

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

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Letter or Email Response:

Transport The required transport infrastructure should be put in place to support the needs of both the current and future residents before any new housing is built. Trains After 16 years of travelling into London each day for work, I have very recently given up a career in the City because of the impact of the daily commute on my everyday life. For 11 years I travelled from North Weald to 'a' London Underground station for onward travel into London. At first I could park my car at Epping station but after a time the station car park had become too busy and I would find myself having to drive further down the line to Debden station in order to park my car. This later became too busy, along with Loughton and I would be making regular trips to Buckhurst Hill station car park before I even began my actual journey into London on the tube. My commute to (the east side of) central London was regularly taking 2 hours, with 45 minutes of that sat in traffic trying to reach an underground station car park. In order to get to a train station from North Weald you must first contend with the traffic bottlenecks at: • The Plain in Epping • West of Epping High Street up to the Bell Common traffic lights • Rectory Lane junctions with Borders Lane and the Broadway Buses Buses from North Weald into Epping were an alternative to using a car for the commute to the train station but they were (and are) unreliable, they come early, late or not at all. When you do catch one, you can fear for your life due to the manner in which they are driven. More recently, this has improved a little but it is not a mode of transportation that you can have faith in. During the day they are infrequent and in the evening the last bus from Epping Station to North Weald is approx. 8pm. This is inadequate if you want commuters to use public transportation over cars. The Local Plan Report on Site Selection states 'Public transport is limited and unreliable. There is no tube station and bus services are infrequent'. The Master Planning Study of 2014 along with other Local Plan technical documents also confirm this. Destinations served by bus routes through North Weald are also limited, these are mainly Epping and Harlow and any other destination which may be serviced could be at a frequency of 1 bus per day. Chelmsford is home to our local university yet students would need to use multiple bus routes spending many hours per day travelling to and from campus. Hospitals now specialise in specific areas of care i.e stroke, heart, burns etc. It is no longer a case of being treated at the local hospital. However, travelling to these sites to visit patients or attend appointments can be impossible without a car as these locations are just not served by buses from this area. There has been no interest in proactively improving the quality or frequency of bus services in North Weald to support the current level of residents. This is unlikely to change and there is no evidence to show if/when/how this could happen. Taxis The alternative to a bus is to use the local taxi services, the cost of which is high but has become extortionate due to the meter system implemented by EFDC. A journey from Epping High Street to the centre of North Weald (on the High Road) will cost £10. The journey takes 3 and a half minutes! If you typically work until 6.45/7pm in some part of London, why would you not take your car to the station if this is the alternative to missing the last bus back from Epping Station.

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Congested Roads Travelling into Epping was/is difficult as The Plain at Epping could not (and cannot) cope at rush hour with traffic from North Weald (and Ongar), and Harlow via Thornwood. People from Harlow travel to Epping to pick up the (cheaper) Central Line at end of the line at Epping instead of catching the (more expensive) overland trains from Harlow. Any development at North Weald will further add to the congestion problems in Epping. Essex County Council has highlighted that funding for road infrastructure is limited. The Plain is a significant constraint to any development taking place at North Weald. Epping High Road (not Street) is congested due to the mini roundabout at Bury Lane and the traffic lights at Bell Common. Rectory Lane is a bottleneck for traffic trying to get to Debden station or the M11 junction 5. Hastingwood Roundabout I gave up travelling on the Underground and for the last 5 years I travelled by car into London. Using a car to commute was not a decision I took lightly but it was the only to shorten my daily journey to work. I would use the Hastingwood roundabout to access the M11 southbound as this would bypass the slow traffic in Epping but I would at times be delayed at Hastingwood as traffic from here could not flow quickly enough into Harlow and the roundabout would be congested. The new 7a junction could alleviate this, however, by adding the proposed number of houses to North Weald and Latton Priory, it would only put us back in the current position and that is not acceptable. Bicycles I am in favour of infrastructure to support cycling for short journeys between North Weald and Epping. Currently, the road between North Weald and Epping is unsafe. It is full of potholes and speeding buses, it is hilly making it difficult to maintain a consistent speed and can be narrow and winding in places. This is a dangerous scenario when surrounded by cars, buses and lorries using the road. The track/path at the side of the road is narrow and in a bad state of repair. In Epping, there are no sheltered areas for storing bicycles on the High Street where you can be confident that a bicycle can be left safely. General Car Use Due to the issues above, it is not possible for many people in North Weald to rely on buses for transportation. We live in a world where mothers no longer stay at home, they work. Part of their commute involves dropping a child to nursery before dropping another at school to only then make their onward journey to work. These complex journeys cannot be made without using a car. The traffic which runs through North Weald at present is high, it has increased significantly over the last year or so and it cannot/will not cope with the proposed increase in homes. When a temporary traffic light is installed in the village it causes tail backs running for miles at peak times. Bypasses will not remedy this, it will only move the problem. Walking The proposed development for North Weald will change the shape of our village, instead of being long and narrow, it will become a mass. This will encourage people to make short journeys by car to go around it to get to where they want to go instead of walking through it. At present, you do not need to walk more than one to two streets before arriving on the High Road or to reach a field for walking. Passing people in the street promotes a sense of community - saying hello, having conversations. The proposed developments will create an urbanisation, pushing people into cars and erode the village feel. Green belt All of the proposed development sites in North Weald is on Green Belt land, an area put in place to protect open space. The Local Plan itself states that 'The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence'. EFDC seems to choose to ignore this as they see fit. They also seem to ignore the fact that many residents in North Weald have bought their property in the knowledge that it borders Green Belt land i.e it is protected and would not be developed on. Agricultural Land in the Green Belt North Weald is surrounded by Grade 2 agricultural land. This land in North Weald is of a higher quality than what is found (generally) across the rest of the Epping Forest district. It could be better used for food growth. Ashlyn's Farm is a good example of the possibilities to connect agriculture and everyday life. In this country we have moved away from producing goods and have become a more service generating economy. Rather than building houses on the proposed scale, the land could be used more beneficially by encouraging the younger generations into agricultural vocations to ensure that skills are not lost. With a growing population there is also a growing need for food production and the land in North Weald is in a position to support this. As we are so close to London, there could be a very real market for 'local' produce if the right support and investment was given to local farmers/businesses and encouragement given to the next generation to get involved. Weald Common and Radio Station Land This area is possibly the most attractive in the area, with rolling landscape, wildlife and heritage. This is an area of great value to the community in North Weald. People walk their dogs or just walk in general. It's a place where you can very quickly distance yourself from roads and the hustle and bustle of everyday life, appreciating the fresh air and the outdoors. It is a place that people can 'escape' to in stressful world. The gradient of this area means that it is a flood risk to the village in bad weather, to turn it into hard landscaping could have serious consequences to the village. Flood alleviation projects have protected the village over the last decade or so but this year North Weald flooded again. If this area was to be developed, flooding could again become a very frequent occurrence. The land currently absorbs a great deal of water, if this was to be developed then the water

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would only have one way to go. The cost to incorporate sufficient alleviation schemes would be immense. It would be a huge loss if this area was developed in any way, it provides an enormous benefit to quality of life and the environmental impact of it changing would be irreversible. The Ongar Redoubt in this area of land is a scheduled monument which should be preserved which should also mean preserving its surroundings. Heritage Epping Ongar Railway and Underground Extension The Epping Ongar Railway is a fantastic asset to North Weald, it draws visitors into the village who also use other businesses whilst here i.e The King's Head and village shops. It would be very beneficial to the local area if this could be reinstated as a commuter service to Epping but it must be a through service onto Ongar. North Weald could not cope if it was to become the end of the line, it would destroy our village feeling and it would only move problems currently suffered by Epping to one stop further along the line. North Weald would effectively become a car park. A commuter line is needed but it must go on somewhere in order to spread the burden. The Master Planning Study does have a suggestion to include a new station on the Airfield which links to Epping. This is a good idea if that line then goes on further i.e to Harlow, in order to spread the burden of parking, traffic and people. If this did go on to Harlow, this would also improve traffic at Hastingwood roundabout, at The Plain in Epping and alleviate the pressure on residential streets of Epping that the Underground brings. If the line was only to be extended to North Weald, there is no benefit, it will only move the problems of Epping to 2.5 miles down the road, a longer extension would be required. Airfield North Weald Airfield celebrated its centenary this year, it has enormous heritage value. Surviving 2 World Wars it still stands today but is severely underused. You could say that that has been on purpose in order to cause reason for it to be sold off for development. Aviation should be continued at the Airfield at all costs. However, a change of licence should be encouraged to enable the site to be used for business aviation purposes to bring in revenue to support its upkeep and its protection. The Halcrow Report of 2002 identifies North Weald Airfield as having 'the greatest potential' for business aviation capacity in the region due to the length of its runway. Hearing the sound of a plane flying in is a wonderful thing, for adults and children, just as is hearing the whistle from the trains on Epping Ongar Railway (EOR). These things should be protected, they are educational resources as well as having a very real potential to bring economic benefit to the area through tourism and business aviation. The airfield could be many things for years to come but aviation MUST be maintained to preserve the heritage of the village. The draft Local Plan's vision for North Weald refers to retaining the village's military heritage. Commercial Centre North Weald's current commercial centre does need improvement, however, it needs improvement now, to cope with the current village population. Whilst the plan suggests that North Weald should become more self-sufficient, it does not need a supermarket or industrial estates. A large commercial site would dominate our village and would go against preserving a 'discrete' village feel as mentioned in the Master Planning Study. We could do with more 'local' shops but they should be spread throughout the village i.e some improvement near The Talbot so that residents do not need to travel down to the village centre (by car) to pick up a few necessities. Perhaps some small village shops near to Blenheim Square and the current employment area on the edge of the airfield would be beneficial and remove some of the burden on the High Road and the shops in the centre of the village. Schools St Andrews does have capacity for growth, however I understand that secondary schools in the area are struggling. A secondary school may be required in the area however it does not belong in North Weald itself. To place a new school in the village would have a significant impact on village life. Secondary education should continue to be available at a distance of 2-3 miles of the village with improved bus services used for transportation. Latton Priory would be at a suitable distance. Housing The allocation of housing proposed for North Weald is excessively disproportionate to the allocation across the district, going directly against the wishes of residents as per the Issues and Options Consultation in 2012. The vision for North Weald as per the draft Local Plan says 'North Weald Bassett will seek to become more self-sufficient while retaining its local character'. There will be no local character left if housing is increased by 1580 homes (78%). North Weald will be unrecognisable. Flats The 'vision' for North Weald talks about 'retaining its local character'. Until Blenheim Square was built, North Weald had only one residential building where there was more than a ground and first floor (with an exception of loft rooms) as far as I am aware. This was a small block of flats located on the corner of Wellington Road/High Road. A small scale development softened by trees and green areas around it. The flats at Blenheim square stand out, being seen from the other end of the village and of a style and density which is not sympathetic to the village. To retain its local character, North Weald cannot accommodate the suggested level of housing and it cannot accept the proposed density on some of these plots. Multi-level (greater than ground and first floor) residences are not appropriate in North Weald village. Typically, flats are now built with some form of outside space on the levels above ground floor. This can result in existing housing being overlooked when these outside spaces are used. These outside spaces are not always used for their intended purpose however, and can become unsightly storage spaces. Any

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development should consider the impact of such spaces on existing residents. Density I strongly DISAGREE with North Weald Parish Council's response concerning an increase in the proposed density of housing in North Weald. Families of today have children who stay at home into their mid to late twenties, it is very common therefore for a household to have between 3 and 5 cars for a considerable number of years. Parking at 1.5 spaces per household is not sufficient to 'retain its local character'. Narrow roads on modern developments is not acceptable when there is not sufficient off street parking provided close to the front entrance of each house. Parking is one of the highest causes of neighbourly dispute and any development should consider this rather than trying to maximise profit for housebuilders through trying to cram as many properties into an area as possible. The social and physical impact of any development should be considered past the point of sale of a property. Perpetuity Place Shaping principle iii states 'provide mixed-tenure homes and housing types that are genuinely affordable for everyone'. I am 35 years old and have lived in this village since 1983. When it came time to move out of my parents' home I struggled to buy a property in North Weald/Epping, even when earning a London wage, it was impossible. Debden was more affordable. I stayed for 3 years but, even living on the edge of the settlement the quality of the outside space was lacking. I still could not afford to buy in North Weald but I sold my property and moved back to my parents' to be able to save further. I consider myself extremely lucky to now own a property in North Weald, managing to be in the right place at the right time. With any development that takes place in North Weald (or across the district), provisions MUST be made for some properties to be held in perpetuity for people who have grown up in the area to be able to afford to buy here. In order for North Weald to 'retain its local character', green areas would be incorporated within these new developments, creating buffers between existing and new housing. People have moved to North Weald because of its access to open green spaces but these proposals seek to take that away by creating a mass development of which the proposed density will not allow for even small green areas. SR-0003, SR-0417 and the southern area of SR-0158A If these areas are developed for housing then the risk of flooding will be increased as they currently lie higher than the existing village and run alongside the sections of the village that are flood risk zones 2 and 3. I would be supportive to sympathetic development in the northern part of SR-0158A along Vicarage Lane to bring some village life to the area around St Andrew's Church. However, it would need to be in keeping with the rural nature of this area and include another area of village shops to reduce car journeys into the existing village centre. Creating housing on the scale proposed for North Weald will put further strain on our local infrastructure which struggles to cope with the level of current residents. Infrastructure improvements are what this community needs now, today. SR-0417 and SR-0003 lie within the approach zone for the short runway on the airfield. Any development here could be detrimental to the operations of the airfield and not in line with the vision to preserve the military heritage. Due to the restriction posed by forest land between Epping and North Weald, it will not be possible to improve the infrastructure to be able to cope with development on the proposed scale. Healthcare Village Surgery There is suggestion that the Limes Medical Centre in Epping is over capacity, however, it is not uncommon to find yourself as the only person in the waiting room. Perhaps a flexible approach to the operational management of the facility could be looked into. There is an existing doctor's surgery in North Weald (part of The Limes Medical Centre) but it is not being used full time. It could and should be modernised but simply opening full time would be an asset to the village and reduce pressure on the Limes at Epping during peak times. There is sufficient demand for a full time surgery. This would also reduce journeys on the North Weald to Epping Road. Village Chemist The current Chemist in North Weald is an enormous asset to the village. The Pharmacist and his team have been here for a considerable time (decades). They know villagers by name, they know both personal and family history of the customers who use the store. Many residents use the surgery in Epping (The Limes) but instead of collecting their prescriptions at the chemist on site, the walk past it and bring those prescriptions back to the village to collect from the village chemist. The personal service and warm welcome is second to none and any new medical facilities should not compete with this.

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