

**Statement to hearing session of the Epping Forest District Council Local Plan
Matter 15, Issue 2, Policy P1 Epping, Tuesday 14 May 2019
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Issue 2: Are the Plan's policies for the specific places and sites within the District justified, effective and consistent with national policy; and are the specific site allocations they include justified and deliverable?

Policy P1: Epping

General Matters

- 1. Should Part K concerning the Strategic Masterplan for South Epping recognise the constraint presented by the National Grid High Voltage Electricity Overhead Line which crosses allocated sites EPP.R1, R3 and E1? (Reps N Grid). 26**

Part K of the Strategic Masterplan for South Epping must recognise the constraints presented by the National Grid High Voltage Electricity Overhead Line which cross allocated sites EPP.R1, R3 and E1? The submitted plan contained significant and far-reaching changes compared to the materials that were initially issued for consultation in 2012, despite assessments highlighting the impact of High Voltage Transmission Cables and BPA Oil Pipelines present throughout the South Epping Masterplan site on volume of land available for development.

The 2016 consultation document set out proposals for in the region of 523 dwellings across three sites (SR-0113B; SR-0069133; SR-0333bi) on land south of Brook Road and Ivy Chimneys. The submitted plan proposed a minimum of 950 homes on this land - an additional 427 homes (82% increase) on the site without consultation.

Taking site EPP.R2 alone, information set out in the 2012 consultation document (page 101, referred to as site EPP-G) *stated: 'potential for residential development which would need to be focused on the northern part of the site due to the electricity lines. Site promoters only suggest the northern part of the site for development...maximum capacity approx. 250 dwellings (equivalent to 10dph – suggested SLAA capacity)'*. The submitted version of the plan includes proposals for 500 homes on this site – a 50% increase on exactly the same stretch of land, despite assessment in 2012 deeming the area suitable for a maximum of 250 dwellings.

- 2. Part K(iii) indicates that new primary school and early years provision could be achieved through the relocation of Ivy Chimneys Primary School. Is this justified, because Essex County Council contends that such a solution should not be investigated?**

Given the likely high volume of young families that will be attracted to a large scale housing development of this nature, it is of great concern that relocation (and required significant expansion) of Ivy Chimneys Primary School appears to be unviable.

The submitted version of the plan sets out aspirations for a new neighbourhood centre, community facilities, employment, retail, primary school, health hub, road access and layout, a bus corridor, and a vehicular, pedestrian and cycling bridge over the Central Line alongside the 950 homes – all

on a stretch of land that was assessed suitable for only 523 homes in 2016. This substantial infrastructure, including the primary school, has not been properly costed and there are currently no guarantees for delivery within the plan.

3. Should Part K(viii) require the conservation or enhancement of the relevant heritage assets in order to comply with legislation and national policy? Will this be possible? (Reps HE).

The South Epping Masterplan Site is affected by a BAP Priority Habitat Area (identified by DEFRA/Joint Nature Conservative Committee as the most threatened and requiring conservation under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan), Ancient Woodland, Tree Preservation Orders, and a Grade II listed farm and buildings. It is not clear what conservation or enhancement methods will be put in place to retain these important features.

Alternative options are available that do not present the significant challenges of the current South Epping Masterplan site. These include (but are not limited to) land to the East of Epping and the North Weald golf course, both of which have committed developers and fully scoped plans (either existing or proposed) for housing, education, health, leisure, retail, and transport provision. It remains unclear why these considerably more sustainable options – and those presented in Theydon Bois – have been omitted from areas for proposed allocation.

4. What is the “Proposed Secondary Frontage” shown on Map 5.2?

Not known

Site Specific Matters

5. EPP.R1 & R2 (South Epping Masterplan Area): Is this allocation justified in respect of the following matters:

a. Is the area a sustainable location for significant expansion considering its relationship to the existing town centre, particularly in respect of distance and topography? How will additional traffic be managed if it is necessary for new residents to use a car?

The South Epping Masterplan is located the greatest distance of all proposed sites in this area from public transport, shops, health centres, and other local facilities, which will increase reliance on car use. The *closest* point of the site is approximately 0.7 miles from the tube station, 1.2 miles from town centre shops/services, and almost two miles from the local secondary school and health centre. The gradient between South Epping and Epping High Road is 1 in 16 (6.25%) over a distance of 480m, exceeding those set out in the Sustrans Guidance¹. This gradient would be unachievable for most people to walk or cycle, increasing reliance on private car use. Building 950 new homes on the South Epping site does not support ambitions for a low carbon future.

Furthermore, the topography of the South Epping Masterplan site is not suitable for large-scale sustainable development. The site is hilly and boggy in many parts. A brook runs along the edge and

¹ Sustrans (April 2014) *Handbook for Cycle Friendly Design* (Page 8) https://www.sustrans.org.uk/sites/default/files/file_content_type/sustrans_handbook_for_cycle-friendly_design_11_04_14.pdf

through the middle of the land directly opposite Brook Road. The land is at the bottom of a hill, one of the lowest parts of Epping (60 metres above sea level, compared to almost 110 metres on the High Road), and acts as a flood plain for excess water. The land is regularly waterlogged and Brook Road itself has experienced frequent floods due to burst water pipes and heavy rain.

Alternative sites are available that do not present the significant challenges of the current South Epping Masterplan site, including the land to the East of Epping, the land currently occupied by North Weald golf course, and substantial pockets of land in Theydon Bois. The land East of Epping is within close walking distance of the London Underground station, the High Road, health facilities, and primary and secondary schools, reducing reliance on private vehicles, offers more straightforward land assembly - just two owners – who have an established developer firmly ‘on board’ (in contrast to the complex multi-party land ownership of the South Epping Masterplan site), is located within a wider, more accessible road network which will better support site traffic, and has been fully costed in terms of site development requirements (shops, health facilities etc.) with consideration given to the government-preferred Garden Village approach. Furthermore, the removal of Green Belt land in this area has been assessed as moderate/low, compared to the high-risk assessment in the current South Epping Masterplan area.

North Weald golf course is well linked with the A414 and M11, avoiding the already congested Epping town area. There is a single landowner actively working with an established developer. This site is not agricultural and therefore, according to National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and other government guidance, should be preferable for development. Plans for a school, health, leisure and retail facilities have been fully costed as part of the development.

In addition to the options outlined above, the neighbouring village of Theydon Bois – an area that is currently accommodating just 57 houses as part of the submitted plan – has potential to take on a considerably greater volume of development on land east of the London Underground station, all of which would be within walking distance of transport, shops and other facilities.

It is not clear why these more sustainable options, requiring significantly less costly and time consuming infrastructure development compared to the South Epping Masterplan site, have not been fully considered as part of the submitted plan.

b. What are the implications of its location adjacent to the M25 for air quality and noise?

The proposed South Epping Masterplan site is located directly next to the M25 motorway, one of the busiest roads in the UK, and likely to become busier following the recent introduction of the Ultra Low Emissions Zone for London. The M25 is clearly visible from both Brook Road and Ivy Chimneys. Properties built on the furthest part of the site will be virtually ‘kerb side’ with the motorway. To mitigate noise and air pollution and the visibility of the motorway, large-scale barriers would need to be erected alongside the stretch of motorway, further increasing infrastructure costs.

The noise and air pollution for families living in homes so close to the M25 on the South Epping Masterplan site is a significant concern. A recent study in the *British Medical Journal* (2017)²

² Smith, E. *et al* (2017) ‘Impact of London’s Road Traffic Air and Noise Pollution on Birth Weight: Retrospective population Based Cohort Study’ *British Medical Journal* Volume 359, j5299.

conducted with over half a million participants in Greater London and surrounding counties up to the M25 motorway, found that air pollution from road traffic in London adversely affects foetal growth. Research published in the Lancet (2017)³ indicated that living within 50 metres of a motorway increases the risk of dementia with noise and air pollution from motorways also linked with respiratory and heart conditions, Parkinson's Disease, Alzheimer's, Multiple Sclerosis, and permanent, life-limiting damage to the lungs of children and unborn babies.

c. What effect will the development have upon the vitality and viability of the existing town centre?

Given the significant distance of the South Epping Masterplan Site (The *closest* point of the site is approximately 0.7 miles from the tube station, 1.2 miles from town centre shops/services from the *closest* point of the site), residents will be increasingly reliant on car travel to use local facilities. Parking on and around the High Road is currently problematic – an issue that will be exacerbated with a significant increase in residents and cars. With limited parking spaces, Epping residents will choose not to use the High Road – opting for out of town retail parks in Harlow and other neighbouring areas. This will have significant and far-reaching implications in terms of the buoyancy and resilience of Epping High Road.

d. Is safe access onto Ivy Chimneys Road possible?

Brook Road and Ivy Chimneys Road (those bordering the South Epping Masterplan site) are one of only two entry/exit roads in to and out of Epping. Drivers use the road to avoid the busy High Road area. Many parts of the road are single track, compounded by parked cars (few houses have off-street parking). The Central Line bridge running across the two roads is on a bend and creates a dangerous bottleneck. Ivy Chimneys Primary School is positioned at one end of the road and Coopersale Hall Primary School (a private fee-paying school) at the other. There is particularly heavy traffic at drop off/pick up times. It would be virtually impossible for the current road network to cope with frequent construction traffic. Additional roads and access points would need to be in place before construction started.

The South Epping Masterplan could easily lead to an additional 2,000 or so road users who, given the location of the proposed development, will be reliant on cars to access facilities in the area. Such increased usage of a road that struggles to accommodate current traffic levels has dangerous implications.

e. Would the relatively small amount of employment land required within the neighbourhood centre have any particular value?

Not known

f. Is this development deliverable in respect of restrictive covenants?

Not known

³ Chen, H. *et al* (2017) 'Living Near Major Roads and the Incidence of Dementia, Parkinson's Disease and Multiple Sclerosis: A Population-Based Cohort Study' *The Lancet* Volume 389, Number 10070, pp-718-726.

g. Is it financially viable in light of the constraint presented by the Central Line dividing the Masterplan area? Is a “bridge” over the railway the only possible means of achieving connectivity (Part (vi))?

The South Epping Masterplan site requires major infrastructure investment, most notably a substantial new road network and relief road over or under the Transport for London Central Line, which currently runs directly across the middle of the site. The cost of building this relief road is likely to run in to the millions and will take considerable time to finalise. The relief road is one of the most crucial parts of the landscape development for this proposed site. It is essential that this is in place before the dwellings are built in order to cope with heavy construction traffic and diversions of existing traffic flows.

The NPPF states that *‘to ensure viability, the costs of any requirements likely to be applied to development, such as requirements for affordable housing, standards, infrastructure contributions, or other requirements should, when taking account the normal cost of development and mitigation, provide competitive returns to a willing land owner and willing developer to enable the development to be deliverable’*. The substantial infrastructure requirements of the South Epping Masterplan site – including a large-scale and complex road network built over a busy London Underground rail line in order to join the two parcels of land – presents significant financial demands which, to date, have not been properly costed to fully assess viability of the development.

It is not clear why the more sustainable options – including (but not limited to) the land East of Epping, the land currently occupied by North Weald golf course, and substantial pockets of land in Theydon Bois which present a more viable existing infrastructure and significantly fewer requirements for costly and time consuming road construction compared to the South Epping Masterplan site – have not been fully considered as part of the submitted plan.

h. Is it justified to require the development to be phased?

Given the substantial infrastructure requirements presented by the South Epping Masterplan site - including a new neighbourhood centre, community facilities, employment, retail, primary school, health hub, complex new road access and layout, a bus corridor, and a vehicular, pedestrian and cycling bridge over the Central Line – a heavily phased approach to development seems the only option.

i. What effect would the development of this area have on the purposes of the Green Belt?

The South Epping Masterplan site – which represents 73% of all housing development in Epping – is on Green Belt land which the LUC Green Belt Assessment (2016) deemed the removal of would have a high level of harm. The 2017 Department for Local Communities and Government Paper *Fixing Our Broken Housing Market* states that *‘Green Belt boundaries should be amended only in exceptional circumstances when local authorities can demonstrate that they have fully examined all other reasonable options for meeting their identified housing requirements’*. The land proposed for development as part of the South Epping Masterplan is also classed as BMV (Best and Most Versatile) Land. Furthermore, the Green Belt land on the proposed South Epping Masterplan site acts a buffer between Epping and the highly polluting M25 motorway, and prevents sprawl between Epping and Theydon Bois.

The NPPF argues that Local Authorities should seek use of poorer quality land in preference to that of higher quality, stating that *'inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances...A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in Green Belt'*. The *'very special circumstances'* to justify building almost three-quarters of housing development in Epping on Green Belt land are not clear – nor are the attempts of Epping Forest District Council to fully examine other reasonable options, many of which (including those outlined in this document) pose significantly fewer challenges.

Following Epping Forest District Council's decision on 26 March 2018 to make site selection reports publicly accessible after the formal consultation had closed and following a successful legal challenge by CK Properties Theydon Bois Limited (without which this information would have remained withheld from the community), it became clear that Epping was taking on a disproportionate allocation of development for the region on the basis of unclear and unjustified evidence.

Of the 31 sites initially put forward for consideration in Epping, 15 were not proposed for allocation. According to the site allocation report, of these 15 non-proposed sites, 12 identified no on-site restrictions or constraints to development. The justification given for not proposing these sites included: complex ownership patterns; landscape sensitivity; Green Belt harm; the presence of BAP Habitats and Tree Preservation Orders which would result in reduced site capacity; and that the sites were *'less preferred by the community'*.

Conversely, the site selection report identified on-site restrictions and constraints in each of the large-scale sites proposed for development in the South Epping Masterplan area. Furthermore, the justifications outlined above for not proposing sites for allocation are very much present in the areas South of Epping proposed for allocation: the land is Green Belt, is affected by BAP Habitats and Tree Preservation Orders, is split across six different owners, cannot be promoted as a single cohesive development, and offers no guarantee of streamlined delivery for development purposes.

The site selection report indicates that of the 12 sites initially put forward for consideration in neighbouring Theydon Bois, nine were not proposed for allocation. According to the report, these nine sites alone had the capacity to accommodate 1,274 units. Theydon Bois is proposing just three sites for allocation, taking only 57 units of the 11,400 required for the district. The original sites in their entirety in Theydon Bois offered capacity of up to 12% of the region's requirements (n=1,331/11,400). The submitted plan proposes that Theydon Bois takes on just 0.5% of the region's requirements (n=57/11,400). In light of the significant housing demand, it is completely unacceptable for Theydon Bois – an area with considerable identified capacity, the majority of which is within notably easier reach of transport, retail and other important facilities compared to the South Epping Masterplan site – to assume such limited responsibility within the submitted plan.

The South Epping Masterplan site presents an unsustainable, environmentally, and economically unsound approach to development. It requires considerable revision to deliver a housing plan for Epping that is consistent with national policy to enable sustainable development.

Thank you for considering this statement.