

**BOWERS GIFFORD & NORTH BENFLEET**

**NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN**

**2018 - 2034**



**PRE-SUBMISSION PLAN**

**FEBRUARY 2018**

Published by Bowers Gifford & North Benfleet Parish Council for Pre-Submission consultation under the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 in accordance with EU Directive 2001/42.

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Contents

Foreword 3

List of Policies 4

1. Introduction & Background 5
2. The Neighbourhood Area 8
3. Planning Policy Context 11
4. Community Views on Planning Issues 16
5. Vision, Objectives & Land Use Policies 19
6. Policies Map 29

Acknowledgement to Neil Homer for the cover photograph

**FOREWORD**

***What is a Neighbourhood Plan?*** *A Neighbourhood Plan allows local communities direct power to develop a vision for their neighbourhood and to shape the development and growth of the local area. Communities are able to choose where they want new homes, shops and offices built.  Communities are also able to have their say about what those buildings should look like, and even recommend that planning permission is granted for new buildings that they want to see go ahead.*

*Basildon Council is currently in the process of producing their Local Plan, but as residents and businesses in Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet, we feel that their vision for the village until 2034 is not the correct one.*

*In order to retain our village identity, whilst meeting the need for housing development in the Borough, we, as a Parish Council and Steering Group, are producing a vision in our Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet Neighbourhood Plan which, based on thoughts and comments gathered over many months from you the community, will protect the integrity and sustainability of our village for future generations. This pre-submission document is the result of this work and we are now embarking on a consultation to find out if you agree with our vision.*

*Many hours of work has been undertaken to produce this document and those involved have worked tirelessly to pull together the evidence and information which will form the basis of our Neighbourhood Plan when it is submitted for examination later this year.*

*We would like to thank the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group for their hard work and continual valuable insight, as well as Parish Councillors, the Parish Council Clerk and consultants RCOH for their support of this project.*

*Above all we thank you, the community, for your interest, input and comments in helping us to reach this stage of our Neighbourhood Plan.*

***Councillor Robert Smillie, Chair***

***Bowers Gifford & North Benfleet Parish Council***

**LIST OF POLICIES**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| BGNB1 | A Spatial Plan for the Parish and New Village |  |
| BGNB2 | The New Village: Hall Farm |  |
| BGNB3 | The New Village: North Benfleet |  |
| BGNB4 | The New Village: Bowers Gifford |  |
| BGNB5 | The New Village: Pound Lane |  |
| BGNB6 | Community Facilities |  |
| BGNB7 | Local Shops & Businesses |  |
| BGNB8 | Country Park |  |

**1. Introduction & Background**

1.1 Bowers Gifford & North Benfleet Parish Council is preparing a Neighbourhood Plan for the whole of the Parish area (see Plan A below). The area was designated for this purpose by the local planning authority, Basildon Borough Council in July 2016. The plan period will be from 2018 to 2034, a period that matches the plan period of the emerging Borough Local Plan.

**The Pre-Submission Plan**

1.2 The purpose of the Plan is to make proposals for how a new village of Bowers Gifford & North Benfleet can be created, which remains separate from Basildon and Pitsea by the Green Belt. The proposals are being made as an alternative to Basildon Borough Council’s Draft Local Plan, which proposes the merger of our communities with Basildon and Pitsea.

1.3 Neighbourhood plans provide local communities like ours with the chance to shape the future development in their areas. Our goal is to persuade the Borough Council, or if not, the Inspector of the Local Plan later in 2018, to change the Local Plan to incorporate our proposals in due course. We cannot make those changes ourselves, as amending Green Belt boundaries is something that can only be done by the Local Plan.

1.4 For this reason, we are not yet sure how and when our Neighbourhood Plan will proceed after this point. We will look at all the comments made on this version of the Plan and then discuss with Basildon Borough Council if it will re-consider its proposals for our area.

1.5 In the meantime, the Parish Council wishes to use this version of the Neighbourhood Plan to formally consult with the statutory bodies, as well as the local community and other stakeholders, on a set of proposals that it is promoting as alternatives to those coming forward in the new Local Plan for this Parish. The proposals are based on a very different vision of the future of the Parish to that of the Borough Council.

1.6 The Parish Council is also intending to bring forward a separate Neighbourhood Development Order for North Benfleet (covering the Plotlands area). Although the process of making the Order is identical to that of making the Plan, the completion of the Draft Order must await the adoption of the Local Plan and/or Neighbourhood Plan. In which case, it is expected that the Order will be consulted on, examined and put to referendum in 2020. An initial report looking at the potential of the Order is published in our evidence base.

**Sustainability Appraisal**

1.7 The Parish Council has prepared a Draft Sustainability Appraisal report (incorporating a Strategic Environmental Assessment) to comply with EU Directive 2001/42 and with the Environmental Assessment of Plans & Programmes Regulations of 2012. It consulted the statutory bodies on a scoping report in summer 2017 and the comments made have been reflected in the Draft report. Both reports are also available in the evidence base.



*Plan A: Designated Neighbourhood Area*

**Consultation**

1.8 We are now consulting local people and other organisations on a draft version of our Plan. We have summarised our proposals in this document. The detailed Plan (and our comparison of the Plan with Basildon’s proposals) is available to view on our Parish Council website ( [www.essexinfo.net/bgnb-parishcouncil](http://www.essexinfo.net/bgnb-parishcouncil) ) and paper copies are available at Pitsea Library, Northlands Pavement and Benfleet Library, Tarpots or on application to the Parish Clerk.

1.9 We will also hold four drop-in sessions on our proposals in the next month – check our website ( [www.essexinfo.net/bgnb-parishcouncil](http://www.essexinfo.net/bgnb-parishcouncil) ) and Parish Council noticeboards for details of when and where.

**You must make your comments in writing, by post or email to the Parish Clerk by 5pm on Thursday, 29 March 2018.**

Email Address: clerkbgnbparishcouncil@gmail.com

Postal Address: The Parish Clerk, 15 Highlands Road, Bowers Gifford, SS13 2HR

**2. The Neighbourhood Area**

2.1 Bowers Gifford is a small village in southern Essex, England. It is located east of Basildon, between Pitsea and Thundersley. The population of the Parish of Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet is approximately 1,936

**A Short History of Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet**

2.2 Bowers Gifford & North Benfleet is located east of Basildon between Pitsea & Thundersley. The name Bowers comes from the Saxon ‘Buras’ meaning a dwelling or dwellings. It was first mentioned in 932AD when King Ethelstan granted 10 hides in Bura to Abbot Beorhtsige and was first mentioned in the Doomsday Book in 1086. Gifford was added some centuries later when the manor, which stood on the land, was granted to the Giffard family who were descended from the maternal line of William the Conqueror, and who gave their name to the village of Bowers Gifford.[[1]](#footnote-1)

2.3 North and South Benfleet were originally joined together in Anglo Saxon times and Benfleet was called Baemfloet which literally means “floating wood”. [[2]](#footnote-2)

2.4 St Margarets of Antioch Church in Church Road is the oldest church in the village and dates back to Saxon times and the fourteenth century. The original building would probably have been made of wood, but a stone church was built by Sir John Giffard in the early fourteenth century. The Church of All Saints, North Benfleet Hall Road, is Circa1300 or earlier but was rebuilt in around Circa 1700 and restored Circa 1900 and is Grade II listed (Ref: Historic England). St Margarets School was built in 1936 on Glebe land next to the old St Johns Hall.[[3]](#footnote-3)

2.4 In the 1950’s Bowers Gifford is referred to as the “village on the Marshes” and the BBC made a programme about it, showing the houses raised from the ground on stilts. The Plotlands (North Benfleet) were developed at the turn of the century. They were quite simply a large area of sub-divided blocks of land. There were no roads or footpaths and the plots were originally bought by Londoners who built wooden weekend and holiday homes. Many of these homeowners were bombed out of London during the war and set up permanent homes in the Plotlands.[[4]](#footnote-4)

2.5 During the war years tank traps extended across the fields stretching from the Old London Road to Wickford. These dug outs filled automatically because of the level of the water table and required no rainfall.

2.6 It was between the two World Wars that the village of Bowers Gifford expanded and becomes more developed and recognisable as the village we know it today.

**Sustainability Characteristics**

2.6 There are seven listed buildings in the area:

* Church of All Saints (Grade II\*)
* Church of St Margaret (II\*)
* Bradfield’s Farmhouse (II)
* Cottage at Junction with Burnt Mill Road (II)
* Horseshoe Cottage (II)
* Saddler’s Hall Farmhouse (II)
* Tiffayne’s Farmhouse (II)

2.7 There are two SSSI’s in the south of the Neighbourhood Area at Pitsea Marsh and Holehaven Creek.

2.8 The ‘East Basildon High Level Development Framework of December 2017 (also published in the evidence base) provides a comprehensive and detailed description of the sustainability characteristics of the area (including land beyond the Parish boundary that forms part of the Framework at Pitsea). The Framework makes the following key observations relating to land in the Parish:

* Relatively few heritage assets (listed buildings and archaeology)
* The presence of three coastal Special Protection Areas in proximity to the area and the potential for increased recreational pressure from large scale development that cannot be substituted by non-coastal alternative recreational areas
* No significant biodiversity interest within the area itself
* The character of the landscape is able to accommodate new development in some places but it is important to prevent coalescence, with the open views and rural break between Basildon and North Benfleet /Bowers Gifford needing to be protected to ensure that there are clear boundaries and separation between the settlements
* The area makes little or no contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt other than in preventing coalescence as noted above
* The area around Pound Lane lies within Flood Risk Zones 2 and 3 (adjoining North Benfleet Brook) and a wider area is subject to surface water flooding; more generally the area lies within a larger Critical Drainage Area, requiring attention at the planning application stage
* The highway network will be able to accommodate this scale of development but with major improvements to key roads and junctions, notably the A127/Pound Lane junction
* Public transport services are reasonable along London Road but with only one hourly service on Pound Lane
* The existing provision of education services meets the current needs, but a new 2FE primary school will be necessary to serve this scale of new development and the area may be a suitable location for one of two new secondary schools needed for the Borough overall

2.9 The Framework summarises the key constraints on development thus:

* Lack of landscape capacity in parts to accommodate the promoted quantum of urban development
* Land to the east of Pound Lane - Green Belt separation between Bowers Gifford and Thundersley/legibility of settlements
* Flood risk to areas to the east and west of the northern part of Pound Lane
* Mature landscape in the north and middle west parts of the site
* Lack of services in Bowers Gifford or the nearby Plotlands
* Vehicular access via Pound Lane and junction with A127 inadequate for the proposed development
* Lack of vehicular access to parts of the site
* The level of development growth has implications for the necessary highway infrastructure improvements
* Safeguarding of long distance views towards the Thames Estuary /Kent

**3. Planning Policy Context**

3.1 The Neighbourhood Area lies within the administrative area of Basildon Borough Council in the County of Essex.

3.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published by the government in 2012 is an important guide in the preparation of local plans and neighbourhood plans. The Plan must demonstrate that it has had regard to the provisions of the NPPF. The following paragraphs of the NPPF are especially relevant:

* Achieving sustainable development (§7 and §17)
* Promoting the retention and development of local services and community
* facilities in villages (§28)
* Protecting and exploiting opportunities for the use of sustainable
* transport modes (§35)
* Delivering a wide choice of high quality homes (§50)
* Planning for larger scale development (§52)
* Setting out the quality of development (§58) and using design codes where they could help deliver high quality outcomes (§59)
* Creating a shared vision with communities of the residential environment and facilities they wish to see (§69)
* Delivering the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs (§70)
* Access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation (§73)
* Protecting and enhancing public rights of way and access (§75)
* Promoting sustainable patterns of development in the Green Belt (§84)
* Insetting villages in the Green Belt (§86)
* Managing flood risk (§100 etc)
* Minimising pollution and other adverse effects on the local and natural environment (§110)
* Planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure (§114)
* Sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets (§126)

3.3 The Neighbourhood Plan must also be able to show that its policies are in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan, which currently comprises policies of the 1998 Basildon District Local Plan. The Borough Council is currently bringing forward its replacement Local Plan, which is expected to be adopted in 2019.

**The Basildon District Local Plan**

3.4 The Basildon District Local Plan was adopted in March 1998. A number of policies have been saved, the most relevant of which to the Neighbourhood Plan are:

* BAS S2 Housing Sites
* BAS C1 Protected Areas
* GB1, GB, GB3, GB4, GB5, GB6, GB8 Green Belt (including Plotlands)
* R1 School Playing Fields and Other Open Space
* C7, C8 Marshes Area
* C1 SINC (Site of importance to nature conservation)
* BE13 Areas of Special Development Control

3.5 Generally speaking, the focus of the saved policies in the Neighbourhood Area is to protect the Green Belt and other important environmental assets from harmful development (see the Proposals Map in Plan B below).

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*Plan B: Basildon District Local Plan Proposals Map(Extract)*

**The 2016 Draft Basildon District Local Plan**

3.6 The last iteration of the new Local Plan was published for consultation in 2016. It contained a number of very significant policy proposals affecting the Neighbourhood Area (see also the extracts from the Proposals Map in Plan C below):

* GB2 – Green Belt
* GB3 – Plotlands Infill – proposing a smaller area for the North Benfleet area than at present (see below)
* E8B – Safeguarded Employment Zone at Burnt Mills Road (see below)
* H3 & H5 – Established G&T and Travelling Show People Sites Policy
* TS5 & TS2 – Safeguarded Areas for Transport Improvements – including a new highways junction from Pound Lane to the A127 on the northern boundary of the Parish
* H13 – Housing Allocation East of Basildon – proposing 2,000 homes in an urban extension between Basildon and Bowers Gifford/North Benfleet Plotlands (see below)
* HC5 – Public Open Space – identifying two spaces in the Parish
* HE3 – Listed Buildings
* NE4 – Local Wildlife Sites

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*Plan C: Basildon Draft Local Plan 2016 Proposals Map(Extract)*

3.7 **The implication of these policies – most notably H13 - for the Neighbourhood Area is very significant.** In the view of the Parish Council and the local community they will have the effect of merging the settlements of Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet into the Basildon town urban area by removing the strategic gap provided by the Green Belt. As shown in Plan F below, the H13 policy covers the whole of that gap – the proposed strategic open space running north-south through the residential developments will be no more than 500m wide, and as narrow as 200m in some places. The space will contain formal recreation facilities and a new distributor road.

3.8 Its Policy GB3 on Plotlands proposes that the land should remain ‘washed over’ by the Green Belt and that there should be a significant reduction in the size of the North Benfleet area, allowing for approx. 40 new homes to fill vacant plots (see also Plan F). The Borough Council published a Plotlands study in its evidence base for the new Local Plan. The study included an assessment of the development potential of the North Benfleet Plotlands amongst all the other similar communities in the Borough.

**Basildon Borough Council High Level Development Framework**

3.9 Following the consultation on the Draft Local Plan and on Alternative Sites shortly afterwards, the Borough Council commenced the preparation of a High Level Development Framework for the ‘H13’ land in order to set out the overall development concept and development principles, as well as address phasing and other key delivery issues.



*Plan D: East of Basildon High Level Development Framework Concept Plan*

3.10 The framework was intended to test the vision and development policy objectives for the area. It reviewed the objectives of the developers to examine ways to accommodate these in a final H13 policy. It proposes a preferred masterplan for the area and a set of development principles (see Plan D above). However, it did not undertake an accurate or thorough review of the alternative ways of planning for this level of growth.

3.11 The document has not allayed the many serious concerns of the local communities with the H13 approach to planning housing growth east of Basildon. Those concerns are less about the scale of growth – they accept that new homes are needed in this area and that land needs to be released from the Green Belt for that purpose – and more about where they are delivered within and around the edges of the Parish.

**4. Community Views on Planning Issues**

4.1 The Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared in the face of considerable community concern about the proposals of the Borough Council for merging Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet with Basildon and Pitsea with 2,000 new homes planned within and adjoining the Parish boundary.

4.2 The Parish Council understands the challenges facing the Borough Council in planning to meet local housing needs when much of the Borough lies within the Green Belt. It also accepts that, if the Borough Council can make the case that there are very special circumstances for releasing land from the Green Belt for housing development, then seeking to use the Neighbourhood Plan to prevent development will not work.

4.3 It has therefore undertaken to bring forward a Plan that informs the local community of these challenges and encourages a positive approach to be taken to planning for new development in the Parish. The local community had already reacted favourably to the proposals of Orbit Homes at Hall Farm and, as noted in the North Benfleet Plotlands report, the residents of North Benfleet were looking to the Plan to resolve their land and infrastructure problems.

4.4 Over the past 30 months the Bowers Gifford & North Benfleet Parish Council (and since its inception the Project Steering Group) have met extensively with residents, developers of the various sites proposed and organisations to discuss housing development within the Parish Council’s designated area. Throughout the process reports have been provided on the process and progress at monthly Parish Council Meetings. The time table below is a snapshot of the activities undertaken to reach the Pre-Submission stage of the Neighbourhood Plan.

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|  | **Timetable of events to Pre-Submission** |
| January 2014 | Basildon Borough Council Preferred Options Report - 20 January 2014 - for an eight-week public consultation in regard to their emerging Local Plan |
| August 2014 | Basildon Borough Council Local Plan Core Strategy - Revised Preferred Options - Statement of Consultation |
| April 2015 | Presentation by Basildon Council Officers on Neighbourhood Planning to Parish Annual Meeting. |
| May  2015 | Parish newsletter published advertising two drop – in sessions to consult with the Community on their views and aspirations for the future of the village. |
| June 2015 | Community Event – Consultation with residents at Picnic- in-the-Park event and leaflet on Neighbourhood Planning distributed. Information on the Parish Council website |
| July 2015 - Jan 2016 | Background work and networking commenced – on going. Prepared a draft vision statement based on comments received at drop-in sessions/updates at Parish Council meetings |
| January 2016 | Basildon Council produce their draft Neighbourhood Plan for consultation. |
| Feb 2016 | Parish Council attended a training session run by RCCE and secured £950 initial funding for publicity. Councillors agree “next steps” at PC meeting 24th February 2016. |
| April 2016 | Training on Neighbourhood Planning with members of public and RCCE in preparation for moving NP forward. |
| April 2016 | Letter to Basildon Borough Council to designate the Area for the Neighbourhood Plan |
| May - June 2016 | Public consultation held regarding designated area. Publicity distributed and community information provided at Picnic-in the Park Event on 12th June 2016. Publicity on website and updates at Parish Council meeting 29th June 2016. |
| July 2016 | Meeting with Basildon Council regarding progress of designated area and Neighbourhood Plan |
| November 2016 | Basildon Borough Council produce their Alternative sites consultation |
| November 2016 | Parish Council Newsletter published and delivered to all households in the Parish and available on the website asking for residents to engage with their views. |
| June 2017 – February 2018 | Steering Group formally meet and vision and scope of content in Neighbourhood Plan discussed and agreed. |
| June 2017 | Parish newsletter produced updating residents on Neighbourhood Plan progress and including a consultation questionnaire survey for community to complete. Survey included on the website for completion, available to download and via telephone request. |
| July 2017 | Community Engagement: Consultation undertaken to obtain the views of the Community on Plan proposals via three drop-in sessions held during July at various times and locations in the Parish. |
| August 2017 October 2017 | Scoping Report: Six week consultation with statutory consultees on Sustainability Appraisal, incorporating a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SA/SEA) |
| September 2017 | Consultation on Neighbourhood Plan proposals undertaken at Parish Council Picnic – in – the Park event. |
| October 2017 | Results of Neighbourhood Plan survey published on the Parish Council website and at Parish Council Meeting |
| December 2017 | Meeting with Plotland Owners regarding Neighbourhood Development Order |
| January 2018 | Consultation survey to Plotland Owners to obtain views and results published. |
| February 2018 | Publication of Pre-Submission – Regulation 14. Consultation with statutory consultee, community and other stakeholders. |

4.5 The summer 2017 consultation exercise generated a 20% response rate from parishioners using the survey forms, but many others commented on the draft ideas at the Picnic in the Park event. The survey showed that people responded from right across the main settlement areas of the Parish. 80% of those responding had lived in the Parish for over 10 years.

4.6 The survey demonstrated that almost everyone was familiar with the Borough Council’s proposals for east of Basildon. A very high percentage were against those proposals as they would lead to Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet becoming part of the town – no-one considered that the proposed area of open space left would maintain the separation between the town and villages.

4.7 Almost half of respondents supported the Orbit Homes proposals for housing and a new country park at Hall Farm even though that would also require a considerable release of land from the Green Belt. And two thirds backed the proposals for greater infill development in North Benfleet and its removal from the Green Belt to enable proper investment in its local infrastructure. There was also overwhelming support for keeping traffic to a minimum between London Road and the A127 to discourage it becoming even more of a through route. And there was also strong support for protecting existing shops, facilities and allotments and for additional facilities e.g. a pharmacy and a doctors surgery.

**5. Vision, Objectives & Land Use Policies**

**Vision**

5.1 Our vision of the Parish in 2034 is a very simple one which can be summarised as:

**“One Village”**

**Objectives**

5.2 To create one village, we need to achieve the following five key objectives:

* combine Bowers Gifford, North Benfleet and new land at Hall Farm to create a single, sustainable settlement inset from the Green Belt
* deliver a wide range of plots for new homes of all types and tenures, suited to large and small house builders and self-builders
* deliver new shops, primary school, health centre and country park with access for all
* protect important green spaces for biodiversity value and rural character
* reduce the effects of traffic on Pound Lane on safety, air quality and congestion

**Land Use Policies**

5.3 The following seven policies relate to the development and use of land in the designated Neighbourhood Area of Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet. They focus on specific planning matters that are of greatest interest to the local community, especially in seeking to direct and manage the considerable change likely in this area in the coming decade or so.

5.4 There are many parts of the Parish that are not affected by these policies, and there are many other policy matters that have been left to the Basildon Local Plan to cover. This has avoided unnecessary repetition of policies between the two plans, though they have a mutual, helpful inter-dependence.

5.5 Each policy is numbered and titled, and it is shown in bold italics. Where necessary, the area to which it will apply is shown on the Policies Map attached to the document. After each policy is some supporting text that explains the purpose of the policy, how it will be applied and, where helpful, how it relates to other Local Plan policies.

**BGNB1 A Spatial Plan for the Parish and the New Village**

***The Neighbourhood Plan proposes the definition of a new village of Bowers Gifford & North Benfleet that is inset within the Green Belt, as shown on the Policies Map.***

***The new village will comprise the existing village of Bowers Gifford and the North Benfleet Plotlands and the new residential area of Hall Farm. It will be served by upgrades to Pound Lane between the new junction with the A127 and an improved junction at London Road.***

***The following new development and infrastructure proposals will be supported:***

* ***approx. 800 new homes, local commercial services and community facilities at Hall Farm (see Policy BGNB2)***
* ***approx. 300 – 400 new homes at North Benfleet (see Policy BGNB3)***
* ***approx. 50 new homes in Bowers Gifford (see Policy BGNB4)***
* ***traffic management measures along Pound Lane (see Policy BGNB5)***
* ***the protection and improvement of existing community facilities, shops and business premises (see policies BGNB6 and BGNB7)***
* ***the creation of the 83Ha Country Park (see Policy BGNB8)***

5.6 This policy is presented as an integral part of the alternative spatial strategy to that proposed by Policy H13 of the Local Plan and in the High Level Development Framework. Its key elements are shown on the Concept Plan (Plan E below) and are set out in the other policies of the Neighbourhood Plan.

5.7 The other elements of the strategy are the development of approx. 500 homes adjoining Pitsea and as many as 1,000 homes at Hovefields & Honiley, both of which lie alongside the Parish boundary. When taken as a whole the strategy will deliver at least the same if not a larger quantum of development proposed in Policy H13 and will invest in the major highways and social infrastructure of that policy.

5.8 The most fundamental weakness in the H13 approach is that it will lead to the coalescence of both Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet with the main Basildon urban area. Although the policy requires a green wedge to be provided between new development at Pitsea and Bowers Gifford on either side of the wedge, that landscape feature cannot form an effective gap between the settlements, as acknowledged in the Local Plan landscape sensitivity evidence.

5.9 The outcome of our alternative strategy will be the creation of a single village of Bowers Gifford & North Benfleet comprising the existing village of Bowers Gifford, the current Plotland area of North Benfleet and the developable area of the scheme east of Pound Lane at Hall Farm. The single village will be inset from the Green Belt so that development management policy would be consistent across the whole settlement. North Benfleet will no longer be regarded as a ‘Plotland’, although its future development and infrastructure improvements will respect its heritage and distinct character within the new village.



*Plan E: ‘The New Village’ Concept Plan*

5.10 The new village will benefit from the significant upgrade in community and green infrastructure, notably the country park and a 2FE primary school, local shops and community hub located in what will become the geographical centre of the village. The vast majority of Green Belt between the village and Basildon/Pitsea will remain to prevent the coalescence of the two and all of the land to the east of the village towards Thundersley will remain in the Green Belt, but with it all being open to public access as part of the country park. There will be no need for a new, expensive link road through the countryside. Pound Lane will be the main village road with a network of walking and cycling routes through and around the village linking to it and the new community hub and Country Park. There will be new traffic management measures to encourage walking and cycling and additional bus services.

5.11 This scale of development, and its location, will still mean that it is able to contribute at least, if not more, to the costs of improving the A127 junction and related road infrastructure. And there will be greater confidence in its delivery within the plan period, especially within the Neighbourhood Plan area, as the land is available, there are fewer land owners and no need for any equalisation agreements between them. The Hall Farm site is in single control and the North Benfleet proposals will be delivered by some form of new community development vehicle.

5.12 There is also no need for a new link road between Burnt Mills Road and London Road to serve the new developments. The land off Pitsea can be served by London Road and can stitch in to some of the existing residential streets in Pitsea. The ‘new village’ can be served by an upgraded Pound Lane from the new A127 junction to Burnt Mills Road, with the remainder of Pound Lane to London Road improved to encourage slower traffic speeds, cycling and walking as the new spine for the village.

5.13 The Parish Council consulted the local community over the summer of 2017 to gauge its views on this alternative strategy. As will be shown in detail in the Consultation Statement of the Neighbourhood Plan in due course, there is a clear majority in favour of this strategy, especially when compared with the H13 approach.

5.14 Work has been commissioned by the Parish Council to review each of the evidence documents – Green Belt, landscape, infrastructure– and to prepare revised evidence to support its preferred strategy. From the work done so far on the Draft Sustainability Appraisal of the Neighbourhood Plan, it is possible to make some top-level comparisons across the various Sustainability Appraisal objectives.

5.15 It has confirmed that the preferred strategy delivers a stronger sustainability outcome than the H13 approach, especially in respect of its landscape, biodiversity, health/well-being, vibrant communities and efficient land use objectives. By contrast, the alternative strategy will:

* minimise the harmful effect of losing Green Belt land
* preserve the settlements as distinct from the main town
* enable North Benfleet to become properly integrated into a new village
* deliver a recreational asset of regional, let alone, local value, and
* provide a greater certainty that the strategy will be delivered, with far fewer landowners to bring together.

**BGNB2 The New Village: Hall Farm**

***The Neighbourhood Plan reserves land at North Benfleet Hall, as shown on the Policies Map, for a residential-led, mixed use scheme, subject to its future partial release from the Green Belt as part of the insetting of the new village from the Green Belt.***

***Development proposals will be supported, provided:***

* ***A comprehensive masterplan is prepared and approved by the local planning authority for the whole site and comprises a residential scheme, a country park, a green infrastructure scheme, a primary school, a commercial scheme and a community facility;***
* ***The residential scheme comprises approx. 800 homes of a variety of types and of which at least 200 are provided as affordable homes, including at least 40 Starter Homes;***
* ***The country park comprises 83 Ha of land that will remain in the Green Belt and that will include a variety of areas including informal recreation, allotments/community gardens and managed woodland/biodiversity value;***
* ***The green infrastructure scheme comprises land within the residential and commercial schemes for a village green, sports pitches, children’s play areas and amenity land, in accordance with the development plan requirements, and which connects with the country park in the form of walking/cycling and habitat corridors;***
* ***The primary school area is planned to accommodate two forms of entry in its buildings and outdoor play area and is located within the site to be convenient to pupils in Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet;***
* ***The commercial scheme comprises a local centre of retail and is located within the site to be convenient to the residents of Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet; and***
* ***The community facility comprises a multi-functional building to serve the residents of Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet and is located within the commercial scheme***

***Development proposals must also have regard to the need to:***

* ***Sustain and enhance the historic significance of All Saint’s Church and its setting;***
* ***Avoid development in Flood Zones 2 and 3 and to satisfactorily manage the effects of surface water and groundwater flooding within the site and its adjoining area; and***
* ***Make a financial contribution to the improvement of the junction of Pound Lane with the A127 and to traffic management measures to Pound Lane as far as London Road and to the promotion of high quality bus services.***

5.16 This policy operates in tandem with the Local Plan by reserving land at North Benfleet Hall for a residential-led, mixed use development scheme pending its release from the Green Belt by the Local Plan for this purpose. The land will form one of three parts of the new village of Bowers Gifford & North Benfleet.

5.17 The policy sets out the key development principles by which the scheme will be required to come forward to secure planning consent, which must be done through the submission and approval of a comprehensive masterplan covering the whole site. Those principles have been agreed with the land interest and the Borough Council and form an essential part of the justification for the release of the land from the Green Belt. In general, the principles reflect the design provisions of the Local Plan but are specific to this site in respect of the importance of the benefits of the scheme being accessible to the existing communities of North Benfleet and Bowers Gifford. Its Pound Lane frontage, especially in its south west corner, provides the opportunity to locate a new primary school, commercial scheme and community facility to serve this purpose.

5.18 Similarly, the policy acknowledges the importance of All Saints Church, as a special heritage asset, in views across the site, and of the flood risk zone on part of the Pound Lane frontage. Finally, the policy makes clear the importance of the scheme providing appropriate financial contributions to upgrading that section of Pound Lane to its junctions with the A127 and to the junction itself, in line with the Local Plan highways strategy. However, traffic should be discouraged from using Pound Lane through the new village to London Road with contributions made to measures to encourage walking and cycling and to promote higher quality bus services.

**BGNB3 The New Village: North Benfleet**

***The Neighbourhood Plan proposes that land at North Benfleet, as shown on the Policies Map, is inset from the Green Belt. Development proposals within North Benfleet will either be consented by the North Benfleet Neighbourhood Development Order or will otherwise be supported, provided:***

1. ***any buildings are in keeping with their surroundings by reason of their form, bulk and general design;***
2. ***the creation of any residential curtilage does not harm the openness or visual amenities of the surrounding green belt;***
3. ***they will not result in inappropriate outside storage of any materials, machinery and/or vehicles; and***
4. ***the immediate access road is adequate to accommodate the increase in vehicle traffic generated, having regard to its physical and environmental capacity.***

5.19 This policy proposes that the settlement of North Benfleet is inset from the Green Belt by the new Local Plan as part of its release of Green Belt land within the Parish to meet local housing needs. This will enable the area to be considered an integral one of the three settlements that together will form the new village of Bowers Gifford & North Benfleet. Development will be managed primarily through the North Benfleet Neighbourhood Development Order, which will be formulated once the new Local Plan is adopted and/or the Neighbourhood Plan is made, or otherwise by the criteria of this policy.

5.20 Although North Benfleet is one of thirteen Plotlands in the Borough, the scale and nature of the changes proposed in the Local Plan are profound. In effect, North Benfleet will cease to be a distinct settlement set within the Green Belt and instead will become part of a significantly larger Bowers Gifford & North Benfleet village. The release of Green Belt land to deliver 800 new homes and country park at North Benfleet Hall, as provided for by the Local Plan and Policy BGNB1, will functionally and physically connect North Benfleet with Bowers Gifford and will transform Pound Lane as the ‘spine’ of the larger village.

5.21 In any event, the last few years have seen residential and other developments in North Benfleet, both consented and unauthorised, that have undermined its role in preserving the essential open character of the Green Belt. Further, there is sufficient vacant and under-utilised land within the defined area to make a significant and positive contribution to meeting local housing needs and, in doing so, to create a critical mass of new development to invest in upgrading the local road network and its sustainable drainage and utilities infrastructure. It is therefore no longer necessary or appropriate for North Benfleet to remain ‘washed over’ by the Green Belt.

**BGNB4 The New Village: Bowers Gifford**

***The Neighbourhood Plan reserves two parcels of land at London Road, Bowers Gifford, as shown on the Policies Map, for residential schemes for a total of approx. 50 homes, subject to their future release from the Green Belt as part of the insetting of the new village from the Green Belt.***

***Development proposals will be supported, provided each scheme provides a satisfactory access to London Road and makes a financial contribution to the improvement of the junctions of Pound Lane with the A127 and with London Road and to the management of traffic on Pound Lane.***

***The Neighbourhood Plan designates the land north of Homestead Road, as shown on the Policies Map, as a Local Green Space. Development proposals that will harm the essential open character of the Local Green Space will only be supported in exceptional circumstances.***

5.22 This policy operates in tandem with the Local Plan by reserving two separate parcels of land on London Road at Bowers Gifford for small residential schemes, pending their release from the Green Belt by the Local Plan for this purpose. The extended village will form the other of the three parts of the new village of Bowers Gifford & North Benfleet.

5.23 The policy sets out the key development principles by which the schemes will be required to come forward to secure planning consent. In practice, the principles focus on ensuring a safe and convenient access is made to London Road and that financial contributions are made to the improvements of Pound Lane and its junctions with London Road and the A127.

5.24 This policy designates a Local Green Space as defined by §76 of the NPPF and in accordance with the tests set out in §77. The land is currently in the Green Belt, with which Local Green Spaces share the same purpose. However, the land forms a distinct part of a wider area of land at Little Chalvedon Hall Farm that has been actively promoted for release from the Green Belt. Although it has no physical feature on its western boundary, the extent of the development on its northern, southern and eastern edges, and the presence of the Farm buildings on its western edge, combine to form a distinct parcel of land. It lies in close proximity to most residents in the Parish and it is not an extensive tract of land, in contrast to the land to the west of the Farm buildings. It has no public access, but it is cherished by the local communities as defining the space between Bowers Gifford to the south and North Benfleet to the north.

**BGNB5 The New Village: Pound Lane**

***Proposals for development fronting on to Pound Lane, as shown on the Policies Map, must demonstrate that they can achieve a satisfactory access to the road.***

***Development proposals requiring the preparation and agreement of travels plans as planning conditions or obligations, are required to prioritise in their travel interventions the making of financial contributions to walkway and cycleway improvement projects on Pound Lane and its connections into Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet.***

5.25 This policy identifies Pound Lane as critical to the success of managing traffic and of promoting cycling and walking in Bowers Gifford & North Benfleet village in future years. It firstly requires all proposals for development that seek a direct access to Pound Lane to show that this can be achieved successfully. And secondly, it requires the Travel Plans of relevant planning applications to prioritise investments in creating new cycling and pedestrian facilities along the road.

5.26 As such, the policy refines Policy TS3 of the Draft Local Plan in specifying Pound Lane as the local focus for cycle and footpath infrastructure actions. It is vital that the increase in traffic using the road to serve the new developments and to access the new A127 junction to the north does not discourage cycling and walking through the village.

5.27 However, the advantage of the arrangement of uses in the new village will mean that there is no need for a new distributor road in the strategic gap and Green Belt between the new village and Pitsea. The upgraded and traffic-managed Pound Lane will serve the new community but will avoid it becoming part of the strategic road network between the A127 and A13/A130.

**BGNB6 Community Facilities**

***The Neighbourhood Plan identifies the following buildings and ancillary land, as shown on the Policies Map, as community facilities for the purpose of applying development plan policy:***

* ***The Benbow Club, Pound Lane***
* ***Pound Lane Mission***
* ***St. Margaret’s CoE Primary School, London Road***

5.28 This policy identifies three valued community facilities in order to prevent their unnecessary loss. It works in tandem with Local Plan policy serving this purpose, i.e. Policy HC10 in the Draft Local Plan.

5.29 Each facility is popular and occupies a convenient location that is reasonably well suited to its function. Neither the Benbow Club or Pound Lane Mission are especially well provided for in respect of car parking, but many users walk to the facilities. It is expected the new primary school and community facility that will be delivered at North Benfleet Hall will supplement these facilities to serve a larger future population.

**BGNB7 Local Shops & Businesses**

***The Neighbourhood Plan identifies the following buildings and ancillary land, as shown on the Policies Map, as established retail or business uses serving the local community:***

* ***Bowers Convenience Store, Pound Lane/Canvey Road***
* ***Wilton Pet Centre, Pound Lane***
* ***Manor Garden Centre and adjoining land, Pound Lane/Clarence Road***
* ***Pound Lane Autos, Pound Lane***
* ***245 Pound Lane***
* ***The Gun Pub & Restaurant, London Road***
* ***Offices, Church Road***

***Proposals that will lead to the loss of a defined retail or business use through its redevelopment or change of use to a non-retail or business use will be resisted, unless it can be demonstrated that:***

1. ***the use is not financially viable as shown by at least 12 consecutive months active marketing of the premises for retail or business uses; and***
2. ***the location is no longer competitive for, or suited to, a retail or business use.***

5.30 This policy seeks to protect the small number of existing shops and businesses in the Parish from unnecessary loss to other non-retail (A1-A4) or non-business (B1-B8) uses. With the local population expected to increase significantly in the coming years, Bowers Gifford in particular will need to provide local services within walking distance of the majority of local people.

5.31 There are a number of well-established retail and business uses, especially along Pound Lane, which will become increasingly important as the ‘spine’ of the new community. Once lost, these uses will be difficult to replace in such a convenient and sustainable location. The commercial scheme that forms part of the North Benfleet Hall allocation is intended to supplement not replace the existing provision in Bowers Gifford.

5.32 As such, the policy supplements Policy R15 of the Draft Local Plan by extending the scope of that policy to cover all retail-type uses (i.e. A1 – A5) and business uses (B1 – B8), by increasing the minimum marketing period from 6 to 12 months, and by requiring evidence to show that the location, not just the present occupying business, is no longer competitive for a viable retail or business use.

**BGNB8 The Country Park**

***The Neighbourhood Plan designates 83Ha of land east of the new village of Bowers Gifford & North Benfleet as a Country Park for the benefit of the communities of the new village, of the wider Borough and of South Essex.***

***As the land will remain in the Green Belt, development proposals in the Country Park will only be supported if they are either defined as appropriate development in the Green Belt or in very special circumstances.***

5.33 This policy forms an integral part of the setting to the new village of Bowers Gifford & North Benfleet. The laying out of the land for use as a Country Park in perpetuity will mean that it will continue to play a fundamental role in preventing the coalescence of the village with Thundersley to the east.

5.34 This proposal forms an important part of the ‘very special circumstances’ to warrant the release of the adjoining Hall Farm land from the Green Belt and is in line with new Government policy that expects such releases to be compensated for by opening up access to private land for the enjoyment of the local communities of the Parish and further afield.

**POLICIES MAP**





**PUBLISHED BY BOWERS GIFFORD & NORTH BENFLEET PARISH COUNCIL**



1. *Basildon Borough Heritage Group. The Green Centre, Pitsea, SS16 4UH* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Institute of Historical Research* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Historic England* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Basildon Borough Heritage Group. The Green Centre, Pitsea, SS16 4UH* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)