



Settlement Boundary Review

Part of the evidence base for the new Local Plan, April 2017 Update

WBG03 – Consideration for development could also consider more comprehensive development together with WBG04.

WBG05 – Any development proposed on this site will need to have regard to Listed Buildings and potential access issues.

WBG07 - the site is not situated adjacent to the settlement boundary and would extend the boundary in a fashion which realistically would be likely to need to incorporate a larger area of land within the boundary. If any development were to be proposed in this area it will also be necessary to ensure that adequate protection from surface water flooding is in place as this site is at high risk from this type of flooding.

WBG10 – the site only just touches the settlement boundary. Amending the settlement boundary to include this site alone would require extending it in a fashion which realistically would be likely to need to incorporate a larger area of land within the boundary. The site is currently situated in open countryside and is currently farmed.

Summary

West Bergholt has been classified as a sustainable settlement and is capable of accommodating some additional growth without compromising the existing settlement shape. The broad area on the north eastern edge of the existing settlement encompasses land that would form logical amendments to the settlement boundary and has the potential to deliver an appropriate level of growth (approximately 120 dwellings); the sites for which will be determined by the Neighbourhood Plan within the broad area defined in the Local Plan.

West Mersea

Settlement shape and form

West Mersea is the larger of two settlements on Mersea Island, the other being the much smaller village/hamlet of East Mersea. West Mersea was originally formed around the harbour and nearby oyster pits to the south east of the island and has since expanded to the north and west. The shape of the settlement is concentrated within a well-defined and defensible northern boundary. The settlement boundary to the east is less well-defined and existing development is very loose knit.

High level constraints (at settlement level)

- Natural coastal boundary to the south and west of the town and sloping topography to the north west of the island deem expansion in those directions impossible or unlikely.
- Land to the north of the existing built up area is in a prominent location in the landscape and further development that extends beyond the existing development line would tend not to be appropriate.
- The estuarine and coastal areas of the island are covered by European wildlife designations, Special Protection Area and Special Area of Conservation

designations. These designations may be a constraining factor to settlement expansion especially when cumulative impact is taken account of.

- Additionally all of the undeveloped areas of the island are covered by the local Coastal Protection Belt designation. This also has the potential effect of constraining development if it impacts on the landscape character of the area.
- West Mersea is located a significant distance from the nearest train station (12km) and although bus services to Colchester are good, travel by car is necessary for most journeys.
- East Mersea is not considered suitable for future development other than infill and rural exception housing (should a need be demonstrated). Public transport is severely restricted, the area lacks foot and cycleways and there are few services and facilities. No sites are considered suitable for new residential development.

High level opportunities (at settlement level)

- There are opportunities to facilitate some logical expansion of the West Mersea settlement without compromising the existing character of the area. Expansion in appropriate locations is also likely to result in a more defensible boundary being formed.
- West Mersea is currently designated as a district settlement and as such has a high level of existing services to support its population and the surrounding rural areas south of the borough.
- The Mersea Island School has current capacity and is also capable of some expansion (as stated by the school in the Issues and Options consultation).

Parish council/neighbourhood plan group view

West Mersea Town Council (WMTC) submitted a representation to the Preferred Options consultation objecting to the two Mersea housing sites. The Town Council stated that West Mersea is a proud and unique community within the Colchester Borough, and whilst WMTC appreciates that Colchester has an obligation to build additional dwellings to house a growing national population the TC would contend that the areas shown for development in the Local Plan may be suitable for additional dwellings but only if all the issues raised are addressed in full. The Town Council urged CBC to consult further with WMTC and to take into full consideration the heart felt views of the local community. They indicated they would be pleased to work with CBC to find solutions that protect the unique environment in Mersea and that go in some way to providing more housing and local amenities to meet the growing and changing needs of the population.

Discussion on appropriate growth

- West Mersea currently has approximately 3,200 dwellings within its settlement. An additional 350 dwellings would therefore represent an approximate 11% increase in the existing housing stock. However, owing to the capacity of infrastructure a lower figure of 200 would be more appropriate.
- West Mersea is one of three district centres in the Borough and is a preferred location for some housing growth based on its existing infrastructure provision.

- The area for new development is limited by the environmental constraints outlined above.

Potential areas of search / settlement expansion following high level constraints and opportunities

Broad Area 1 - Expansion to the east of the settlement. This area includes three sites, MER18, MER20 and MER24. Although this area is covered by the Coastal Protection Belt (as all undeveloped areas of Mersea Island are) the current settlement shape does allow for some infill opportunities. Such infill would include MER18 and MER20 and to a lesser extent MER24. MER18 is the largest of the sites and also represents the best infill location because development could incorporate access from Cross Lane and Seaview Avenue as well as East Road. Furthermore Cross Lane represents a defensible boundary for the eastern edge of West Mersea. MER18 is capable of accommodating 100 new dwellings which could be phased over a longer period. MER20 has not been promoted and currently forms part of a private residential garden, furthermore it has little relation to MER18 being separated by hedgerow and it offers no highway access to the south of the site. MER20 is therefore not a logical or deliverable extension to the settlement boundary. MER24 is located further along East Road to MER18, also falling within the Coastal Protection Belt. Although MER24 could form an extension to the settlement boundary the capacity that could be achieved at MER18 would mean that extending farther east on to MER24 is not necessary and can therefore be discounted.

Broad Area 2 - Expansion to the north east of the settlement. This area contains MER02. The site is also covered by the Coastal Protection Belt but is free from other constraints. MER02 as submitted is a large site which if allocated in its entirety would extend West Mersea's northern boundary much further northwards than the rest of the existing settlement. For this reason only half of the site should be allocated to bring it level with residential areas to the west. The southern half of the site would accommodate 100 new dwellings.

Green/Amber SLAA sites (4)

• MER02	Dawes Lane, West Mersea	250	Amber
• MER18	Brierley Paddocks, East Rd, West Mersea	231	Amber
• MER20	Land north of Estuary Rd, West Mersea	20	Amber
• MER24	East Rd, West Mersea	48	Amber

All other sites/broad locations were not considered suitable or scored a red RAG rating and have not been assessed.

SLAA sites to recommend as potential allocations

MER02 (in part) – 100 dwellings could be accommodated in the southern part of the site nearest East Road which is considered suitable for development with the remainder of the site delivering open space and associated benefits to the community.

Safe access will need to be agreed with the Highways Authority. There will also be a need to undertake a pre-determination archaeological evaluation with an agreed mitigation strategy as necessary. The design, layout and landscaping of any proposed development will need to minimise the impact on the surrounding landscape, protecting the character of the area and the Coastal Protection Belt.

MER18 – has the potential to deliver 100 dwellings across the entire site. Because of the scale of the site it may be more suitable for only part of the site to be brought forward for development during the plan period. Safe access will need to be agreed with the Highways Authority. In addition it will be necessary to ensure that safe pedestrian access is provided and opportunities to enhance connectivity between the site and West Mersea centre are secured. Development on this site will also be required to deliver necessary improvements to community infrastructure.

Allocation of the two sites will be dependent on there being adequate infrastructure which includes primary school capacity. Contributions to improve capacity may be required. It will be necessary to ensure that the cumulative impacts of proposed development on the European designated wildlife sites is adequately considered and mitigation agreed and managed if required.

SLAA sites to discount

- MER20 – the site has not been promoted for development and would not provide a logical extension due to a lack of highways access at this end of the site and further development beyond the two preferred sites identified is not necessary.
- MER24 – the site does not represent the most logical extension of the town and there are issues regarding highways access. Given the capacity that could be achieved at MER02 and MER18, it is not necessary to allocate additional land at this site.

Summary

West Mersea is heavily constrained by its coastal boundaries and the associated wildlife and landscape designations that come with an estuarine location. Future expansion is only really possible to the east of the town where previous development has left some opportunities to expand the settlement boundary. Overall the town is well served by infrastructure and there is an active community in the town providing many services to residents. The capacity at the local primary school and the option to expand is an advantage. Distance to secondary schools and train stations are the most significant issues affecting growth in the settlement but the frequent bus routes which service the town mitigate these issues to some degree.

West Mersea Town Council have decided to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan and the area has been designated. The two suitable sites referred to above will be allocated in the Local Plan because of the advanced stage it has reached, but details regarding the allocations will be made in the Neighbourhood Plan.