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Your ref: CJ EiP Feedback  
Our ref: Chigwell2

Ms Louise Phillips  
BY EMAIL ONLY

2 July 2020

Dear Ms Phillips

## **EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL EXAMINATION OF THE DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN 2011-2033**

We act on behalf of London Square Developments and we represented their land ownership interest in Chigwell ('Front Site, Former Grange Farm, High Road, Chigwell' (Site 2)) via our Hearing Statements and at the Examination in Public into the Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) Local Plan last year. As you may recall, the site in question had a draft allocation and was removed from the Green Belt at the Regulation 18 stage but the draft allocation was removed and the Green Belt status reinstated at the Regulation 19 stage. Our hearing statements and comments at the Examination outlined the inaccuracies of the Council's site assessment process and the obvious mistakes made in the analysis of the site's characteristics which led to the removal of the draft allocation at the Regulation 19 stage.

We wrote to you in December last year highlighting that we understand it is not within your remit to suggest alternative site allocations, however we were reassured that your advice after the hearings (dated 2 August 2019) implied that the Council would need to identify alternative allocations to replace lost capacity where you have recommended that draft housing allocations are reduced or deleted. In particular, paragraphs 21 and 22 of your letter state:

*"21. The implication of my advice concerning the SAC and some of the sites in the Plan more generally is that the capacity of certain allocations might need to be reduced, or the sites deleted altogether. However, the evidence does not yet rule out the possibility that alternative sites could be found relatively quickly to replace any lost capacity resulting from my recommendations. Indeed, the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of December 2017 (EB204) indicates that significantly more sites passed Stage 3 of the site selection process than were needed to reach the Plan's housing requirement – i.e. sites within the Council's preferred strategic growth options for the District's settlements.*

*22. Furthermore, the evidence which I've read and heard indicates that certain types/categories of sites could be revisited if necessary, although I am not suggesting that this must be done to correct systematic methodological flaws. Such types/categories include those sites which were proposed for allocation in the Regulation 18 version of the Plan but deleted from the Regulation 19 version; those which were proposed to the Council for more dwellings than have been allocated; those which have been allocated in part but subdivided for technical reasons; and similarly, those which fall low in the "land preference hierarchy" for technical reasons but which might be perceived by a layman as derelict previously developed land."*

We were concerned when reviewing the Council's response to you dated 11 October 2019, as this makes no reference to replacing the capacity of reduced or deleted draft residential allocations. Furthermore, at the EFDC Cabinet meeting which took place on 17 October 2019 Ms Blom-Cooper explained to Councillors that officers are not proposing to make any new draft site allocations as part of the technical work which is being prepared in response to your comments. Officers stated that they do not consider that they will need to make new allocations to meet the housing target of 11,400 new dwellings during the Local Plan period. This is surprising and frankly unconvincing given that your initial advice recommended the removal of allocations which comprised some hundreds of units.

Your Interim Advice rejected a number of draft allocations; of particular relevance to London Square's site in Chigwell are Limes Farm (CHIG.6) at 100 dwellings and Chigwell Convent (CHIG.7) at 28 dwellings. This leaves Chigwell with in the region of 128 fewer dwellings than proposed in the draft Local Plan. In our opinion, this represents a substantial reduction (against the previously proposed provision of 376 dwellings in the village) for a settlement in a sustainable location with an Underground Station and a good level of facilities. Furthermore, London Square's site is more favourable than the aforementioned allocations. Whilst located in the Green Belt, it is comprised mainly of hardstanding and accumulated building materials having been used as a building compound since 2007 and is therefore considered to be low quality. More importantly, in contrast to CHIG.6 and CHIG.7, an allocation on London Square's site would not result in the loss of any public open space and would not negatively impact any heritage assets.

It is a concern to us that there is currently no evidence to demonstrate where the 11,400 new dwellings will be delivered in the District. Homework note 24 (under document ED90B) makes reference to the Local Plan having a total capacity to deliver 9,774 dwellings, however this is clearly some way below the target of 11,400. When we have asked the Council for clarity on this matter, we have received no explanation.

Given that our site was allocated at the Regulation 18 stage and removed (with errors) at the Regulation 19 stage as well as being low in the land preference hierarchy (as it is hard standing which has been used as a site compound for many years), we believe that this is a missed opportunity for the Council to consider sites such as this and others which could make a valuable contribution to meeting the District's housing need.

Action 9 in your post hearings advice advised that the Council should seek alternative sites to meet the housing requirement. We remain seriously concerned that the Council is not taking the housing target seriously; avoiding the requirement to revisit and re-consult on potential alternative residential allocations and a general unwillingness to engage in discussion with us and other landowners in the District on this matter.

The additional work being undertaken by the Council to address the concerns of Natural England and the Conservators of Epping Forest in respect of the SAC will undoubtedly now be delayed further given the impact of Covid19. Our concern is that when the examination sessions recommence, further delays will then ensue given the lack of attention which has been paid to Action 9, the housing target and alternative site allocations.

If you could advise on how you believe EFDC will address their housing target, how the timetable for concluding the Examination might be impacted by the above issues and if/when you might expect the Hearing sessions to recommence, that would be helpful.

Yours sincerely



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