

North Benfleet



**An Exhibition Report for
Hickfort Ltd**

November 2006

CONTENTS

1.	Background	3
1.1	The site	3
1.2	The Consultation Process	4
2.	Public Exhibition	6
2.1	Timings and Logistics	6
2.2	Advertising	6
2.3	Attendance	6
2.4	Feedback Mechanism	6
2.4.1	Hard to reach groups	7
3.	Public Responses	8
3.1	Key Issues	8
3.2	Question 1	9
3.2.1	Sample Comments	10
3.3	Question 2	11
3.3.1	Sample Comments	12
3.4	Question 3	13
3.4.1	Sample Comments	14
3.5	Question 4	15
3.5.1	Sample Comments	16
3.6	Question 5	17
3.6.1	Sample Comments	18
3.7	Question 6	19
3.7.1	Sample Comments	20
4.	Conclusion	22
4.1	Next steps	22



1. BACKGROUND

1.1 The site

The site consists of 326 acres and is bound by the A130 to the north, the A127 to the west, existing playing fields and houses to the south and existing houses and fields to the east. The site is largely in the Green Belt. It consists of a series of homesteads and fields, as well as the industrial estate, Manor Trading Estate.

The site falls within the boundaries of Castle Point Borough Council and the Castle Point parliamentary constituency.

The borough of Castle Point is required to build 4,000 new homes. Approximately 800 of them have already been accounted for – the Hickfort scheme would deliver 2,400 new homes, the vast majority of the remaining 3,200.

The proposals

- 2,400 new homes
- 50-acre business park
- 80 acres of leisure area
- New primary school
- New retail park
- New community land (e.g. community centre)
- Relocation of Manor Trading Estate (traffic, noise and danger away from local residents) to the A127/A130 junction.
- New access link road
- Funds for local sports pitches and other

The aim is to deliver the required housing (helping to retain younger people) and new jobs in a single, sustainable scheme, while removing an industrial estate from a residential area and opening up new community land.



1.2 The Consultation Process

Hickfort Ltd is committed to consultation with the local community and stakeholders. By engaging Green Issues to act as a third party on this project it has opened up a vital process of consultation and dialogue, increasing understanding and ensuring the best results for all parties.

Hickfort is also encouraging participation in Castle Point Borough Council's Local Development Framework process, in particular the Core Strategy and Generic Development Control Policies Preferred Options Report, which was subject to public consultation until 10 November 2006.

To date, Green Issues has consulted with a number of key stakeholders to discover their views and provide them with the latest information on the project. Those consulted so far include a local school, a residents association, sports clubs, councillors and regional bodies. A survey of all occupants of the Manor Trading Estate has also taken place and a separate report has been produced which outlines its results.

As a direct result of this consultation, a number of changes have been made to the outlined scheme. These include:

- The repositioning of a large roundabout and realignment of a highway following consultation with Benfleet Football Club
- The re-routing of the bus only route and repositioning of the junction onto Church Road to improve safety for Robert Drake Primary School
- The pledge to provide new security fences around Woodside Cemetery
- Increased landscaping along the western border of Woodside Cemetery

There are a number of other suggestions and comments that have been made which Hickfort is looking at in more detail.



The plans are in their early stages and the consultation taking place is an ongoing process which aims to encourage input and participation. The public exhibition was a part of that process.



2. PUBLIC EXHIBITION

This report summarises the local community feedback from the public exhibition that has taken place in relation to the proposed development of North Benfleet. It also gives some responses provided by Hickfort to the issues raised. The aim of the public exhibition was to enable local residents and other interested parties to view the proposals by Hickfort for North Benfleet. It gave the opportunity for attendees to ask questions of the project team, including representatives from Hickfort.

2.1 Timings and Logistics

The exhibition was held on Wednesday 1st November between 3.30pm and 8.00pm. There was also an additional councillors' briefing between 2:30-3:30pm on the same day. The aim of the timings was to cover a weekday and evening, in order to maximise the opportunity for stakeholders to attend. The exhibition was held at the Hollywood Restaurant, Benfleet.

2.2 Advertising

To encourage attendance at the exhibition letters of invitation were sent to 5,126 local households. Prior to the event, posters were distributed around North Benfleet. There were also several articles in local newspapers outlining the purpose and timings of the exhibition.

2.3 Attendance

The public exhibition was attended by approximately 600 residents and other interested people.

2.4 Feedback Mechanism

An important aspect of any consultation process is maximising the opportunity for local residents to provide feedback on the proposals for the site. The project team handed out feedback forms to every person who entered the public exhibition and suggested they complete the forms. These could either be filled out at the event or taken away and returned by email, fax or via freepost address. In total 253 feedback



forms were received: 123 returned the feedback form on the day via the ballot box, 65 were returned via the freepost address, a further 55 were sent in through the website or via email and 10 were faxed to Green Issues.

2.4.1 Hard to reach groups

Hickfort Ltd accepts that not all members of the local community could attend the public exhibition for a variety of reasons. For this reason, a website has been created at www.greenissues.com/northbenfleet with all the information presented at the exhibition in an easily accessible format online. The website also has an online automated feedback form. A contact number was provided on the resident invitation letters, posters and newspaper advert. The telephone number allowed further information and feedback forms to be provided on request.

A four-page information leaflet was also produced and was available at the exhibition for people to take away. This was also sent out by mail directly to those who phoned Green Issues or Hickfort asking for further information.



3. PUBLIC RESPONSES

This section contains a detailed analysis of the feedback forms and breaks down the results. Please note that the percentage figures given are as a percentage of all the 253 feedback forms analysed. Therefore, respondents' answers can, in some cases, be included in two or more categories (where a range of issues are raised, totals may then add up to over 100%).

3.1 Key Issues

Based upon the feedback received from the exhibition there are several key issues arising from the proposed development at North Benfleet.

The most significant issue raised from the consultation was the impact upon traffic levels which the proposed new development would bring. Given the already high population density of the area this response is entirely understandable.

The relocation of the Manor Trading Estate generally received positive comment; even from those who were not in favour of the proposed scheme as a whole. This proposal could certainly be used as a win-win for the local community.

Although many thought that North Benfleet was currently well served with local facilities, there was an identified need for more retail outlets and a secondary school, provided the development went ahead. In fact a secondary school was seen as being more beneficial to the community than a primary school. However, there is little statistical analysis to support this assertion.

The issue of employment gain was scarcely raised, with the majority of respondents stating that they felt there was little need for local employment, given North Benfleet's status as a commuter town. This does however raise wider questions about transport use and investment within the town.



3.2 Question 1

This section of the feedback form is regarding public open spaces. The question asked was:

Our intention is to open up to the public areas of land that are currently in private hands. Please provide us with your comments on this.

The table below lists the responses gained.

Comments	No respondents	%
Will benefit local residents	33	18.75
Will not benefit local residents	32	18.18
No need for greater open space	20	11.36
Land should remain private	19	10.79
Concern over loss of green belt land	18	10.22
Should provide more land for open space	13	7.38
Maintain existing open spaces	11	6.25
Needs long term management	7	3.97
Need to encourage wildlife	7	3.97
Install bridleways/cycleways	4	2.27
Will remain available for public use	4	2.27
Include recreational facilities for public use	3	1.70
Install facilities for children	3	1.70
Concern about negative impact on wildlife	2	0.56
Total completed responses	176	69.56

The largest category in this section was those local residents who believed that the proposal to open up more private land to the public would be beneficial to the local community with 33 (18.75%) of respondents stating they were in favour. Although this figure is only slightly ahead of those who stated that the proposals would not be



beneficial (18.18%) it can still be seen as a positive outcome and one which should be used as a community gain if the development goes ahead.

Nineteen (10.79%) respondents stated that they wished to see the land remain in private hands and not be opened up as public space; this was closely followed by 18 (10.22%) who were concerned that such a move would be detrimental to the green belt.

There are a variety of factors which could explain the reasoning behind the 20 (11.30%) respondents who stated that they did not wish to see more public open space, the most frequent being a perception that this would lead to development occurring on these open spaces at some unspecified point in the future.

Seven (3.97%) respondents were also concerned about the long term management of the public open space and who would ultimately be responsible for the revenue costs associated with its maintenance. Linked into this concern was the need to ensure that the newly-created spaces were environmentally sustainable and would actively encourage wildlife and recreational use by local residents.

3.2.1 Sample Comments

- *“Already have plenty of public spaces”*
- *“We welcome public spaces but not the houses”*
- *“Will not benefit us, we would prefer it to stay in private hands”*
- *“There are many pleasant areas and walks within the area and we prefer it to remain in private hands”*
- *“Fine, so long as this is for recreation and leisure”*
- *“Absolutely essential, not enough at the moment”*
- *“So long as the land is for public use and remains that way by law i.e. not built on at some future date then I am all for it”*
- *“You can’t understate how important open space is. The more open space built into a proposal the better, in all aspects, to provide a more pleasant surrounding”*
- *“I feel that the public space is already available”*



- “If you get this land, will it be planted and who will provide the maintenance?”
- “Who will look after this land or will it be left and eventually built on”

3.3 Question 2

This section on the feedback form regarded the amount of heavy goods traffic passing through North Benfleet. The question asked was:

We believe that we can make a significant difference to the amount of heavy goods traffic currently passing through North Benfleet. Do you consider this to be beneficial to the area?

The table below show local residents responses.

Comments	No Respondents	%
It will have little impact on tackling congestion	51	29.31
The proposals will be beneficial to local residents	43	25.28
Increased residential traffic will be created	33	18.96
Proposals are good but offset by increased development	24	13.79
It is beneficial to move Manor Trading Estate	10	5.74
Saddlers Farm improvements needed	6	3.44
Should remove trading estate completely	2	1.14
Proposals will exacerbate rat-running	2	1.14
Improvements in public transport required	1	0.57
Concern over impact of construction traffic	1	0.57
Total completed responses	174	68.77%

The most common issue raised in this section with 51 (29.31%) respondents was that the proposed scheme would not help alleviate congestion in the area. In fact 33



respondents (18.96%) stated that the proposed development would adversely impact upon traffic levels on the surrounding roads.

Ten (5.74%) respondents indicated strong support for moving the Manor Trading Estate to improve traffic flow through the area. In terms of 'win win' gains this proposal can be seen as the most significant and should be used accordingly.

Other comments made in this section included 6 (3.44%) respondents who stated that improvements should be made to Saddlers Farm to alleviate traffic pinch points; one respondent commented that greater improvements should be made in public transport, whilst another that construction traffic would, in the short term, have a detrimental impact to current congestion levels.

3.3.1 Sample Comments

- *"I believe that reducing heavy goods traffic that passes through the area will be of benefit to everyone, especially the school children"*
- *"It won't make any difference"*
- *"The increased traffic due to the development will offset any benefit, making traffic congestion even worse than it currently is"*
- *"Your plans are for over 2k homes. How many more cars will that produce in comparison to a couple of lorries?"*
- *"The amount of heavy goods traffic would pale into insignificance when you take into account the amount of extra cars from the proposed development"*
- *"Great HGVs gone but hundreds of cars to come. This area is grid locked twice day now"*
- *"Yes, very beneficial"*
- *"This will create vastly more traffic using Church Rd to get to the A13, A127"*
- *"Ridding our small residential roads of HGVs can only be a good thing"*



3.4 Question 3

This section of the feedback form asked the question:

We have included plans for new shops and a new location for the Manor Trading Estate, along with other essential services like a school. What do you think of these ideas?

Below are the results of the feedback received.

Comments	No Respondents	%
There are enough facilities currently	40	23.66
The proposals are not beneficial to residents	27	15.97
Good to move Manor Trading Estate	27	15.97
The proposals are beneficial to local residents	26	15.38
Keep trading estate in current location	12	7.10
New retail outlets necessary	7	4.14
New secondary school needed	7	4.14
No need for additional primary school	6	3.55
New local health services needed	6	3.55
New primary school provision needed	5	2.95
Community Hall would be beneficial	2	1.18
Concern over impact on traffic levels	2	1.18
Sport/Leisure facilities should be included	2	1.18
Total completed responses	169	66.79

From the feedback forms received we can see that the main issue raised was the perception that there were currently sufficient retail outlets, services and schooling for local needs, with 40 (23.66%) citing this. This was based on the assumption that the development would not take place.



That said, 26 respondents (15.38%) stated that the proposals would be beneficial to the local area and new retail outlets were needed, along with 6 respondents (3.55%) who wished to see greater access to local health services.

The proposal to move the Manor Trading Estate was also seen as a positive attribute, with 27 respondents (15.97%) expressing a desire to see the estate moved. As mentioned in the earlier question this can be considered to be one of major benefits of the proposals.

Other comments raised included 2 respondents (1.18%) who favoured the provision of a new community hall in the proposed scheme and 2 (1.18%) who wanted to see greater provision of sport/leisure facilities, though neither of the two respondents expanded on this as to what sort of facilities they wished to see.

3.4.1 Sample Comments

- *“New location for the Manor Trading Estate, excellent idea. Shops and primary school essential. But what about dentists, secondary schools and the extra strain on police and hospitals?”*
- *“Another school? There are at least 7 in the local area.”*
- *“I believe this is a very good idea, that will make Castle Point a safer place. News shops are greatly needed.”*
- *“If we do not have the houses we do not need more shops”*
- *“We already have enough shops.”*
- *“Manor Trading Estate should not be in a residential area.”*
- *“Yes, again this is essential.”*
- *“I agree with these proposals.”*
- *“We don’t need any more shops”*
- *“Excellent opportunity to enhance the borough’s facilities including providing local jobs.”*



3.5 Question 4

The next section of the feedback form asked:

How do you believe the proposals respond to local housing needs for example, first time buyers, young families, key workers and the elderly?

Below are the results of the feedback received in this section.

Comments	No Respondents	%
Detrimental impact upon the green belt	30	19.86
Development should occur elsewhere	27	17.88
More affordable housing needed	24	15.89
Adequate housing stock already in area	17	11.25
Satisfied with proposals	14	9.27
Too much affordable housing	13	8.60
More help needed for first time buyers	10	6.62
Greater social housing provision needed	5	3.31
Concern over migration	5	3.31
Infrastructure needs to be developed first	4	2.64
Greater elderly residential provision	1	0.66
Concern over environmental impact of development	1	0.66
Total completed responses	151	59.68

In terms of the provision of new housing the major concern raised in this section centred on the detrimental impact the development would have upon the green belt, with 30 (19.86%) of residents citing it as their main area of concern. 27 (17.88%) of respondents suggested that development should take place elsewhere in Castle Point and 17 (11.25%) stated that there was already sufficient housing stock in the local area.



In terms of the responses to the composition of the housing itself, 24 (15.89%) of respondents stated that they wished to see a higher proportion of affordable housing included in the scheme, whilst only 13 (8.60%) respondents held the belief that the current level was already too high. Within the housing allocation, 5 (3.31%) wished to see more social housing and 1 respondent 0.66% suggested the need for more elderly accommodation to be included in the proposal.

Other comments made in this section included 5 (3.31%) respondents who stated their concern over migration to the area from other parts of the country, and the subsequent loss of a community feel; and 1 (0.66) respondent stated that the environmental impact of the current proposals would need to be clearly considered.

3.5.1 Sample Comments

- *“It’s the best proposal that has come up in the last twenty years”*
- *“Won’t benefit locals but will bring outsiders into the area”*
- *“Very good proposals”*
- *“Affordable housing in this area is critical”*
- *“I think that affordable housing should be distributed more evenly across the borough”*
- *“35% for first time buyers etc is not enough”*
- *“House prices in this area have risen so much that there must be a shortage”.*
- *“This new estate will not benefit the local young families, key workers or the elderly, only people from London”*
- *“More affordable housing needs to be provided, but with the priority given to local people as this will not increase the congestion we already have”*
- *“Critical need for affordable housing meaning generations of families can continue to reside in the area”*



3.6 Question 5

This section of the feedback form asked:

Do you believe that the proposals respond effectively to the need in Castle Point for better employment opportunities?

Below are the results of the feedback received for this section.

Comments	No Respondents	%
The proposals will not provide additional employment	31	22.30
Increase in new residents will outweigh benefits	22	15.82
Proposals do respond to local needs	18	12.94
No need to create additional employment	17	12.23
Proposals are beneficial to local community	14	10.07
Only provide low skill jobs/limited opportunities	11	7.91
Employment will last only during construction period	7	5.03
Concern over environmental impact of scheme	4	2.87
Concern over increased traffic	4	2.87
Area should remain primarily residential	4	2.87
There is a need for increased facilities i.e. retail	4	2.87
Will additional education/training be provided	3	2.15
Concern over the impact of relocating Manor Trading Estate	2	1.43
There will be increased opportunities from a new trading estate	2	1.43
Total completed responses	139	54.94

The largest single response to this question was surprising; with 31 (22.30%) respondents stating that they did not believe that the proposals would result in better employment opportunities in Castle Point.



There was a strong feeling, 22 (15.82%) respondents that any new employment would be taken up by residents of the new development and would therefore not be of benefit to the local population.

However, another 18 (12.94) respondents stated that the proposals do respond effectively to local needs in North Benfleet, while 14 (10.07%) held the belief that the proposals would benefit the local community as a whole.

There was a level of concern raised by 4 (2.87%) of respondents regarding the impact on traffic levels, whilst 4 respondents (2.87%) also voiced concerns over the environment impact of creating more employment opportunities.

11 (7.91%) responded stating that they felt that any additional employment created would consist of low paid and/or low skill jobs, offering limited opportunities to local residents. However, 2 (1.43%) respondents stated that the new Manor Trading Estate would provide additional employment opportunities.

3.6.1 Sample Comments

- *“More local jobs means less travelling, less carbon emissions, so good”*
- *“No. The new housing will probably bring an influx of people”*
- *“Yes, I’m sure it can only be good”*
- *“I don’t feel that there is an employment problem in Castle Point”*
- *“The only guaranteed employment this brings is in construction jobs whilst it is being built”*
- *“No, Benfleet is a commuting to London area, there is no need for more local employment”*
- *“No, a few retail shops and a supermarket will not constitute any significant increase in employment opportunities”*
- *“Yes, this would provide many local jobs, which will reduce the need for Castle Point residents to commute”*
- *“Hopefully it will as long as you can attract decent companies to the area”*
- *“You only need more jobs if you build more houses”*



3.7 Question 6

The final section of the feedback form requested any additional comments on the proposals laid out in the scheme.

Below are the results of the feedback received:

Comments	No respondents	%
Concern over impact on traffic levels/congestion	66	30.84
Against (unspecified)	26	12.14
Concern over loss of green belt land	19	8.87
No need for further development in Benfleet	19	8.87
Positive about development enhancing local area	17	7.94
Adverse impact upon environment/quality of life	16	7.47
There needs to be greater housing provision for the disabled	10	4.67
Insufficient infrastructure proposed	8	3.73
Positive about re-developing Manor Trading Estate	8	3.73
Concerns over increased levels of crime & anti social behaviour	7	3.27
Proposals are not beneficial to local residents	4	1.86
Concerns over water provision	4	1.86
Would like more details	3	1.40
Positive about increased retail facilities	3	1.40
Greater need for mixed development	2	0.93
Would rather develop Canvey Island	2	0.93
Positive regarding open space provision	1	0.46
Concerns over road safety	1	0.46
Total completed responses	214	84.58



The most frequent comment made under the general comments section relates to the impact of additional traffic created by the scheme on congestion in the Benfleet area, with 66 (30.84%) all respondents citing it as the main issue of concern.

A surprisingly high 26 (12.14%) respondents stated that they opposed the scheme although they failed to disclose their reasoning behind their opposition.

Development of the Green Belt, which was always going to be high, is closely linked to a belief held by 19 (8.87%) residents that Benfleet was already over developed and any future growth should occur elsewhere. This is of course not something that fits neatly with the housing targets imposed on the council.

Notably, 17 (7.94%) respondents stated that they were happy with the current proposals and that the scheme would enhance the local area, with 8 (3.73%) holding a positive response to proposals to move the Manor Trading Estate.

Other general comments included the need to provide housing to cater for people with learning disabilities with 10 respondents (4.67%); 8 (3.73%) stressed the need to ensure that additional infrastructure is provided to enable the development to be sustainable; and concerns regarding whether the area's water supply would be substantial enough to accommodate a new development 4 (1.86%).

3.7.1 Sample Comments

- *"I appreciate this opportunity to express my concerns about this project"*
- *"My main concerns are pollution and gridlock for the surrounding areas"*
- *"If it moves the trading estate it has to improve the area 100%"*
- *"Against any further building on green belt land"*
- *"Overall a good idea and excellent plan – thank you!"*
- *"Yes, I think this is a fantastic idea"*
- *"Where is all the extra water that will be required going to come from?"*
- *"We do not need the housing"*
- *"We are totally opposed to any further development in this already congested area"*



- *“These plans will not only affect the residents in and around this proposed site, but will destroy green land and its wildlife”*
- *“Community facilities would be very good as we have so very little in Benfleet”*



4. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the forms shows that respondents have seen a number of positives in the scheme, in particular, the relocation of the Manor Trading Estate and the proposal to create more areas of open space for public use. A number of local residents also felt that North Benfleet was in need of a greater provision of facilities for the community.

The major issue raised at the exhibition was the increase in the levels of traffic using already congested roads in the area, in particular, Saddlers Farm roundabout. Given the already congested roads in the area this perhaps was to be expected. There was also a strong negative response to the loss of green belt land which would occur if the proposals go ahead. However, this was tempered by the number of people who recognised that more housing, especially affordable housing was needed in the area.

4.1 Next steps

The objective of this report is to present a balanced view of the comments and opinions held by the people who attended the exhibition. The comments within this report will be carefully analysed and will influence any proposals put forward by Hickfort Ltd.

