



Chairman Cllr Jim Devlin

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Dear Matthew

Further to the Infrastructure, Growth and Development Committee meeting held on the 7<sup>th</sup> December 2017 the Town Council would like to express concern at the following decision made by the Committee: *(And the subsequent inclusion in the draft local plan March 2018 of the route through Frithwood).*

- *'To progress the alternative option detailed in the Agenda report in respect of sites H20-23 with the recommended option held as a 'fall- back' position if the biodiversity impacts are significant and cannot be overcome in order to allow the Local Plan to progress in accordance with the Local Development Scheme.'* **(from the minutes of the meeting of the 7th December)**

As the committee was made aware by its own Planning Officers, this option will require the loss of part of Frith Wood which is an **ancient woodland**. They should also have been aware that it will cut through a Bridle Way and a **Priority Habitat Area** at Wiggins Lane. In any event, either route would be damaging to a valuable community asset.

Whilst the decision was made to destroy part of an Ancient Woodland in Billericay, land at H18: South of London Road Wickford, which in the Council's own Housing Topic Paper recognises *'there are no known historic/archaeological features of concern on the site'* was removed from the plan 'due to concerns in respects of encroachment and impact on landscape' which does not appear to be a consistent approach.

National Planning Policies and Standing Advice are very clear that the impacts on Ancient Woodland cannot be 'overcome' because it is an irreplaceable habitat and the Town Council is concerned that this option will be progressed in the plan through pre-submission consultation and possible submission to the Planning Inspectorate before the biodiversity testing can be completed.

The route for the relief road was not the recommendation of the Planning Officers but an alternative promoted by developers who were invited to speak during the meeting. A decision to destroy part of an Ancient Woodland and a priority habitat area to build a road is contrary to National Policy and Standing Advice:

- *'You and the developer should identify ways to avoid negative effects on ancient woodland or veteran trees, such as selecting an alternative site for development or redesigning the scheme'*  
**Standing Advice (material planning consideration) from Natural England and the Forestry Commission<sup>1</sup>**
- *'...planning policies should promote the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats.....'*  
**National Planning Framework (NPPF), paragraph 117.<sup>2</sup> (see also, paragraphs 110, 114 and 118)**
- *'Ancient woodland and aged or veteran trees are irreplaceable habitat and we consider it important that national policy reflects the need to protect them.'*  
**Department of Communities and Local Government, 2017, Fixing our Broken Housing Market, pp77-78<sup>3</sup>**

The Town Council would also like to draw your attention to the weight given to the ancient woodland in the HLDF report for SW Billericay:

- *'Several options for the south west relief road were considered: Alignment in a distance from the town, using the northern portion of the Golf Club; **this was deemed unsuitable due to its (i) impact on ancient woodland; (ii) limited effect on local traffic (loss of 'attraction' function) and (iii) construction cost.***  
**Pell Frischman, 2017, Draft Billericay High Level Development Framework, p51**

Whilst the Town Council notes that the decision made on the 7<sup>th</sup> December is subject to ecological testing, removing part of an Ancient Woodland **will** be damaging to it. It would also not be satisfactory to claim that that part of the wood does not contain veteran trees or that it is in a poor condition:

- *'Wooded continuously' doesn't mean there's been a continuous tree cover across the whole site. Not all trees in the woodland have to be old. Open space, both temporary and permanent, is an important component of ancient woodlands.....*
- *'Ancient woodland or veteran trees are irreplaceable, so you should not consider proposed compensation measures as part of your assessment of the benefits of the development proposal.*
- *You should not take account of the existing condition of ancient woodland (if this is poor) as a factor in favour of the development proposal, because you can usually improve its condition with good management proposals.'*  
**Standing Advice (material planning consideration) from Natural England and the Forestry Commission<sup>1</sup>**

This decision, and the HLDF for SW Billericay as a whole ignores recommendations in the Greenbelt Study 2015 and Landscape Appraisals 2015<sup>4</sup> that some of these areas, including for the additional 300 houses, are **NOT** recommended for development as they contribute to the purposes of the greenbelt and/or have a low landscape capacity for development. The relevant excerpts from the landscape appraisals have been attached for your information.

In the event that a satisfactory route for the relief route can't be found there is the opportunity to reduce housing in this area due to environmental and highways constraints. During the meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2017 the committee removed the following sites against the recommendations of the Planning Officers for arguably less tenable reasons:

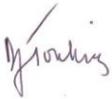
- *'Members considered both the recommended and alternative options for site H10. On balance, the alternative option was preferred, with protection for the remainder of the site for the whole Plan period inserted by the Chairman.' **This effectively removed 2000 homes from the plan.***

- *'To agree the recommendation for site H13 as presented in the Agenda report, but reducing the number of homes from 2,500 to 2,000, and excluding the site to the east of Pound Lane shown as being able to accommodate 528 homes to mitigate the over development of the area.'*
- *'H18 Land South of London Road, Wickford: 5ha allocated for 180 homes. Not to include this site in the Publication Local Plan, due to the concerns in respects of encroachment and impact on landscape.'*  
*(Taken from minutes of the Infrastructure, Growth and Development Committee, 7th December 2017).*

Frith Wood and its surrounding area is a valuable community asset, it is highly accessible and contributes to Billericay's landscape and heritage character. The wildlife of the wood ranges across nearby fields and hedges and building in its vicinity will bring harm to the wood as is described by the Woodland Trust:<sup>5</sup>

In conclusion the options for sites H20-23 (now H18) appears to go against all current advice and legislation as well as recommendations from the Council's own planning officers. The Town Council are keen to hear your comments regarding our concerns and would appreciate a response at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely



Town Clerk

**cc. Cllr Linda Allport-Hodge – Chairman of Infrastructure, Growth and Development Committee**

Appendices:

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ancient-woodland-and-veteran-trees-protection-surveys-licences>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf)

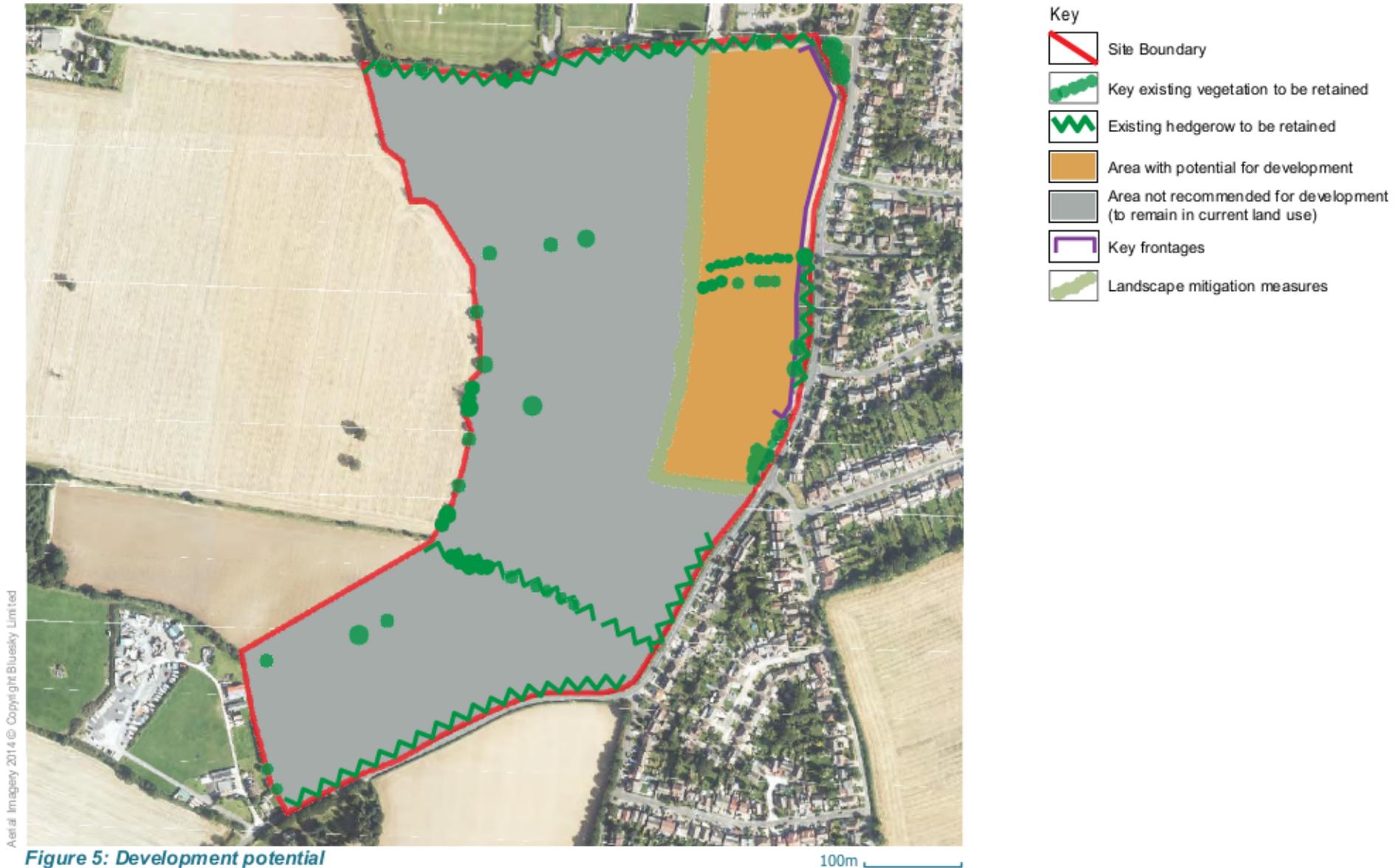
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fixing-our-broken-housing-market>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.basildon.gov.uk/article/4948/Evidence-Base---Landscape-and-Green-Belt>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/2017/09/planning-for-ancient-woodland/>

# Site 5

## Land at Kingsmans Farm, Billericay





- Key**
-  Site Boundary
  -  Key existing vegetation to be retained
  -  Existing hedgerow to be retained
  -  Existing public footpath
  -  Existing public bridleway
  -  Area with potential for development
  -  Area not recommended for development (to remain in current land use)
  -  Area not recommended for development (suitable for open landscape uses)
  -  Key connections
  -  Key frontages
  -  Landscape mitigation measures

Aerial Imagery 2014 © Copyright Bluesky Limited

**Figure 5: Development potential**

100m 

## Land west of Mountnessing Road, North of London Road and South of the railway line, Billericay



Aerial Imagery 2014 © Copyright Bluesky Limited

Figure 5: Development potential

100m 