from the proposed development area of 'West of Braintree'. This village, together with the other villages along the Pant Valley, is historically and environmentally significant. There are many fine examples of medieval architecture in the village centre. The village and surrounding countryside feature in the works of Edward Bawden and Eric Ravilious, and other members of the Bardfield Artists group, whose work is included in many national art collections. Care has been taken to preserve the heritage of the village whilst ensuring that it remains a lively, viable community with development having been mainly organic and within the village boundaries. The proposed 'West of Braintree New Town' would significantly and negatively impact on this and other villages in terms of environment, transport and infrastructure. The quintessentially rural environment will be destroyed. This can never be undone.

We object most strongly to the concept of these so-called 'Garden' Communities. Our experience of larger developments is that they fail to meet the 'pie in the sky' theory of delightful places to live and work. Lack of infrastructure (including utilities such as water supply, sewerage, electricity supply, mobile phone signals, internet access) and insufficient transport links cause chaos and dissatisfaction. Provision of school places and medical

facilities have lagged far behind local development and have not yet caught up. We do not have confidence that this proposal will be deliverable. The statements made by those promoting this proposal are confusing, glossy and over-optimistic.

We do not believe that other options for residential development land have been fully investigated, including all potential brownfield sites in the district, several of which are derelict and not in use. Nor do we see sufficient evidence that unoccupied housing/other redundant buildings have been identified and brought back into use.

Braintree District Council's strategic housing land availability assessment (SHLAA), which is a requirement of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), was approved at the local plan subcommittee on 11/11/2015. This confirms that within this district the Call for Sites resulted in 344 sites identified, which could be capable of accommodating 54,856 new homes. On the basis of the council's estimated housing requirement of between 12,000-15,000 new homes up to 2033, there was an availability of nearly 4 times the estimated housing need. Only one quarter of these sites need be viable to satisfy the housing need without including the 'Garden Community' option.

NPPF Para 7 highlights three dimensions to sustainable development namely, economic, social and environmental.

Economics/Employment

The suggestion that 10,000 new jobs (i.e. 1 per household) will be generated locally is unrealistic and over-optimistic. Even with this exaggerated expectation at least 1 other person per household will be commuting to work in other locations putting more pressure on local country roads and other transport links. We have seen no evidence that the creation of 10,000 new jobs, within the garden Community is achievable. Promises! Promises!

Social/Services/Facilities

The proposed 'New Town' will need its own schools, shops and employment opportunities. We are concerned that such facilities will be focused entirely on this community, with fewer services directed or supported in other smaller local communities. Rural locations already suffer from lack of funding for leisure facilities, for example, whereas we foresee sporting & play facilities, skate parks etc., being provided by our District Council to these new communities, further eroding the available funds for existing villages.

We fear the closure of local village services - pubs, shops, schools, health centres - as the concentration of funding and effort goes to the new development. With local Councils already strapped for cash, how is this to be funded properly in future?

Environment/Loss of Agricultural Land

The land identified for development is almost entirely greenfield in nature. This proposal will result in the loss of prime agricultural land, a reduction in the natural environment, and a negative impact on wildlife. The historic airfield at Andrewsfield, which is also under threat of re-development, is a viable and much used facility and is also used by local residents as a social hub following closure of several local pubs.

We also have concerns that the development will contribute to night light pollution. This area is fortunate to have broad skies, where stars are clearly visible. The glow of light pollution is, however, extending along the whole A120/A12 corridor from Bishops Stortford & Stansted Airport to Colchester & Tendring.

Transport/Traffic

The impact of 10,000 extra homes in this area will be catastrophic on other local villages. Poorly planned public transport for rural communities means that cars are a necessity. Although Braintree District Council suggest that new residents will be encouraged to use public transport and that employment will be available locally, our experiences suggest that this is unlikely to happen. Parking and increasing traffic are already putting too much demand on our villages. Improved road and rail links are promised and we understand that most traffic is 'expected' to travel south. We cannot see that this will work in practice. How can people be prevented from choosing to drive on local rural roads, and taking short cuts away from congested major roads?

Many of our local roads are narrow, in deep protected green lanes and already receiving damage from large HGVs. Our old bridges, and streets and houses in our medieval villages are regularly damaged by inappropriately sized vehicles trying to squeeze down narrow roads and manoeuvre in places designed for no more than passing horses & carts. Another settlement the size of Great Dunmow with all the employment opportunities promised will also involve much increased HGV transport movements, as well as private cars travelling north to seek ever-decreasing rural areas for leisure and enjoyment.

Unethical Process

The consultation process has been designed to be convoluted and complicated, making it difficult for individuals and groups to respond effectively. Much of the pertinent information has been hidden in the depths of BDC's website, difficult enough for IT literate people to find, and completely inaccessible to a significant proportion of the population, such as the elderly.

The maps and documentation indicating the size of the area being considered, its positioning in the landscape and other features of the proposal have changed during the consultation process making it difficult for people to make informed objections.

To start the West of Braintree Issues & Options Consultation in November 2017, on the presumption that the Local Plan is to be approved by the Planning Inspectorate, suggests a 'done deal'. Responses to this latest consultation are required by the middle of January – half way through the Local Plan Examination. No doubt these responses will be used as evidence of local people's acceptance of the Plan.

To enable the development of this land will require the local district council to establish a development corporation to purchase the land at agricultural prices, give themselves planning permission, hence significantly increasing the value of the land, to their benefit, and enabling them to obtain funding to proceed with the proposals and additional infrastructure required. We understand that the government intend to change the law to allow this yet feel it is entirely unethical and immoral for local government to benefit from their own decisions.

Following a consultation with village residents, Great Bardfield Parish Council wishes to emphasise its strong opposition to the concept of huge so-called 'garden communities' in rural areas. The adverse impact on our community and those surrounding the proposed development is unacceptable. Concreted fields and woodlands will never be reinstated and the ethos of traditional English villages will be lost for ever. The government's focus on the south-east of the UK is short-sighted and unsustainable.

We believe that the siting of West of Braintree Garden Village is completely inappropriate, based on the ease of purchasing land primarily from one willing, major landowner and ignoring the democratic process whereby local residents be consulting properly.

Yours sincerely

Kate Fox

Kate Fox
Parish Clerk