

The following comments reflect the order of topics within the published consultation booklet for the Draft Local Development Plan 2014-2029.

“Spatial Vision”

1. Appreciate the pressures for more housing and recognise the garden suburb concept is an effort to contain further sprawl, but surprised at the low number for areas other than Maldon and Heybridge. One third of the district population currently lives in Maldon town and Heybridge, yet those two areas stand to contribute three quarters of the new housing stock.

2. Particularly surprised that the those towns and villages with stations, such as North Fambridge and Burnham, are not allocated more new housing.

3. Unless the 2 garden suburbs are *really* knitted into Maldon town centre (e.g. with constant buses and more cultural/social activities such as a cinema etc) they might as well be anywhere. Not convinced that knitting process is adequately safeguarded in the rest of the Plan so fear Maldon will become a ‘doughnut’ with a hollow middle. Plan needs to be reworked to strengthen this cohesive aspect through all the policy areas.

4. Applaud the intention to lay down important development principles and create a masterplan for each suburb. Urge the council to rebuff piecemeal approvals for development in the meantime until each masterplan is complete (e.g. current proposal for 120 houses at Spital Road). This includes holding back from determining change of use for larger spaces in town centre (e.g. McCarthy and Stone at the Orth’s garage site). Sporadic development will risk losing opportunities for essential infrastructure and appropriate levies.

5. The Maldon South suburb seems to lack the same degree of definition and structure as the Heybridge proposal. This is of special concern as 39% of the proposed 4,430 new houses for the entire district will be in this one suburb. In Heybridge, there is an apparent attempt to create a barrier/buffer against sprawling further into the countryside, for example with the relief road that combines landscaping, drainage and flood defence etc. In contrast there is only an amorphous area for the south Maldon suburb, apparently purely defined by current land ownership rather than any existing or even planned barrier.

6. The additional housing at Heybridge will, however, further exacerbate the fact that this “distinctive large settlement” will become one of the largest in the district but still lack basic amenities within easy reach - such as a library, a full time medical centre, secondary school, or even adequate and centrally placed primary places.

7. The area further east defined by the Mundon and Fambridge Roads, rather than a cluster round the A414, may prove a better focus for housing development in South Maldon, being much quieter in terms of traffic, nearer the rest of the Dengie if community facilities (such as a surgery) are placed here, and nearer the town’s main recreational spaces. Cycle and footpath connections would also have easier gradients. There are drainage issues with both areas.

To use an existing barrier other than roads, this alternative area could be extended across to the west to the railway embankment.

8. The A414 approach junction would already benefit from a relief road.

9. Highly concerned the various health authorities have not grasped the strategic vision this expansion plan presents - see later comments.

10. Particularly applaud inclusion in Policy S1 of:-

- > environmental limits on growth
- > high quality design
- > maintaining rural character of the District
- > intention to make developers pay for necessary infrastructure both locally for the suburbs **and** centrally for community provision through Community Infrastructure Levy.
- > the (quote) ‘golden thread’ throughout that sustainable development contains all three economic, social and environmental roles. This threefold requirement will need to be rigorously applied to ensure the words come to life.

11. Particularly applaud inclusion in Policy S4 of:-

- > need for adequate medical provision to be made, especially as Maldon is proven to be radically under provided currently
- > inclusion of infrastructure that is not only practical (e.g. sewage) but also green
- > provision for community hubs and local centres, but provided that these have defined functions and not present undue competition for the High Street and other central provision.
- > provision for affordable housing, but some consider the percentage of 40% is set too low given the demonstrated degree of deprivation in Maldon
- > inclusion of provision for the needs of more elderly.

Policy S5 The Maldon and Heybridge Central Area

12. The Plan rightly recognises the key assets Maldon centre has in terms of its heritage, visual attraction, significant economic contribution, and the major draw of its maritime location. We don't believe this last point has been sufficiently recognised in the past, (Sadd's Wharf development for example). Trust this appraisal will encourage planning officers and others to stiffen their resolve in enforcing this particular set of policies.

13. Particularly applaud: -

- > the emphasis on focusing the tourist, arts and cultural role in the central area.
- > making more riverside access
- > improving connections to the different parts of the central area
- > preserving and enhancing the historic character including its skyline, archaeology and built environment
- > boosting public transport

but,

14. believe more emphasis is needed on a variety of methods to ensure the suburbs do not become isolated lumps of development disconnected from this central area, through using short haul public transport to connect the town centre with the enlarged residential areas, a pedestrian bridge over Limebrook Way, etc.

15. regret that no mention is made of park and ride proposals, or need for further parking in the centre if more visitors/residents are to take advantage of its key assets. 2.68 on Page 34 merely refers to 'retaining' parking spaces, which is too weak a policy.

16. The proposed treatment of the Lower High Street is particularly problematic. Given the extraordinary length of the High Street it seems a frankly desperate measure to suggest this become a "Food Quarter", the only likely outcome being that it will further undermine outlets elsewhere in town that have a more attractive or accessible location. There has to be a recognition that the impact of online shopping on High Street retail generally, plus the existence of two (recently enlarged!) supermarkets requires the District and Town Councils to focus on the more popular or distinctive parts and make them a success, and if need be let this particular part of town revert to attractive housing. The gap between the upper High Street with the Hythe and Leisure quarter is already longer than most people would walk (witness the fall off for even the Post Office in its latest location) so needs connecting with more frequent short haul transport. Food and drink needs to continue to be woven into the upper part to enrich the offer already afforded there.

17. It is ironic that in drawing out the distinctiveness of certain central areas (The Hythe, the Promenade leisure quarter, the Upper and Lower parts of the High Street etc) some of the proposed solutions seek to blur or dilute that very distinctiveness. For example, a cafe restaurant down at the prom: - unless it is a spectacular building and a draw in its own right like the Burnham Royal Corinthian Yacht Club (most unlikely) it will detract from the seaside-like cabins and the maritime pubs which are wholly appropriate to that distinct area. If visitors there particularly want a restaurant there should be ready transport to the town centre and improved footpaths to the likes of Madison Heights (exemplifying the connectivity mentioned elsewhere). Similarly it is suggested that the Prom is suitable for evening use, forgetting that it is near to natural habitats, that sound carries across water, and that the resultant 'safety' lighting and parking would detract from its special 'daytime only' character. Each small area needs to focus on its strengths, not try and blur the mix.

Design Quality and built environment

18. There is a great deal in this section of the plan to be highly commended, if of course it can be brought about in practice. Amongst the wealth of laudable aims we would single out the need to contribute to and enhance local distinctiveness, and providing a set of design principles to support that. It has been noticeable in the recent past that developers have singularly failed to take into account the fine detail and character of our built environment.(e.g. 123 High Street, Sadds Wharf etc)

Conservation and Heritage Assets

19. It is heartwarming to see most of the values expressed in this section, in particular the value of our historic environment. It is therefore a shock to read on Pages 50 and 51 several references (albeit with certain qualifications) to sanction removal or demolition of a heritage asset if it provides a 'public benefit'. Most of our membership are either long standing Maldonians, or significantly, refugees from a wide range of towns whose own worthy custodians attributed 'public benefit' to the destruction of what made them distinct or interesting. With exemplars like this year's Stirling prize winners with Astley Castle, we would maintain it is in fact only lack of imagination that makes a heritage asset considered non viable. The wording of this particular policy therefore needs considerably tightening to remove this dangerous let out clause.

Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Generation

20. Statements about a potential new nuclear power station at Bradwell are concerning because they are contradictory. It is starkly stated that the district Council will strongly support it, but then says it will ensure that local views are fully taken into account when it is consulted on a government proposal. Given previous experience of Bradwell's own leaks here through human error, and the current world wide examples of the risks involved, it cannot be presumed that local views will necessarily be supportive, or that improved safety measures will necessarily be adequate. Similarly the references to the crucial importance of the estuary and its food related industries, leisure and tourism elsewhere in the Plan seem at odds with this apparently unquestioning support. Of the potential sites nationally this was the only one with such shallow water so it is to be hoped Bradwell continues to be well down the shortlist for government attention so these contradictions in local policy are not put to the test.

21. Given the opposition to onshore wind energy and greenfield solar farms, new and existing buildings with a large roof areas provide more opportunities for photovoltaic energy generation without further loss of visual amenity.

Flood Risk and Coastal Management

19. Proposed measures to prevent flooding are supported

Economic Prosperity - Retail Provision

20. With 75% of the district's companies having less than 4 staff and recognition of its strong entrepreneurial base, it would be welcomed if the Council could further encourage employment in the Town Centre. Maldon has previously had a reputation for being a town worth visiting because of its unique shops, but the current plethora of coffee shops, charity shops and voids has made that reputation in danger of being merely a memory. By focussing on the upper part of the High Street, and for example addressing parking and rate concerns, supporting training in customer relations and start up business management, positively encouraging diversity either with a town manager or by other means, much more could and should be done to address this.

Community Services and Facilities

21. The council is urged to use to the full any and every leverage it has with developers and land owners to provide not only local community services within the suburbs, but also to enhance the cultural and other aspects of life in the town centre and to provide the vital connectivity with short haul public transport. A cinema in the old post office had several proposers from our membership.

Tourism

22. Given that 10% of jobs in the District are linked to tourism, the policies in E5 are supported with one exception. In some cases it may be difficult to prove there is an identified 'need' for the provision *in advance*. Some original or imaginative proposals should also be supported even if they then fail, so long as they are then removed or replaced.

Housing

23. 40% affordable housing seems low in the context of Maldon's needs as a whole?

24. Mix of housing, including provision of the elderly, is fully supported.

Natural Environment and Green Infrastructure

25. Again it is heartwarming to see this policy expressed and the Council is urged to apply that policy in practice. The recognition of the value of the waterways and estuary is particularly welcomed, as is the need for wildlife corridors and to connect green infrastructure. In this sense the garden suburbs provide an opportunity to get things right despite housing development, but one that could be eroded all too easily by economic pressures and the push to satisfy housing targets.

26. References to the Leisure Quarter appear to stress deficiencies whereas in fact the existing provision is already considered good.

Transport

27. Reference to the need to 'explore the potential' to ease traffic congestion in the historic core of Maldon could be expressed more proactively and purposefully. This must also be considered in conjunction with actively promoting use of the High Street

28. Improving access to railway services is fully supported.

29. Focus for public transport appears to be weighted towards longer journeys, but there is also a need for specifically connecting the 3000 plus new adjacent households (including many elderly) with the town centre and its leisure, cultural and retail opportunities.

Implementation and Monitoring

30. The Council is fully supported in its wish to improve infrastructure, and ensure that it is delivered *in advance* of development. It is vitally important that no housing development is allowed to proceed until the suburb locations have been more precisely defined complete with relief roads and local roads more carefully planned, green spaces defined, main drains and sewers sorted, and sites reserved for healthcare redistribution

31. The Local Development Plan process is a chance to view our town holistically and address its future needs and present shortcomings. It is vital therefore that developers **fully** contribute to those improvements if the town is not to be short changed.

Health and Wellbeing

32. Shocked to see evidence of how poor GP provision for Maldon is in terms of a physical capacity deficit of 800m², and over registration of 8,500 patients. Frankly bemused at the suggestion that 73% of the Districts residents can get to St Peter's within 15 minutes and 45% to Broomfield within an unbelievable 15 minutes too. These estimates clearly need further scrutiny.

33. Extremely concerned that the commissioning and other health bodies appear not to be fully grasping the need to fundamentally re-evaluate the distribution of medical provision within the town. The masterplans for both the suburbs must provisionally reserve appropriately well connected sites for GP provision and one, presumably South Maldon as it is nearer the Dengie, allow sufficient space for the potential hospital relocation until such time as the health authorities get their resources together.

34. If relocation of St Peters does become necessary, the society would like to put down a strong marker now that in the trade off with the developer, the Spital Road site should only be considered for residential re-use, and definitely not for retail use this close to the town centre. Local shops already exist including a general store/newsagent, hairdressers, and even a bakery.

35. Growth in intended population (perhaps especially the elderly..) has resulted in calls for Maldon district to have its own crematorium.

MS/JAL 8.10.13