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## CHELMSFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL - LOCAL PLAN SECOND ISSUES REPORT

### 1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report outlines the details of a series of possible locations for future housing development within the Chelmsford Borough Council area and, in particular, makes reference to a suggestion of development adjacent to the Rochford boundary at Battlesbridge.
- 1.2 The preparation of a Local Plan is a statutory function and as a matter of course, authorities consult with their neighbours on proposals.

### 2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Chelmsford Borough Council has published a second Local Plan Issues Report to build on the basic principles for development outlined in their first issues report. The new report assesses against the Council's principles a number of green field locations which might be used for future development.
- 2.2 In order to provide the number of dwellings that the Essex Structure Plan requires (7,900 taking into account dwellings already built between 1996 and 1999), Chelmsford Borough Council has a preference for new building at Margaretting, Battlesbridge and South Woodham Ferrers. The Second Issues Paper outlines the arguments for these preferences.

### 3 KEY PRINCIPLES

- 3.1 The Council has adopted a number of key principles against which the consideration of sites for development has been assessed.
  - 3.1.1 *The Sequential Approach* - This key principle directly reflects the latest Government guidance and requires local planning authorities to look for development land first, within existing urban areas, second, as extensions to the edge of existing urban areas and finally, the expansion of existing settlements or the creation of new settlements.
  - 3.1.2 *Reducing the need to travel* - dwellings should be located to minimise people's need to travel for daily activities. New development should be within 800 metres of important facilities and close to public transport interchanges.
  - 3.1.3 *Metropolitan Green Belt* - Green Belt should be protected, but the expansion of smaller settlements within the existing Green Belt is considered to be a more sustainable option than development adjacent

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to Chelmsford and would not in itself endanger the key role of the Green Belt.

- 3.1.4 *Strategic Gaps and Green Wedges* - a series of strategic gaps and green wedges are proposed around Chelmsford to protect important areas of landscape.

#### **4 LOCATION OF NEW DEVELOPMENT**

- 4.1 After establishing these key principles, the Second Issues Paper proceeds to assess the possible locations for new development following the sequential approach.
- 4.2 The document first examines the potential for Chelmsford to accommodate new development and then considers peripheral locations, before finally looking at the options for expanded or new settlements.
- 4.3 The options considered for expanded or new settlements are:
- Boreham
  - Howe Green
  - Battlesbridge
  - Runwell Hospital
  - Margaretting

Note: South Woodham Ferrers is also proposed as a location for new development, but here this is classified as peripheral development.

- 4.4 *Runwell Hospital* - The area identified is within the Green Belt between the Hospital site and the Runwell Road. Development here would add to the site already allocated for housing at the Hospital site, though there is no rail link and access would be dependent on the completion of the new A130. The estimated housing capacity is 2100 to 3100 units.
- 4.5 *Battlesbridge* - The area is within the Metropolitan Green Belt and comprises land north and south of the existing railway line, including the residential and commercial area adjacent to Hawk Hill. The estimated housing capacity for this area is 1900 to 2600 units.
- 4.5.1 The issues paper suggests that development would provide improvements to the existing railway station and enhancement of the bus services in the area, improving transport choice for existing and future residents. New development would also, it is suggested, enhance the range of existing community, shopping, recreation and leisure facilities available in the area. Also mooted in the report would be the provision of a secondary and primary school.

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- 4.5.2 The final point made in support of the Battlesbridge location is that development would help meet the housing needs arising from outside the borough to the south.

## **5 DISCUSSION**

- 5.1 Members should bear in mind that the options floated in the issues paper are at an early stage of development and that there will be a formal opportunity to make representations to Chelmsford Borough Council when their Local Plan is placed on deposit. At this stage, any comments will simply help Chelmsford to formulate their proposals.
- 5.2 In principle the approach adopted by Chelmsford to identify options for future development sites follows closely the latest Government guidance on such matters.
- 5.3 However, there is no doubt that proposals for development in the Metropolitan Green Belt are very often met with significant opposition, though recent decisions by the Secretary of State for Transport, Environment and the Regions suggests that the Government takes the view that in certain circumstances such development can be acceptable.
- 5.4 The expansion of Battlesbridge by 2000 or more dwellings would have some impact on the remainder of the settlement on the south side of the river within Rochford District, though as the issues paper points out, development may have many positive benefits. On the other hand, many residents in Battlesbridge live there because of the very fact that the settlement is a small village in the countryside. New housing and other associated development would change this situation significantly for the existing residents on both sides of the river.
- 5.5 The Essex Structure Plan identifies Chelmsford as one of the key districts for development in the County over the next 10 to 15 years. Inevitably, this status means that the borough is faced with a very significant new housing and employment land allocation. It is, as the issues paper points out, very difficult to see how all this new development could realistically be accommodated within, or adjoining, Chelmsford. Therefore, other locations are being closely examined.
- 5.6 The issues paper paints a quite persuasive argument in favour of the release of land at Battlesbridge. However, whilst the existence of a railway station may be considered a positive advantage, the other so-called benefits are somewhat tenuous.
- 5.7 Given that many residents of a small village like Battlesbridge have made a decision to reside there on the basis that they are at arms length from facilities, it is considered that the provision of new schools,

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recreational and leisure facilities or other infrastructure may not be quite as beneficial as it first appears.

- 5.8 Looking at the alternative suggestions proposed in the issues paper, it is considered that perhaps the development around Runwell Hospital and north of South Woodham Ferrers would be preferable to imposing significant new development on a small village settlement such as Battlesbridge, notwithstanding the existence of a railway station.
- 5.9 It is considered that, at this stage, Chelmsford be requested to give further consideration to the suitability of Battlesbridge as a location for new development.

## **6 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Battlesbridge is within the Metropolitan Green Belt and new housing development and related infrastructure, etc. will have an impact on this part of the County.

## **7 PARISH IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 Part of the Battlesbridge settlement is within Rochford District and Rawreth Parish.

## **8 RECOMMENDATION**

- 8.1 It is proposed that the Sub-Committee **RECOMMENDS**

That, subject to additional comments from Members, this report forms the basis of a response to Chelmsford Borough Council in respect of the Local Plan Second Issues Report. (HCPI)

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### **Background Papers:**

Chelmsford Borough Local Plan 2001-2011 Second Issues Report

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