

Ongar Town Council Response to Local Plan

Ongar Town Council (OTC) is concerned that EFDC's Local Plan lacks Green Belt policies. If Green Belt land is to be released for building, there needs to be clear and transparent policies relating to such things as limited infilling, previously developed land, conversions and similar issues as found in the Brentwood draft Local Plan in addition to the NPPF. We believe there should be further definition as to how the Green Belt policy will be applied to new developments to ensure that further 'inappropriate' building within the Green Belt does not happen either now or in the future.

Current deficiencies in infrastructure

- Primary schools in Ongar are already full or near capacity. Children living in Marden Ash have to travel to Doddinghurst Primary School as their local primary school in Chipping Ongar is currently over-subscribed. Shelley school children are being transported to Moreton School for the same reason.
- The Ongar Academy does not have the capacity to provide secondary education for the expected number of pupils.
- Since the closure of the High Street doctor's surgery in August 2016, the Ongar Health Centre at Fyfield Road is oversubscribed. Patients find it extremely difficult to get an appointment. There is no room on the site for the building to be extended to provide further treatment and consultancy rooms. There is inadequate parking at the surgery and ONG.R3 should be utilised for parking and future expansion of the Health Centre.
- With inadequate public transport links out of Ongar, the prospect of St Margaret's Hospital closing and Princess Alexandra Hospital being relocated on the outskirts of Harlow town centre, residents of Ongar without transport will have problems travelling to and from hospital for appointments and treatment.
- With an ever ageing population, more provision for the elderly, such as sheltered housing, care homes and retirement flats, will be necessary and there seems to be no provision for this in the Local Plan.
- The restrictions and cuts to emergency services, especially the police, is an increasing concern.
- Road improvements to the A414, A10, M11 and M25 are all mentioned in the Local Plan. The A128 (Ongar's historic High Street) is used as a relief road for any incidents on the M11 and M25. The High Street (A128) and pavements are in a very poor condition and urgently need attention, a further increase in traffic will only exacerbate its deterioration. The A128 is unsuitable for the current volume of traffic and a by-pass is required to reduce the traffic volume, reduce pollution and vibration to the historic buildings.
- OTC's cemetery will be at full capacity in approximately 20 – 30 years with current population. After this time a new site will need to be found. There is currently no suitable site within the town. St Peter's church, Shelley has an open burial ground but it is not known for how much

longer. A new burial ground takes between approximately 20 – 25 years from planning to opening.

- Utilities

There are no guarantees that the various utility companies will upgrade the existing and inadequate supplies, Water and the Victorian sewerage system both of which fail regularly.

Broadband speeds and mobile phone reception have disappointing performance.

Current situation and the effects of proposed new development

Ongar currently has around 2,500 homes; the proposed development of over 695 new homes (*including the 105 homes on the Fyfield Business Park, already approved by EFDC*) and the subsequent influx of new residents will increase pressure on the existing infrastructure and the community. Existing problems relating to heavy traffic, inadequate parking spaces, healthcare, school places, public transport, and local services will worsen and there is no provision in the plan to accommodate an increase in population.

Commuting – public transport and car use

Ongar is a rural commuter town and cannot support employment for the working population therefore the majority of residents are required to use private vehicles to travel to work.

The local bus service is unreliable and has limited timetabled destinations. Therefore residents need a vehicle to commute to work. A vast majority of residents presently commute to London, Brentwood, Harlow, and Chelmsford, and other centres by tube and over ground trains to London.

Epping Forest District Council's 'Vision for Ongar' to support non-car based modes of travel is not realistic and is contrary to the Local Plan 'Vision for Ongar'. The self-sufficiency aspiration is not achievable as Ongar is a commuter town it cannot provide sufficient work for the population and the diversity of their skills.

Ongar is a rural community and does not enjoy the same level of public transport, or the variety of shops and facilities, enjoyed in the more urban parts of the Epping Forest District Council's area and therefore cannot fully support the needs of the residents.

Air pollution

Current air pollution in Ongar is in excess of EU regulation. Pollution will rise with the inevitable increase in the number of vehicles using local roads. Noise, vibration and air pollution is intensified in Ongar's historic High Street due its narrow, restrictive nature and current volume of traffic. This has an impact on residents living and using the High Street, pedestrians and shoppers and potential further damage Ongar's historic buildings in this conservation area. Pollution levels in Ongar should be under constant monitoring.

Car parking provision

No provision has been made to cater for additional car parking in Ongar High Street to deal with the significant increase in vehicles from new residential developments, and to cater for the “vibrant centre” proposed by Epping Forest District Council, if achievable.

Residential side roads are already used as free parking for shoppers, workers and tourists. The residents suffer the inconvenience this causes to their environment. Additional car parking is essential and car parking charges should be reviewed, reduced or free parking should be provided to ease the parking situation. These measures are necessary to attract more trade for the local retailers, who are the life blood of the High Street, and to entice more businesses to locate in Ongar. Adequate car parking must be provided in any new development.

Traffic Congestion

Ongar already has a problem with the high volume of non-local traffic passing through it to access either the M11 or M25 and other major routes. Essex County Council recognises that the current flow of traffic on the M11 is not fit for purpose and has, for some time, been lobbying Central Government to improve the traffic management. An increase in local population will intensify this issue. When the M11 or M25 are congested or blocked the A128, A414 and A113 are used by motorists, including heavy goods vehicles, to avoid the motorways, causing severe congestion in Ongar High Street and surrounding routes. Major traffic tailbacks in the High Street, caused by heavy goods vehicles loading and unloading and illegally parked cars, occur at any time, particularly at peak periods. Traffic queues extend along the High Street to the Four Wantz roundabout and onto the A414 from either Chelmsford or Harlow and in the other direction along the A128 and A113 from Brentwood and Romford. The two access points to Ongar – Four Wantz roundabout and Coopers Hill - are already congested during rush hour periods. The provision of a bypass would ease this problem. Traffic management plans for all the proposed development should be made available for consultation prior to the Local Plan being adopted.

Infrastructure

The Local Plan appears to have a vague approach with regard to infrastructure with little recognition of problems that residents currently face or the detrimental affect any additional development will present. Infrastructure improvements appear to be totally reliant on other agencies over which Epping Forest District Council has no direct control or authority. It seems unlikely that S106 agreements on individual sites will provide enough funding to accommodate the necessary improvements to the infrastructure for both existing and new residents. Ongar Town Council opposes further urban intensification unless adequate infrastructure is identified, discussed and agreed, alongside timescales for its implementation, to help minimise any negative impact on our residents.

Comments re specific sites

ONG.R3 – Land southwest of Fyfield Road – Approximately 27 homes - Suggested alternative use

Ongar Town Council strongly recommends that this site should be used solely for additional parking and expansion for the Ongar Health Centre, which currently has very limited parking and recently increased its patient numbers due to the closure of the only other Doctors' practice in the High Street. The limited parking will be greatly exacerbated with the significant increase in the population of Ongar. The limited additional parking currently available at the Leisure Centre, as an over spill for patients, is seriously affected by the opening and future expansion of the Ongar Academy.

ONG.R4 – Land north of Chelmsford Road (A414) – Approximately 163 homes

The site will greatly increase the number of vehicles accessing the A414 very close to the Four Wantz roundabout. Road user and pedestrian safety is the concern as is the overall size of the development. The Local Plan gives no information as to how the additional traffic will be managed, or any suggested alteration to the road system. Traffic management plans should be made available.

ONG.R1 – Land to the west of Chipping Ongar – Approximately 99 homes ONG.R2 – Land at Bowes Field – Approximately 135 homes

These two sites should be reduced in scale to run parallel to the A414 away from existing houses.

These two sites merge into one and will form an estate of 234 homes, greatly increasing the number of vehicles accessing the A414 very close to the Four Wantz roundabout on the opposite side to ONG.R4 – Land north of Chelmsford Road (A414). Road user and pedestrian safety is the concern. The Local Plan gives no information as to how the additional traffic will be managed, or any suggested alteration to the road system. Traffic management plans should be made available.

ONG.R1 and ONG.R2 Bowes Field is Green Belt and supports an abundance of flora and fauna. The residents of Great Lawn and Marks Avenue currently enjoy panoramic views of the local countryside which will be lost to them and will have a detrimental effect on the environment they presently enjoy and have done since the homes were built. OTC believes that this development should be removed from the Local Plan.

ONG.R5 – Land at Greensted Road – Approximately 107 homes

Due to the very narrow, winding and dangerous nature of Greensted Road at this point, road user and pedestrian safety is the concern particularly access onto the A128 at the Two Brewers junction. The Local Plan gives no information as to how the additional traffic will be managed, or any suggested

alteration to the road system. Traffic management plans should be made available to address the single carriage way, blind bends and no footpaths. This road floods as it collects water runoff from the adjacent fields.

ONG.R5 location is bisected by a high pressure gas main, this has not been addressed in the Local Plan.

The residents backing onto this site currently enjoy panoramic views of the local countryside which supports an abundance of flora and fauna. This will be lost to them and will have a detrimental effect on the environment they presently enjoy and have done since the homes were built. OTC believes that this development should be removed from the Local Plan or that the development size is scaled down to reduce any impact on the residents and the flora and fauna.

ONG.R8 – Car park at the Stag public house – Approximately 9 homes

The Stag Public House is an old and attractive building located in Marden Ash, out of the town centre. The building of 9 modern homes next to it will spoil the street scene and the historic character of this community amenity Public House.

ONG.R6 – Land between Stanford Rivers road and Brentwood road – Approximately 33 homes

This development is on agricultural land.

This development's access is onto an accident black spot, A113 Stanford Rivers road and will greatly increase the number of vehicles movements. Road user and pedestrian safety is the concern. The Local Plan gives no information as to how the additional traffic will be managed, or any suggested alteration to the road system. Traffic management plans should be made available.