



## **Ref. Application : 201467 for 56 dwellings on land off East Road West Mersea**

**Reason for Comment:** Object to the proposal

**Comment:** A very significant number of detailed comments from the community have been received by Colchester Borough Council on this topic and additionally WMTC Councillors have also received a great deal of direct feedback from concerned residents. West Mersea Town Council endorses the public's concerns and therefore recommends that consent is NOT granted to this planning application. WMTC considers this application speculative and opportunistic.

**The detailed reasons for WMTC's objection are as follows:**

**Prematurity:** In the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) February 2019 paragraphs 59-50 (page 14) premature applications are specifically discussed.

The Colchester Borough Council (CBC) Emerging Local Plan is at an advanced stage, it has already been submitted, therefore the justification to refuse is clearly given in paragraph 49 as both sub terms a). "...to grant permission would undermine the planning process..." and b). "the emerging plan is at an advanced stage but is not yet formally part of the development plan for the area" are fulfilled.

The West Mersea Neighbourhood Plan has now progressed to preparation of a Draft Plan and granting permission for this application would therefore "prejudice the outcome of the plan making process" – NPPF February 2019 paragraph 50 (page 15).

**Lack of Conformity:**

- i. This application is NOT in conformity with the CBC Emerging Local Plan. It is also NOT in conformity with the developing West Mersea Neighbourhood Plan which is following the NPPF February 2019 paragraph 29 (page 10) and respective footnote (16).
- ii. This application conflicts with Policy ENV1, which states that the Borough will conserve and enhance Colchester's natural & historic environment, countryside & coastline. The policy also states development within the Coastal Protection Belt will not be permitted that would adversely affect its open and rural character.
- iii. This application conflicts with Policy DP1, which states that all development must respect its landscape setting and contribute to the surrounding area.
- iv. This application conflicts with Policy DP23, which states that development within the Coastal Protection Belt will only be supported if it would not be significantly detrimental to the landscape character of the area:
  - a. Within the Coastal Protection Belt and along the undeveloped coast, an integrated approach to coastal management will be promoted and, development will only be supported where it can be demonstrated that it:
    - i. Requires a coastal location and is located within the developed area of the coast;

- ii. Will **not be** significantly detrimental to conserving important nature conservation, historic environment assets, maritime uses and the landscape character of the coast;
  - iii. Will deliver or sustain social and economic benefits considered important to the wellbeing of the coastal communities; and
  - iv. Provides opportunities and scope for adaptation to climate change.
- v. It would be contrary to the National Planning Policy regarding protecting the Island's character which is key to achieving sustainable development.

**Vehicular and Pedestrian Access:** West Mersea Town Council have grave concerns around the safety and suitability of the proposed access.

East Road is one of the busiest access points to the town centre and also provides access to two of the Island's major holiday parks: Seaview and Waldegraves (both of which have had recent extension plans approved) and provides an exit from West Mersea towards East Mersea and Cudmore Park.

The proposed access is adjacent to the busy Fox Public House which itself will block any line of sight for motorists exiting the proposed site, and East Road at this point, is most regularly reduced to single-file traffic as residents of East Road and clients of the Fox use it as over-spill parking.

In the vicinity of proposed site access there have been six recorded RTA's in the vicinity in the past 5 years, 2 of which were recorded as serious.

The pathways leading to the site are very narrow and are not continuous along East Road.

Additional pedestrian access to the site will likely be via Cross Lane – designated a bridleway at the point of proposed access.

This bridleway provides authorised access to the Water Treatment plant for Anglian Water approved vehicles only (including their 40-tonne tankers), and is shared with authorised pedestrian and equestrian users. However, the bridleway is increasingly being used by unauthorised vehicular traffic as a means of access to the beach.

Anglian Water have strenuously opposed previous developments in Cross Lane, since it would likely impact their safe use of the bridleway.

Further, the East Road site is on an infrequent bus service so any access to the town centre and amenities will significantly increase vehicular movements along the busy East Road.

In addition, it should be recognised that were this contentious application to be approved, Dawes Lane would – during construction phases - become the single access point for potentially four housing developments (totalling 357 dwellings) simultaneously. This narrow lane could not cope with construction traffic serving Dawes Lane and Brierley Paddocks *and* potentially East Road and Colchester Road sites.

**Loss of agricultural land:** This site is valuable agricultural land, and accordingly should not be lost to development. Indeed, in 2006, reference planning consent for a cart lodge on the field,

the planning officer's comments stated that the field was:

1. Agricultural land
2. Within a Countryside Conservation Area
3. Open and Undeveloped Countryside

The permission granted goes on to state:

***"The building shall be used for the storage of agricultural machinery and equipment used for the maintenance of the land which it is located and for no other purpose. Reason: the site lies in a rural area where development other than of agricultural purposes is not normally permitted."***

The application describes the field as devoid of wildlife. However, this is incorrect since it is a haven for diverse native and visiting wild birds, fox, badger and red squirrel (both protected species) have been spotted there. WMTC notes that The North East Essex Badger Group has expressed concern that care should be exercised in respect of this site.

**Cumulative impact on the Island's character and infrastructure:** It is vital that the cumulative impact on the infrastructure, traffic management (during both the construction and residential phases), the environment and the Island's sense of place is considered when evaluating this application in the context of two approved sites at Dawes Lane and Brierley Paddocks; and a further speculative application for Colchester Road.

WMTC notes that NHS North East Essex have expressed concern as to the potential impact this proposal would have – unless mitigated - on healthcare provision, stating: *“until such time as a solution can be sought to successfully mitigate the impact of further development on Mersea Island, North East Essex CCG would not be in support of this application... the existing GP Practice does not have the capacity to accommodate the growth resulting from the proposed development.”*

The two sites (Brierley Paddocks and Dawes Lane) with outline planning approved, deliver the strategic housing number (200) for West Mersea as defined in the eLP. Any additional sites risk unsustainable housing growth being forced upon a community which already has serious concerns that the infrastructure cannot cope with further development.

Colchester Borough Council has to ameliorate this risk by standing-by the planned 200 homes for precisely the reasons it reduced the original proposed housing numbers in the draft Local Plan from 350 to 200.

**Summary:** WMTC cannot support this application given the impact and adverse effect it will have on the character of the Island:

- The site is located in an agricultural zone and forms a key part of the Island's landscape structure and sense of place
- Developing this site would breach both the West Mersea Settlement Boundary and the Borough's Coastal Protection Belt policy
- These breaches would damage the Island's high value views and the landscape setting which are important to the health and wellbeing of the community
- It would introduce urbanisation in a location which would have a detrimental effect on the Island's natural beauty, open coastal views and its rural character
- Development of this site would result in yet a further loss of the Island's good quality agricultural land when farming is needed to combat global warming
- The proposed access is entirely unsuitable and presents significant risks to road and pedestrian traffic
- Any alternative access would be across bridleway which is prevented by statute
- Mersea Island has already delivered the planned 200 homes as identified by the Local Plan

**Conclusion:** there are clear and strong Local Authority and National Planning Policies which should protect this island's natural beauty from inappropriate housing development. Mersea Island has met the objectives set-out in the eLP and WMTC urges that any and all speculative proposals should be declined for consideration.