

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

Stakeholder ID	4567	Name	Stella	Morris	Royal Gunpowder Mills
Method	Email				
Date	12/12/2016				

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Letter or Email Response:

RESPONSE TO DRAFT LOCAL PLAN TO 2033 I see various important opportunities in the Local Plan for the Royal Gunpowder Mills from here to 2033 and the contribution that this heritage site can make in return to the community, heritage, wildlife, tourism and the local economy in line with the Plan. It is vital to build on RGM's importance as 'the one of the district's key tourism destinations. Described by Historic England as the 'most important site for the history of explosives in Europe' and designated a Scheduled Monument, its remarkable and beautiful landscape chronicles the development of explosives, propellants and finally rocket motors and fuels from the Civil War to the Cold War, playing a critical part in WW1 and it has national and international significance. It has proven importance to the local community, with many families having links to people who worked here when it was a working MOD establishment immersed in secrecy, and former employees feature in today's large volunteer force helping to manage the 175-acre site and help carry out its conservation, education and events programmes. The Local Plan recognises the importance of retaining and improving access and interpretation of heritage as a key part of local 'DNA' and the importance of community involvement in places. It also recognises that heritage sites and wildlife can be inseparable and the importance of protection and enhancement of wildlife. In the case of the Royal Gunpowder Mills, as its manufacturing processes changed, many buildings were left to be gradually reclaimed by nature and this and other factors created a wide variety of wildlife habitats. It is a Site of Special Scientific Importance. However there is a need to manage nature for co-existence with heritage, which gives rise to community volunteering programmes and opportunities to learn about nature and history through practical involvement, which can be built on. Whilst the site itself is mostly an island shaped by tributaries of the River Lee, it is an integral part of the area, and cannot be viewed in isolation of the Lee Valley Regional Park landscape with its further SSSI wildlife territories, nor the remarkable industrial heritage of the Lee Valley, which is coming now into public awareness as a place of 'firsts' in manufacturing, inventions and transport. The Royal Gunpowder Mills itself features a unique 3-level waterway system used to transport its dangerous cargos around the site and onwards to other destinations. Whilst residual contamination means that areas of the site have restricted public access, there are opportunities to investigate for developing access into and across the site whilst staying protective of both its built and natural heritage. There are investigations into refilling waterways within the site, and there is potential for pedestrian / cycle access points from Fishers Green Lane, from Crooked Mile, and bridges from Lee Valley Park to be investigated. The Local Plan acknowledges the importance of heritage and nature for leisure. Critically, the Royal Gunpowder Mills contributes in developing local economy in its volunteering programmes and placements that build local skills and offering local employment both on site and to the local visitor economy. The eventual repair and reuse of important and unique buildings across the site brings opportunities for

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training and skills via conservation programmes for both built and natural heritage. Community involvement in maintaining and interpreting the collections and exhibitions for the visitor, guiding and explaining and cataloguing archives passes knowledge into the community, helping to increase the sense of place identified as important. It is impossible to geographically divide the Royal Gunpowder Mills from the surrounding destinations of Lee Valley/White Water Centre and Waltham Abbey/Epping Forest, which could be facilitated by the development of new safe access pathways between destinations where these are possible. I share the view with others that this area should become a vital green heritage 'hub' drawing seekers of peace and recreation on short and long break stays from the ever-increasing density of London. Existing connections to Stratford and the City, Cambridge and Stanstead and London underground Central Line, and the road systems can be exploited. Nor can there be a boundary between counties in this regard, again, acknowledged in the Local Plan. Our established events programmes plays its part in attracting people from London and we are building on this and will continue to develop links with neighbouring visitor attractions and those further afield in whichever location or county they are found to strengthen awareness and appeal of this unique and richly diverse 'hub' for tourism. We are known for a strong schools education programme and our public events feature 'learning by stealth' fun family activities to inspire curiosity in the world around. We run tours and talks and have exhibition that cater for general visitor and specialists and are increasing our range and reach, in active collaboration rather than competition or isolation with other tourist venues. Our offer is unique but that is so of other attractions in the area, The combined offer in the area is diverse and exciting. I believe that the potential for growing tourism in the area with healthy returns for the local economy is not to be underestimated. I am sorry that this response is brief but I hope the observations and comments made from the viewpoint of the Royal Gunpowder Mills are useful for the Local Plan Consultation Team.