

Bowers Gifford & North Benfleet Residents Association

Charity Reference EW38482

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Planning Policy

Basildon Borough Council

St. Martin's Square

Basildon, Essex SS14

Basildon Draft Plan January 2016

First of all may we draw your attention to Page Wood, which is not identified in the Draft Plan. This is an area of woodland in SS13 2HP. Until recently this area was unregistered land. It was made an Asset of Community Value by Basildon Council in November 2015. A charity set up by the Residents Association hope to take ownership of Page Woods in May 2016 and retain it as a nature reserve. This will need to be identified as such in the final plan.

Secondly, we note that the map displayed at the roadshows does not reflect the map in the document entitled Sustainability Appraisal including Strategic Environmental Assessment (Main Report), as pages 55-61 show additional strategic sites in particular to the south and south west of Billericay. As these areas are not shown on the road show maps, we feel that the public has had an edited version of the consultation with information withheld. It suggests that consultation has already occurred in some areas separately from the wider public one which is undemocratic, and this has not been communicated at the roadshows.

Background to our objection to building on the land identified in the 2016 Draft Plan

The Bowers Gifford & North Benfleet Residents Association was formed specifically to oppose plans to build on Little Chalvedon Hall Farm (LCHF). The management is formally elected each year to represent the 800+ households in the original village. However, as anger and anxiety over the proposed building on LCHF increased so did the area we embody. We believe that we represent over 1000 households and therefore our voice is strong in expressing our views.

It is disappointing that due to the purdah period the Draft Plan consultation period could not be extended. Due to the writer's absence through most of the last three months it has not been possible to put together a full objection.

However, we would remind you that in 2014 Basildon Council and our MP received over 300 letters from 237 properties objecting to building on LCHF. Just two years later LCHF is one of the 11 properties which Basildon Council propose to take out of the green belt for development. At the Appeal our MP stated that the number of letters received was unprecedented. Many residents believe that these letters of objection still set out valid concerns relating to the Draft Plan. Indeed,

we believe that some have simply re-sent their original letters as a response to the draft plan. We also presented a petition with 5169 signatures plus an on-line petition with a further 650 signatures – the largest petition ever presented to Basildon Council. The concerns of the signatories to those letters of objection and the petition should not be ignored.

We remind you of our response to the Draft Core Strategy dated 1st April 2014 and attach as Appendix 1. We are aware that some development has to take place and suggested areas around the A127 which would be better placed to protect Bowers Gifford, North Benfleet and Pitsea from dust, dirt and noise during years of development as well as long term flooding problems and traffic chaos along minor roads.

We draw your attention to SSO457 as a resident has advised us that this area was previously planned for development. We are given to understand that the matter went to the House of Lords which ruled in favour of keeping the land as greenbelt. If this is the case, the resident will provide details.

The Village Identity of Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet

Part of the identity of the village was lost when the parish council was formed. People in parts of London Road, Eversley Road and parts of Burnt Mills Road still believe that they live in the village and belong to local organisations. We regard the original area as Bowers Gifford & North Benfleet as our villages - not the reduced area represented by the parish council.

The Local Plan states that the document Settlement Hierarchy itself notes that “the development of these sites to their maximum capacity would however cause Bowers Gifford to be subsumed within the wider urban area of Basildon. This would have implications for the community identity of Bowers Gifford.” The Outline Landscape proposal recommends less development. This raises questions as to why the preferred option in the Local Plan is a higher level of development?

Basildon’s own Green Belt review 2015 recommends that the area remain as green belt yet green belt status for Bowers Gifford has been removed with 2000 homes planned. The Site Allocation Appraisal of the green belt areas in 52 and 53 has said that Bowers Gifford green belt would lose its ability to function as a green belt if development goes ahead. This area is part of the strategic green belt corridor connecting the Thames Estuary marshland with open countryside to the North East. The appraisal states that area 53 is close to Benfleet Marshes SPA, Pitsea Marshes SSSI and the Ramsar site. Areas 52 and 53 will lose the openness of the landscape, becoming built up with Pitsea encroaching from the west to Bowers Gifford in the east.

Loss of Green Belt

Areas 52 and 53, H13. The proposed developments here in the green fields would encourage the merging of Pitsea and Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet. The loss of open space will create a sense of enclosure and the green strip that is proposed is insufficient to prevent this. It is also proposed by the Local Plan that this green strip house sports and recreational facilities, further adding to the encroachment on open space and subsequent increase in traffic, noise and pollution. Local people, anecdotally, believe that air quality has worsened since the opening of the newly “improved” Sadlers Farm and A13 intersection. Future increases to local traffic will add to this.

We believe that the moving of the Eversley Leisure Centre and Gardiners Lane South Sports, Social and recreational facilities should not be relocated to this area (52/53). Some suggestions have been made to move facilities instead to the land (area 54) west of Church Road between London Road (B1462) and the A13. This latter site is easily reached and is not close to residential areas.

Flooding

One of our major concerns is around flooding. We have taken an active role in the Flood Risk Action Group (FRAG) representing villages in South Essex. The FRAG believes that details of the water flows were lost when the Water Authority was replaced by various different agencies. More recently Essex County Council (ECC) has been given responsibility for water and this move is welcomed. However, FRAG has expressed concern for the recent "Where Water Goes Project" to try to identify local water flows. To be Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS) approved, ECC should already be aware of where water goes. If ECC and BBC are not already aware of water flows how can they propose development in this area? It appears that no assessments have been carried out prior to the Draft Plan to ensure that the area can cope with additional development.

Villages such as Rawreth have suffered flooding at a level not previously experienced following smaller development than planned for this area. The FRAG chair has taken Rayleigh and ECC councillors to the local football pitches which had contributed to the increased flooding because the base of the pitches had not been laid in accordance to plan or checked properly by the planning officers responsible.

The Anglo Saxon word for Benfleet is Baemfloet, which literally means floating wood. In other words Benfleet was swamp land. Bowers Gifford is built on clay soil which retains water. We enclose some of the photographs which we supplied to the Landscape Partnership Assessment and the LCHF objection. These are set out in Appendices 2 to 6. We can supply others if requested.

Many of our elderly local residents speak about the proposed compulsory purchase (CPO) of LCHF and other surrounding areas at the time that the "new town" was developed. It was planned that Ilfracombe Avenue was to extend to Burnt Mills Road; and William Road was to pass through, what is now 31A Westlake Avenue, to meet with Ilfracombe Avenue. The area around the extended Ilfracombe and William Roads was to be used for dwellings to home the migrants from London. However, the land was later found to be unsuitable for development because of the flood risk. The Draft Plan of 2016 seems to ignore this risk.

After the CPO was withdrawn a false lake was apparently made on the area, where BBC now plans football pitches, to reduce the flood problem suffered in the surrounding areas. Following a transfer of land ownership the lake was drained. The Addendum to the Green Belt review 2015 suggests using flood plains, in a similar location to the earlier "lake", as potential for open landscapes uses e.g. playing fields. Whilst the fields of Bowers Gifford (area 53) are not flood plains, this short sighted suggestions means that people using such open areas within Bowers Gifford would lose access to such space during times of pluvial flooding.

Traffic

The council is well aware of the traffic problems in this area. London Road, Pound Lane, Burnt Mills Road and Rectory Road will be unable to cope with more traffic than already suffered. The council states that it will build a new road across Bradfields Farm. We assume that this is at the same point as the junction previously suggested by Meridian Strategic Development. We pointed out that prior to this suggestion, and following complaints from residents, Essex County Council had built up the banks in that area after the widening of Courtauld Road. The banks were to protect residents living in that area from traffic lights, noise etc. If the planned new junction with the A127 goes ahead how will those residents be protected?

If development of 2000+ dwellings goes ahead on the green area between Bowers Gifford and Pitsea as well as Jotman's Farm, on the edge of the Sadlers Farm side of South Benfleet, then the problems faced by drivers can only worsen.

The increased traffic caused by the new Corringham Dock will also bring havoc to local roads.

We would also bring to your attention that one of the oldest cottages in Essex (16th century) is situated next to the current A127 / Pound Lane junction. Another 17th century cottage (Walnut Cottage) is situated in London Road. These cottages, like several other local buildings have no foundations, will suffer from the traffic and hammering of the local landscape caused by new infrastructure and development.

Transport Infrastructure

We have concerns that the proposed increase in the size of the village of Bowers Gifford & North Benfleet, along with the increase in residences to the east of Pitsea would cause increased congestion in Pound Lane and surrounding areas such as London Road and Burnt Mills Road, both from new local traffic and traffic arriving from the new A127 interchange with Pound Lane. Currently Pound Lane is already used as a cut through in an attempt by traffic to circumvent the A130 and Sadlers Farm particularly during periods of disruption. We have seen no evidence of traffic surveys to determine the current usage of Pound Lane/London Road/Rectory Road nor studies that might give a prediction of how that might change. The Local Plan document states that funding for road improvements will be the subject of future bids, yet local housing and industrial development could go ahead before the infrastructure to mitigate its effect might be in place. A previously submitted development application for LCHF had a proposed upgrade to Homestead Road junction with Pound Lane. We are concerned that if that plan is resurrected then this would add traffic from a considerable number of new dwellings and associated traffic to Pound Lane.

It is not clear from the Local Plan documents how additional traffic from the proposed new junction with the A127 will be prevented from using Pound Lane and how local residents might retain historical access from here. As one purpose of the new junction is to serve Wickford to the north, with the other purpose to serve the industrial areas of Burnt Mills we would say that the access to Pound Lane be removed and replaced with a slip road from the A127 further west of this junction and Cranfield Park Avenue in order to take freight traffic directly to the industrial areas. This could also mitigate the effect on the Bradfield Farm Dairy, an important local business which under the local plan would have a new road pass through it. Local Pound Lane access could be via this slip road route, which could maintain local access and be less attractive as a cut through and proposed access to Wickford be preserved.

Commuting

We attach as Appendices XX some data collected by two local commuters at the time of the LCHF Appeal. Trains were overcrowded at that point in time and things have not improved.

We would also draw to your attention the weak bridge linking Pitsea Station and Pitsea Refuse Collection to the roundabout. The weak bridge can only take single file traffic when used by lorries. All commuter parking is on the station side of the bridge. Commuter parking areas are often full and recent parking restrictions prevents parking elsewhere. The increased number of commuters will cause more traffic chaos and further weaken the bridge.

North Benfleet Plotlands Infill

We have no objections to infill here subject to local planning regulations and any Neighbourhood Plan that might take place. Planners need to pay special attention to flood mitigation.

Site 27 area 51

Land east of Bowers Gifford adjacent to Pound Lane and Clifton Road has been identified as a potential strategic site. This is arable farmland and green belt and so should not be built on. It forms part of the green belt that was identified by the Basildon outline Landscape Appraisals of Potential Strategic Development Sites and is recommended as an area to be protected/retained as open arable landscape. It states that development in this area would threaten the strategic green corridor. Building here will form new encroachment and create sprawl.

Proposed School

The Local Plan document states that there is no primary school provision in Bowers Gifford (p145, para 11.131). Primary schools provision is currently St. Margaret's Church of England Primary School, London Road Bowers Gifford, SS13 2DU. Its 2015 Ofsted report grades it as a good school. This school serves the catchment of Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet and is currently undersubscribed and so accepts pupils from outside the catchment. We would suggest that if future admissions excluded pupils from outside the catchment area there could be sufficient capacity for children from Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet's growing population. This needs to be properly forecast using validated methods. The lack of the Local Plan's knowledge of an existing school undermines its credibility.

Alternative Sites for Housing Developments

We suggest that the proposed development of 600 homes in Bowers Gifford is relocated to the alternative site of H23 as originally noted in the Sustainability Appraisal including Strategic Environmental Assessment main report, which shows a much larger area for H23 (strategic area 7) than that on the map shown on the roadshows.

If the new proposed road on the Local Plan map to serve H20, 21, 22 and 23 is modified to join the roundabout of the A176/ B1007 junction, then this would provide a logical route through the enlarged H23 site. This would help fulfill option 2 of the Local plan or use the areas H20A and H23A which are earmarked as alternative sites. These are fairly large sites that could easily incorporate the 600 homes planned for Bowers Gifford.

Politics

It is a pity that the increased population in London has not been better controlled or the number of properties sold to foreigners, who do not live in the UK, restricted. BBC states that 220 properties included in the plan each year will be for migrants, however, we believe that this figure is understated. Without better controls then this number will continue to increase.

It is disappointing to learn that 2000 of the dwellings originally marked for development in Billericay have been transferred to the area between Bowers Gifford and Pitsea. Billericay has a lower density of population than Basildon and yet BBC now wishes the Basildon/Pitsea area to take the largest proportion of planned development.

We also understand that it is unlikely that developers in the Billericay area will provide a percentage of development as affordable housing but instead choose to pay the S106 Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The reasons for this are obvious i.e. that the profits on expensive dwellings in Billericay will exceed any CIL.

Two questions arise from Basildon Council's deals with Billericay:

1. Where will the affordable housing, which should have been allocated to Billericay, go? Is this part of the allocation to the Pitsea side of the green area between Bowers Gifford and Pitsea?
2. Will the CIL follow the affordable housing or remain in Billericay?

Health and Well Being

Basildon Hospital does not cope now and neither do our GP services. The fact that only one additional GP surgery is planned in the area is extraordinary. If development goes ahead then more than one surgery is needed.

Nature and good health go hand in hand. Our current "Getting to Know Nature Project" has been informed that it is widely acclaimed that nature plays a role in contributing to good mental health. Walking and exercise plays a role in good physical health.

Health and well being will suffer from the stress of development e.g. noise, traffic, dirt and dust, commuting, even the stress of change etc.etc. All these factors need to be better taken into consideration in the plan.

Local nature and wildlife will undoubtedly suffer.

A footpath runs across the area that Basildon Council has earmarked for development. Residents may not be able to use this popular footpath whilst development takes place.

Although the council plans to remove the football pitches from Eversley, where admittedly they are sloped and unsuitable, is the planned location any better? The area also appears to be some sort of flood plain. How can the football pitches be used if they are waterlogged?

Does the council plan Multi Use Sports Arenas (MUSAs) otherwise known as CAGES? Superb constructions in the right locations and where usage monitored. If so, will the hard flooring not cause additional flood problems elsewhere? Will flood lighting be intrusive to nearby dwellings? Will usage be monitored to prevent noise late at night? Will CAGES be locked at night so that they do not become meeting places for "hoodies" and "drug users"?

Future Generations

Although not part of the NPPF we believe that the disappearance of farm land will affect future generations. Currently we are reliant on foreign imports. The United Kingdom is often referred to by foreigners as "Treasure Island". As the world grows we need to ensure that future generations in this country have adequate and affordable food supplies and a healthy place to live – this cannot be achieved with the current level of increased population which in turn concretes over our farm land.

Yours sincerely

On behalf of Bowers Gifford & North Benfleet Residents' Association

Rose Griffin-Twidell
Chairman

Summary of Reasons Outlined in Objection to Build on LCHF Letters sent by Residents to our MP and Basildon Council

- When land was classified as green belt it used to mean that it could not be built on and I don't know when that changed.
- This area of greenbelt restricts the urban sprawl between South Benfleet and Pitsea.
- This area Green Belt between Bowers Gifford/North Benfleet acts as a wildlife corridor. This narrow corridor should not be reduced in any way or else it will have a negative impact on flora and fauna alike.
- Agricultural land is about feeding the people, not building homes. The UK is now in a position that it is no longer able to feed its population without imports, and this position is becoming all the more extreme due to the loss of its agricultural industry. Recently in the news, concerns have been raised that Russia will cap its export of wheat due to a 27.5% reduction in yield resulting in higher bread prices. Ukraine, the so called 'bread basket of Europe' will almost certainly follow. The USA has had crop failures and China is importing more grain, so providing another market for the dwindling supplies that remain. Even I can do the math on that. Our own pork industry is struggling because of the rising cost of animal feed, another import in the main. A debate on the global reality is far beyond the scope of this letter, but the point I'm trying to make is that we need to reinstate this country's independence of these outside influences, and not to become even more reliant on overseas supplies.

Even if our bellies were full and we were not worried about the price of food, there is the ever present concern over fossil fuels and the alternatives that need to be explored. Again we are reliant on overseas imports for gas and oil; our mining industry virtually gone, and the worries over nuclear power if it all goes wrong. Agricultural land could provide a safety net if it's considered for growing bio fuels, another big debate beyond the scope here, but once the land is gone, well, there's no getting it back.

- The land is greenbelt, which is land designated **not for building**. As far as we are aware there has been no change in the law which would enable the current designation being changed.
- Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet are built on marsh land. We experience flooding in Pound Lane and Burnt Mills Road. On occasion after heavy rain, when the drains have not been able to cope, raw sewage has overflowed into parts of Pound Lane, Highlands, and the plot lands. Flooding in this area, like other parts of the country, has been worse in recent years.
- Flooding has been exacerbated since the Sadlers Farm and A130 renovations.
- The roads around the new development are minor roads. 750 houses, most of which are 2 and a half storey, could result in more than 1000 additional cars on roads which already do not cope. In addition, the developer wishes to build shops and offices which would further exacerbate the problem.
- Flooding has become more noticeable as driveways have been paved over or properties have been developed, many people are getting concerned about the sewerage capacity and even the internet speed has over the last few years gone down with broadband speed sometimes as slow as dial up. All of these problems relate directly to the increased demands

on an already stretched infrastructure. Therefore one thing we do not want to do is exchange a working farm, something that will probably prove to be even more valued in the future as food supplies diminish, for an initial influx of 750 properties and associated buildings.

- Pound Lane is already used as a by-pass between the A13 and the A127. This traffic will be forced around the new development and past the proposed school which is not an ideal situation with regard to child safety. Traffic will be slowed down by the pedestrian crossing making journeys home progressively longer. The proposed school will also increase the volume of traffic going through Pound Lane.
- 1000 extra cars and the volume of noise and exhaust fumes will increase as the health of the local population deteriorates.
- Trotting ponies in this part of Basildon are numerous. No thought has been given to residents with trotting ponies either in relation to the safety of ponies or their drivers;
- Increased traffic will cause longer delays when encountering slower moving trotting ponies and will increase the risk of accidents.
- The A127 is already unable to cope in commuter hours with long queues of traffic heading towards London from the Pound Lane exit to the Fortune of War roundabout. On the way back from London presumably the new traffic will turn off at the Nevendon roundabout causing congestion to the roads around Burnt Mills.
- There is a 16th century cottage at the junction of Harrow Road and Pound Lane. How will this be affected by the increase of traffic travelling towards the A127?
- There are several local properties e.g. Osborne Road, Westlake Avenue, Harrow Road, which were built without foundations. How will these properties stand the pressure of heavy development, lorries/diggers etc along with increased residential traffic?
- We do not know what the accident rate is like on the A127/A13 but suggest that the Council finds out and considers the accident rate in the area. When considering the accident rate please consider the huge volume of lorries using the A13 when the new port at Corringham is opened, and the increased traffic when the new Incinerator is in operation, as well as the additional commuter traffic.
- Those of us who commute know only too well that local trains are already full to capacity journeys are uncomfortable for commuters. The alternative is to drive with slow queues in and out of London making the journey extremely stressful – and contrary to the plan to reduce the number of cars/fumes on the roads/in London.
- With the closure of so many industries on the Burnt Mills Industrial Estate traffic has lessened in the last year. However, if Burnt Mills ever regains its status as a busy industrial site, and the vacant plots where offices/factories once stood are put back to us, traffic congestion could be even worse than in the past.
- The outline plans include widening of Pound Lane at the A127 and London Road exits. In addition to the proposed development at LCHF over 4-5 year being carried out there will be more road works to contend with. The Sadlers Farm improvements are already delayed by a year. What guarantees are there that this development and the intended work on Pound Lane will be finished by a specified date?

- Although we have been told that local services would be provided to cope with any additional population it is clear that Basildon Hospital and GP surgeries are not currently coping. If sufficient resources cannot be found to run these services to a satisfactory standard now then how will resources be found in the future? In addition other public services like fire, police and schools are already stretched.
- When the new town was built it was designed to have some green spaces to stop urban sprawl. The green oasis between Pitsea and South Benfleet is one of those green spaces. Some of that space was recently lost to the new A130 “improvements”. Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet may not have been designed to be a wildlife corridor to the Pitsea marshes but many who live locally will confirm that there is a noticeable increase in the volume of wildlife sighted. This may well be lost if the new development goes ahead.
- There are some protected species on the LCHF site including greater crested newts, adders and bats. The developer’s wildlife report also states the presence of rare jewel beetles.
- If the development were to go ahead then it would set a precedent for other development on greenbelt land. Nottingham Council/Meridian has already made it clear that their ultimate aim is to build 1296 dwellings.
- Farms are for animals and growing crops not for building houses.
- When I go shopping I try to buy British products but it gets more and more difficult. The situation will become worse if we keep concreting over farm land.
- If we keep concreting over farm land then we are putting the future food supplies of our children at risk.
- As we become more and more reliant on foreign food products we stand the risk of price rises in line with fossil fuels.
- Hedgerows like fields could be a source of future food supplies. If we lose hedgerows we lose a potential source of future food supplies if the need should ever arise.
- Our green heritage is being stolen from us.
- If we allow this land to be built on we are allowing our children’s heritage to be stolen.
- Past generations have fought, and lost lives, fighting to protect this green and pleasant land. Now we are expected to give it away.
- We read in the papers about how terrible it is that South America is chopping down trees and harming our environment by doing so. However, by destroying our own fields and hedgerows aren’t we doing the same thing?
- This country has already lost much of its manufacturing and other industry. Jobs are few and far between. Now it appears that there is a possibility of losing our working farms too. None of this makes sense. As this country continues to import food and prices go up we need to think about protecting local food supplies for future generations – not short term profits. We already rely on foreign imports for coal and oil and complain about the ever increasing prices. Perhaps we can’t do much about fuel but we can keep our working farms and help ensure an affordable food supply for future generations.
- The houses around here use soakaways for the rooftop rain. There would be major engineering needed for the area to cope with 5-10,000 new homes and the extra burden on the water company to supply the needs of all those extra people. The water pressure isn’t high here at the best of times, and can the sewage treatment plant cope with the extra waste?

- If Basildon Council has to build houses I don't know why green belt farm land should be used when there are brown field sites available. Neither do I understand why Nottingham Council or its pension fund should be involved in building in Basildon. Green belt should remain greenbelt.
- When I go shopping I try to buy British but if farms are concreted over then there won't be much left in the way of British food supplies.
- The loss of farm land means a loss of habitat too. One of the things that makes the countryside what it is, is the diversity of wildlife that finds a niche in hedgerows and trees. And the countryside around here is not just for the inhabitants of Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet, but for the residents of Pitsea and the surrounding areas to enjoy too. This area seems to take the brunt for various developments as it's less affluent than neighbouring Billericay, Brentwood and Wickford who seem to be able to exert more influence and have more success in rejecting undesirable projects.
- Farm land is for growing crops and feeding animals not for building. If we give away our farms then we are also giving away our long term food supply. Hedgerows are for wildlife and should also be protected not violated.
- This is a picturesque piece of countryside, with a lot of wildlife which should be preserved for future generations.
- We feel as if our heritage is being stolen. We need to save our greenbelt and our wildlife for future generations.
- When I drive past the new estates of affordable houses in Pitsea a lot of them seem to be empty. There does not appear to be any point in building houses which blot the landscape and that nobody wants to live in.