

From: Fiona Philip [REDACTED]
Sent: 26 February 2023 15:01
To: Section 62A Applications <section62a@planninginspectorate.gov.uk>
Subject: S62A/2023/0015 Proposed development at Grange Paddock, Ickleton Road, Elmdon, Essex

For the attention of the Inquiries and Major Casework Team

We have lived in Elmdon for seven years and specifically chose to live in the village because of its unique tranquil character and historic significance. We are concerned to hear of the latest planning application to build 18 houses on prime agricultural land.

The Uttlesford Local Plan adopted in 2005 states that “The rural nature of the District is recognised for its intrinsic character and beauty, its value for agricultural production and its biodiversity. The strategy is to conserve and enhance the local distinctiveness and historic character of these rural settlements and support this character and the thriving rural communities within it”.

No reference has been made in the application to the *Village Design Statement for Elmdon, Duddenhoe End and Wenden Lofts* adopted by Uttlesford District Council on 13 June 2019, the aim of which was to inform and guide planning decisions.

According to the housing proposal, ‘The applicant has enthusiastically sought to work with the residents of Elmdon to develop the details of this application’. The residents of Elmdon were, in fact, afforded a cursory 48 hours in order to assess what was termed: ‘an opportunity to preview a plan for increasing village amenities and housing opportunities’. The notice given was so short that a significant number of interested parties were unable to attend and thus the process did not represent an appropriate village consultation.

A village-wide survey was conducted in 2022 and over 90% of residents rejected the idea of building houses on a greenfield site.

Disproportionate scale of development

We understand that the delivery of housing is a top priority and we are not averse to sympathetic and proportionate development. However, 18 houses would represent a circa 10% increase in Elmdon's housing stock, and we believe this development would undoubtedly alter the unique character of Elmdon. Half of the proposed houses will have more than four bedrooms, rendering them out of reach to buyers in search of affordable housing.

In our view, the number of unspoilt villages in rural Essex - with their fabric and character preserved - is rapidly diminishing. Nearby and unfortunate examples include Newport and Clavering, both of which have been severely impacted by the unchecked development of poor quality houses, many of which are out of keeping with the local vernacular architecture. As ever, property developers are concerned with the maximisation of shareholder profit over quality of build and aesthetics. If carried out, we feel the proposed development would be an incongruous, urban extension into pristine, rural farmland. If this were permitted to go through unchallenged, it should be noted that all of the surrounding land is owned by [REDACTED] and therefore susceptible to further applications by the landowner. Approval of this development could set a hazardous precedent, encouraging other landowners to sell good agricultural land for further housing developments.

The location of the site

The proposed site sits on an elevated and prominent position on the edge of the village. A number of houses on Ickleton Road will be overlooked and their privacy compromised by a new development. The site is highly visible from many public footpaths, including the Icknield Way. We have major concerns over the increase in traffic, light and noise pollution.

The application states: 'the plans would only cause limited harm to the openness of the countryside which would be outweighed by the scheme's "very significant benefits".'

The biodiversity of the area and the unspoilt countryside would certainly be impacted by 18 houses erected in such a prominent position. Farmland will be lost, a number of mature trees and hedgerow removed and wildlife habitats destroyed. It remains unclear what the 'very significant benefits' of allowing such a development would be.

Lack of village infrastructure and pressure on local services

According to the Design & Access Statement, 'this proposal would represent sustainable development that would enhance the viability of existing community facilities'. The reality is that Elmdon does not have any facilities. It has neither the infrastructure nor amenities to support such a development.

Amenities stretch to a church and small village hall. Other local villages have been able to shoulder development because of their facilities. Manuden, for example, has a large community centre, school, church and pub. Elmdon does not have a primary school or a village shop and the pub closed in 2013 and has never reopened. The applicants state that there is a village childminder, but this is incorrect. There is no public transport. The village hall is small and inadequate for the existing number of inhabitants.

The proposal states that 'the site is within easy walking distance of the village centre, which would encourage future residents to walk instead of using their cars for 'some day-to-day functions'. The day-to-day functions to which the proposal refers are unclear. Elmdon is a peaceful village and home to very few day-to-day functions. Cars are essential to get to and from the village for travelling to work, shopping or socialising. A development could introduce around 40 extra cars into the village on very narrow roads already prone to congestion, in addition to leading to a surge in delivery vans and trucks.

18 houses will represent a significant increase in the village population and in traffic throughput, particularly given that Elmdon does not have a bus route. Ickleton Road is narrow but adequate, and part of the charm of a small village. The road is regularly used by children who cycle along it. If the road is widened, this will encourage further use as a cut through, increasing the volume of traffic and potential for accidents.

The local schools are oversubscribed. Broadband and sewerage provision is at full stretch and the latter prone to backing up - adding this number of new houses will put a considerable strain on existing services.

We believe that a development on the scale proposed would urbanise the very rural character of the village of Elmdon and would be entirely unsustainable.

A similar application for development on the site was refused in 2015, we understand for some and if not all of the reasons outlined above. We see no merit in this application and trust that it will not be permitted.

Yours sincerely,

Henry and Fiona Philip

