

Basildon Borough Council Local Plan

views on Policy H 26 Land East of Greens farm Lane

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Comments on behalf of the Mill Meadows Society Management Committee

Comment is on the viability of the proposal wrt the include 'extension to Mill Meadows Nature Reserve': (not concerned with issues of urban sprawl, services or infrastructure). By making comment on the proposal, this does not imply a support of a planning application nor does it imply that The Society accepts that there is necessity to build on Green Belt land – we are following the Essex Wildlife Trust policy of not supporting planning applications but will comment on the impact of an application on the local wildlife habitats and make suggestions to mitigate the impact and to improve the biodiversity of an affected area.

1. The additional housing in such proximity to the existing Mill Meadows will cause a spike in recreational use of the Local Nature Reserve. We need to look carefully at the consequential risk of damage to the existing reserve and how to mitigate this. Consideration must be given to:
 - a. improving the PROW and Marked Trail to try and prevent footpath widening and de facto new routes,
 - b. possible need for additional fencing to protect areas,
 - c. vulnerability of cattle,
 - d. risk of increased dog mess and vandalism
 - e. education about the nature of the site i.e. LNR not amenity park. E.g. extending the new interpretation boards to more access routes.
2. Wrt the proposed extension: in principle it is a good idea in that:
 - a. a larger area of the LNR could absorb the increased human impact,
 - b. it does potentially provide a corridor linking the LNR to the wider Living Landscape
 - c. it does potentially enhance the Countryside Walks by providing a safe route between the LNR and Outwood Farm Road which is not through a built environment.
3. (at least) Two main reasons why the grassland habitat may not develop:
 - a. Open access, with the risk that footfall impacts and/or erodes the newly planted grassland
 - b. Unsuitability of soil. According to Natural England¹ “species rich grassland is a very difficult habitat to create and there have been many failures”. We would need assurances that the soil has been tested and the appropriate treatment diagnosed.

¹ <http://tinyurl.com/zxbongq> TIN066 © Natural England 2010 First edition 18 June 2010 www.naturalengland.org.uk Arable reversion to species rich grassland

Although we would ideally want to see unimproved grassland develop we would also suggest an area is considered for a new orchard of native fruit trees.

4. Ref 11.205 : the proposal to have the housing at the north and south ends of the site (see pic1 below) has some drawbacks:
 - a. the interface between Mill Meadows and the Extension being limited to Hillmans, which is a wooded rather than a grassland area.
 - b. some of the best of the hedgerows i.e. along the boundary of Sunnymede School will be lost.
 - c. Road casualties of animals moving between Mill Meadows and the Extension. Within the last 3 months there have been, to our knowledge, a Red Fox and a Muntjac Deer killed, the latter which dies of injuries. Whereas these are not protected species there is distress to the animal (and potentially the driver). We therefore suggest that, as Greens Farm Lane will effectively be bisecting a Local Nature Reserve, that the current 40 mile limit would be inappropriate and that traffic calming should be implemented.

Whereas there is not a solution that does not result in some habitat loss, the possible impact of these aspects of the design needs to be verified in the surveys (see next point) and mitigated for in the Transition. It may be that we will recommend that all development is kept away from the the north end of the site.

Pic 3 below shows a view of the site and the possible wildlife corridors that need to be built into the landscape plan. The species likely to use the corridors will do so to move to feeding areas and to establish territories; birds which move through the hedgrows, bats which follow hedgerow lines and reptiles and small mammals which will need cover under which to move.

Ref 11.206: the ecological assessment needs to include seasonal surveys e.g. breeding bird, butterflies and other insects, bat feeding, flowering plants. It would be useful to invite local naturalists to start contributing to these from Spring 2016. For example, we would like to know which hedgerows are favoured by bats and bullfinches.

5. Ref 11.209 : concerned about the access point from Outwood Common Road, as this may need to be developed resulting in a loss of good roadside hedgerow.
6. Ref: '5'. Basildon Council is the ideal choice given that they own and manage Mill Meadows.
7. Ref: Point 6; should state "Development of this site must not cause harm to biodiversity *on the adjoining Mill Meadows LNR*, and in association with the landscaping proposals should seek to achieve a net gain in biodiversity."
8. Accompanying an actual planning application there should be a Development and Management Plan for the Mill Meadows Extension. This to include:
 - a. Current state including key habitats and conditional assessment
 - b. Importance as a link to Mill Meadows – known and possible wildlife use of the site as a corridor

- c. Desired state: including key habitats and species
- d. Transition plan, including the protection of habitats from people, dogs (and cattle?) as they evolve e.g. grassland and pond bank vegetation
- e. Ongoing management regime, including monitoring the success of the habitat development

We should assume that the site layout in the promotional video (see pic 2) is illustrative for concept-marketing, and is not prescriptive. There are many factors that need to be taken into account in the layout of habitats e.g. the impact of new street lighting and footpaths.

- 9. Volunteers who work with Essex Wildlife Trust, Basildon Council and the Mill Meadows Society would want to work with the developers' ecologists on this plan, which should be approved by Basildon Council Countryside Services as a condition of approval of the Planning Application.

pic 1



pic 2



1. Scrub & Grassland Meadow
2. Wildflower Meadow
3. Grassland Meadow
4. Retained Woodland Planting
5. New Tree Planting
6. Informal Grass Footway
7. Waterbody/Natural Drainage Feature
8. Wetland Area
9. Diverse Mix of Vegetation, Enhancing Biodiversity



pic 3