

## Epping Forest District Council Representations to the Draft Local Plan Consultation 2016 (Regulation 18)

Stakeholder ID	3375	Name	Rachel Bryan on behalf of the Landowners of Site SR-0032	Sworders
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Date	19/1/2017
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### Letter or Email Response:

Question 6: The Draft Local Plan has identified our draft strategy for meeting the housing and employment needs up to 2033. We have identified sites for housing which are suitable and available and can be delivered over the next 17 years. Do you agree with the proposed sites in Coopersale, Fyfield, High Ongar, Lower Sheering, Moreton, Sewardstonebury, Sheering and Stapleford Abbots (Draft Policy P 12)? (please tick one box) YES Please explain your reasons for this:

1.0 INTRODUCTION 1.1 This representation is made on behalf of the landowners of site SR-0032, land at Lower Sheering who support part iv) of Draft Policy P12 which proposes to allocate the site for approximately 26 homes.

2.0 LOWER SHEERING 2.1 Lower Sheering is a sustainable settlement sitting on the boundary of Essex and Hertfordshire, and looks towards Sawbridgeworth for its facilities and services. It should arguably be considered part of Sawbridgeworth, however, given the reality of its situation in Essex it is logical to consider it as a village benefitting from a good range of services, in view of the easy access to the facilities of Sawbridgeworth.

2.2 Furthermore, additional development can provide an opportunity to capture planning contributions and increases in land values to invest in local infrastructure and services within Lower Sheering itself to reduce reliance on Sawbridgeworth and improve the situation with regard to deprivation. In addition, the creation of new households will further support schools, local shops and businesses and the public transport which serve the existing population.

3.0 THE SITE 3.1 The site is in a suitable location for development in an edge of settlement location which constitutes a logical extension. The site is a disused gravel pit and not in agricultural production. As such, development of the site will not result in loss of productive agricultural land. Development of the site could enhance the character of the area; it is currently disused land in a semi-urban environment, being opposite existing development and the station. Development of the site will have no adverse impact on significant or protected ecological sites. A site specific ecological appraisal can be undertaken prior to the submission of a planning application to ensure that there will be no impact on protected species.

3.2 Access to the site is via the existing access off Sheering Lower Road within a 30mph zone with adequate visibility. Detailed access design can be provided as part of a planning application.

4.0 GREEN BELT 4.1 It is entirely appropriate to alter the Green Belt boundary in order to release the site for development, in accordance with national policy. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states at paragraph 83 that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of a Local Plan.

4.2 Whilst it is acknowledged that housing need alone does constitute the exceptional circumstances

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necessary to release Green Belt, housing need combined with local conditions means that it is simply the only option remaining to meet these needs. Insufficient land outside the Green Belt exists to meet the development needs of the district. 4.3 The development strategy presented in Draft Policy SP 2 maximises opportunities for development around Harlow and also in locations within the existing settlements before considering a limited release of Green Belt land, using a sequential approach. Density has also been maximised in order to limit the extent of Green Belt release. This is a sound approach and in accordance with the NPPF. 4.4 Site SR-0032 is appropriate for Green Belt release; it is in a sustainable location and will help to deliver the housing needs of the district. 4.5 The five purposes of including land within Green Belts are set out within paragraph 80 of the NPPF and are reproduced below followed by our comments: 1. To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas According to the Green Belt Review Stage 2, site SR-0032 lies within parcel 002.1 and makes no contribution to this purpose. Lower Sheering is a small village and cannot be said to constitute a large built-up area. It is adjacent to the larger settlement of Sawbridgeworth, however, the site is of modest scale and is contained to the south by existing housing and to the north by the Lower Sheering Road. The proposed amendment to the village boundary would be a good fit with the shape of the current boundary. 2. To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another According to the Green Belt Review Stage 2, parcel 002.1 makes no contribution to this purpose. Sawbridgeworth and Lower Sheering are already a contiguous built up area. This site is on the north/eastern side of Lower Sheering, with no neighbouring town in close proximity. 3. To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment According to the Green Belt Review Stage 2, parcel 002.1 makes a relatively strong contribution to this purpose. However, this assessment relates to the whole of parcel 002.1 stretches along the entire eastern edge of Lower Sheering, half way towards the motorway. Site SR-0032 forms only a very small part of this parcel. Development of site SR-0032 would not result in the encroachment of development into open countryside beyond the existing spread of the settlement, given that it is already surrounded on two sides by residential development and by a road on a third. As number 1 above indicates the proposal is a good fit with the existing development boundary. The majority of parcels within the district were found to make a strong contribution to this purpose. In order to provide a more nuanced picture of how Green Belt performs across the District, EFDC have discounted this purpose of including land in the Green Belt in the Site Selection Methodology. 4. To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns. According to the Green Belt Review Stage 2, parcel 002.1 makes a relatively strong contribution to this purpose. However, as above, this relates to the whole parcel of which site SR-0032 forms only a very small part. Site SR-0032 does not provide an important area of open land adding to the setting of the village and its development would not affect the approach to the village or to Sawbridgeworth, is already protected by existing landscaping and does not form part of the open countryside. 5. To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land. Site SR-0032 is a disused gravel pit and is not in agricultural production and as such, can be considered derelict land. Whilst not strictly urban, it is surrounded on two sides by residential development and by a road on a third. 4.6 The Green Belt Review Stage 2 makes an assessment of the potential level of harm associated with the release of each parcel in the context of purposes 1-4 and purposes 1, 2 and 4 only, i.e. excluding the effect of purpose 3 since the rural nature of the District means the majority of parcels perform strongly against this purpose. 4.7 Against purposes 1-4, harm arising from the release of parcel 002.1 was found to be high, with the majority of sites in the district having a very high potential for harm. Excluding purpose 3, the parcel was still found to have high potential for harm, whereas the outcome for most other sites in the district resulted in a different result, with harm levels for many reducing. 4.8 Given the above we do not believe the development of this site would conflict with the purposes of including land within Green Belts. If the Council is to meet its objectively assessed housing and employment needs the case for Green Belt release will need to be considered. 5.0 SITE SELECTION REPORT 5.1 The Site Selection Report scores the site positively in many areas, such as lack of existing uses, restrictions, physical infrastructure restraints, open space, green infrastructure and Central Line capacity. Below are some points of clarification, where the site was scored either neutral or negative. Ownership 5.2 The site is owned by multiple parties, however, it is held on a single title and jointly owned by family members Christine Watt, Marian Wills and Mrs Sheelagh Hodge who have jointly instructed Sworders to promote the site. As such, ownership will not be a constraint to development. Marketability 5.3 The site owners are keen to sell the site or enter an agreement with a developer, however, in order to achieve best value it will not be marketed until the Local Plan is further advanced. The fact that it is not being marketed now is no reflection of the availability of the site when the time is right or willingness of the site owners to release the site for development. 5.4 The National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) (Paragraph: 020 Reference ID: 3- 020-20140306) states that: "A site is considered

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available for development, when, on the best information available (confirmed by the call for sites and information from land owners and legal searches where appropriate), there is confidence that there are no legal or ownership problems, such as unresolved multiple ownerships, ransom strips tenancies or operational requirements of landowners. This will often mean that the land is controlled by a developer or landowner who has expressed an intention to develop, or the landowner has expressed an intention to sell.” 5.5 The availability of this site complies with this guidance and lack of marketing at this stage should not be considered a constraint. Site Viability 5.6 The Site Selection Report states that the SHMA viability data suggests that in this postcode area residential would be marginally viable, potentially overcome through flexible affordable housing. We have accounted for the proximity of the London to Cambridge railway line and have taken both the benefit of the excellent public transport connection and potential blight from train noise into account. We consider the site to be viable in the current market and consider that it could support a 40% affordable contribution, although if subsequently market conditions were to worsen, we appreciate that the affordable contribution could be revisited to ensure viability. Distance from schools, open space and healthcare 5.7 The site may not be within the specified distances to these facilities within Epping Forest District, however, Lower Sheering effectively functions as a part of Sawbridgeworth, within East Herts District. Sawbridgeworth provides many of the facilities Lower Sheering is judged to be lacking. Whilst it is appreciated that reliance on cross border services may be a concern for larger sites where the infrastructure needs are greater, for a site of this modest scale, the burden on services will be minor. 5.8 Lower Sheering falls within the catchment for Sheering School, some 1.5 miles from the site. However, there are three primary schools in Sawbridgeworth with Reedings Junior School being only 0.8 miles away; a 4 minute drive or 17 minute walk. 5.9 Whilst it is appreciated that there are capacity issues at local primary schools, development of the proposed 26 dwellings on this site would generate demand for only 8/9 additional primary school places which is unlikely to place unacceptable pressure on local schools. In any event, planning obligations for this site could fund expansion of existing schools or go towards a new school. 5.10 In terms of secondary education, existing admission arrangements for the secondary school in Sawbridgeworth provide for pupils from a number of Essex primary schools, suggesting a current cross boundary funding arrangement is in place. The modest scale of this site means that the secondary school needs generated by the site will be equally modest. The Leventhorpe School in Sawbridgeworth is only 1.1 miles; a 4 minute drive or 21 minute walk. 5.11 Given the likely scale of development in and around Harlow during the forthcoming Local Plan period, together with the cross boundary working that this will require between Harlow and Epping Forest, it would be straightforward to absorb the requirement for secondary school places within Harlow, with those places funded via contributions from the scheme. 5.12 Excellent public transport bus links are provided from the village westwards towards Harlow with high frequency buses during peak hours and at least hourly otherwise, providing access to secondary schools and healthcare. 5.13 In regard to access to GP surgeries, Lower Sheering is within the catchment area of the surgery at Hatfield Heath, which exceeds the specified distance. However, there are two doctor’s surgeries in Sawbridgeworth. For a site of this modest scale, the demand will be equally modest. 5.14 Whilst the site may be further than the specified distances from public open space, this site is an edge of village location, with good access to the footpath network and River Stort, including the Stort Valley Way. Landscape impact 5.15 The site is judged to be within an area of medium landscape sensitivity, however, according to the Settlement Edge Landscape Sensitivity Study (SELSS) appears to lie outside of landscape setting area 3, having judged to be within the built up area of the village. 5.16 As such, whilst this area does not currently fall within the development limits of the town, in landscape sensitivity and Green Belt terms the SELSS considers that it should be included within the settlement limits in any event. Therefore, the development of only a modest scheme on the land adjacent to the junction of Sheering Lower Road and Sawbridgeworth Road would have no detrimental impact on the landscape or Green Belt. 6.0

STATEMENTS OF COMMON GROUND 6.1 We note that the intention is to meet with site promoters and seek to agree Statements of Common Ground. The site owners are willing to meet with the Council and enter discussions into such an agreement. 6.2 The adjacent site SR-0313 is within the ownership of the same family and as such, the landowners would have no objection to the proposed allocation being enlarged to incorporate some or all of this site, should EFDC consider it appropriate. 7.0

SUMMARY 7.1 The landowners of site SR-0032, land at Lower Sheering, support part iv) of Draft Policy P12 which proposes to allocate the site for approximately 26 homes. 7.2 Lower Sheering is a sustainable settlement appropriate for this level of development. The site is in a suitable location for development which would enhance the character of the area. The site is appropriate for Green Belt release and will help to deliver the housing needs of the district. 7.3

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The site owners are prepared to work with both the Council and (if appropriate) neighbouring landowners in order to facilitate timely delivery of the site. WAT953 207420 Question 6 07 12 2016 Question 9: Do you wish to comment on any specific policies in the Draft Local Plan? YES Policy Number / Paragraph Number Paragraph Number 5.1/Figure 5.1 Comments: 1.0 Paragraph Number 5.1/Figure 5.1 1.1 We note that Lower Sheering has been determined to be a 'hamlet' within figure 5.1. This is outlined as being based on the findings of the Settlement Hierarchy Technical Paper. 1.2 The Technical Paper notes within the assessment provided at Appendix 3 that, "The settlement effectively functions as part of Sawbridgeworth to the west." It admits that, "Lower Sheering is a difficult settlement to categorise, given its proximity and relationship with Sawbridgeworth." However, notwithstanding the admission that the settlement could be argued to be part of Sawbridgeworth the assessment considers only those facilities within only Lower Sheering. 1.3 We consider this approach is illogical and results in a lack of robustness within the evidence base. In practical terms, in a cross boundary situation such as this access to services needs to be considered on a category by category basis. Taking the categories within appendix 3 of the technical paper; in terms of retail facilities, these are provided within the private sector and are therefore the cross boundary situation has no bearing on their capacity or provision - in fact additional population within their catchment will improve viability and therefore safeguard provision. As such Lower Sheering should be marked positively for access to post office, local shop, supermarket, ATM and bank given their availability within Sawbridgeworth. 1.4 In regard to transport, there is no change in this regard as the scoring reflects the real life situation. In terms of access to health facilities; dentists, opticians and pharmacies are provided predominantly by the private sector. As such, Lower Sheering should be marked positively for access to these facilities. 1.5 In regard to access to GP surgeries, Lower Sheering is within the catchment area of the surgery at Hatfield Heath. On this basis the scoring would continue to be 'no' for access to this service. 1.6 In regard to community facilities and services, given places of worship are provided within the 'private sector' then cross boundary issues have no bearing on their provision, and as such Lower Sheering should be marked positively. In terms of the remaining facilities within this category which are provided within Sawbridgeworth, on a precautionary approach it would make sense to continue to mark these as 'no', given the cross boundary complications. 1.7 In terms of education, for primary schools Lower Sheering falls within the catchment for Sheering School, as such the answer to this would continue to be 'no'. In terms of secondary education, notwithstanding that existing admission arrangements for the secondary school in Sawbridgeworth provide for pupils from a number of Essex primary schools, which suggests a current cross boundary funding arrangement is in place, we accept the complexities around secondary education provision across county boundaries and therefore adopting a precautionary approach would suggest that the assessment should not assume that Lower Sheering has access to a secondary school. 1.8 Adopting the above approach shows that Lower Sheering should fall comfortably within the category of a 'small village'. 1.9 Figure 5.21 Spatial options by settlement, in relation to Lower Sheering states: "Aside from strategic site options, which have been considered through the Housing Market Area optioneering work the sites proposed for residential development are clustered around the centre of the settlement. The Council does not therefore consider that there are distinct spatial options to locating residential development with Fyfield. Sites were assessed for their suitability on a case by case basis." It is assumed that this is a typographic error. WAT953 207420 Question 9 07 12 2016

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