

STATEMENT BY ALAN STONES ON BEHALF OF KELVEDON AND FEERING
HERITAGE SOCIETY, BRAINTREE PLANNING COMMITTEE 26/05/20

Application 19/01222/REM 162 Dwellings North East of Inworth Road, Feering

On the 8th August 2019 we objected to the monotonous and characterless layout of the original scheme and the lack of coherent linked frontages enclosing street spaces advocated by the Essex Design Guide. Unfortunately the applicant has made only minimal changes and not fundamentally redesigned the scheme as we recommended.

The government's National Design Guide promotes better-designed housing and emphasizes the importance of local design guides such as the Essex Design Guide as the basis for what constitutes good design. The NPPF in para 130 says that planning authorities should refuse applications which disregard the principles of good design taking into account local design guidance. Yet the case officer for this application claimed in reply to a query from the local district councillor on the 2nd March that he regarded the NPPF in this matter as 'subjective', and that, although the Council has adopted the Essex Design Guide as a Supplementary Planning Document, it only uses the Guide's recommendations on garden size and back-to-back distances. Instead of following design guidance, officers review each design and site 'on its merits'.

The officers' report to the planning committee on this application does not mention the officers' views on the design quality of the scheme, whether the scheme complies with the principles of the Essex Design Guide, or whether urban design advice has been sought by officers. It merely quotes the applicant's Site-Wide Strategy agreed without consultation in May 2019. This document states (p36) under 'Design Streets as Places' "The design of all streets in the development should comply with the design principles set out in the Essex Design Guide". This the application scheme signally fails to do. Instead there seems to be an assumption that somehow this scheme's repetitive rows of similar yet slightly different detached or pairs of semi-detached houses separated by narrow gaps in some way respect the informal character of Feering.

Policy RLP 90 of the Local Plan Review 2005 and LPP 55 of the Publication Draft Local Plan 2017 say that the Council 'will seek a high standard of layout and design in all developments'. Instead the design quality of this application has been disregarded by the Council and is still being disregarded by the applicant, and so we urge refusal until the applicant is persuaded to address the design issues more seriously.