

SHEERING PARISH COUNCIL

AREAS OF OBJECTION TO BE CONSIDERED REFERENCE

EAST OF HARLOW MASTER PLAN

MAIN MODIFICATION DOCUMENT TO THE EFDC LOCAL PLAN 2021.

MM No.21

Public Footpaths and Tracks

The Current proposals in the EFDC Local Plan 2016 (Harlow strategic Site assessment Final Report -AECOM) and the Allies and Morrison report Harlow and Gilson Town Vision, show the area West of the M11, South of Pincey Brook and the new M11 spur road, and east of the B183 to be developed into a series of Villages known as the East Harlow development and to form part of Gilden Park.

The documents show a proposal to relocation of Princess Alexander Hospital from the Centre of Harlow to a site bounded by the new spur road to the South and Sheering Hall and Pincey Brook to the North.

Advantageous Purchase of Greenbelt land

The Main Modification Document proposes that this area is removed from Green Belt protection and becomes part of East of Harlow development. The open spaces enjoyed by the community of Sheering would be lost and destroyed in favour of accommodating thousands of new homes, which in many cases would no doubt be outside the price range of either any local residents or our younger generation looking to get their feet on the first rung of the property ladder.

The Green Belt Review, Stage One, June 2015, refers to the concerns of the Green Belt and the character of the District, with the continued protection of the Green Belt being a priority of the residents of the area. It stresses the importance of maintaining green areas between villages and towns and assesses this area in question, emphasising its importance in the prevention of urban sprawl from Harlow. The proposed development land being considered as set out in the document does not support this to the slightest degree.

The area shown is generally in the main farmland, land that has been farmed by Sheering families for generation after generation and the proposal is perceived as an opportunity for selling off land to money making developers with no interest in the local community or their needs, and the opportunity of advantageous land prices for farmers who through pressures of continued low prices for farmed produce by wholesalers, see the sale of their farmland more attractive and most favourable for development than farming. Earlier documents showing these proposals maintain the Green Belt status of this land but show the area as a leisure opportunity or development for care facilities, not an area for housing development. The Main Modification Document removes this protection so that housing development can be extended to Longlands Bridge on the B183 crossing into the Street, in Sheering.

There is a long-established policy by EFDC to retain Green Belt land as green breaks between urban areas and specifically to preserve the definition and character of our historic villages. Development of this land, (and the land to the South as proposed by HDC), would not only mean the complete loss of Churchgate Street as a village, it would effectively join it to Sheering. The value of our historic villages must not be lost to future generations to understand the landscape in which they live. A significant Green Belt space must be retained to protect the historic nature of Sheering as a separate village.

Designated Green Belt Land

Reasons for Green Belt Land as identified in the document are given as:

- 1) Stop urban sprawl
- 2) Prevent settlements coming together
- 3) To protect the countryside and natural habitat
- 4) Encourage urban regeneration

Sheering like many villages, is shaped by land which is protected from development because it has been designated as Green Belt, emanating from the Town and Country act 1947. Sheering was divided into Sheering Village and Lower Sheering after the M11 was built in 1977. The area adjacent to Sawbridgeworth and extending to Durrington Hall, Aylmers Farm, on Lower Sheering Road past New Hall Farm and across to Sheering Hall, (all listed buildings closely associated with Sheering Village, in fact Durrington Hall and Sheering Hall are linked via a priest's tunnel), Sheering Village is surrounded by farmland crossed by a multitude of footpaths, mainly in a state of good repair which link adjacent villages. It is possible to walk between adjacent settlements without using the main vehicular routes. Routes for the wildlife exist along the network of ditches and hedgerows and along Pincey Brook which is a main route for crossing the M11 to the fields around Lower Sheering and towards Little Hallingbury.

Sheering Village comprises approximately 395 households. It has a grade 1 listed church, a listed pub, a village shop and post office, café, hairdressers and beauticians, a football club operational for over a hundred years, a primary school for 100 local children and a village hall. It has an active preschool and several clubs whose activities take place in the village hall. Many of the houses and outbuildings were built before 1800 and, whilst they are not listed, are nevertheless historic in nature. There is great interest in the village to regreen, planting trees to replace those lost through farm expansion and disease and to create wildflower meadows to celebrate the Jubilee and to commemorate those lost to the pandemic.

Sheering as a community is a place where people live together and have a feeling of belonging to the village and, the community as a whole, with their individual association with the village church, school and pub, all assets of the village enjoyed not only by current residents, but of generations of families in the past. The feeling of belonging will be lost with the influx of 1000s of more houses with people, who, being drafted in from other areas would have no interest in what Sheering stands for, its past heritage or indeed where it goes in the future.

We have over the years experienced restricted or limited development encroaching on Green Belt land since the conception of the Town and Country Act 1947, so why then, this sudden outburst and desire to further decapitate the future of the English Countryside and landscape. Is this an example of panicked thinking to get the housing market back on track, a market that has suffered serious setbacks through years of Government think tanks on housing needs, available land and development sites failing miserably. There has always been a need to improve the provision of housing, whether for private purchase or affordable housing and the targets set by Governments have never been met. So why now must we decide that Local Authorities must be able to demonstrate over five-year periods how they propose to meet the potential demands, and the easy route is to take our Green Belt land and not pursue other options.

Brown Field Sites

There is great emphasis on the development of Green Belt land within the document and the issues that surround the invasion of this land. There appears little or no reference to potential Brown Field sites that during the period up to 2033 may become available for re development. This would suggest that the emphasis has been concentrated solely on Green Field sites where the purchase of such land would be considered an easy option. Why therefore has there not been the same effort and emphasis at looking at what numbers of properties can be achieved on the re development of these sites and their specific locations, to those potential Green Belt land sites.

Infrastructure

The road system around and through Sheering with its present number of residents is already stretched and struggling to handle the volume and speed of traffic imposed on it, with one section barely wide enough to allow two cars to pass without slowing or stopping, (the country section of Sheering Lower Road with one area of the road running into a country lane). Both The Street in Sheering Village, and Sheering Lower Road, are already rat runs for traffic and with the new M11 junction 7A, it is feared this problem will become worse. With the proposed area for development, it is expected this will increase local traffic volumes by thousands of vehicles to these roads. Attempts have been made in the past to get traffic calming measures to control the unacceptable levels of speeding traffic using what are only B roads to avoid accidents, particularly fatalities, along both Sheering Lower Road and the Street, with current levels of traffic, but to no avail. The level of congestion is unthinkable with the proposed influx of vehicles generated from the proposed development, this being in addition to further developments proposed for Lower Sheering and Sheering Village also outlined in the Local Plan.

Parking facilities/availability

Sheering and Sawbridgeworth are already heavy commuter areas. The parking facilities at present levels are far from adequate even with some commuters still choosing to work from home, and as such forces drivers to park on local streets, so causing obstruction and

congestion within these areas. The result of this action often causing refuse vehicles, and heavy delivery vehicles often making deliveries of building materials to the many home extensions and additions to properties, having to mount the footpaths and grass verges to access the roads, resulting in damage not only to the footpaths/verges, but also the dislodging of kerb stones. All of this causing additional costs in respect of repairs and replacement kerb lines which only last a short while before the problem is repeated. The anticipated additional cars generated by the proposed development just could not be accommodated in an area already deemed saturated by parked vehicles. It is obvious that the present infrastructure of Sheering is far from adequate to cope with any proposed significant increase in traffic volumes created by this development on top of that already proposed by the M11 junction 7A works.

Education

The local Sheering school has for many decades been part of the Sheering Institution and seen by Sheering residents not only as an institution of the Village but also as a family tradition with many from generation after generation of Sheering families starting their infant and primary education at the school. Although the proposed development indicates the inclusion of the provision of infant and secondary schools, it is likely that the construction of these facilities will not take precedence over the construction of the residential properties, so resulting in families looking for education facilities in the surrounding area in the early stages of development. Sheering School therefore faces two major problems. Firstly, it is already operating at its maximum level of 100 plus children and assuming that this level is maintained, would not be in a position to accommodate applicants from the new development. It is suggested that other local schools in Sawbridgeworth would be in the same position, taking into account the increase in development areas currently under construction under the East Herts District Local plan. Secondly, with the proposed development area offering and including new education facilities, this could in itself cause the closure of Sheering School which would be a devastating loss to the community and with current thinking would then release another area for even further residential development.

In conclusion, the Draft Green Belt Review Stage One, June 2015, states that, perhaps the strongest strategic network of parcels, (including the proposed development area parcel) preventing sprawl are those bordering Harlow to the west, south and east. The Green Belt designation on the boundary of Harlow is critical as in many instances there is little else to protect the sprawl of Harlow. Whilst the M11 may be considered an effective boundary preventing Harlow merging with Sheering, Sheering Parish Council does not accept that this is as affected as the current Green Belt status of the proposed development area and this suggestion should be discounted.

MM21 states that a 'build to line' between the new East of Harlow development and Sheering needs to be agreed. In the opinion of the Parish Council, this must be defined as the new M11 junction 7a spur road with no further development to take place to the north of that line.

Sheering Parish Council and the residents of Sheering, believe that the aforementioned facts clearly set out and demonstrate that further development, and the loss of the Green Belt status of the proposed area as outlined in the Main Modification Document is not sustainable and should be dismissed at consultation stage and not considered any further.

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