Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community EIP

Response to the Inspector's Questions
From Cllr. William Sunnucks

19 April 2024

Introduction

I support the Garden Community as a concept, but believe that the DPD requires significant amendment if it is to deliver the intended benefits.

I am in a good position to comment following a long career in property and finance[1]. I have been tracking the garden community proposals since 2015 and played an active role in both the 2018 and 2020 Examinations of the Section 1 plan. My comments were taken seriously by Inspector Roger Clews whose two reports echoed closely my own conclusions.

My answers below will show why stronger financial and phasing controls are needed if the community is to be assured of the promised benefits. More detail is provided in the four appendices in my personal Dropbox[2], and even more detail in my Reg19 response[3]

Appendix 1 – Link Road Delivery (Matter 7)
Appendix 2 – Viability (Matter 7 & 9)
Appendix 3 – Colchester's resolutions explained (Matters 1,7 and 9)
Appendix 4 – New Towns – the track record (Matter 9)

Main matter 7 – Movement and Connections Policy

Does the Policy provide clear direction as to how a decision maker should react to a development proposal?

The phased approach to the Link Road has undermined public confidence in the infrastructure delivery promises[4]. There is a significant risk that, despite good intentions, the Councils will be pressured into housebuilding before the full road is delivered (see my appendix 1[5]).

[1] I have recently become a substitute member of the Joint Committee formed by the three Councils – not a proper member. I have an investment in a company which owns a small business in Elmstead Market. I don't regard either as a conflict.
[2] https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/1iki52h3vlzj37qxz449w/AEdggNEeiLm-jLulFUnvjms?rlkey=9ratbb3x97y26ge5gnylthpox&dl=0 .
[3] https://www.dropbox.com/sh/skhjwuf7iswy8ej/AAA-lhfL-Wa67zIw_wbRQHu-a?dl=0
[4] See Colchester's formal resolution to that effect described in Appendix 3 to this note
[5] https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/qy7sjzn0f0r1r0bu9yexk/Appendix-1-Link-Road-delivery.docx?rlkey=86bx2v2sbfez1w4ilhlekeojm&dl=0

I suggest that the DPD should clarify and strengthen the wording of the Section 1 plan[6] which requires that no planning approval should be granted without funding approval for the A120-A133 Link Road.

- The words "funding approval" could mean anything from a non-binding letter of intent from a Bank through to a fully underwritten commitment from a credible covenant. Clarification needed.
- There DPD should give clarity on the number of houses that can be built if phase 2 of the Link Road is delayed. I suggest that i) there should be no housing starts until both phases of the link road are started (not just funded). And ii) that no more than "x" dwellings should be occupied before the link road is completed. The number x should be justified by traffic modelling to show that congestion on Clinghoe Hill will not be above current levels.

Are the requirements of the Policy justified by appropriate available evidence?

The evidence base needs updating to

- Disclose the full extent of the cost over-runs which are likely to exceed the £21.25m in the appraisal. The costings are at least two years out of date (see my appendix 1) and exclude significant items such as the cost of a Public Enquiry and inflation since late 2021. The second item alone is estimated at £19m.
- Make it clear who is responsible for building the Link Road phase 2 – Latimer's MOU talks about seeking ways to fund it rather than taking responsibility for delivery. This is understandable because the project includes complex CPOs and bridge construction which is probably outside Latimer's expertise or risk appetite.
- Include traffic modelling which acknowledges the phasing. The public cannot be expected to have confidence in the pre-phasing modelling, and will want assurance that congestion on Clinghoe hill will not rise above current levels.

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William Sunnucks is a Chartered Accountant with a first degree in Economics and a Masters degree in Business Administration. His career took him overseas with Shell and then into a series of Finance Director roles in the UK. Over the last 20 years he has initiated and overseen two significant mixed use town centre developments in the Greater London area, working alongside professional developers with all their strengths and weaknesses.

[6] Policy SP6 2a requires 'funding approval', not 'full funding approval' as described in the Councils' responses.