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Mr John Mears



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Application Reference number S62A/2023/0015

Grange Paddock, Ickleton Road, Elmdon, Essex.

I wish to make a strong Objection to the proposed plans.

I am a resident who lives opposite the proposed site. I wish to provide a flavour of what it is like to live in Elmdon and why this proposed development is unsuitable, impractical, unnecessary, and undesirable.

Elmdon is a very small village positioned miles away from the nearest settlement and is one of the most isolated villages in Essex. There are only three narrow roads in and out of the village all via steep hills.

The only gritted road out of the village is via Essex hill which provides access to the nearest railway station at Audley End five miles away. The road out of the village towards Cambridge Ickleton Road/ Quickset Road is not gritted beyond the turning to Hollow road which is opposite the proposed new access road to the proposed development. The main access / exit route towards Cambridge becomes impassable most years in winter conditions as it proceeds over a steep hill.

Ickleton road itself is a single-track road down most of its length due to resident parking. As this is an agricultural route often very large farm vehicles block the road.

There is currently only one paved footpath along Ickleton road through the village, which in places is uneven and extremely narrow. People pushing prams often must leave the path and progress on the road itself.

There are no paved paths out of the village to any of the nearest settlements four or five miles away. To walk out of the village, you would have to use the road itself or use rutted footpaths.

The nearest village is Ickleton and to walk it would take a very fit person one and a half hours. Great Chesterford station two hours. Audley end station two hours. The nearest shop is at Ickleton one and a half hours walk away along the road itself. Impossible and dangerous for those with mobility issues or the elderly.

There are no shops in the village at all. No public houses, schools, doctors not even street lighting. The only facilities in the village is the church (services once a month) and a very small archaic village hall.

There is no bus service to the village other than a small school service that leaves 7.30 am in the morning. Everybody drives, everybody has too. The proposed access to the new development comes out opposite to hollow road exactly where the school bus stops.

It is my belief that access and egress from the new site would be difficult and would increase pressure on an already unsuitable and dangerous rural road.

Because of the lack the of amenities in the village, poor infrastructure, and its isolated location every new resident in the proposed development would have to rely heavily on their vehicles to obtain all their staples and transport. Contrary to the statements included by the developers in the proposal.

Regarding the site itself.

As stated, I live opposite the proposed site. Ickleton Road is an ancient hollow road. To the north it cuts into the hill and is bounded by a ten-foot bank with a low hedge on top.

The first-floor level of my daughter's bedroom is approximately level to the top of the bank. From there the land rises quite considerably to form a hill or ridge which exceeds the top of my house. The proposed buildings on grange paddock only thirty yards away would look directly down into my daughter's bedroom and every other property to the south of Ickleton road.

Due to the topography of the land which slopes downwards south from Ickleton road any development built on grange paddock would be grossly out of scale and proportion in relation to the buildings to the south. They would loom over the existing settlement spoiling an open rural landscape.

Flooding

Despite what is written by the developers in the planning application statement. There is frequent flooding issues of rainwater flow off from grange paddock and the northern side of Ickleton road. Manor Row is particularly at risk and my neighbours and myself have experienced an ingress of flood water on several occasions. During heavy rainstorms the water flows off the hill onto Ickleton road, the drainage ditch and drain system gets blocked by alluvial deposits of silt and gravel and are overwhelmed causing flooding in Manor Row. Manor Row is directly opposite the site and is particularly vulnerable to the effects of it.

The drainage ditch has proved to be insufficient protection against flooding on several occasions and the residents of Ickleton road rely heavily on the current owners of Grange paddock who are required to dig out that ditch twice a year to keep it operational.

The planning document does not make it clear who inherits the full expense and the duty to maintain this vital drainage ditch when grange paddock changes ownership.

Nor does it state whose responsibility it is to maintain the long ancient and biodiverse hedge that forms the southern boundary of grange paddock. The application statement uses the existence of this hedge on several occasions to reduce the impact of scale on the surrounding landscape of their development but fails to provide a sufficient explanation on how this important facility it to be maintained in the future.

Unofficial footpath

The plans show on the site plan the existence of an “unofficial” footpath that runs from the site down towards Ickleton Road. Much is made in the statement of this access which links the site with the paved access to the rest of the village.

Let me make this clear. As a resident who has lived opposite this alleged path for twenty-six years I can categorically tell you that this path not only does not exist but I have never seen anybody walking on this portion of private land. It would be impossible to do so as the thick hedge mentioned above extends all the way down the road. If the intension was to create a pedestrian access path were shown much of the hedge and a portion of the drainage ditch would have to be removed first.

Frankly I am amazed that such a blatant misrepresentation could be included in an official planning application. And I trust that when the official planning officer surveys the site that this error among others in the planning document will be noted. As follows.

Comments on other errors in the planning document.

- 3.1 On a previous application by the owners planning permission on grange paddock was refused by Uttlesford District in 2018. The village was deemed at that instance as not suitable for development.
- 4.1 There are not any existing community facilities or services in the village to be enhanced by the development of a small estate. No street lights, shops, public houses, proper bus service. The centre of the village is devoid of any of these.
- 4.2 There will clearly be a massive impact upon the openness of the countryside by building a small estate on high ground overlooking the village. Especially as it is stated in the plan that the development will include street lighting where the rest of the village is unlit. It is self-evident that without any community facilities to enhance the balance of the proposal is weighted against the benefit of the community and will only result in the loss of top farmland and an open countryside.
- 4.4 The document mentions the 2005 local plan. However, the application documents do not make reference to the Elmdon Village Design statement adopted by Uttlesford District Council on 13 / 6 /2019, which should be used as a guideline for planning.
- 4.7 None of the two stated planning objectives will be met by this application. To provide benefits to the community by enhancing existing community services or facilities. None exist. Or provide low cost housing for the community. Any property built in this village would only be affordable to people with deep pockets. Sadly this is the current state of the local property market. The negatives of this proposal vastly outweigh the balance of benefit (none that I can think of) to our community.

- 4.8 No mention made of the Elmdon Village Design statement adopted by the council in 2019.
- 4.11. 4.14 The land in question may be outside the settlement but it is enclosed by the settlement on two sides and because of its elevated position overlooks and will be unproportionate to all the village within the rural landscape and dominates all. This will also be evident to the planning officer on his site visit.
- 4.17 Ickleton road could be classed as a sunken lane, especially in the context of Manor Row cottages where this description feels accurate.
- 4.18 Badgers have been seen using the woodland and the land along the southern boundary of the hedge as a foraging route. The paddock provides a foraging area for several important species of Bats, Barn and little Owl.
- 4.19 Ickleton road footpath is the only route exiting to the east of the village and is heavily used by the whole village and other walking groups as a recreation path. The road is heavily used by cycling clubs. The proposed site plans will overlook this closely being on high ground and therefore highly visible from many public footpaths including the Icknield way.
- Light pollution. Currently because of its lack of street lighting and its isolation in the landscape Elmdon is one of the few places in the countryside where light pollution levels are kept to a minimum. It is one of the facts that make Elmdon a special place to live. This new development overlooking the village which is stated to include street lighting (not found elsewhere in the village) would significantly and very visibly change this for ever.
- 4.25 On the south side of Ickleton road the proposed development is stated as enclosed by Horseshoe close and Elmcourt. However these small developments were purposely built on land which is on the same level or slightly downhill from existing properties and recesses in with the community and landscape in a proportionate way. This cant be said with this proposal which is highly visible, large disproportionate and dominates the landscape and existing houses including horseshoe close and Elm court.
- 4.29 Management of communal areas. There is no specific mention of the management of the vital drainage ditch and hedge along Ickleton road which is currently maintained by the existing landowner. The new pond proposed for the site to provide drainage will most certainly dry up during the summer forming an eyesore and create a danger to small children during the rest of the year. How will responsible maintenance be organised?
- 4.31 Street lighting. New lighting as stated would have a major impact on the character and atmosphere of the village.
- 4.32 Being a small village there is virtually no anti-social activities in the village despite being without street lighting.
- 4.38 I have already stated in detail how isolated this village, without shop or amenities which makes it unsuitable for development without creating an increased need for vehicular transport. Access to the village is difficult because of the local topography, unpaved distance to the nearest villages and due to a lack of public transport. Despite

the planning application erroneously stating that there is a public bus service to the village. The nearest supermarket is six miles away in Saffron Walden.

- 4.39 Policy GEN 1 (part e). To encourage movement by means other than by driving a car. As there are no services or community facilities in the village and due to its isolation from nearby services both topographical and distance the construction of a small estate of eighteen dwellings would facilitate none other than an increase in vehicular traffic. Nor could it be conceivably be stated that the construction of eighteen dwellings change the economic realities to stimulate the development of a shop or other facilities within the village that would forgo the need to drive.
- 4.40 Manuden is mentioned as a comparison to Elmdon where such an economic benefit developed after a similar application to build was awarded. Manuden is a significantly larger settlement with actual real existing services and community facilities. Such a comparison cannot be supported.
- 4.41 Ickleton road public footpath is barely sufficient for its existing traffic. There is no possible space available to widen it without the loss of road width.
- 4.71 There is no stated policy vacuum created by the absence of an up to date local plan. Once again, the planning application fails to mention the Elmdon Village Design statement adopted by Uttlesford district council in 2019. This document clearly states what is suitable and acceptable in our local community. There is nothing in this development proposal that meets the requirements of 2019 Elmdon Village Design statement.
- 4.75 Ecological issues. The development plan and associated proposed path to Ickleton road would mean the destruction of a section of ancient hedgerow and a number of trees. The Hedgerow has significant ecological advantages as it has a biological diversity of species that highlights its age and importance to local wildlife. Its destruction or failure to maintain it correctly would have a negative effect to the landscape in general. Furthermore, the construction of a paved surface crossing this site would disrupt the movement of badgers and Fallow deer observed crossing this area to the nearby set.

Other points to consider.

- Once a grade 2 greenfield site is lost it is lost for ever.
- The development of a small estate on high ground overlooking the village would Urbanise the very character of the village.
- The site is outside the village development limits.
- Any new housing should be restricted to brownfield sites with limited infills as stated in the Elmdon Village Design statement and be aimed at meeting the needs of the community. This proposal fails these tests.
- The approval of this development could set a very dangerous local precedent and encourage other local landowners to sell good agricultural land for housing development.

- Uttlesford district council is close to meeting its 5-year land supply target. There are other villages or areas that would be considered as more suitable for development. Elmdon has been considered as area unsuitable for development for obvious reasons.
- We also have only a small local school in a nearby village fifteen minutes' drive away which is already oversubscribed.

I appreciate your consideration of this letter of objection against the proposed development. We look forward to the visit of the Official Planning officer in order to view the site in a proper manner so that a clear and accurate picture of this proposed application can be obtained. So that a balanced and accurate decision can be made. Sadly I do not think that the mistakes noted in the application in its current form do not allow for this without a site visit to verify.

Yours Sincerely

J E Mears