

Dedham Vale Society

Workhouse Cottage,
Workhouse Lane,
Little Horkesley,
Colchester CO6 4DS

August 2016

Colchester Borough Council

(Attn: Local Plan – Karen Syrett)

Rowan House,

33 Sheepen Road,

Colchester CO3 3WG

Dear Karen,

Dedham Vale Society – Response to the Preferred Options Document

The prime consideration of the Dedham Vale Society (DVS) in reviewing the Colchester Local Plan is the protection provided to the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the villages therein. However, developments throughout the Borough, and indeed north Essex and Suffolk, can impact on the AONB.

Policies SP8 and SP9 concentrates the major housing over the period of the Plan in two “Garden Communities” at Salary Brook to the east of Colchester and West/Marks Tey which appears sensible given the heavily built up nature of Colchester after the last two decades of development. This is welcomed as is Policy NC1: North Colchester and Severalls Economic Area –which implies that the boundary for major development to the north of Colchester remains the A12.

Policy SP4: Infrastructure and Connectivity sets out a number of considerations to improve the current largely ineffective transport system. The DVS feels that the impact of the two large communities set out above will impact across the whole of the area – “rat runs” through the northern villages is already a problem, given the number of single track lanes, and will only increase with the employment opportunities in the “greater” Colchester area. DVS would be most concerned about any plans to improve the two major roads which pass through the AONB, the A12 and A134, unless extensive action was taken to limit pollution – noise and lighting.

Policies SS6/8/9/16 appears to limit housing developments in the northern villages to either where a development is incomplete, Great Horkesley, or Neighbourhood Plans are underway, West Bergholt and Eight Ash Green etc and this is welcomed. However, concerns have already been expressed on the plan to build 17 homes, mainly within the AONB, at Dedham Heath – the preferred option of Dedham Parish Council.

SG7: Neighbourhood Plans – the opportunity for local communities to be actively involved in creating guidance on the development of their community in many ways is welcomed but it needs to be recognised that not all villages have the resources, mainly of personnel, to complete a Neighbourhood Plan and such communities must enjoy protection. The process of producing a Plan is such that there is wide consultation in the community and eventually a referendum in which the community itself has the opportunity to comment on any housing targets set.

Policy OV1: Development in Other Villages and Countryside – is a concern that it appears to support “new infill Developments” which could lead to coalescence between villages e.g. Great Horkesley and Nayland which would be highly damaging to the countryside. The previous Plan specifically excluded such coalescence and the concept of building on garden/back land which could be very harmful to our rural villages.

Policy ENV4: Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Section 5.26 to 5.32 are welcomed as they appear to strengthen existing policies particularly by including areas outside the AONB where developments could have an impact within the AONB. However, specific planning guidance on minimising light pollution across the AONB would benefit the DVS drive towards a “dark skies” initiative in the Vale.

It is also noted that the status of “protected lanes”, which appeared in previous plans, appears to have disappeared – this is disappointing as these key lanes in the countryside are a vital part of the rural landscape.

Policy DM7: Agricultural Development and Diversification – this is welcomed particularly in the changed economic environment where the governmental approach to blanket subsidies may well change. However, the countryside is already suffering from lanes, designed for the horse and cart, being used by massive agricultural machines and large commercial vehicles and, therefore the problems of access must be addressed as part of the planning process. The observations from ECC Highways frequently seem to be at odds with practical common sense rules to protect the Vale.

Policy SG 8: Developer Contributions and Community Infrastructure Levy – as stated above the impact of the rapid expansion of the Borough will be felt across a wide area not just in those communities immediately affected. Therefore funds raised from development should be spent across the Borough, including in the Vale, to mitigate the problems caused by a rapidly expanding population.

The co-operation with other Essex Borough/District Councils is welcomed in producing a cohesive plan for north Essex. The missing element appears to be the involvement of Suffolk Councils. The Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty embraces both Essex and Suffolk and yet the Preferred Options Document makes no mention of co-operation between Essex and Suffolk.

Yours sincerely,

J R Drury

DVS Essex Planning Secretary