

REPORT TO COUNCIL 17 SEPTEMBER 2024

CASTLE POINT LOCAL PLAN 2023-2043 - ISSUES AND OPTIONS CONSULTATION.

Castle Point Borough Council have been consulting over the summer on the very early stages of their new local plan. The consultation period has been running since June and officially ends on 16 September, although the Borough have granted an extension until 18 September to allow the Town Council time to respond.

In its introduction the Plan states 'What you tell the Council during this consultation will help the Council decide on the best strategy and ways of meeting future development needs in the period to 2043'.

The document summarises the key issues to be covered in the new plan and asks a series of questions. The document also states that the production of the Plan would be based on the principles of engaging broadly with residents and, as a starting point, will

identify the locally assessed housing need for the borough,
prioritise brownfield land for housing development; and
protect and preserve the Green Belt.

As part of the production and consultation on a local plan, Councils make a call for sites across the Borough and in the last 2 weeks there has been considerable controversy in the Hadleigh and West Leigh area over a submission by the Salvation Army in connection with its landholdings at Hadleigh Farm.

Councils will look at any land put forward and will go through a process of assessing it against policy and other criteria. One such policy is Green Belt. Throughout this process sites can be rejected for justifiable reasons and it is by no means certain that the Salvation Army land will go forward as a development site. However, there has been documentation sent locally indicting a development of 2500 homes on the land which has obviously set alarm bells ringing.

The Salvation Army has attempted to quell the inevitable fears by issuing a statement (attached). It can be seen from the plan that the stated intent is to retain the majority of the land (shown green) west of Leigh as green open space.



There is, however, a proposition to provide space for residential development in the orange areas. The plan is an illustration only and gives no numbers or further information.

Regardless of where the residential proposition is placed, albeit further from Leigh, it still represents a large area, and although the figure of 2500 is refuted, a considerable number of houses could be built on it. It could also be seen as a precedent for more houses in the future in the wider area.

Clearly there are no (as far as we know) firm plans to consider, but inevitably the development of the area for residential on any significant scale has consequences for infrastructure with implications of changes to traffic movements which could have a considerable effect on Hadleigh itself and West Leigh and by the ripple effect on traffic going eastwards.

In the 1970s a bypass of Hadleigh town was considered and ruled out because of existing development, of which there is now far more. The existing road system would have difficulty coping and a new access would be needed probably to the east of the town centre.

Any such road proposals could affect more Green Belt and open land. It would also place pressure on other infrastructure such as health services, schools, utilities, water and sewerage etc. both in Hadleigh and inevitably in Leigh where doctors' surgeries for example, are already under great pressure.

Whilst there has been a huge push by successive Government's for more housing, which is promoted with increased targets by the current Government, it is clear that with the use of the new term 'grey belt' there are areas of current Green Belt land which will be in the firing line for new development. Castle Point's own targets have been increased substantially recently.

It is of course important that we have housing, particularly social housing, to meet the needs of residents, and local plans are the vehicles for allocating such areas, but there needs to be a rigorous process to ensure that it is the right land, in the right place and provided with the right infrastructure.

Castle Point has a stated aim of protecting the Green Belt, and by virtue of this should be looking at non Green Belt sites and applying strict criteria in its consideration of any Green Belt sites which are promoted by developers or owners. Indeed, before any such proposal could be included the Borough Council would need to undertake a thorough review of its Green Belt.

Although the Plan is at a very early stage and no proposals, have been made by the Borough Council itself, it is deemed appropriate that Leigh Town Council, as the closest neighbouring parish, needs to make known to Castle Point its views on any potential development which would affect Leigh and should request effective consultation and discussions with the Borough should the area in Hadleigh move forward as a residential prospect or otherwise developed area.

RECOMMENDED:

1. That Castle Point Borough Council be advised of this Council's deep concern for the effects on Leigh and wider Southend of any but appropriate Green Belt uses on the land the subject of the Salvation Army submission and the downgrading of the Green Belt function of the Salvation Army land, bearing in mind the need to maintain the Green Belt's original aim of preventing coalescence of individual communities..
2. That this concern focuses on the potential implications for traffic and the road hierarchy, infrastructure, such as health and education provision, as well as services and the cohesion of the towns of Hadleigh and Leigh, and importantly the historic character of Hadleigh and Leigh as adjoining parishes with a deeply rooted and significant role in the nation's history and their context in the landscape of this part of Essex.

3. That Leigh Town Council would appreciate close liaison with Castle Point Borough Council throughout the local plan process to ensure that its views and those of Leigh residents are taken fully into account should this site, or any other site which would affect Leigh, come forward beyond this first stage of the local plan.
4. That the representations be copied to the Salvation Army with a request to be kept abreast of their proposals should they move forward.

5. That Castle Point Borough Council be advised that due to the importance of any potential allocation for major development which would have a detrimental affect on Leigh, at such time as any such allocation is proposed for consultation, LTC will make a suitable room available to CPT free of charge in order for the proposals to be displayed and for CPT officers to be on hand to answer relevant questions. The purpose of this is to allow Leigh residents to voice their opinions and to feed these into any response from LTC.