

I have been a resident of West Horndon for 17 years and I am writing to set out my objections to the proposed development in West Horndon as follows:

1) Major development in West Horndon

The Preferred Options document published by the Borough Council proposes a major development alongside a small rural community. The development would treble the size of our village, changing the character of the whole area and effectively transforming our small village into a town. The number of dwellings proposed for West Horndon represents 43% of the total number to be provided in the Borough up to 2030.

The scale of the development proposed would swamp the existing village, effectively creating a new settlement. My family and the others within West Horndon chose to live in this area because it was a small village with a real sense of community. This would be lost forever, changing the way in which we have chosen to live our lives and raise our children.

There is no explanation as to why West Horndon is thought to be suitable for this scale of development, nor an explanation as to why other areas e.g. the north of Brentwood have not been earmarked for development. Why also is there not more development for Shenfield in readiness for Crossrail? Reference is also made to traveller sites although no detail is provided but it is highly unlikely that a traveller community would be able to live harmoniously in this area.

The Preferred Options document makes reference to an evidence base and infrastructure, but is only able to say that an "Infrastructure Delivery Plan is forthcoming". How can it be a fair consultation process when we are expected to respond without knowing the details that would enable us to do so properly? It is simply unacceptable for any building to take place without the appropriate infrastructure.

National guidance states that Local Planning Authorities should assess the quality and capacity of infrastructure, water supply, wastewater and its treatment, energy (including heat), telecommunications, utilities, waste, health, social care, education and flood risk and its ability to meet forecast demands. This has not been done.

The village is being asked to comment on a major proposal, having been presented with only an outline of what is proposed. It is not known what benefits, if indeed there are any, for the village, or how the scheme might seek to mitigate against the many harmful impacts.

The Borough Council are therefore attempting a consultation exercise on a proposal which is at best sketchy, is poorly researched, and premature in terms of an evidence base. Overall therefore it is ill conceived.

There are also other areas within Brentwood where building could take place where it would improve the area, which have been overlooked. For example, on the Ongar Road near to Shenfield Common there was previously a very large Peugeot garage and showroom. This has been derelict for some time and is currently an eye sore. The houses next to it are also derelict. I therefore cannot understand why this site has not been earmarked as suitable for development. This is just one of a number of sites that could be developed to improve Brentwood and would not negatively impact on the existing residents.

2) Neighbourhood Planning and Localism

The National Planning Policy framework says that local planning authorities should aim to involve all sections of the community in the development of Local Plans and in planning decisions, and should facilitate neighbourhood planning.

It also says that:

"Early and meaningful engagement and collaboration with neighbourhoods, local organisations and businesses is essential. A wide section of the community should be proactively engaged, so that Local Plans, as far as possible, reflect a collective vision and a set of agreed priorities for the sustainable development of an area, including those contained in any neighbourhood plans that have been made."

In passing the Localism Act the Government has said that:

"Too often, power was exercised by people who were not directly affected by the decisions they were taking. This meant, understandably, that people often resented what they saw as decisions and plans being foisted on them."

The plan and the consultation process have so far been a top down process, with little regard for the involvement of the local community. The consultation process also does not seem to have taken account of the high proportion of elderly residents in West Horndon who are simply not able to write, email or go on-line to register their objections, therefore skewing the outcome of the process so it appears that less people object than is the reality. The petition you received should give you some indication of the levels of objection.

3) Metropolitan Green Belt

The National Planning Policy Framework states that:

"The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. 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."

The larger part of the allocation is within the Green Belt. National planning guidance is clear that the development in the Green Belt is by definition inappropriate and harmful.

Exceptional circumstances must exist to justify the loss of Green Belt land. The Government has recently clarified that housing demand is unlikely to constitute the exceptional circumstances to justify such loss. In a direct contradiction the Borough Plan is suggesting that Green Belt land should be released to satisfy housing demand, even though there are other more suitable alternatives.

4) Flood risk

The strategic allocation proposes a development of land extending to some 25 hectares. The village has flooded in 1958, 1981 and most recently in 2012. There is no evidence that the Council has carried out any assessment of drainage in the area. The Environment Agency web site shows West Horndon and Bulphan as being at risk of flooding. In fact currently any persistent rain in the village causes a problem.

Building 1500 homes will affect the water table. Currently the fields around the village absorb some of the water but this will not be the case if a further 1500 homes are built. Even if you deal with this problem you will simply push the problem elsewhere. A further flood alleviation scheme will increase risk to the area to the south of the railway line i.e. there will be a knock on effect.

Residents in West Horndon already find it difficult to obtain house insurance because of the flood risk and the actual flooding particularly since 2012.

I also understand that it is not permissible to locate traveller sites in flood risk areas.

5) Is West Horndon a sustainable location?

Whether new development can be proved to be sustainable is central to planning policy.

Sustainable is defined as "ensuring that better lives for ourselves don't mean worse lives for future generations." In practice the essential requirement is that new homeowners will not be over dependent on the car for journeys to work, school, shops, leisure and other services and amenities.

West Horndon is a small village of less than 1900 people, with a very limited range of amenities and facilities. It has few shops, no secondary school and is remote from the larger centres of Brentwood, Basildon and Upminster. The primary school is at full capacity and there is an infrequent bus service.

A railway station provides a commuter route into London, but has limited additional capacity. The railway does not cater for the important local journeys, such as to Brentwood it simply runs straight in and out of the Borough. It does not support travel within the Borough.

People outside of the Borough can more easily access jobs created in West Horndon, this does not support local job creation within Brentwood for Brentwood residents.

If the residents of the new development have no choice but to make most journeys by car, the village, quite clearly, does not offer a sustainable location.

It is possible that improvements could be made to the infrastructure and public transport, and new local amenities provided. But given the major scale of the proposed development such measures will not overcome the fact that West Horndon is not a genuinely sustainable location. Previous promises of improved amenities have also not been honoured.

6) Impact on the countryside and setting of the village

West Horndon is a small lower density settlement surrounded by open countryside. The village is characterised by larger plots backing onto open fields.

A wide variety of wildlife can be seen in and around the village including birds such as the dunnock, thrush, finch, nightingale, skylark, kestrel, buzzard, tawny owl etc. Also butterflies such as small blue, red admiral and wall brown plus the water vole, great crested newts and pipistrelle bats.

The construction of 1500 additional houses on the edge of the village, and the consequent loss of a large expanse of open countryside, will destroy its open setting and rural character.

No consideration has been given to wildlife and bio-diversity issues, nor the impact building would have on the learning opportunities our children currently benefit from by living in this environment.

7) Impact on the residential amenities of the village

The proposals are not clear on the mix and proportion of land uses, with what appears to be a

leaning towards an almost wholly residential scheme.

There is no question that a development of the scale proposed will greatly increase the volume of traffic passing through the residential streets of the village, which will lead to a greater number of accidents. We already suffer from cars speeding through the village, ignoring the speed limit and not stopping at the zebra crossing. Policing is currently inadequate to deal with this problem, let alone an increase.

Overall our concern is that the people of the local community are most likely to suffer the harmful impacts of the development by way of increased traffic, overlooked back gardens, loss of rural character, without any discernible benefits.

8) Impact on roads and junctions

Roads and junctions in the area are inadequate to cope with more traffic.

The A127 is at a standstill most mornings heading into London with heavy traffic also going towards Southend. If you were to add the traffic from another 1500 homes you would seriously risk a gridlock situation.

On the A128 towards Brentwood the current levels of traffic are already close to breaking point. Add the vehicles from 1500 new homes and the traffic will back up across the Halfway House roundabout and further back creating more issues for vehicles wishing to join the A127. It is simply not practical to widen the A128 or provide an alternative route.

Existing junctions onto the A127 are also inadequate.

9) Is the Borough Plan sound and robust?

National guidelines state that:

"Local Plans should develop robust and comprehensive policies that set out the quality of developments that would be expected of the area, responding to local character and being visually attractive."

A local planning authority should also submit a plan for examination, which is "sound", in respect of how it is prepared, whether proposals are properly justified, whether it can be delivered, and whether it is consistent with national policy.

Given the level and extent of concerns as set out above, the plan clearly has fundamental shortcomings. It is not therefore sound or robust.

The Borough Council, in consultation with the village, is urged to carry out a study of West Horndon focusing on infrastructure, services, amenities, public transport and village life.

Only after this has been carried out can the plan be said to be responding to the needs of the local community.

I do not believe most of the residents of the village are opposed to all development, they are realistic but if there is any development it needs to be proportionate to the size of the village and to take account of our way of life. We want to continue to live in a village, not a town.

The Council will be aware that the residents currently encounter many problems because of the location of the industrial estate within the village. If this site was removed and placed elsewhere and a small amount of development of the same type of properties as currently exist within the village were built this would improve the lives of the current residents, serving both the needs of the Council and the residents. However, at the very most no more than 250 new homes should be built, which is still a sizeable amount given the current size of the village.

Given the high proportion of elderly residents within the village consideration should also be given to building warden sheltered accommodation in West Horndon as this would also potentially improve the lives of the current residents if they move into this accommodation and their existing homes would then provide homes for new families.

I also think it is inappropriate to put a traveller site in West Horndon. The village is simply not equipped, nor will it ever be, to deal with a traveller community and the many challenges it would bring to the area.

I hope you will take my concerns and those of all of my fellow villagers seriously and reconsider this plan.