

COLCHESTER BOROUGH COUNCIL

EMERGING LOCAL PLAN

ENV 1 / ENV2 / SS12b

COAST ROAD , WEST MERSEA

HOUSEBOATS

A :The Marsh

Coast Road is in the West Mersea Conservation Area .

The Marsh on the coast side of Coast Road is an SSSI , an MCZ and a Ramsar site .

In addition to the terms of ENV 1 and ENV 2 the background to them in “ Coastal Areas ” states :-

- “... the coastal area of Colchester Borough is an extremely rich, diverse and irreplaceable natural asset ... ” (13.15)
- “ ... the coastal belt ...include(s)internationally important habitats ...” (13.16)
- “ The Coastal Protection Belt has a unique and irreplaceable character which should be strongly protected and enhanced . ” (13.19)

In short , the Marsh is a vitally important Conservation Area .

It could be said that there has been inadequate attention in previous plans to giving the Marsh the appropriate protections . Planning issues / Enforcement proceedings in the past 2 or 3 years have highlighted this failure.

It should be noted that the Marsh is a living thing which changes over time (e.g. vegetation growing in creeks) and what may have been permissible in the past, particularly before it became a conservation area , may no longer be appropriate .

It is our duty to protect the Marsh for future generations who would not forgive us if we wasted this opportunity

Given the above the whole plan (including in particular the section dealing with houseboats in SS12b) needs a total rethink and greater precision. In particular , the following issues need to be addressed ;-

1 : SEWAGE :

The plan completely fails to address the fact that raw sewage is pumped from Houseboats on to the Marsh close to where swimmers and other water sports participants use the river all year round . This needs to be dealt with .

2 : LOCATION / MOORINGS:

The plan completely fails to address important issues such as :-

- (a) Any replacement Houseboat needs to be in the same position as the existing Houseboat , generally in a creek or on the mud .
- (b) Apparently a s106 Agreement specifies the location and maximum number (8) of Houseboats on the eastern section of the Marsh .
- (c) New Houseboat locations should not be permitted on the western section of the Marsh . The locations of existing Houseboats in the western section are plain to see . In particular between the eastern edge of West Mersea Marine and the Gypsy Rose walkway there have not been any Houseboats in locations other than the current ones for many , many years , if ever .

The plan needs amendment to make these points clear .

3 :SIZE :

The plan fails to (but must) address the issue of size . Generally a Houseboat should be no larger than the one it is replacing .Subject to that , there needs to be a maximum length / beam / height and square meterage of both the whole vessel and living area . It should be noted that there are 2 converted barges on the Marsh with footprints of approx. 140 and 170 square meters respectively and estimated living areas of approx. 100 square meters (over the 2 decks) as against the UK average house size of about 83 square meters .

4 :DESIGN / DEFINITION OF A HOUSEBOAT:

The plan completely fails to address this issue .It needs to be amended so as to address it . Houseboats need to be something which ordinary people would accept as a traditional Houseboat and of a design befitting the Marsh and Mersea's maritime heritage .The wording in the draft Neighbourhood Plan in this respect would be a good starting point .

5 :PARKING :

The plan fails to address parking issues . Parts of the Marsh appear to have been covered in hardcore / wooden standings for parking . A parking area policy taking account of the importance of the Marsh needs to be put in place

OTHER CONSTRUCTIONS ;

The plan needs to ensure that only appropriate 'other constructions' (eg suitably designed and constructed walkways) are put on the Marsh with other things (eg sheds) being banned .

B :ADDITIONAL COMMENTS RE COAST ROAD :

Any changes of use on either side of Coast Road need to be in keeping with Mersea's traditional maritime heritage. Amusement arcades etc should be expressly prohibited .

