



West Mersea  
Town Council

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Our Ref: WMTCRCBCLP01  
Your Ref: Local Plan  
Date: 14/09/2016

Dear Colchester Borough Council

West Mersea Town Council consulted the island community on the 1<sup>st</sup> September 2016 with approx. 500 residents turning up this is approx. 8% of the island population, and 10% of the voting population. The response to CBC plan for 350 dwellings was an overwhelming NO from an estimated 95% of the attendance.

WMTC holds the view that the proposed development areas in the plan would be areas that could be developed only if the following criteria are met:

- Items to be considered:
  1. The safety of the island community and emergency services
  2. Caravan parks and houseboats must be considered in population numbers
  3. Infrastructure including the proposed access to the new sites
  4. Public transport
  5. Health
  6. Improvements to local educational system including school and playgroups
  7. Utilities
  8. Possible new Bradwell power station
  9. The Strood
  10. Employment
  11. Sustainability of the community
- We would urge Colchester Borough Council to take the comments of West Mersea Town Council to **REPRESENT** the vast majority of the island which is approx. 7800 people excluding caravans. It **should not** be considered as a single comment.

West Mersea Town Council Town Clerk: Petra Palfreyman  
Office Hours: 9am to 1pm, Monday to Friday.

## **Island Safety**

The safety of the island community is paramount and with the proposed development of up to a maximum of 350 houses would affect this in the following ways:

- i. Increased road traffic
  - As you are aware Mersea Island only has one access road which divides at the end of the Strood to East and West Mersea. If the Strood or the B1025 gets blocked it brings the island to a standstill. If the main road into West gets blocked and the traffic gets diverted to Dawes Lane it also causes major tail backs. Dawes Lane is not designed for major traffic.
- ii. Possible new Nuclear Power station
  - Has an up to date Island evacuation plan been agreed to take account of an increased population and the possibility of Bradwell B?
- iii. Health. The island doctors are already struggling to support the community as it stands.

## **Caravan parks and house boats**

The Local plan does not consider the permanent residents in the caravan sites or the House Boats. This population must be considered and not left out. They increase the island population by approx. 2000 all year round and during the holidays the population of the island can be as high as 22,000 people.

## **Infrastructure including the proposed access to the new sites**

The majority of the existing roads and pavements on the Island are in a poor state of repair and are in need of attention. A lot of the footpaths are unusable for people in wheel chairs, push chairs or electric buggies. Our roads have more coloured lines and pot holes on them than should be acceptable.

Access to the proposed sites appears to be ill thought out and we believe would cause traffic chaos. East Road and the junction with Queens Corner is already badly congested so additional traffic would make matters considerably worse. There is Dawes Lane which could be widened and would relieve East Road but would require high expenditure but appears to be the only viable alternative.

## **Roads and Transport**

The 2008/9 Village Appraisal stated: 'Under the Housing Employment and Development (Section 3) strong views were expressed that there should be improvements to the infrastructure before further development is allowed and much of this would relate to traffic and parking'. In 2016 little has changed. Access/egress traffic for West Mersea is via Mill Road/Colchester Road going west, and going east via Dawes Lane. The two proposed developments would have to use East Road and Dawes Lane and neither of these would be suitable for further hundreds of cars on a daily basis.

The fork for east or west on the southern end of the Strood would become an even greater bottle neck for vehicles trying to leave from the east since, priority is for vehicles going on or off to the west. A roundabout would be the only cure.

The current bus routes are not user friendly taking too long around the villages and even turning off to Lethe Grove on the outskirts of Colchester. To get to the General Hospital takes an hour and requires passengers to walk from Turner Road into the hospital and on the return to change buses in Town.

If you happen to arrive back during high water spring tides, you are dropped off at The Peldon Rose, two miles from the Town! Moreover, there is very limited parking for car owners wishing to switch to the bus in West Mersea.

Parking has already become almost impossible in the Town with one small car park and a couple of spaces in front of some of the shops. Add to this the massive weight of holiday traffic and the caravan sites and it is fair to say we are at capacity now.

Then there are the high water spring tides when queues can stretch up both hills on the Island, and as far as Abberton on the mainland.

## **Public Transport**

The suggested sites are serviced by a bus service running along East road which takes 35-40 minutes each way. Monday to Saturday they run hourly from approx. 0645-2300hrs, on a Sunday they run 2-hourly between 0840-2240hrs. Due to The Strood flooding at high tide many buses terminate at Peldon, leaving the whole Island un-serviced by buses for up to 4hrs. 45% of days this month have been affected by at least one bus cancellation. Not only would this mean at best a 3 mile walk on dangerous country roads with no footpath, including 60mph stretches, but for an hour the road is flooded and completely impassable to pedestrians.

## **Health and Wellbeing**

The current Surgery opened in 1979 for a population of 3,000 and now it is well over double that, plus residents in the caravan sites with 11 months continual occupation (and even that is not policed). It is more than at capacity and had been singled out as one of the four urgently in need of replacement as far back as 2006. It is still the surgery despite many attempts to build a replacement and currently patients are being removed from the local list. Getting on for 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the population is retired and nursing services are stretched to meet the demand.

To visit the doctor at the Mersea practice requires phoning from 8 am sharp to obtain 10 minute slot. This can take up to half an hour of repeated attempts to even get on to a line. Alternatively patients go to the surgery at 7.30am and queue to make a booking at 8am which is not much of an option if ill. For a longer visit to see a specific doctor requires a booking of up to three weeks in advance.

There is a pressing need now for highly trained practice nurses to take the weight off the island doctors but space for them is a problem.

Without a new surgery major development on Mersea Island the lives and wellbeing of residents would be put at risk.

There is also the problem of emergency services and 999 calls. Should they occur during high water springs the choices are limited to the Air Ambulance service (and that cannot be in two places at once), or the Lifeboat. For this reason Mersea has a brilliant team of First Responders, but they are an entirely volunteer force.

## Education

Improvements to local education system including school and playgroups

Mersea Island School currently has 441 pupils aged 4-11, and a nursery for up to 52 children aged 2-4.

This means for each primary year there are 63 pupils, making class sizes already at 30 plus. Although the school has reportedly said it can take extra capacity, it would mean extra classrooms being built on what is becoming a limited site. This means decreasing the open space available for recreational activities. If the open space is decreased with pupil numbers increasing, parents feel there will be health and safety issues.

As it is, the school hall is barely adequate for events such as shows where the number of children participating, and the audience of parents, means it is overcrowded. If more classrooms are needed for any extra capacity of pupils, then facilities such as the school hall must surely be replaced or expanded.

The number of children in a class is a concern already for many parents. It could be considered that the quality of education is suffering because of this. Indeed, in the OFSTED report from 2014, just 2 years ago, the 'overall effectiveness' was judged as 'requires improvement'. In the previous inspection it had achieved a judgement of 'good'. The same is true for various areas of the inspection. If more classrooms are built then filled again, the situation then stays the same rather than improving.

If numbers increase at the school, which they will if there are extra houses built, it will add to the number of cars around the school area, which is often dangerous as it is. The parking within the school is not sufficient so many parents park in surrounding roads, often causing chaos. With the potential increase in traffic, it will present a greater safety issue.

Looking ahead, the students from Mersea School feed into two main secondary schools, Thomas, Lord Audley, at Monkwick and Thurstable School in Tiptree. With further, much larger housing plans being put forward that will affect these areas, there is going to be a great strain put on the secondary schools. What will this mean for Mersea children moving up to secondary school?

With Mersea's schooling facilities already overstretched, any increase in numbers to those facilities will have a detrimental effect. Serious consideration must be given to the current situation in order to ensure a viable future for the education of this and any new generations.

## Utilities

**Electricity** - The current supply covers both commercial and domestic premises. Upgrades to the infrastructure would be needed to provide additional sub-stations and an assessment would be carried out to establish whether the existing cabling onto the Island would be robust enough to handle the increase needed.

**Gas** - Not all domestic properties have gas supplies and with the requirement to reduce the use of fossil fuels investment in infrastructure will be limited potentially precluding a substantial increase in new homes from having a gas supply. Being an island with a single point of supply presents unique issues of maintaining sufficient pressure.

**Water** - The Island water supply is delivered through one piping system. Any new developments will reduce the pressure further than the statutory requirement which has frequently not been achieved.

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**Telephone** - The current telephone network provision in the location of both proposed developments utilises copper wire. The likelihood of the future provision would be fibre to the Cabinet (FTTC) and thereon the copper connections to the properties. An ideal would be to provide fibre directly to all properties which will be in line with imminent requirements. The Exchange in Kingsland Road was built well before the newer technologies were imagined and will need substantial upgrading.

**Sewerage** - Unlike the other utilities, the sewage works is actually on the island. Whilst, when it was built, it would have had spare capacity, now, both with the new developments at Wellhouse Green, (in immediate proximity to the proposed new developments), the connection to main sewer of the nearby caravan parks and the increase in torrential rainfall it simply cannot cope. This results in flooding adjacent to the sewage works onto the Bridle Path next to the Seaview Holiday Park. This can be up to waist deep and is contaminated. As a result, the bathing water and shellfish water quality are, at least, threatened, in reality this could destroy key elements of the local economy. Problems in East Road are on-going with regular call-outs to clear blockages.

### **Bradwell New Build**

The Government is in negotiations with Beijing regarding a new Chinese built and owned Nuclear Power Station at Bradwell, two miles across the Blackwater Estuary from Mersea Island.

If this becomes an actuality, it will have serious implications for the population of Mersea. In the event of even a minor nuclear incident or the worst case scenario, a meltdown; the 7,500 residents of Mersea, plus, during the summer increased by large numbers of holidaymakers (e.g. we have 1,400 static caravans) would need to evacuate. There is only one route off the island is the B1025 which leads to the mainland via a causeway over the Pyefleet channel. This causeway floods on a monthly basis, (according to the phases of the moon), when it becomes increasingly impossible to get to and from the island at high water.

At this moment in time we are unaware, what restrictions the Government may be required to curb the number of dwellings allowed to be built. When Bradwell 1 was in service there was a moratorium on the amount of housing but this was no longer required once the plant was decommissioned. However, the new Chinese plant, which will be much larger than Bradwell, has yet to publish safety requirements for the immediate area.

Moreover, it would seem impractical to consider further island development until such time as the decision on the new Power Station is resolved. In view of the above circumstances any further increases in the island's population will only compound these issues. The current issues as a legacy of the decommissioning mean we now have both high level nuclear waste remaining in the old reactor chambers which would normally be dealt with at Sellafield and the new Intermediate Level Waste (ILW) store which will receive waste from Sizewell and Dungeness.

## **Employment**

The majority of people on the island have to commute to their places of work which once again puts huge pressure on the roads which are already in poor repair. The local businesses need to be supported to allow expansion on the island. We need areas of employment to promote this. The local supermarkets especially during the holiday season regularly run out of essentials like milk etc.

## **Sustainable Community**

A sustainable community is one that is economically, environmentally, and socially healthy and resilient. It meets challenges through integrated solutions rather than through fragmented approaches that meet one of those goals at the expense of the others. And it takes a long-term perspective – one that's focused on both the present and future, well beyond the next budget or election cycle.

Success depends upon its members' commitment and involvement through active, organized, and informed residents, responsible, caring, and healthy community institutions, services, and businesses.

As a result, a sustainable community manages its human, natural, and financial resources to meet current needs while ensuring that adequate resources are equitably available for future generations. It seeks a better quality of life for the whole community without compromising the wellbeing of other communities. It needs to be active, informed organized and responsive.

It is essential we protect and enhance the local ecosystems and biological diversity of this beautiful small Island of Mersea This MUST Include water/ sewage supply, land, energy, and non-renewable resources, utilization of prevention strategies and appropriate information about proposed Bradwell power station expansion, indeed minimize pollution of the waters and land if this went ahead. What happens if the station fails and emergency evacuation of the Island is required?

The demand for more housing is a national problem with an ever increasing population. It could be said each area has to help and take its fair share. People resist change; places of natural beauty have to be protected or enhanced. If Mersea Island has to suffer some development let us consider the type of infrastructure/ buildings to progress the community maybe two bedroom bungalows with gardens, smaller homes for local younger Families. We have a plentiful stock of large homes making it almost impossible for the younger generations to stay on the island unless they are members of the wealthy community.

Mersea Island is Unique.

## **Summary**

West Mersea is a proud and unique community within the Colchester Borough, and whilst WMTC appreciates that Colchester has an obligation to build additional dwellings to house a growing national population WMTC would contend that the areas shown for development in your Local Plan may be suitable for additional dwellings but only if all the above issues are addressed in full. We would urge CBC to consult further with WMTC and to take into full consideration the heart felt views of the local community. WMTC would be pleased to work with CBC to find solutions that protect this unique environment here in Mersea and that go in some way to providing more housing and local amenities to meet the growing and changing needs of the population.