

Colchester Local Plan Review Preferred Options

Eight Ash Green Parish Council statement

The Preferred Options produced by the City Council propose two sites totally 430 dwellings in Eight Ash Green (EAG). In early 2025 the Parish Council held two public consultations which were well attended the outcome being a total rejection of site PP31 and some support for site PP32.

Site PP31 was involved in a previous referendum as part of the evidence base for producing the Eight Ash Green Neighbourhood Plan (NP). In total there were ten sites involved in that process and PP31 came 10th. This has been fully explained previously but the site was proposed regardless.

PP32 has also been submitted as a preferred site however subsequently it became apparent this site was not in fact in Eight Ash Green but in Aldham parish. To maintain the rural nature of the villages and not dilute the coalescence in this area it is vitally important to maintain a green buffer between villages. Such a buffer would not exist with PP32.

After some months delay whilst an infrastructure report was progressed the consultation process began. Unfortunately, this was arranged over the Christmas and New Year holiday period which has caused a variety of problems. Nevertheless, the Parish Council have managed to arrange two public consultations on 10 and 11 January. Around 200 residents attended the consultations and their views are reflected in this submission.

We have strong reservations about PP31. As mentioned above it is very unpopular with residents. The site is outside the village boundary and it disregards the reasoning and policies set out in our NP. It would be a substantial ribbon development with houses on the roadside from entering to leaving the village as you travel west. It would take away the rural aspect and country views to the detriment of residents and visitors. There are substantial concerns regarding damage to Choats Wood, habitats and wildlife. Also, real concerns regarding drainage given the underground streams in that particular area. Added to that is the existence of the watercourse flowing at the bottom of the steep slope. Extra concrete from property foundations will prevent water absorption and add to any potential flooding which will have a detrimental impact on the properties which back onto the stream from the opposite bank. Access to parts of the site is also a genuine concern.

In addition, we are very much against PP32. Aside from it creating coalescence to the neighbouring parish of Aldham, it again extends high impact urbanisation ribbon development out into a rurally valued open countryside setting. Far reaching views would be lost not just from within EAG but from Fordham replaced by unmitigable urban development. Management of resources would be difficult as this dormitory development would be in Aldham Parish but spatially seen as an estate stuck next to the natural settlement boundary Eight Ash Green. Development on this site would almost entirely surround the ancient woodland, The Woodland Trust has expressed serious concerns for the woodland should this proceed, habitats are in danger and three veteran trees are located on the site. Changes to the water table, artificial light and encroachment access issues are already being experienced from the far smaller Aspen Walk site.

The addition of this site further out to the already poorly connected community at Aspen Walk would create a joined community of some 400 houses with no mention of any community amenities, additional transport capacity, provision for schooling or shops. Walking distances even to the limited

services of EAG create and encourage a car centric development because of its distance from the village centre.

Much hard work went into producing a NP for EAG which brought forward 150 houses at Aspen Walk. Fully adopted by CCC, EAG NP balanced the need for housing growth but fundamentally supported our communities overriding decision to maintain its rural aspects and set this into the local plan 2017-2033. Those houses are only just becoming homes but the development is not yet complete. Residents rightly believe that EAG had 'done its bit' with this estate which added around 20% to the number of houses in the village. Looking at allocations around Colchester it seems inequitable that a further 430 houses have been allocated here, especially impactful given the clear intent and purpose set out by EAG NP. Our strong preference would be for no further immediate developments however we reluctantly accept there are Government policy demands for an increased number of builds in the Colchester area. However, we believe that many more central and brownfield multi- use sites including those with higher density should be used rather than prime agricultural land which will be lost forever. We would like the EAG allocation to be reviewed given these circumstances.

After CCC set out its preferred options, over the summer and autumn months the PC accepted separate invitations to meetings from Bloor Homes and Cala Homes each representing landowner sites south of Halstead Rd which were not preferred by CCC. These have been discussed with Planning.

Given the unsuitability of the proposed sites, we entered into discussions with Bloor and Cala on that basis having decided that we should take a pragmatic view as it is very likely that some development in EAG will be required. Bloor is proposing a 270 dwelling site south of Halstead Road opposite Aspen Walk. There is a possibility of the entry/exit to this development being moved to opposite the existing Aspen Walk exit thus making a substantial junction possible with a roundabout, crossings and bus stops. All of these were high on the list of resident concerns and would go some way to produce benefits from development. In addition, substantial green space is proposed within the plan which would be welcomed by Aspen Walk residents. The village would not be stretched towards Aldham. From the information available at present the PC felt this site could be a preferable alternative so was worthy of wider community discussion.

In turn, the site proposed by Cala opposite PP31 could accommodate 125 homes on the south side of Halstead Road. Here, like the Bloor Homes site, there are concerns regarding country views footpaths and traffic impact to the A1124. This part of the village suffers from high volumes of traffic flow in the mornings and evenings in particular with residents finding it difficult and often dangerous to exit onto the main road. Before this development could be considered further, residents would need to see a detailed plan showing the buffers between the site and existing buildings together with substantial traffic management proposals. These would need to include consideration to additional and better placed crossings and mini roundabouts.

During our most recent consultations we shared both of these possible alternative sites. There was approval by many residents for the Bloor Homes site over PP32 however strong opposition from residents of Seven Star Green and those south of the A1124 in respect of the Cala Homes site. Site PP 31 was again regarded as totally unacceptable.

The overriding concern and demand at the consultations was for a detailed proposal on infrastructure in a concise format and evidence that it was funded. An additional 430 houses imposed into a community that has no doctor in the vicinity and very little in the way of healthcare is

of concern. Public transport provision is very poor already and no increase in capacity has come forward even with the uplift of 150 homes and the vast increase in car trips to the Tollgate/Stane Park facilities. Secondary school children and College students from Aspen Walk and the rest of the village have to walk to Wood Corner to get the bus and frequently the bus runs past them as it is already full. Even before Aspen Walk the majority of parents with children aged 11+ need to drive those children to school because our bus service has such limited capacity. This should have been anticipated and resolved at the time of development. The draft plan fails to recognise EAG with any active travel options nor does it improve in any way the ability to connect our community to the opportunities of employment, shopping and use of the facilities of Tollgate/Stane Park without car ownership. Walking routes along the A1124 are narrow and feel vulnerable to the traffic. Dedicated cycle provision is non-existent and it's just too dangerous an option to encourage cyclists onto the A1124. Transport is vitally important and a huge issue especially when the alternatives are just not viable options. The A1124 is very busy at present – doubling the population of the parishes along this route is simply not feasible without appropriate traffic management mitigation. Highways East acknowledge junction 26 is operating at capacity now with AM/PM queues impacting upon residents in EAG. Traffic flows through EAG are notably poor during peak times yet suggested mini roundabouts that could aid flow are continuously dismissed. Gaining access to the A1124 is very difficult at present from Spring lane, Jubilee Meadow, Blind Lane, Wood Lane and Aspen Walk. Highways East suggest new planning in the area needs to focus on modal shifts towards more active travel but as already mentioned there is nothing in the draft plan that recognises that need. There are also very real concerns about our future water and sewage systems with the proposed level of development, however it is the fundamental speed of change to the rural village setting, so cherished by many that inform our response to this local draft - and as noted rural preservation is a major consideration within frameworks provided for and by CCC.

It should be noted that at the public consultations 100% of respondents noted traffic volumes and pollution as a concern, 90% noted doctor availability and 80% noted schools/education. This must be addressed together with the very strong desire to retain the rural ambience of the village.

We believe that any development needs to be phased in line with appropriate infrastructure provision and with particular regard to vehicle movements. The pylon project is likely to create major transport challenges around our villages over the next few years.

We will be happy to continue to work closely with the Planning Department in an effort to agree a final plan that offers the best possible balance for all the residents of EAG.

Eight Ash Green Parish Council

14 January 2026