

LAYER DE LA HAYE PARISH COUNCIL RESPONSE TO 'ISSUES AND OPTIONS' CONSULTATION

Q2 Do you agree with the scope of the evidence base set out under the heading '*What Information will be used to inform the Plan?*', is there anything that you think is missing from the list, or that you think is not needed?

The SHMA seems to be the key document for establishing projected growth and its conclusions are going to have a major impact on the Borough for the next 20+ years. We are not qualified to assess the quality of the research – the document appears thorough and well-presented - but in our opinion, something with such a major impact on many thousands of residents for the next 20 years should not depend on just one piece of research. What corroborative sources are there?

We realise that the Borough needs to start somewhere, and basing future needs on the past five years is one approach. But as a Parish Council we do challenge the automatic assumption that because the need may be there, it must therefore be met, whatever the cost to existing residents. Many residents feel that the way of life they value in and around Colchester is being lost as the Borough continues to grow; the SHMA suggests that many people want to live in and around the Borough because they like the lifestyle offered – but why should this be delivered at the expense of those who already live here?

Q8. (Housing) Have the correct issues been identified, are there any missing?

We concur with the need stated of ensuring “housing of different types and sizes to cater for the full range of ages and needs”. Our experience is that the open market does not deliver this. All too often, bungalows and small properties are bought by builders and replaced by bigger dwellings. In our opinion, this need for a mix of properties needs to be enforced by the Borough and not left to economic open market drivers.

Q11. (Employment) Have the correct issues been identified, are there any missing?

We concur with the need stated of ensuring “a retail hierarchy which safeguards the pre-eminence of the Town Centre while supporting appropriate levels of growth in other areas ... policies for the Town Centre that help to create a balanced mix of activities in the daytime, evening and night time.”

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Q14. (Rural Colchester) Have the correct issues been identified, are there any missing?

We agree with issues (w), (x) and (y).

Issue (z) about defining settlement boundaries is more complex. Who determines whether something is “adversely impacting on the character of the villages/hamlets and surrounding countryside”? Our residents tell us that they do not wish to see the village envelope enlarged since they believe that it would “adversely impact” the place where they live. Therefore while we agree that the principle behind issue (z) must be correct, as written it is too open-ended and we cannot therefore support it.

Q20 (Sustainable Transport and Accessibility) Have the correct issues been identified, are there any missing?

We strongly agree that key issue (gg) is important – “Managing congestion and minimising the impact of traffic on our communities.” Our residents are of the opinion that the road infrastructure in and around Layer de la Haye cannot accommodate any significant increase in traffic as a potential consequence of enlarging the village. For example, at peak times there are already long queues to get from Layer into Colchester at the Kent Blaxill roundabouts, largely induced we believe by increased traffic from the Garrison developments. Roads within the village are also heavily used, especially at peak times and there are regular issues to do with congestion near the school at drop-off and pick-up times.

Q29 (Growth Options) Which option do you think would form the most appropriate strategy for the growth of the Borough and why?

Options 3A and 3B include expansion of Colchester Town. We do not believe this is realistic given the existing congestion and shortage of infrastructure in the Town.

Feedback from a recent Open Meeting and discussions within the Parish Council show that there is support for Options 1A and 2A. If growth is inevitable, it seems sensible to create additional housing in new self-contained settlement areas where space exists and appropriate infrastructure either already exists or can easily be created.

Options 1B and 2B include “a proportion of growth of the Borough’s villages”. We (and our residents) are very wary of this if it were to include adoption of the 5 sites in Layer de la Haye put forward by landowners as part of the Call for Sites. We realise that at this stage there is nothing definite about these, but at a recent public meeting held in the village to discuss the Local Plan Review and the Call for Sites, it is clear that there is very strong opinion against any major increase in the size of the village.

Our residents’ overall view is that the organic growth seen over the past 10 or so years which has seen a steady increase of several new dwellings per annum, is all that is desirable and achievable.

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Reasons why additional growth over and above this is not welcome include:

- Additional traffic on roads that cannot cope with extra volume: into and out of the village is already congested (see Q20). Local access to the obvious potential major development sites in The Folley would either be through the existing estate, thus turning cul de sacs and quiet roads into busy roads, or via The Folley itself, which is narrow, bumpy and has no pavement or street lighting.
- The Primary School is already full and over-subscribed
- Any likely major development, including additional housing in The Folley area, would remove precious green space at the heart of the village and result in a significant loss of rural amenity
- The Doctor's surgery is already over-subscribed

The potential Folley developments are quoted here because they have been raised by the Call for Sites and are therefore foremost in residents' minds, but similar arguments would probably apply to other likely major developments in the village.

We, and our residents, recognise that there is the possibility of planning gain for the village if major development should occur. However, there is some scepticism about the extent to which we would really benefit, especially around delivery of infrastructure improvements.

An RCCE housing needs survey carried out in 2010 identified a need for 8 units of small affordable homes in the village. Many residents do acknowledge and support the need for 'affordable homes', using the term generally to mean accommodation for such needs as starter homes for new families and for elderly people downsizing as well as social housing.

There would be more support for modest-scale developments if residents could be completely confident that affordable housing would be included. In our opinion, there is likely to be a better chance of achieving this through seeking very occasional permission for exception sites outside the current village envelope rather than accepting a de facto expansion of the village envelope. There is no support from our residents or the Parish Council for any enlargement of the village envelope.

We do not therefore support Option 1B or 2B.