



BOWERS GIFFORD & NORTH BENFLEET PARISH COUNCIL

BOWERS GIFFORD & NORTH BENFLEET NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

NORTH BENFLEET PLOTLANDS REPORT

DECEMBER 2017

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1. Introduction & Purpose

1.1 Bowers Gifford & North Benfleet Parish Council is preparing a Neighbourhood Plan for the designated area which coincides with the Parish boundary.

1.2 The Plan will contain a policy covering the 'Plotlands' settlement of North Benfleet as currently defined by the adopted Basildon District Plan (see Plan A). The policy assumes that the policy area will be removed from and inset in the Green Belt and proposes that future housing development there will be managed through a Neighbourhood Development Order. In doing so, the policy will bring about the development of up to 400 vacant or under-used plots for new homes and for new green infrastructure and deliver significant improvements to the local infrastructure.

1.3 This report provides the evidence base to explain the rationale for the policy and the justification for the development capacity of the area.



Plan A: North Benfleet Plotlands Policy Area

2. Background

2.1 The North Benfleet Plotlands is one of a dozen such areas in the Borough of Basildon. Plotlands refers to small pieces of land laid out in regular plots on which a number of self-built settlements were established in the south-east of England from the late 1800s and up to the Second World War. North Benfleet is one of the largest of these areas in the Borough (of about 83 Ha and 240 dwellings), lying immediately north of the village of Bowers Gifford in the Green Belt to the east of Basildon town.

2.2 Although the Plotlands were identified as distinct settlements within the Green Belt by the 1998 District Plan (and defined on its Policies Map), the policy setting out the principles for development (BAS GB8) has not been saved. Instead, the Borough Council uses a series of other Green Belt-related saved policies to manage development proposals in the Plotlands, together with the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework.

2.3 The Borough Council is currently preparing its new Local Plan for the period up to 2034, which will replace the 1998 Plan. Its Draft Local Plan of January 2016 included proposed Policy GB3 (see below) and proposed to reduce the area of the North Benfleet Plotlands by about 25% (primarily to exclude land currently subject to flood risk). It estimated approx. 40 homes could be developed on vacant plots within the smaller area.

2.4 It is expected that a similar policy will be included on the final version of the Local Plan in summer 2018. In addition, the new Local Plan will contain proposals for major Green Belt land releases adjoining North Benfleet and elsewhere in the Parish to deliver 2,000 homes as an extension to Basildon (known as Policy H13).

Policy GB 3

Plotland Infill

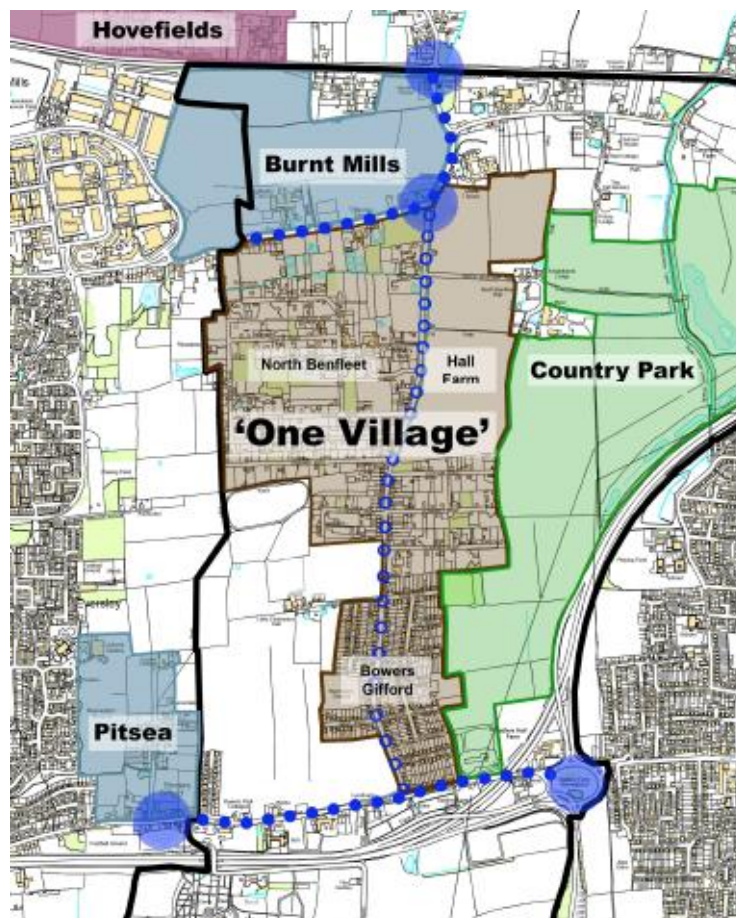
1. Limited residential development within the Plotland Infill Areas, as identified on the Policies Map, will be supported where they are compliant with all other relevant policies of this plan, and:
 - a. Where it can be demonstrated that the infill is intended to meet the need for housing arising from the plotland settlement itself, or the plot is being made available for self build via the Council's Self-Build Register;
 - b. Where the intended infill plot is not the result of subdivision of a larger plot and is located between existing dwellings on an existing road frontage, or on a corner plot. The development should not however face onto the strategic road network;
 - c. Where the intended development is appropriate in scale and setting to preserve both the character of the plotland settlement and the openness of the Green Belt. In particular, development proposals within the plotland settlements should normally be:
 - I. Structures low in height, such as bungalows and chalets;
 - II. Set within the site, with sufficient space between the dwelling and the boundary of the site to maintain an open appearance; and
 - III. Integrated into the wider landscape through the use of soft boundary treatments, such as hedges or tree lines, soft landscaping and the retention of trees.
2. Where development proposals are permitted within the Plotland Infill Areas, the Council will seek to remove the permitted development rights of the new development in order to ensure that extensions, alterations and ancillary buildings do not result in the development causing harm to the character of the plotland settlement or the openness of the Green Belt over time.
3. Non-residential development proposals will not normally be permitted within the plotland settlements.

3. A New Vision for Bowers Gifford & North Benfleet

3.1 A significant number of objections were made from the local community to the Draft Local Plan proposals, which would have the effect of merging the settlements of Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet within the large urban areas of Pitsea and Basildon.

3.2 However, recognising that major Green Belt land releases would be inevitable within the Borough, the Parish Council embarked on a Neighbourhood Plan as a means of devising a spatial strategy that would be more successful in delivering the same overall housing supply objective. Preparing a Plan would provide a framework for formally engaging the local community and other interests and the technical resources to devise a credible alternative strategy.

3.3 Consultations with all of the local communities in the Parish have so far given a clear indication that they wish to see a stronger relationship between North Benfleet and Bowers Gifford as one community – expressed simply as a vision of ‘One Village’ – and the retention of the village as a distinct settlement (see Plan B). This vision would be strengthened by the release of land from the Green Belt at Hall Farm opposite North Benfleet for a major mixed used development scheme. That scheme could comprise approx. 800 homes, an 83Ha Country Park and community infrastructure. The new Local Plan will also propose the allocation of Green Belt land at Burnt Mills for employment uses.



Plan B: Alternative Spatial Strategy for East of Basildon

3.4 In respect of North Benfleet, the strategy is specifically intended to address the current disconnect between the Plotlands and the rest of the community, which is exacerbated by the application of highly restrictive Green Belt policy. This has led to a considerable amount of unauthorised development that has detracted from the special character of the area. And, with no coherent plan for the Plotlands, it is not possible to co-ordinate and manage development to address its poor road, utilities, green and flood risk infrastructure. The new Local Plan proposals will have no effect on tackling these issues and, worse, has allowed the potential contribution of North Benfleet to be ignored in the planning of growth east of Basildon in Policy H13.

3.5 The challenge facing the Neighbourhood Plan is twofold: on the one hand, how can a coherent plan be devised and implemented successfully in these circumstances? And on the other, how can development be promoted and managed as a valid exception to the Borough's general Plotlands policy, either by leaving or by inseting North Benfleet in the Green Belt?

3.6 From the analysis undertaken so far, the answer to both questions appears to be the use of a Neighbourhood Development Order.

4. What is a Neighbourhood Development Order?

4.1 Neighbourhood Development Orders were created by the 2011 Localism Act alongside Neighbourhood Plans. They grant planning permission for specified developments in a neighbourhood area. Once established, there would be no need for anyone to apply to the council for planning permission if it is for the type of development covered by the order.

4.2 The process for making an Order is identical to that of making a Plan – evidence gathering, drafting, consultations, submission, examination and referendum. Where the neighbourhood area has already been designated to enable a Plan to be prepared, as here, then there are advantages of coinciding the Plan and Order processes. But here, the intention would be that the Order will only apply to the current extent of the North Benfleet Plotlands, and not the whole Parish.

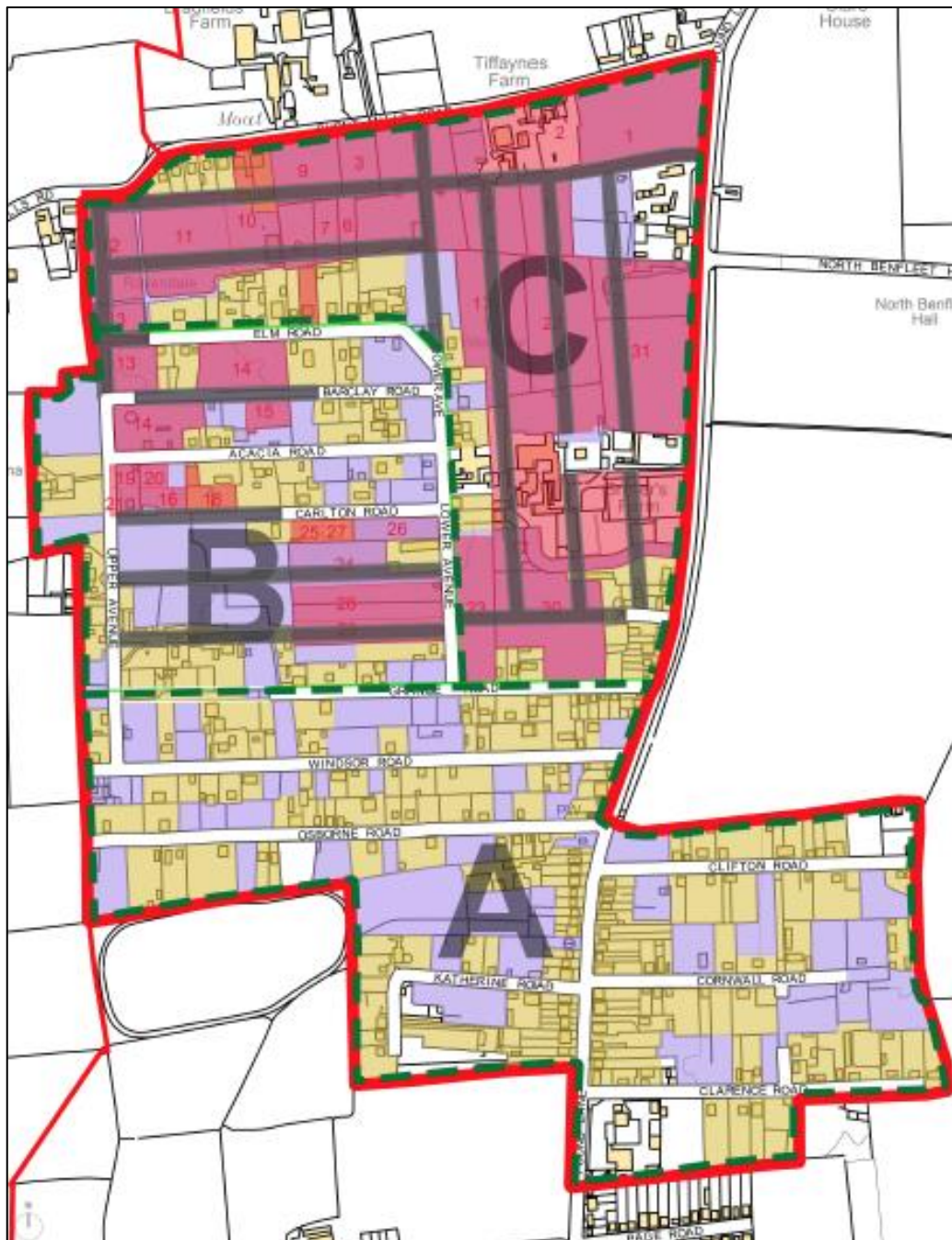
4.3 Using an Order here will:

- Encourage and enable future housing proposals (for new development on vacant plots and for redevelopment on existing plots) to come forward of a high standard of design and that will contribute to the delivery of supporting infrastructure
- Provide a clear and justified exception to the Borough's general Plotlands policy that will not set precedent on other Plotlands
- Either enable the Plotlands to remain in the Green Belt (if the revised National Planning Policy Framework expected in spring 2018 defines development permitted by an Order as not inappropriate development in the Green Belt), or provide the very special circumstances by which it should be removed and inset from the Green Belt as an extension to Bowers Gifford

4.4 It is envisaged the Order will comprise a masterplan of agreed land use principles, a design code and a S106 heads of terms. Its scope will cover all proposals for housing development.

5. The Potential for Development

5.1 Preliminary site assessment work has concluded there are three zones within the Plotlands, each with a different type and scale of opportunity for new development (see Plan C). Zone A ('Below Grange') comprises vacant, standard plots distributed across a large area on either side of Pound Lane with an approx. capacity of 100 homes. Zone B ('Above Grange') comprises a smaller number of standard and larger plots with an approx. capacity of 150 homes. And Zone C ('Above Elm') comprises larger plots with an approx. capacity of 200 homes, but provided a new road infrastructure is delivered to open up land that is currently inaccessible and provided the flood risk sequential test can be met for some of the land.



Plan C: Capacity Analysis of North Benfleet Plotlands

6. Realising and Delivering the Order

6.1 It is proposed to include a policy in the Pre-Submission Neighbourhood Plan setting out the development principles for the Plotlands, assuming the land is removed from the Green Belt and forms part of a new, single village with Bowers Gifford (on Pound Lane) and with the new development at Hall Farm. The policy will require any housing development proposals in the Plotlands to come forward through the Order, unless the development falls outside the scope of the Order.

6.2 By the time the Order is made (either alongside or separate to the Neighbourhood Plan, depending on circumstances), the land interests in the Plotlands will need to have agreed a collaborative venture to co-ordinate development proposals. Before then, either they or a development partner will need to prepare the masterplan that will form the basis of the Order land use plan, design code and infrastructure improvement delivery and financing proposals.

7. The Next Steps

7.1 The Pre-Submission Plan will be published for consultation by the end of January 2018. It is proposed to publish the principles of a draft Neighbourhood Development Order at the same time. This will comprise a plan showing the land to which the Order will apply, the key features of the design code (to specify the essential parameters for proposals to secure consent) and the types of supporting infrastructure (on-site and off-site) that proposals will need to help finance.

7.2 The capacity work has been completed, so over the next month, some technical work will be undertaken to analyse the Local Plan evidence base (primarily the Higher Level Development Framework for East of Basildon report) to identify the nature of the aggregate effects of the Order and the likely mitigation measures. Given the recent and planned flood mitigation measures that are being delivered in this area, the precise nature of the residual flood risk issue will be ascertained. Expert advice will also be sought from an experienced Order Examiner to inform the scope and scale of the evidence required to support the Order. The key features of the design code will also be drafted.

7.3 Following the recent successful landowner engagement event, the Parish Council will write to all known land interests in the Plotlands to ascertain their individual support for the principles of the Order and their willingness to collaborate on its delivery mechanisms.