

EPPING FOREST LOCAL PLAN

EXAMINATION PRE-HEARING STATEMENT BY CHIGWELL PARISH COUNCIL

MATTER 15.2 (POLICY P7 CHIGWELL)

Introduction

This short statement by Chigwell Parish Council relates to the provisions of Policy P7 of the Local Plan, and specifically to its Parts C and D in relation to infrastructure requirements. The Parish Council has submitted other statements relating to other elements of Policy P7 (see: Statement 5.1.1 on site selection, Statement 5.1.4 on Chigwell Convent and Statement 7.2.2 on Limes Farm) and to Policy D1 (Statement 14.2 on Delivery of Infrastructure).

Inspector Matter

2. What is the significance of the "Community Hub" referred to by Chigwell Parish Council? Should Part C refer to this, or is it to be delivered in some other way? Should reference to the Hub be made in the vision on page 147?

Statement

The Vision for Chigwell (on p147 of the Local Plan) states:

"Chigwell will provide a range of services and infrastructure to support new and existing communities through the allocation of small and medium sites to meet local housing needs. Key priorities for infrastructure in the Village are sustainable transport, health care and education."

Part C of Policy P7 states that, "Infrastructure requirements must be delivered at a rate and scale to meet the needs that arise from the proposed development, in accordance with the Infrastructure Delivery (Plan), development in Chigwell will be expected to contribute proportionately towards ... infrastructure items" (text error corrected). It then lists four 'items' relating to schools, highways, waste water and open space. It is noted that the list does not include a reference to 'health care' as identified in the Vision.

Part D of the policy states that, "The Council will only permit planning applications that contribute towards the delivery of those infrastructure items set out above and in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan unless subsequent iterations of the Infrastructure Delivery Plan or discussions with providers determine that these items are no longer required".

Before addressing the specific items identified in Part C, it is first necessary to clarify precisely how the combination of Parts C and D will operate in determining planning applications, together with Policy D1 Delivery of Infrastructure and any made neighbourhood plan policies on infrastructure. On the one hand, Part C indicates that only the four items listed will benefit from financial contributions from qualifying consented schemes.

On the other, Part D indicates that the list in Part C is not exhaustive and any other infrastructure item included in the submitted Infrastructure Delivery Plan (in practice, the Infrastructure Delivery Schedule in Part B of the Plan) or its successors, may also benefit from such contributions. Policy D1 appears to propose this same approach, although both it and Policy P7 fail to acknowledge the role that made neighbourhood plans may choose to play in setting out infrastructure needs and priorities (see Parish Council Statement 14.2 on this matter).

It is firstly important that this ambiguity is resolved. Either the reference to specific infrastructure items should be deleted from the Vision and Policy P7 or one or both remain (with clearer policy wording) but more accurately reflect the local community's desires for infrastructure investment.

The Parish Council welcomes the Infrastructure Delivery Plan and its Schedule of December 2017 as it contains a valid and comprehensive overview of the likely infrastructure needs of the Parish as it seeks to satisfactorily accommodate relatively high levels of housing growth proposed in the Local Plan. The approach to prioritising infrastructure items is reasonable and accepted as it relates to the needs arising from new development, but it does not make provision for the opportunity or need for investment in infrastructure that is already inadequate in meeting local needs.

If it is agreed that both the Vision and Part C of Policy P7 will continue to refer to infrastructure items then both must include the Chigwell Parish Community Hub, which is considered a very important and urgent need by the local community. In the Schedule, the Hub is identified as Ref CHG20 as separate to the need for improved community facilities in the Parish identified in the Delivery Plan (Ref CHG19 and CHG21). Each of these items is considered 'desirable' in its priority for investment and the Schedule notes that the Hub is one approach to meeting the need proposed in Ref CHG19.

In actual fact, the Hub is a pressing need and has been a project of the Parish Council for a number of years. The main community facility serving the whole of the Parish, other than the Limes Farm area, is Victory Hall on Hainault Road. Although popular, the Hall is almost a century old and is not fit for modern community facility needs in terms of its size and room configuration. It faces a significant repair and maintenance bill and the Parish Council does not consider this will represent value for money. The Parish Council owns all of the land occupied by the Hall and its own adjoining office building, but the County Council owns the adjoining land occupied by the library, which is scheduled for closure in 2020.

The Parish Council commissioned a report from the Rural Community Council of Essex in December 2017 to assess the needs and opportunities to replace one or all of the above cluster of community facilities with a Hub. The report validated the opportunity presented by a redevelopment option to deliver a new multi-purpose hall, a library service, a village café, new Parish Council offices and sufficient on-site car parking. In parallel, the Parish Council promoted the proposal to redevelop and extend the existing site in its then emerging Neighbourhood Plan.

In recent months, the Parish Council has revisited the essential features of the proposal and the options for the specification of the scheme and for financing the capital and ongoing costs. With the option of securing most or all of the capital funds from a nearby enabling development scheme now not possible, it seems most likely that a redesigned Hub scheme on the existing site (outside of the Green Belt) as part of a mixed-use scheme (including some residential uses) will be necessary. Such a scheme will also depend on securing investment through Policy P7 as all of the new homes to be allocated by that policy (the Parish Council's objections to the CHIG R5 and CHIG R6 allocations notwithstanding) will add to the demand for improved community facilities in the village, as quantified in the Delivery Plan.

For this reason, it is not enough for such a high profile and very specific and known infrastructure need to reside solely as one of three potential projects in the Part B Schedule. Rather, the Vision for Chigwell should be modified to include a reference to the Community Hub and Policy P7 Part C should be modified to add the Community Hub as a fifth infrastructure item.