



Colchester Civic Society



While we appreciate the considerable undertaking involved in producing The Borough's Local Plan, the Society's response must necessarily be negative. To quote from the Chairman's recent response to Mr Abbs in the Standard, February 13th,

“Significant changes to planning legislation will make it increasingly difficult for groups and individuals to influence future development.”

The clarification of the Duty to Cooperate makes it clear that even if an option is the one with most public support, it will not necessarily be the one with which the Council will be able to proceed. Options 1a and 1b are most likely to satisfy the duty to cooperate.

Viability plays a significant role in policy-making; this also makes it unlikely that any public opposition to a planned development would weigh very heavily against the competitive returns to a willing landowner and a willing developer. This makes it seem very unlikely also that the need for affordable housing can realistically be met.

The possible changes to settlement boundaries now seen as necessary will surely make it difficult to prevent coalescence of villages and to protect strategic “green gaps”. The countryside will therefore be threatened by the need to build on greenfield sites, and the Borough's aspiration to protect biodiversity cannot presumably be achieved if they have a duty to cooperate with the Government's proposal for “biodiversity offsetting.”

Sustainable transport and accessibility would incur a surely unviable expenditure on the provision of a network of safe cycle paths. The provision of bus services frequent enough and comprehensive enough to attract enough regular users to make them profitable will depend on commercial providers being willing to undertake the financial risks involved. The cooperation of Essex County Highways will be required to ensure that the proposed network of footpaths and footways is maintained to a sufficient standard to encourage pedestrian use.

We realise that the Borough Council may have the same aspirations for Colchester as the Society's members, they will now be even more constrained by the Duty to cooperate, and the associated financial considerations.

Elisabeth Baines
Chair, Colchester Civic Society