

## **Agenda Item 134/2025 Planning Applications**

### **251310 - Land off Foxes Corner Halstead Road Aldham Colchester CO6 3PP**

Outline application for the erection of up to 250 residential dwellings, public open space and associated works. Approval is sought for the principal means of vehicular access arrangements from Halstead Road. Internal access and all other matters are reserved.

### **Background**

The application relates to an agricultural field of 10.68ha (26.4acres) on the north side of Halstead Road, immediately to the west of the current Bellway development at John Flower Avenue. The application is supported by a range of documents covering landscape impact, traffic, ecology etc.

A joint meeting with Eight Ash Green Parish Council was held with Ward Councillors and Planning Officers to discuss the application and background to the Local Plan Review on 24<sup>th</sup> July. Draft Minutes are attached but remain confidential at the time this report was drafted.

Eight Ash Green PC have been invited to attend the Meeting and to share their concerns regarding this site and the other proposed allocation in the Preferred Options tabled in February, and the implications for their Neighbourhood Plan.

At the time of writing there had been 26 objections to the application. The Statement of Community Consultation submitted with the application significantly under plays the responses of the two Parish Councils and the general opposition to the principle of development. Only 29 responses were received to 909 notifications.

### **Considerations**

The site lies in open countryside outside any area designated for development and the application is therefore contrary to the Adopted Local Plan for Colchester. The applicant is relying on two issues to argue in favour of allowing development on the site now. The first is that the site was identified in the Preferred Options for the Local Plan Review that were tabled at the Council meeting in February and again in June, and secondly, that the Council is unable to demonstrate a 5 year supply of Housing Land as required under Government Guidance. On the former, as yet the Preferred Options have not been approved by the Local Plan Committee for Consultation and as such should carry no weight in the decision making process. Even if the Plan had been approved for consultation it would be at such an early stage that it would be deemed premature to grant permission. On the latter we are assured by the City Council that currently they can demonstrate a five year housing land supply.

Notwithstanding the officers' report recommending the inclusion of the site in the Preferred Options the development would cause harm to interests of acknowledged importance that would not be mitigated in the way suggested in the documents supporting the planning application. These can be summarised as follows:

### **Imbalance & Coalescence**

The extension of Eight Ash Green along the north side of Halstead Road as proposed would create a form of ribbon development that would stretch 1.27 miles along the northside of the A1124, almost coalescing with the outlying parts of the much smaller village of Aldham and doubling the number of houses in the Parish. The development of the site would create a separate community with the current development adjoining that would be remote from the centre of the village, creating an imbalance to the built form of Eight Ash Green.

### **Landscape Impact**

The development of this site overlooking the Colne Valley to the north would create an intrusive urban form into views across and out of this important local landscape feature,

including from PRow and Fordham on the other side of the valley. The Landscape Impact Analysis recognises this impact as 'Moderate' across a distance of 850m but the mitigation is limited and the photographic evidence does not accurately convey the impact.

### **Ecology**

Fiddlers Wood, a Local Wildlife Site, adjoins the site along the northern boundary and the cumulative impact of development of the adjoining site is not assessed in the Ecology Report and there is no survey analysis of what flora and fauna exist in Fiddlers Wood or how that might be affected by the development. The Ecology is limited to an analysis of the agricultural field and adjoining hedgerows which will inevitably have little interest apart from some mature oak trees. Mitigation in the form of a 30m buffer is an inadequate response, given the lack of evidence as to what needs to be protected.

### **Traffic & Transport**

Whilst the application relies on the inclusion of the site in the Preferred Options Report to justify a permission, the Transport Assessment (TA) fails to include and assess the impact of the other sites along the A1124 that are proposed in that Report, namely 180 dwellings on land elsewhere in Eight Ash Green and 235 at Chappel & Wakes Colne. Furthermore, given congestion on the A120 at Marks Tey the proposed allocation of 125 dwellings at Gt Tey will impact on the A1124 and the village of Aldham as drivers seek to avoid using the A120 to access Colchester. No further development in the villages west of Colchester should be granted until the cumulative impact of the 3600 new dwellings proposed in the Preferred Options have been adequately assessed and a plan for mitigation agreed.

The TA and the Travel Plan overstate the existing bus services along the A1124 and proposes no improvement to frequency. The level of traffic and narrow carriageway through parts of Eight Ash Green make cycling unattractive on the A1124. The Travel Plan is wholly unrealistic in suggesting a reduction of 5-10% in Single Occupancy Car Journeys is a reasonable target and no practical measures are proposed to achieve any significant reduction in what will inevitably be a heavily car dependent development.

### **Design & Layout**

The applicant is a land promoter, not a developer, and all matters of detail apart from the access will be subject to separate applications by whichever housebuilder purchases the site, if outline permission is granted. There is no design code and no indicative master plan that addresses the sensitivity of the site and the evidence of the development of the adjoining housing site is that there will be little distinctiveness to reflect the rural character of this location, resulting in further harm.

### **Precedent**

If this application is approved it would create a precedent for further applications to come forward in advance of the Local Plan Review. However, a recent appeal decision in Maldon is relevant here. In that case although the absence of a five year housing land supply was a significant factor, the Inspector considered the harm caused by the impact on the landscape setting was decisive – 'the proposal conflicts with the development plan and that conflict is not outweighed by other material considerations'.

### **Conclusion**

The application is contrary to the Adopted Local Plan for Colchester, would cause harm to interests of acknowledged importance, does not amount to sustainable development and no material considerations have been put forward that would justify an exception to the policy considerations or outweigh the harm caused.