

WEST HORNDON PARISH COUNCIL

WEST HORNDON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL

Executive Summary

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is a mechanism for considering and communicating the likely effects of an emerging plan, and alternatives, with a view to avoiding and mitigating adverse effects and maximising the positives. At this early stage of the Neighbourhood Plan we have appraised different growth scenarios for the village.

1.2 Government planning practice guidance states there is no legal requirement for a neighbourhood plan to have a sustainability appraisal as set out in section 19 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. However, a qualifying body must demonstrate how its plan or order will contribute to achieving sustainable development. It also states that a sustainability appraisal may be a useful approach for doing this and the guidance on sustainability appraisal of Local Plans should be referred to.

1.3 This executive summary explains purpose of the document, the importance of sustainability testing at neighbourhood level, the purpose of the appraisal, and method by which we have tested different growth scenarios for the village. It then summarises the findings of the SA.

2.0 The Parish of West Horndon

2.1 The SA sets out the characteristics of the Parish generally and the village of West Horndon. This process highlights the issues to be dealt with in moving forward with a Neighbourhood Plan, and arriving at sustainability objectives.

2.2 Taking a snapshot of the community and the way it functions, West Horndon is a small Green Belt village of only c.1800 people, with a very limited range of amenities and facilities. It has few shops, no secondary school (either in the parish itself, or within walking distance), and is remote from the larger centres of Brentwood, Basildon and Upminster. The primary school is at full capacity. The doctors' surgery is close if not at capacity with delays to see a doctor. There is an infrequent and narrow bus service. A railway station provides a commuter route into

London, but has limited additional capacity. The railway does not cater for the important local journeys, such as to Brentwood. The station car park already struggles, with many cars parking in the village. Many of the roads and junctions in the area are at full capacity.

2.3 A key issue for West Horndon is whether it is appropriate that it becomes a focus for growth within the Borough's emerging Local Development Plan. West Horndon Parish Council fully appreciate that there is a need for housing land over the period 2015-30, and that very difficult and politically sensitive choices have to be made. New housing can be a catalyst to plan responsibly for the future of the village, with a simple objective in mind; to ensure that West Horndon is an attractive and sustainable place to live. The SA is part of that process.

2.4 The appraisal identifies a vision for the future of the village, providing an underlying principle for testing the growth options. The vision is worded as follows:-

“Maintain and enhance the village character and rural setting whilst permitting sustainable growth that is in line with the needs and wishes of the community”

3.0 Sustainability and the Neighbourhood Plan

3.1 Most people's daily lives revolve around their neighbourhood. A neighbourhood's sustainability reflects both individual behaviour, such as walking and cycling, and the built environment that links people together locally and with the wider region.

3.2 Improving sustainability at a neighbourhood level contributes to more sustainable environments at a wider scale. Equally, the sustainability of a house depends partly on the built environment of the neighbourhood in which it is located. Getting neighbourhoods right is therefore important both for the people who live in them and the resources they consume.

3.3 Sustainable development seeks to ensure a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come. It focuses on the consideration of the long-term environmental, social and economic issues and impacts in an integrated and balanced way.

3.4 The NPPF requires an integrated approach to the provision of housing with accessible local services, or provide a high quality built environment. Sustainability appraisals are a tool to help ensure that this is the case. Creating a sustainability appraisal is an iterative process and can be up-dated to respond to new planning documents as they are prepared. The position will therefore be reviewed as other documents are brought forward.

4.0 The Purpose of the Appraisal

4.1 National Planning Guidance states that the purpose of a Sustainability Appraisal should be to “To promote sustainable development through better integration of sustainability considerations in the preparation of plans”. This is particularly relevant for West Horndon Parish Council given that they have declared an intention to produce a Neighbourhood Plan. Under Section 19(5) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, plans must be subject to a sustainability appraisal throughout their production, ensuring that they are fully consistent with and help to implement the principles of sustainable development.

4.2 The Neighbourhood Plan is still at an early stage. We have been unable to make progress whilst waiting for a strategic context to be provided by a local plan. The appraisal at this stage has looked at different growth scenarios and the assessed the sustainability considerations for each in turn.

4.3 The early stage of the local plan from 2013 had suggested that the village could be a strategic location for expansive housing growth of up to some 3,000 houses. The draft plan as now published has however concluded that such growth would be disproportionate in relation to the size of West Horndon. Proposals have been scaled down. The growth scenarios that we have suggested cover both ends of the spectrum.

5.0 The Methodology

5.1 The appraisal follows the same process as recommended in the government planning advice for local plans. It establishes the baseline information and policy context, it then sets out substantiality objectives, with reference to the three dimensions of sustainable development as set out in the NPPF. These being social, environmental, and economic. It therefore follows logical steps, is well informed, and provides a sound basis for testing growth options.

5.2 The framework is as follows:-

Economic

- Thriving economically - access to a range of local job opportunities
- Prosperous - maintain/grow workforce

Environmental

- Reducing fossil fuel consumption/adapting to climate change
- Protecting environmental assets - landscape/ecology
- Preventing urban sprawl - Green Belt / greenfield
- Protection of residential amenities

Social

- Provision for education and health care
- Quality of life - decent and affordable homes available for all
- Vibrant centres - reasonable access to services appropriate to that centre
- Access to a range of recreational and social facilities
- Sense of community and belonging

5.3 Different growth options have been set according to levels of housing provision within the Parish boundary. These are:-

Scenario 1 – No Growth. This assumes no growth, no investment in infrastructure or facilities, and a failure also to meet the NP objectives.

Scenario 2 – Controlled Growth. A second scenario would envisage controlled growth in the form of redeveloping the industrial area to provide 400 houses. It would also realise the vision and objectives as set out above in Section 4 above.

Scenario 3 – Proportional Growth. This would be LDP2 housing need scaled to the size of West Horndon. As set out in paragraph 3.4 above, the village would take their share of the housing demand in proportion to the existing number of households. Applied to West Horndon, if there are some 700 households, of the some 30,600 in the Borough, this represents around 2.28% of the total. Applied to the higher figure of 5,500 dwellings for the plan period, this would translate into a West Horndon requirement of 125 dwellings.

Scenario 4 – Controlled Growth along with 1 strategic site. This would be as Scenario 2 above but with the addition of a further site such as could be provided by way of redeveloping the Timmermans Nursery. This could add up to another 40 dwellings to the total to be provided within the Parish.

Scenario 5 – Expansive Growth. This would involve housing growth greater than any of the above scenarios.

5.4 The testing process has used a “traffic light” system. This is a methodology used in the Building for Life document, a government-endorsed industry standard for well-designed homes and neighbourhoods. Local communities, local authorities and developers have been encouraged to use it to guide discussions about creating good places to live. **Appendix 4** of the SA explains the assessment process in more detail, how we have adapted the “traffic light” system to our needs, and how we have sought to be objective in applying scores. The ratings used are:-

Red: The scenario fails to meet the criterion.

Amber: The scenario partially meets the criterion.

Green: The scenario fully meets the criterion.

6.0 The Findings of the Appraisal

6.1 In the first instance the work on the appraisal has provided important evidence in terms of a database for West Horndon. It has carefully assessed the character and function of the village as a community, residential, and employment centre. Whether a scenario meets the sustainability objectives requires detailed planning considerations. We have referred to these as the “main indicators”, set out in Appendix 4 of the SA, under the headings of transport, education, Green Belt, health, employment, housing, shopping, residential amenity, flooding, accessible green spaces, ecology, and community. They sit behind and inform the sustainability tests.

6.2 Section 7 of the SA has assessed a range of growth scenarios and provided a commentary on the how each scores more reds, greens, or ambers. Looking at the two ends of a growth spectrum, it is clear that Scenario 1 (No growth) would be beneficial in terms of protecting the Green Belt and preventing coalescence. It would also maintain the existing village character and its setting. It would not however provide for any real development of community spirit and investment in infrastructure and facilities.

6.3 Scenario 5 looks at expansive growth, defined as being greater than that anticipated by the first four scenarios. Such a level of growth has been put forward at one stage by the Borough Council, and is still being promoted by developers. It would involve a much larger development on open Green Belt land such that the village would double or more in size. Given the location of West Horndon at a distance from larger centres, and the current strain on services and facilities, such a scenario scores poorly in respect of social, environmental, and economic dimensions. Out of the 11 elements of the sustainability framework it scores 5 reds, 6 ambers, and no greens. It would be disproportionate and unsustainable.

6.4 Scenario 2 is described as “controlled growth and Neighbourhood Plan objectives”. It suggests an additional 400 houses for the village, and scores well against most sustainability objectives. It is important to note however that some of the positive scores, say in respect of

residential amenity, or in the provision for education and health care, are dependent on a commensurate level of new infrastructure. Without the infrastructure in place, such growth cannot be described as “controlled”, or in accordance with Neighbourhood Plan objectives. It would not therefore be sustainable.

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