**Outline objection to the Croudace planning appeal**

My principal objections to the Croudace plans remain:

* The failure to review them in the context of the overall development of the RO3 site as designated in the Local Development Plan.
* The partial and thus very poor road safety assessments, both on Chelmsford Road and Alexander Lane.
* The failure to deliver the community benefits required by the LDP, a serious shortcoming that requires a fresh consultation as it is such a major deviation from the LDP.

Now we have seen all four major applications – and are still waiting a fifth from William Thompson Homes for the development of the Alexander House site – we can see that considering them in this piecemeal fashion is a serious error. It prevents any adequate consideration of the interaction between the sites, especially in terms of traffic, cycling and walking, and also the combined impact on biodiversity and drainage.

I believe it has also prevented many of the statutory consultees, especially those from health and social services, submitting a proper overview of the impact of the whole RO3 development. This will inevitably lead to some major shortcomings in terms of the necessary expansion of the many services that will be needed to support what will be well over 2000 new residents of North Shenfield.

**Travel and road safety**

When it comes to transport, road safety and travel assessments the application falls far short of what we expect and deserve if we are to get this important development right.

Nowhere is there any acknowledgment of the Hutton FC site on the opposite side of Chelmsford Road. None of the maps submitted, even in the few weeks immediately prior to it going to the Planning Committee, showed this, let alone made any assessment of how the entrance to the ground will interact with the proposed roundabout on Chelmsford Road just over a few hundred metres away. This is a serious oversight and must be rectified by the developers and Essex Highways before any plans are approved.

Second, there is no account taken of the pending application from William Thompson Homes for the Alexander House site on the bend at the bottom of Alexander Lane. This will require a third road entering the very constricted Alexander Lane. Despite this site being shown within the blue boundary of the overall development it is completely ignored by the Masterplan. Why? How can any decisions be made without understanding its impact?

When the application from Stonebond was considered by the Planning Committee, the dangers created by the proposed configuration of junctions on the narrow Alexander Lane, very near to a bend that is effectively blind for vehicles travelling in both directions, were explained in detail.

The developers – both Croudace and Stonebond – sustainable transport plans highlight the problems with Alexander Lane. The suggestion that it can be widened is just not achievable. The expectation that it might be partially closed (at the top end near Chelmsford Road) is little more than wishful thinking at this stage. Neither developer has made any formal submission for the road to be closed. The application cannot proceed until that is resolved and the implications for the flow of vehicles properly assessed once a decision has been reached. Another very sound reason for sending it back to the drawing board.

If all the sites were considered together, the overwhelming logic of providing a single road out of the Stonebond and Croudace sites would be obvious to everyone.

Provision of safe walking and cycling are key requirements of the Local Development Plan. This application does not meet those. There is no cycle route from the site and no safe walking route.

No consideration has been given to pedestrian and cycle safety. The pavement – where it exists – on Alexander Lane is not wide enough for safe use by the pedestrians who want to walk into Shenfield. In places it only runs alongside one side of the road and it barely 0.5

People in wheelchairs and with prams, buggies and shopping baskets are already forced into the road. This needs a complete rethink and until that happens an application that either forces people into cars for short journeys or asks them to risk life and limb negotiating an inadequate footpath, perhaps with young children should not be approved.

The developers are all over the place in knowing how to respond. The ill-thought through proposal for a cycle path down Hunter Avenue is just more evidence of the failure to come up with safe, deliverable answers. It needs a period of reflection and review to solve these problems.

There are solutions but they require imagination and, crucially, collaboration between the developers, residents and councillors, something that has been sadly lacking from the start of the creation of the plans for North Shenfield.

**Care home and community benefits**

The RO3 plan promised three major community benefits, a school, a care home and employment land. Two of those were promised for this site. The care home has been bounced onto the Countrywide site and the employment land proposed there ditched completely. We have been offered nothing in its place.

The care home has gone, allegedly because of flooding issues. But these were known about all along, right from the consultation on the local plan ten years ago, so that is a feeble excuse.

However, the NHS do not want a care home, Essex social services do not want a care home. They want more imaginative healthcare solutions. This includes providing a multi-function community centre where fitness and wellness classes and vaccination sessions can be delivered. The Chelmsford Road Area Residents Association wants a community centre. Yet, these requests have been completely ignored by the applicants.

Instead, they point us to the Community Hub. This is a single tree, perhaps with a bench round it. A tree for a development with over 2000 new residents, joining the several hundred who already live at the end of Shenfield. It is an insulting proposal.

With many people on this site living over 45 minutes – not 20 minutes as the developers keep claiming – walk away from any shops or cafes, a community facility is essential. Without it this will be a soulless car dependent housing estate rooted in the mistakes of past developments.

This is the most serious flaw and the main reason why the whole RO3 development needs to be put back out to public consultation is the major deficit in community benefits.

There are meant to be three community benefits: a primary school, the care home and two hectares of employment land.

We are now being offered barely one and a quarter community benefits, in place of the three required by the LDP.

The school site is in the local plan at 2.1 hectares and that is what was originally proposed. However, in order to meet the education authority’s requirement for a buffer zone between the end of the residents’ gardens and the school, the developers have merely chosen to slice off a proportion of the site instead of moving it further into the meadow. Essex County Council have not confirmed this reduced site is acceptable. Indeed, with the prospect of further development at the bottom of the RO3 site, maybe a larger school site is required.

The deal between Croudace and Countrywide to bounce the care home from a position at the back of Officers’ Meadow, a pleasant location that would have been acceptable for a care home – notwithstanding that health and social services want assisted living accommodation and not a care home – to a polluted site wedged between the A12 and A1023 and ditch the employment land further reduces the community benefit.

In the Countrywide plans, the care home takes up less than one hectare. So, not only have they made a major change to the LDP without any consultation, they have further reduced the provision of land for community benefits.

Although not directly relevant to the Croudace plans, the assertion that there is no demand for employment land in the RO3 site is based on very flimsy evidence. When the one commercial site – the former MOT garage – came on the market it was snapped up very quickly at the asking price by a kitchen showroom business. This shows there is demand.

The employment land was not properly marketed. Indeed, it appears to have been marketed at a time and in a manner to a very limited range of businesses that was almost designed to receive a negative response.

There are many imaginative ways of delivering the employment land, some of which should be on the Croudace site as compensation for not providing the care home required by the local plan. There is an obvious need for a café, a modest local shop, as well as a community facility that could be used to provide a nursery, and space for the NHS to deliver the well-being, vaccination and other preventative health sessions they want to be able to provide to the new and existing residents of North Shenfield.

With a community facility we can start to build a modern, vibrant community.

We want the developers to join us in that mission. This should be done through a fresh consultation on a revised RO3 proposal that reflects the major changes being proposed through these piecemeal applications and the substantial deviation from the local plan they represent.

***Cllr David Worsfold***

23 December 2024