



1. This submission from Great Horkesley Parish Council (GHPC) responds to the proposition (PP34) contained in the Preferred Option Local Plan consultation that before 2041 around 400 dwellings should be provided on two adjacent sites north of Coach Road in the village.

2. The matter is complicated because the City Council has already given outline consent, albeit conditionally, for the development of 150 homes on the more southerly site, opposite ribbon development on the south side of Coach Road. To forestall local criticism, it is restated here that GHPC objected to that consent. That said, for the purposes of this submission, it is accepted that this consent has effectively determined the status of this southerly site as housing land and it will not be contested here.

The existing Great Horkesley settlement

3. The preamble contains a significant error in the sentence “... *development has spread westwards along a number of roads off the main road. Land to the east of the main road has remained relatively free of development and is more open in character.*” At the time of writing, a reserved matters application for consent for 100 dwellings to be built to the east of the main road around Great Horkesley Manor is close to agreement. Also to the east of the main road, in the late 1980s 60 dwellings were built south of The Crescent, triggering sporadic infill, still ongoing, in the years since.

4. In the same period, on the west side of the main road, in the mid-1990s 34 houses were built at the end of Keelers Way, whilst in the following decade, 154 dwellings were built on Tile House Farm. Thus as far as east and west are concerned, the honours are more or less even: two significant sites on each side, with dwelling numbers roughly of the same magnitude. Whilst it is true that the 100 houses around The Manor have yet to be built, it is disingenuous to describe that land as *free of development and ... more open in character* when it is most unlikely to be so by the time the emerging Local Plan is adopted.

5. This is not cavilling over minor detail. The land around The Manor appears in the current Local Plan precisely because it has well-defined boundaries, in contrast to sites west of the current settlement boundaries which were offered under the previous Call for Sites, adoption of which as housing land was recognised as likely to lead to a sprawl out into the open countryside. This potential sprawl was identified best avoided in the draft Settlement Boundary Review prepared by the planning authority as part of the current plan review process and sent to GHPC for comment. GHPC updated the draft, mostly identifying changes in local facilities, and returned it to the planning authority.

6. No explanation has ever been given for the decision to perform a *volte face* and recommend for major development land which had previously been identified by both authorities as open countryside best left undeveloped. At the very least, one would have expected draft PP34 to have recognised the problematic absence of strong natural boundaries between Coach Road and Old House Road, just as did the Settlement Boundary Review, but it is silent on the matter.

The development proposal in PP34

7. GHPC would argue that, taking into account the 150-dwelling site that has outline consent, there are obvious boundaries to the existing and consented development north of Coach Road. In the east, there is frontage onto Nayland Road and The Causeway, the main road. To the south, the boundary is Coach Road itself, closely developed at the eastern end but less so towards Woodhouse Corner, on the settlement boundary. From the main road to Woodhouse Corner, the developed land forms (or strictly will form) a rough quadrilateral with the Jubilee Green at its centre.

8. At its western end, the northern edge of this quadrilateral of development is the only strong boundary between Coach Road and Old House Road. It should be recognised as such and respected. To go beyond it, as draft PP34 proposes, is to invite, in decades to come, loss of countryside to urban sprawl, as foreseen in the agreed Settlement Boundary Review. To avoid this, there should as a matter of policy be no development north of the site which currently has outline consent.

9. Furthermore, because the more northerly site of those identified in PP34 is bounded on three sides by open countryside, albeit with the rural part of Coach Road running through it, development here will be particularly intrusive, especially when viewed from Old House Road to the north, the village green to the north east and the public right of way which connects them.

Housing numbers

10. Failing to take account of the 100 dwellings to be built around The Manor enables the impact of the 400 proposed for the PP34 site to be set in a false context. In recent decades Great Horkesley has not been shy of major development: Tile House Farm was notably the largest green-field site in the relevant plan period and was built with full support from GHPC. The Parish Council also supported the inclusion of the land around the Manor in the current Local Plan and has worked with other stakeholders to ensure that it brings benefit to the village. It has also worked in the same way, albeit rather more reluctantly, with the would-be developer of the 150-dwelling site north of Coach Road and will continue to do so.

11. For the purpose of assessing the impact on the village, these two developments “in the pipeline” totalling 250 dwellings must be considered together. PP34 would increase those “pipeline developments” to 500, the impact of which on a village currently of around 1300 built dwellings is deeply concerning. Removing the truly rural dwellings from this consideration, PP34 as it stands would bring about an increase of over 50% in urban dwellings in the parish. It is doubtful that any amount of master-planning, as proposed in the policy, could mitigate the impact of such a massive increase on village organisations and social life in such a relatively short time, especially in a village which has no medical facilities of its own and where the three GP practices in adjacent areas are already overloaded.

12. The impact of schools is also of concern. It is widely assumed that youngsters from Great Horkesley are likely to be admitted to Trinity School in Chesterwell, an easy cycle ride from Coach

Road. In fact, the default secondary school for Great Horkesley is the St Helena School, some 4 miles from the PP34 site. Because its admission criteria are distance-based, Trinity School is already reducing the proportion of pupils it takes from Great Horkesley. There is currently a bus route between the village and St Helena school but journey times are (in the long experience of the writer) unpredictable, especially for pupils wishing to take part in activities outside teaching hours.

13. The impact on the Bishop William Ward primary school in the village is also of concern. While developers and the education authority will of course ensure that BWWS has the capacity to teach children living in the new developments, the physical expansion of the school to accommodate the children from 500 new homes will be massive. Once the “bulge” in pupil numbers resulting from the new development has passed, there will be physical over-capacity in the village school which the education authority will want to fill by bringing in children from outside the village. Even taking into account the measures set out in the conditions of the 150-dwelling consent, if they are enacted, this importing of pupils will exacerbate existing congestion and parking problems around BWWS.

14. Finally, employment. There are two established employers in the village, a school photographers and an agro-business growing and packaging onions for supermarkets; they are unlikely to offer many new jobs as the village expands. There are other minor businesses on the main road. In promoting a 400-home expansion of the village, it is surprising that the planning authority did not identify the need to increase the amount of employment land within the village, perhaps on one of the offered sites on or close to the main road. Reducing the need to travel to work by fuelled vehicles and increasing the ability of people to walk or cycle to work should be at the heart of a Local Plan. PP34 is silent on this, even though the 400-dwelling proposal is the 5th largest in the whole of Colchester in emerging draft Plan.

Conclusion

15. Great Horkesley Parish Council remains open to reasonable proposals to provide additional housing, recreational facilities including improved access to the countryside, and employment opportunities provided that it is clear that no harm to the quality of life of the existing residents will result and that appropriate mitigation of the impact of the development is feasible.

16. Having considered PP34 as it stands, GHPC takes the view that 400 new homes cannot be provided on the site identified in PP34 without causing harms that cannot be mitigated, as set out above, to the quality of life to those already living in the village and damage to the countryside around it both directly within the Plan period and indirectly in the decades to come.

17. The number of new dwellings to be provided on the site identified in PP34 should be reduced to 150, as per the outline planning consent already granted. The northernmost part of the site, which is currently designated as open countryside, should be removed from the consultation draft.

Please note: GHPC will conduct a Housing Needs Survey to demonstrate that the provision of 250 new dwellings on the land around Great Horkesley Manor and North of Coach Road is more than enough to meet local demand for the foreseeable future. It will aim to share the results with the planning authority before the results of the Regulation 18 consultation are put to elected members.