

Marks Tey Parish Council Response to Consultation on the Borough Council Local Plan Preferred Options

Marks Tey Parish Council offers the following response to Colchester Borough Councils Consultation on its 2017 to 2033 Local Plan Preferred Options. It does so in general terms both noting our support and our concerns under four broad headings of:

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1. Introduction, Summary and Overall Comments

1.1 Marks Tey Parish Council considers the proposal to absorb the growth required of the local authorities within new Garden Communities proposed within the Local Plan Preferred Options to be visionary and forward-looking. However, it is extremely high risk with no identification or mitigation of the economic or delivery risks. Also, at least in the short term, it is very detrimental, uniquely, to the community of the parish of Marks Tey, again with no stated proposed mitigation.

1.2 Thus, as presented, Marks Tey Parish Council cannot support the proposals as they are unlikely to be successful. This lack of support is also due to the likelihood that it may be harmful to the Marks Tey community without significant alteration in the approach..

1.3 The overall Local Plan Preferred Options document itself presenting this information, together with its plethora of Evidence Documents, is extremely complex, confusing, and mechanistic, and completely unsuited to the wide public consultation that presumably was intended. Forensic concentration is needed to weave between the relevant documents which grew in number over the consultation period. This was not helped by seeking consultation over the summer holiday months nor the lack of detailed synchronisation of the release of documents and decision dates across the authorities.

1.4 Such a lack of detailed coordination between the three authorities at this stage does not bode well for the efficient management of such a large project.

1.5 Whilst recognising the highly technical nature required to prepare a Local Plan, little empathy seems to have been shown to the community who are funding the Plan and for whose betterment it is presumably intended. This is shown by the minimal community consultation (at least with the Marks Tey community) prior to presenting the Preferred Options. This resulted in Marks Tey Parish Council presenting its own unsolicited representation to CBC. Seeking public contribution to the Local Plan Panel where contributions were sought either for or against proposals that where only just introduced did not help, but did not seem to inhibit the contributions (because everyone ignored it). Also in currently seeking Consultation contributions based on specific Policy numbers in the document, the process seems more geared to professional efficiency and constraints rather than the public. These are not documents and approaches seeking contributions by the

public rather ones seemingly constructed to prevent it or at least presented for professional efficiency. Marks Tey Parish Council has neither the professional skill nor the resources to employ the required talent to respond in this way and thus offers a community based view and critique of the proposals in broad terms.

1.6 Marks Tey itself has been significantly mis assessed and misrepresented in the document in that the effects of the A12 and A120 on the community are underrepresented and whilst the community is well provided with facilities, most of these facilities are sustained by people outside of Marks Tey via proximity to Junction 25 on A12. Movement around Marks Tey whether by local vehicles, pedestrians or cyclists is severely compromised fragmenting the community with the added imposition of noise vibration and pollution. At the same time the community have reported through contributions to the Neighbourhood Plan that what is good about Marks Tey is its smallness of size and access to the countryside. The intention is to capture these existing community and environmental strengths in our emerging Neighbourhood Plan, but whose forward view of our community is rendered blind by lack of any clarity for the future in the proposed Local Plan to which the evolving Neighbourhood Plan has to conform.

1.7 Marks Tey Parish Council Principal Recommendations

- a.** For future community consideration and consultation, a plain English summary of the proposed Local Plan should be prepared including heavy and effective referencing to the many other documents and policies. It would be helpful if this summary document was available electronically and the references linked automatically to the relevant documents.
- b.** Future iterations of the Local Plan the three authorities synchronise the release of information and their political decision-making and effect an electronic notification for town and parish councils and other interested parties for key dates and information publication.
- c.** The affected communities get full involvement in the development of the proposals and that the Marks Tey parish community get a full say in the size of any surrounding development. How such community involvement in the development of the Communities is to be effected should be crystallised and stated in the Local Plan in order to improve on the vague comments contained within the document.
- d.** Whilst it is accepted that further examination is required into the Garden Communities, measurable undertakings should be given regarding this. This should include specific details of this further examination plus fixed timetables for what will be undertaken in this examination and by when. Such undertakings should be included in all proposal documents (and within the Local Plan itself if work is still outstanding) to give assurance and security to all affected communities, particularly Marks Tey.
- e.** As Marks Tey is so affected by the Garden Community proposals no changes to the parish/settlement should be proposed in Part 2 from what currently exists, pending clarity on proposals for the Garden Community. Also that innovative ways be sought in the same timescale to integrate the evolving Marks Tey Neighbourhood Plan into the wider strategic plans to form a Neighbourhood Plan 'Plus' that reflects the innovation intended for the development of the Garden Community itself.
- f.** Due to the significant and underestimated affects of the A120 as a local distributor to en route communities, investigations should be undertaken to

see if the release of land for residential development within the proposed local plan initial period can also provide temporary early relief to the effects of the A120 on Marks Tey, Coggeshall, Feering, and Kelvedon. No new development should be occupied prior to the provision of such highway improvement or an alternative. A clear and unambiguous statement should be included within the Local Plan to this effect.

- g.** Assessment of the significant economic and delivery risk needs to be undertaken for the Local Plan, together with contingency proposals to overcome or reduce these else the provision contained within the Local Plan, particularly Part 1, will only be aspirational and likely to fail. If Part 1 under achieves or fails then this is likely to cause failure of Part 2 due to existing communities needing to pick up the additional housing load.

These points and more are covered in more detail in the following submission in some cases with lengthy explanation where the CBC document seems to have missed the point but in most cases with a suggested recommendation to mitigate the identified issue.

2 Detailed comments on Part 1 – Shared Strategic Plan

2.1 Marks Tey Parish Council is still, as previously stated, supportive of new communities to solve Colchester's growing need, of taking a 15 year view of how this is to be provided and avoiding the 'spread' and merging of other communities. We agree that this needs to be effected by innovative means with forward funding and forward provision of infrastructure needs. Marks Tey Parish Council also feels that some expansion of Marks Tey is needed if this solves Marks Tey's current significant highways problems and deficits, but before any significant new housing is added. Such development should add to Marks Tey's sense of place, providing that this also protects the communities view of what is important to the community as reflected in its developing Neighbourhood Plan.

Recommendation

- Relief from current significant highway problems, enhancement of Marks Tey sense of place, and protection of current locality strengths as expressed through the emerging Neighbourhood Plan are the factors that should be used as the success measures on how the wider strategic proposals or any significant growth affect the Marks Tey parish community.

2.2 The Garden Community approach, however, has the implication, of in effect of imposing two Local Plans on the affected areas of which Marks Tey is the only one involving the proposed inclusion of an existing 2,500 population community. The Plan states that these Communities will take limited growth in the 2017 to 2033 period, with much more significant development after this (to possibly 20,000 dwellings in the case Marks Tey). Such an imposition on the community of Marks Tey without clarification is unique and unfair.

Recommendation

- With Marks Tey as the only Colchester, Braintree, or Tendring community likely to be fully absorbed within a proposed Garden Community, and in effect the first phase of one of these Garden Communities, that its community representation should be integrated into the ongoing process for managing the development of the Garden Communities ideas and implementation.

2.3 There is no examination in the Proposed Options document nor easily found within the Evidence Documents, of the viability of forward funding for needed considerable infrastructure development nor of the delivery options to provide these, which are of course all innovative and new and for which none of the authorities have any significant previous experience.

Recommendation

- Significant delivery risk examination needs to be undertaken (see detailed comments on deliverability concerns below).

2.4 There has to be grave suspicion about the economic viability of a proposed Garden Community sited around Marks Tey (SP9) which does not have the established employment generators of Stansted Airport nor the University of Essex as with its western and eastern proposed counterparts. Yet SP9 is proposed ultimately to be the biggest of all three proposed new communities. No significant additional employment related land use allocations are mentioned within the Local Plan period to 2033 and those that do exist are suggested to be diluted (mixed use of Andersons site). This risks the new Community becoming a larger commuter community or even failing. However the A12/A120 location is good, the examination and timing of improvement of the A12 and A120 and planned capital investment in the A12 are all well suited for fitting in with the proposed Local Plan, and this could enhance employment generation by providing an early opportunity to provide possibly temporary new highway access from a new junction to relieve the infrastructure deficit and access new employment land.

Recommendation

- It would seem prudent to make early investment for employment generation. The option should be investigated for bringing forward into the current local plan period 2017 to 2033, additional employment land in Marks Tey accessed from immanent A12 highway improvement.

2.6 The differing sizes of the new Communities are illogical and no evidence given to support the relevant sizes. The 7 to 9000 of east Colchester seems contrary to the stated self-sustaining principals. The potential of 20,000 dwellings for Marks Tey, the least economical of the sites, swamps the existing community and threatens Coggeshall.

Recommendation

- Even sizes of self-sustaining new communities would seem more logical and some statement be given on the relative priority of each Community or whether these are to be simply commercially driven.

2.7 The Parish Council would like to have an active involvement in the proposals going forward not only to help to advance and communicate the vision as it has been trying to do throughout the Consultation period, but also to deliver a community view into the development of the new Communities as the only community so far fully engulfed by the proposals. The Parish Council are surprised that given the implications on Marks Tey that the Borough Council had not consulted or discussed these issues prior to publication and that all initiatives to seek discussion have come from the Parish Council.

Parish Council involvement would seem a useful offer particularly as the CBC approach to date does not seem community aware. If the new communities are

established and start to grow, those communities are likely to be fully involved in their development. Marks Tey is in effect proposed to be the first phase of a new Community. It seems illogical for the University of Essex to be a member of the Project Board developing the Garden Communities initiative and deciding on things that will affect Marks Tey but not any community interest from Marks Tey itself. The Parish Council have repeatedly pressed CBC for involvement but so far to little effect.

Recommendation

- That a Marks Tey Parish Council, community representative or a representative of any heavily affected community be invited to join the Project Board to give community context.

3 Detailed Comments on Part 2 – Local Plan for Colchester

3.1 The CBC Settlement Boundary Review (comments already sent to CBC by MTPC) as it affects Marks Tey is weak and subjective. The Local Plan proposals pick arbitrary and non evidenced issues to be undertaken by the Neighbourhood Plan some based on wrong information for which there has been no prior discussion with Marks Tey. However, the proposed Local Plan and a proposed new Garden Community has a huge and significant effect on Marks Tey but without clear detail or procedures and timescales. This lack of detail is hugely prejudicial to the community of Marks Tey and to its formulation of its Neighbourhood Plan, more so than any other settlement within the Colchester Borough. Thus to treat Marks Tey's evolving Neighbourhood Plan the same as any other community is illogical and ignores the pressures upon it. Similarly, the parish being treated in the same way as other Colchester's settlements is unfair and there is neither recognition of these pressures within the document nor any proposals to take them into account. With this in mind there is no point in allocating provisions within SS13 just for the sake of it and the removal of the settlement boundary around Little Tey is nonsense while so much is over shadowing the area.

Recommendation.

- a. The Policy for Marks Tey (SS13) should be unchanged from existing until further clarity on the wider strategic implications are clear and a fixed date should be given for the latter.
- b. Investigation should be undertaken to explore innovative ways by which the evolving Neighbourhood Plan can link into the wider strategy to form a Neighbourhood Plan 'Plus'.

3.2 The Options document seriously under assessment the current infrastructure deficit/highway problems in Marks Tey, an issue that unites most of the residents of Marks Tey. The A120 currently performs two separate functions, both badly:

- it is an overloaded strategic trunk road carrying through traffic from Braintree to the A12;
- it is also a local distributor serving the communities of Marks Tey and elsewhere on its route.

On the latter it has a disastrous effect on community life from the point of view of noise, vibration, and pollution, to the curtailment of movement through the

community, for the numerous adjoining roadside properties, and severely limiting local vehicle, pedestrian, and cycling movement fragmenting the community. Even the A120s use as a trunk road is compromised by traffic wanting to go south on the A12 forming a "rat run" through Coggeshall and Feering/Kelvedon. Current attempts to get future acceptance of an A120 improvement in the 2020 to 2025 road building programme (a significant risky assumption) will not produce a new road available to traffic and to relieve any current problems within the next 10 to 15 years and could be longer. Localised en route improvement is unlikely to aid the local distributor problems and could have negative environmental effects on existing communities that might undermine environmental improvement that is sought in the longer term through the current Plan. Thus whilst consultees may say that there is potential with local improvement to increase strategic trunk road capacity on the A120 such a move would be catastrophic to the existing en route communities yet the Preferred Options document suggests that residential expansion is possible.

Recommendation

- The Local Plan should commit to exploring in conjunction with the imminent A12 upgrade, and the decision on a route for an improved A120, for early options to release the effects of the A120 on Marks Tey (and Coggeshall and Kelvedon/Feering) and should not commit to any occupation of new dwellings before the existing infrastructure deficits have been overcome. Again, clear and unambiguous statements should be included within the Local Plan to this effect.

3.3 Marks Tey is currently a largely commuter settlement with a lot of local people living in the estate and using the railway. With increasing traffic and danger to pedestrians and cyclists on the A120 the once heavy number of pedestrians walking or cycling to the rail station has greatly reduced with these people now presumably driving or getting a lift. This is an assumption being tested in our Neighbourhood Plan but it is a trend that is totally contrary to what CBC is seeking to achieve in its Policies.

Recommendation

- Ways are sought within the Local Plan 2017 to 2033 to enhance footpath and cycleway provision through Marks Tey, to aid mobility and connectivity through the fragmented community. This will, no doubt also be picked up in the evolving Neighbourhood Plan.

3.4 There is a general need to apply transitional arrangements to many of the Preferred Options document individual Policies i.e. Sustainable Transport, Changing Travel Behaviour, Parking. Many of these policies are written with an assumption that when they are introduced they are effective. Evidence from the likes of Park and Ride shows the changing behaviours takes time and that for instance new development can be flooded with parked cars because reduced provision has assumed different behaviours from the start. The same need for transitional arrangements will apply to the new Communities and recognition and a view should be presented on this in the Local Plan.

Recommendation

- The Local Plan needs to address this transitional issue with, for instance, interim highway provision pending more permanent solutions or in the case of parking in new developments perhaps a fixed short-term use of amenity

land to be used for additional parking while the landscape provided for the area develops and alternative transport options takes over. This would seek to avoid policies failing from the start.

4 Comments on Delivery Concerns

4.1 The delivery of the Local Plan as written is high risk with delivery of Part 1 and the Garden Communities very high risk. The Local Plan assessment of risks is confined to ecological and environmental and Local Plan Policy monitoring. Little or no consideration is given to the risk factors for the delivery of the Local Plan itself or the Garden Communities in particular. These risk factors are economic, political, and professional capacity issues amongst others.

Recommendation

- With the Preferred Options document having been prepared to cover all of the professional areas and policies required of a Local Plan that additional effort be put in to ensure its practical delivery, the risks to this, and mitigation of these risks.

4.2 On the economic factors, putting aside the risk of increased or decreased demand for housing growth as predicted in the Local Plan, there is considerable economic uncertainty over the 15 to 30 year period that the Plan envisages. The economic effects of BREXIT are not likely to be known for the next two to three years at the earliest, the World economy is at best volatile, and the effects of these are likely to have an influence on the growth and viability of the new settlements.

Recommendation

- Each phase of any new development or of the new Communities is made self sufficient so that it adds to existing communities, has it's own economic viability and employment provision and can be both an end in itself if circumstances require it to be so as well as contribute to a greater vision..

4.3 On the political aspects, the Local Plan timescale encompasses many political cycles both locally and nationally. Colchester Borough Council is a coalition administration between the two smaller parties with the majority party excluded. CBC plans for the development at Tollgate have met political resistance and have been the subject of fierce politic debate within CBC and wider. This must indicate considerable political risk to the Local Plan.

Recommendation

- a. Mitigation of this might be to secure all political parties commitment to the Local Plan in each Authority and to secure the continued partnership commitment and funding of both the County Council and of Central Government to the plan and its continuous monitoring.
- b. The other mitigation would be to secure the development proposals by Act of Parliament, or other statutory means, much as the New Towns were effected previously, or as Essex and Kent CC did for the second Dartford Tunnel.

4.4 Relative to professional risk and resource capability, the three new communities, encompassing some proposed 49,000 new dwellings all in north Essex, are an untried initiatives on many levels. Such large scale new community provision is not happening anywhere else in the UK and is the largest since the

creation of the New Towns. Current Garden Communities, Ebbsfleet, and Bicester are single communities of around 15,000 dwellings being developed independently of each, other and Cranbourne and Poundbury are significantly smaller at 3,000 and 2,500 dwellings respectively. Colchester's experience to date is with 5 year duration Local Plans and some of the longer scale planning that has been undertaken, i.e. the Hythe and town centre Vinyard St development, have been subject to economic uncertainty which has resulted in these plans not realising their objectives as quickly as envisaged and leaving the environment in the mean time in a state of obvious partial completion or worse. Braintree have pursued some of the garden community principles (through the Essex Design Guide) with the Notley Village and Black Notley developments, but again these are only of 5,500 residents (say 2,000 dwellings) and 2 to 300 dwellings respectively. The new Garden Communities initiative put the authorities in the national spotlight and requires a national level of excellence and commitment.

4.5 All of this again indicates political and resource risk that could equally apply to the new Local Plan. None of this of course diminishes the vision contained within the Local Plan, but without recognition and mitigation of the risks being included as part of the Local Plan, the Local Plan becomes aspirational and rather meaningless.

4.6 Whilst the risk is largely to the Garden Communities (i.e. Part 1 of the proposed Local Plan) these communities are proposed to carry a significant part of the 2017 to 2033 identified housing growth (17%) so that if they fail this would need to be transferred to the existing communities within each Authority and this in itself threatens the viability of Part 2's plans for those existing communities.

4.7 Even at "Preferred Options" stage it is illogical not to examine and state the practical delivery risks and to indicate to the public how it is intended to mitigate and minimise these risks.

5 Conclusion

Marks Tey Parish Council recognises that there is good in the Preferred Options proposals but not at any price and the proposals create much worry and concern for residents. No attempt has been made to address issues in any of the other Evidence Documents, and the Parish Council have many issues, i.e. with AECOM Ltd's Garden Community Concept Feasibility Study. MTPC would seek to discuss these with CBC and, of course, more information and ideas can be provided on the issues that the Parish Council mentions above. The Parish Council wants to stay fully engaged in the process as the proposals have so fundamental an effect on the future of Marks Tey (and the Borough) and look to the Borough for active and meaningful discussions on a way forward.

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