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Alternative Development Sites and Boundary Changes Consultation

Summary

We support that part of ALT34 (Boreham) which covers the area north of Boreham to the airfield. As previously stated, we oppose the Council's proposals and therefore we oppose the section of ALT34 that includes the area proposed by the Council i.e. touching the edge of Springfield. Additionally, we feel that ALT34 should run from the A12/railway, as proposed in our own, previous submissions.

The area south of, west of and around New Hall should be maintained as open space, including a Country Park, creating a Strategic Gap to prevent Chelmsford growing any larger.

In 2001 the Council decided on an area north of Boreham as the most sustainable option for the greenfield housing, for reasons set out in detail below. We agree. Our vision is of a properly planned, genuinely sustainable community – not yet another development that functions as a suburb of an existing suburb, far removed from the centre of the town to which it is allegedly 'peripheral'.

The proposal as described above was included in our representation of 19 December 2006 (and April 2005 and December 2005) but the Council did not list it as an alternative site representation.

(192 words)

Why we support this alternative site

The Council considered many alternative sites in the 2001 review period, and identified north of Boreham as the most sustainable option to be progressed within the plan period. It is odd that the Council should now not even consider this site, let alone consult upon it.

The area covers former gravel workings and an airfield, arguably brownfield land. It is the Borough's greatest chance of achieving the essential improvements in infrastructure, in particular a desperately-needed new secondary school. A properly-designed, truly sustainable community can be provided on this site. North of Boreham would function as an extension of Chelmsford by virtue of its high quality transit link, rather than be a wholly new settlement.

Our position is driven strongly by the principles set out in Lord Rogers' Urban Task Force report and elsewhere, namely basing new development around public transport that has a large enough but close enough catchment to be viable. That means building at sufficient density within 800m of a substantial transport interchange. In this context, that means building the proposed station north of Boreham, not north east of Springfield, and having high-quality pedestrian, bus and cycle routes around the new development to link them to the station and neighbourhood facilities.

Officers of the Council confirmed with the railway authorities at the time of the 2001 review the suitability of this alternative location for the station. Indeed, it has a number of advantages over the site proposed by the council.

The land north of Boreham also lends itself to the "mixed use" development required by Government – employment, leisure, retail and schooling as well as residential.

As an additional benefit, the development would add very significantly to the amenities of Boreham village and its residents. However, the Council's preferred location adds little to the amenities of Springfield by comparison. (Even less than we had supposed, now we see the detailed site layout in the North Chelmsford Area Action Plan.)

This is not a new idea

In 2000-2001, the Council consulted the public as part of the process for a replacement (old style) Local Plan. It became clear that a rigid adherence to the 'sequential test' in PPG3 would not provide the most sustainable solution for Chelmsford when other principles were applied.

These other principles were:

- development around major nodes along good public transport corridors;
- implementing strategic gaps - to prevent villages from coalescing with Chelmsford and the development of Chelmsford being skewed to one corner;
- a reasonable walking distance from new development to transport interchanges.

The site north of Boreham emerged from the application of the above principles, and other sites suggested themselves if there were additional housing need – none of which the Council is currently considering.

The Government Office for the East of England confirmed that this was an acceptable approach provided such a site provided the full range of local facilities and was no less sustainable than peripheral development of the Chelmsford Urban Area.

Therefore we oppose the Council's preferred option (and thus that part of ALT34 that incorporates it).

Chelmsford cannot continue to be stretched incrementally in its north east corner. This location is too far from the centre of Chelmsford to be described as an extension of an existing settlement. The recent development of Beaulieu Park is already too far from the town centre and heavy traffic on the local roads makes access to the centre of Chelmsford from this area difficult.

It is very difficult to provide quality public transport to the location proposed by the Council and it is remote from employment centres – particularly now we see the layout proposed in the North Chelmsford Area Action Plan. It is not on the way to anywhere and the existing Beaulieu Park provides evidence of how difficult it is to take new bus services through the existing urban area.

The Council's proposals will not function as a sustainable neighbourhood but merely as a dormitory suburb of Springfield (not even of Chelmsford).

Stephen Robinson
On behalf of Chelmsford Liberal Democrats