

Hearing Statement

Issue 2

Background

The respondent owns land to the south of Great Wakering, which includes allocation SER9b and NEL 3. In addition the respondent's ownership includes the Star Lane Pits Local Wildlife Site and land to the south of the pits. As such these hearing statements are confined to the proposed allocations in this general area. The respondent generally supports the plan and believes it to meet the tests of soundness. That said, the respondent has made representations, which include master plans that present alternative options and possible amendments to the allocations. Whilst the respondent does not object to the Plan, the Inspector has invited the respondent to attend the hearing session for Issue 2, as the Inspector is of the view that the respondent will be of assistance to the parties in exploring the issues.

Questions

- (i) ***Is it realistic to anticipate that existing industrial uses would relocate to the new employment site?***

Star Lane Industrial Estate (SLIE) is made up of multiple freehold interests and as such, there is no single uniting entity, which might choose to, or organise relocation. It is also the case that there is no mechanism, which would compel the users to relocate to site NEL3, were they to consider a move from the existing employment site.

Were a consortium of owners/occupiers to group together to wind down operations on SLIE to make way for the proposed housing allocation, it is more than probable that some of them will choose to relocate away from Rochford altogether, which will put existing Rochford jobs at risk. Another factor that will influence the decisions of owner /occupiers will be the availability and terms on offer on the NEL3 site. For owner/occupiers to relocate to NEL3 as envisaged in the plan, the site would first have to be in place, following an approved planning application, which is delivered early in the plan period and consist of unit sizes and types that would meet the needs and budgets of SLIE owner/occupiers. There are simply too many variables in the process, which make the prospect of housing on SLIE as envisaged in the plan unrealistic.

The respondents anticipated this difficulty and have made similar points in their representations, producing a set of Master Plan Options to cater for various scenarios to ensure that the quantum and type of development planned can be delivered in the Great Waking area.

Master Plan One illustrates the allocations of BFR1, SER9b and NEL3 as proposed in the Plan. In addition, it includes additional public open space to the south of Star Lane Wildlife Site. The Inspector has already identified that in order to realise these allocations in accordance with the Plan requirements, a link road over land not presently allocated for development will be required.



Master Plan Two illustrates the most likely scenario where Star Lane Industrial Estate remains in its current use, but makes alternative provision for the housing intended for part of BFR1. The respondents are able to provide an alternative option for the housing proposed on part of BFR1 (Star Lane Industrial Estate), which is shown below to the south of BFR1. This master plan option also includes additional public open space, which is not allocated in the Plan.



Master Plan Three anticipates the Inspector's concern that the allocations as proposed would require a link road through presently un-allocated land. This Master Plan proposes the relocation of NEL3 a short distance north where it can be served by the existing access onto Star Lane, south of the former Brickworks site. Provision is made for buffer planting between the proposed housing on BFR1 and the relocated NEL3. Provision is also made for a new footpath link between NEL3 and SER9b and the High Street. This pedestrian link will connect jobs with homes and allow accessibility to public transport and other community services.



It is the respondent's view that the prospect of users relocating from Star Lane Industrial Estate is un-realistic; however as can be seen from Master Plans Two and Three above, sound and deliverable alternative options are available.

(ii) If either sites SER9a or 9b are found unsound, would the land to the west of Alexandra Road, included in Option EGE3 (representation 28791) be sound?

There is no reason to believe the SER9a or b would be found unsound, however it is considered that Option EGE3 would not prove to be sound alternative site if one of the SER allocations was not delivered. This is particularly so in relation to the parcel of land west of Alexandra Road. The land here is an awkward shape; large parts of it are too narrow to provide meaningful development layouts, which would maintain the amenity of existing Alexandra Road residents.

Perhaps of more importance is the fact that the land contains similar ground cover planting to that found within the Star Lane Pits Local Wildlife Site R35 (LoWS). The flora and fauna found on the site, being similar to that on the LoWS is most likely be of high biodiversity value. It is understood that Essex Wildlife Trust is considering the site as a possible extension of the adjacent LoWS. For these reasons it is not considered that the land immediately west of Alexandra Road is a sound housing alternative.

In the unlikely event that SER9a or b are found unsound, whilst the site mentioned above is not considered to be a sound alternative, Option WGW3 (shown below) does include two further land parcels, one being a smaller site south of the High Street, the other, a larger area of land south of the former Brickworks and east of Star Lane. These two sites are free of constraint and could be delivered within the plan period.

WGW3



(iii) If NEL3 is found unsound, would the land on the western side of Tithe Park included in Option E23 and E24 (representation 28826) be sound?

There would seem to be no logic for the inclusion of Option (E23 and 24) as possible employment allocations. Both are remote from the settlement of Great Wakering and are too close to the residential settlements in north Southend-on-Sea. So close that they are likely to lead to conflicts with residential amenity. There is also a greater threat to the coalescence between Great Wakering and Southend-on-Sea posed by these options.

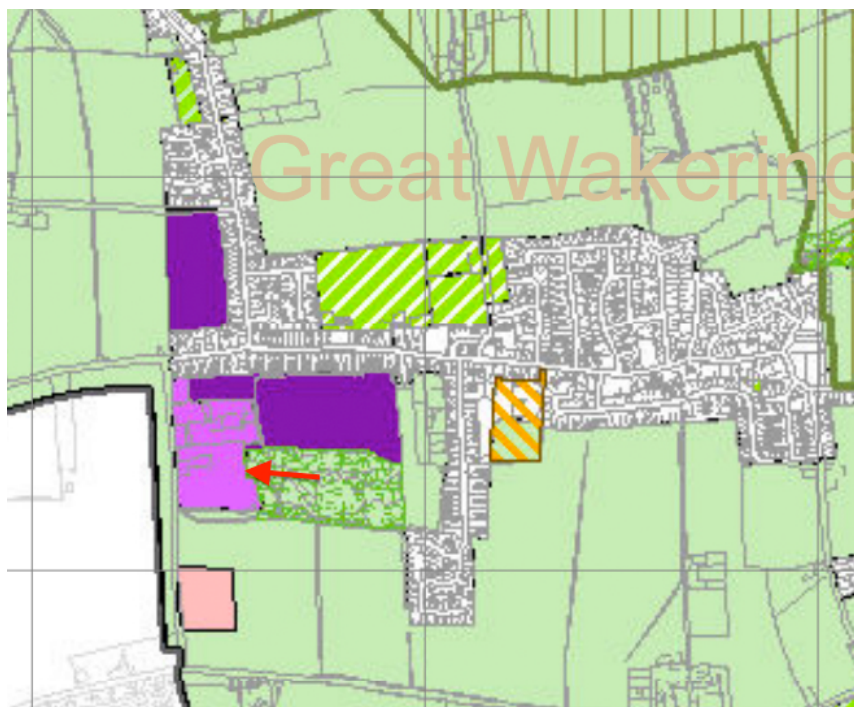
Hearing Statement

Issue 4

Question

Are the existing employment, ecological and landscape, education, open space and leisure facilities, Town Centre and primary shopping area boundary allocations justified, likely to be effective and consistent with national policy?

Presently the Draft Proposals Map shows the Star Lane Pits LoWS (R35) abutting the east boundary of allocation BFR1 (red arrow shown below).



The respondent provided a summary of the ecological value of the LoWS prepared by an ecologist as part of their representations. The land between the fishing lakes and BFR1 is considered to be of less ecological value, consisting mainly of spoil from the former brickworks. Given the neighbouring location of proposed allocations, there is perhaps an opportunity to now review the LoWS boundary, in relation to the allocations.

Since making representations, some discussions have taken place between the respondent and Essex Wildlife Trust. The Trust feels that there may be habitats for invertebrates and some less common plant species, in the area between the lakes and BFR1. As such, the Trust believes that without a detailed review of this land, the present designation boundaries should remain. They are also of the view that if it were necessary to provide a link road or footpath through this land, as part of the planning proposals for the allocations NEL3 or SER4b, then there would be plenty of scope for mitigation, as the landowners own suitable land to the south where comprehensive mitigation can take place.

The respondent considers that if the present boundary of LoWS R35 is not reviewed in the short term, then like the Trust, agrees that the scope for suitable mitigation is in place. The LPA are of the view that the allocations in this area do not threaten the integrity of the LoWS, a view shared by the respondent's ecologist and the LPA are comfortable that any need for mitigation could be resolved through the planning application process.