

Statement of Mr Andrew Ketteridge:

Council, 30 October 2023

For seven years WeAreResidents and Residents4Uttlesford opposed all previous attempts at a Local Plan by this council, and then demanded that the council deliver a local plan based around one or more new settlements, repeatedly favouring land north-east of Great Chesterford when they had given up favouring Elsenham.

In early 2019, this council was given £750,000 by the government to cover costs of planning for new garden settlements.

There are no new settlements in this plan, garden or otherwise, only extensions of existing towns and villages, which is exactly what R4U opposed, but I guess that having left the district open to speculative development the economies of scale have been completely lost. Indeed, Cllr Neil Reeve recently publicly stated that he was happy that as a result of considerable speculative development, councillors would no longer have the difficulty of planning for a new town, after suggesting that nobody on the council really wants to build new houses.

With 299 sites of varying size and location coming forward in the call for sites, planning to build on the Countryside Protection Zone in Takeley and sending officers out to negotiate with other sites that did not come forward to the south of Saffron Walden, is indeed surprising.

“Don’t build on the east” of Saffron Walden was the slogan on posters and boards around 2013 and 2014. They objected to the three sites that were Linden Homes, Engelmann and at the time Kier Homes. They objected to the land that Kier wanted to make available for sports and leisure on the west side of Thaxted Road where development of new housing has now just begun.

And yet, we see plans for the further development of land to the east of Saffron Walden, nearer to Swards End, including a site for 450 homes that currently has no access to roads.

Your draft plan includes a drawing of a road from Thaxted Road through Debden Road to Newport Road, across land that was described as ‘an exciting new opportunity’ and ‘commercially confidential’ and secret until I worked it out and put in a Freedom of Information request. It was also inadvertently leaked by the council’s own consultants!

Despite the Sustainability Appraisal saying ‘it is understood that land might potentially be available’ (one has to ask who it is who understands that?), negotiations with the landowners to the south of Saffron Walden “came to nothing”, or so we are told, yet one landowner put in a planning application for a new agricultural field access off Newport Road a couple of hundred yards south of where they currently have had a field access for many decades, which just happens to be exactly where the road junction would have to be built.

The Beechy Ride or Fulfen valley is a beautiful heritage agricultural landscape, one of several that make Saffron Walden the place that it is, and it is assessed in the

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evidence at the highest level value. Why then would anyone want to develop it or build a service road on it? So, this being the case, why would this council bizarrely pursue a plan to further develop the east side of Saffron Walden when the land for the road isn't available and R4U always opposed it? What is it, perhaps, about that site for 450 houses to the east that it is appraised for development when it should have been appraised as unsuitable and unsustainable?

We desperately need a plan, but Cllr Lees promised she would only deliver a plan if it was "absolutely right, done correctly and sound".

Details of this plan were leaked last year, but in February we were told that the rumours around sites were 'blatant lies'. Only, we now know the rumours were true. This plan was ready in the summer of 2022 but it was kept under wraps until after the election in May.

Will the final draft of the plan will be "substantially different" to this one? If so, I have no confidence in the process to date. We were once in control of the district's future, and yet after years of opposition from R4U, we are now completely at the mercy of landowners and developers!