

Application No. S62A/2025/0077 Land West of High Street, Stebbing

My name is Brian Martin and I wish to object to this application for the following reasons.

This application is simply a cynical attack on our Neighbourhood Plan. Our Parish Council, with others, spent considerable time, effort and money in producing this plan, which was approved by an overwhelming majority of people in the village, in response to a requirement from Central Government and is already being updated to keep it in line with current legislation. The Neighbourhood Plan provided certain areas for possible development, this area was NOT one of these, on the contrary it was declared a protected green space for the village. Having an open space between areas of development has long been seen as a requirement in linear villages to prevent ribbon development. This proposed development will be a desecration of a popular open green space and will remove one of the main characteristics of this village. If accepted, this green space will be lost forever.

I have been the footpaths representative for the parish of Stebbing ever since 2011 when I served as a Stebbing Parish Councillor between 2011 and 2018. I submit a written report on the condition of the PROWs in Stebbing and ongoing maintenance issues to the monthly Parish Council meetings.

The NPPF Section 8 paras. 103 - 108 emphasises the benefits to mental health of open space and from easy access to the peace and tranquillity of the countryside. To this end I am the leader of "Stebbing P3" group, namely the Stebbing Parish Paths Partnership, which is part of an initiative established by Essex County Council to facilitate access to the countryside and promote community involvement. Our group is made-up of volunteers living in Stebbing Parish and we are the group that maintain the footpaths and bridges referred to in this proposal.

Our PROW network is very varied since it takes in footpaths running through open pasture, meadow land, arable fields under cultivation and wet lands as well as some heavily treed/woodland areas. The terrain includes extensive footpaths running in the low-lying valley of Stebbing Brook but also covers footpaths on rising ground to the west and also to the east as well as bridle ways along the plateau high ground to the east. Walkers and cyclists using our PROW network take in a very varied country outlook but the routes do not proceed through built or developed areas.

The Planning Masterplan – All Plots shows Plot B directly adjacent to FP10 but the Proposed Landscape Masterplan shows Plot B close to FP10 but separated by a hedge – it would be interesting to know who will be responsible for ensuring that the hedge does not obstruct the PROW.

Our Parish Council make every effort to encourage people to make use of our green spaces and published an attractive Map of our PROW's (attached) which is made available free of charge to residents and visitors alike at Stebbing Community Stores. Of the 1500 printed in 2016, 1400 or so have already been taken up which is evidence of how popular walking (or cycling as appropriate) is within the Parish. The Parish Council also published, on the village website, 12 walks around Stebbing and neighbouring villages to encourage people to explore the countryside. These walks have been very popular and, at present, are being collated into a free booklet.

It is important to appreciate that these footpaths provide an open and green link which runs free of modern development and provide walkers with an experience of being able to walk in open countryside almost immediately they close their front door. This is not the case for residents in some villages where there are fewer footpaths actually starting in the centre of that village. For us, the open countryside experience when using these footpaths is immediate

– just a matter of yards for walkers setting out from their home or for visitors having parked their car in the High Street,

My comments on this application concern three footpaths, numbers 21 from Mill Lane Recreation Ground to Stebbing Park Drive, 10 from Stebbing Park Drive to Bran End via the water meadows and 12 from Stebbing Park Drive towards The Broadway. Each of these footpaths cross open grazing and pasture land, part of the attraction of these centuries old footpaths is that they remain traditional unsurfaced country footpaths passing through and along open fields and landscape which presently remains free of immediately surrounding development.

These footpaths also have the additional attraction of starting in the mediaeval core of the village but then a historical link is provided with the appreciation of a scheduled monument and listed buildings at Stebbing Park manor house complex, as well as passing through an incredibly attractive landscape with wonderful views. All of these characteristics are exceptional.

If the proposals are accepted, the experience of walking these footpaths would no longer be as wonderful and unspoiled as it is now, since they would end up adjacent to new housing. This proposed development would create a built-up environment for walkers to negotiate. No longer would the footpaths be passing through quiet historic pastureland, unspoiled by buildings and gardens. Instead, walkers would be heading through effectively suburbia made up of back gardens, fencing, washing lines and driveways and inevitably noise coming from play areas. For myself and for the other P3 volunteers, working in the open green space contributes enormously to our own physical and mental health and sense of well-being but not working next to a housing development.

Walkers on these footpaths would be directly overlooked by introduced suburban activity such as car washing, games playing and patio living, the latter of which will be inevitable, given the open decking design proposed. I do not imagine that any new residents will take kindly to being looked upon by walkers on these footpaths which would be located so close to their new homes. Given the experience of other properties adjacent to a footpath, I would be concerned about the amount of green waste and rubbish that would appear on the PROW. Also, I worry that all the open spaces referred to in this proposal will degenerate into the local off-road cycle track due to lack of respect and maintenance.

Apart from my views based on the experience of Stebbing P3 and our local walkers, if this development came about, I consider that Stebbing would no longer be as attractive a place for visitors to come and walk. Several visiting groups include in their walking destination/itinerary one main reason for their visit, namely the historical attractions of Stebbing e.g. St Mary's Church and the large number of listed buildings in the High Street and specifically, The Mount, which they all describe in their guides as the remains of a Norman castle. Their visits certainly benefit the local economy in that the visiting walkers frequent the White Hart pub and the Community Stores.

There is a sense of history that is appreciated by me (and I am sure others) when walking alongside The Mount and the ancient fish pond, which are located only a few yards away from footpath 21, they represent our mediaeval/Norman history and we are all proud to have such a magnificent man-made structure located actually within the heart of a historic village like ours. This proposal will do nothing but detract from one of the main characteristics of this village.

Extract of Stebbing village footpath map.

