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Mr. David Green, BA, Dip.TP, MRTPI,
Director of Sustainable Communities,
PO Box 7544 Civic Centre,
Duke Street,
Chelmsford,
Essex. CM1 1JE

Dear Mr. Green,

Chelmsford Local Plan – issues and options consultation

Thank you for this most recent opportunity to take part in revising the Development Plan for Chelmsford. I have studied its planning history as a whole but am writing to you principally as a resident of Broomfield for the last forty years with a particular interest in its landscapes.

The extensions of Chelmsford towards Broomfield, and of Broomfield itself, which are already planned were, among other objectives, devised to minimise damage to their landscape settings. They were chosen as preferable to all other development proposals you have studied in the Broomfield area and for the reasons you have previously given. The amount of development to be pressed into Broomfield, and between it and Chelmsford's previous edge, reaches the limit of what might ever be sensibly achieved. The amount of development already committed in Broomfield leaves no room for more during either this or any future Development Plan review. It is pleasing to see that design of the new edges has recognised this principle and is creating durable, pleasing outward facing aspects for Chelmsford. When they are built, I hope the same will be true of the planned extensions to Broomfield.

Land west of Broomfield is amongst the best and most versatile agricultural land known. National policy for safeguarding this irreplaceable natural resource has fluctuated over the years but its absolute value remains undisputed, as far as I know. Any building west of Broomfield would diminish that resource. Spatial planning is about the long term and food from our own resources will again become a priority; probably in the nearer future. The best and most versatile agricultural land should not be used for building.

Published assessments of landscape character [Rackham, Hunter, Countryside Agency (now Natural England), Blandford] are unequivocal in their conclusions about the North Essex and South Suffolk Clayland, of which the Pleshey Farmland Plateau is a part. Views over the plateau are long and buildings on it are the dispersed farmsteads; together with the ends, greens and tyes which comprised the hamlets in which farm populations lived. Villages and towns are in the valleys. All one sees of them from the plateau are the spires of churches, sometimes towers too.

Tranquillity of this ancient landscape has survived over centuries to become invaluable environmental capital. Expansions of towns and villages in North Essex have been contained within the valleys. One does not see them until they are reached. This is the best kind of separate identity available. You travel out of one place to another through countryside from which neither is visible. This is a fundamental element in the pattern of settlement and should remain a principle in town and country planning.

In my opinion, no element of this landscape analysis has changed since I last wrote to the Council about it nearly ten years ago. I have not changed my mind about its interpretation for policy making. **I object to development which would extend built areas up onto the farmland plateau west of Broomfield.** Broomfield has already been planned for as much extension as possible within its landscape setting and no further extension can be added without breaching its natural limits. Once out of the valley, every built intrusion would be visible over long distances and thus wholly unacceptable in landscape conservation and settlement pattern terms.

For almost all of its history, Chelmsford has been contained within the valley formed by the rivers flowing through it. Extensions out of the valley are a mistake. There will come a time when Chelmsford reaches the limit of its expansion possibilities. Those possibilities have been reached already on some of its margins but there are opportunities to build within the city's jurisdiction which would be consistent with conservation of its natural resources. These will always be preferable to the diminution of environmental capital which extending Broomfield westward onto the plateau would entail. A town planning strategy which requires building on the plateau west of Broomfield is the wrong strategy. **Any option with that outcome as a consequence should be rejected and an alternative chosen instead.**

I have written also to Neil Gulliver with a copy to Barry Knight.

Yours sincerely,