



IRVINE ROAD AREA RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

newsletter

Your voice in the local community

FEBRUARY 2015

<http://www.irara.org.uk>

IF YOU ARE NOT
ALREADY A MEMBER,
JOIN IRARA NOW!

THE IRARA CAMPAIGN TO PRESERVE THE ANCIENT IRVINE ROAD ORCHARD AS A COMMUNITY RESOURCE AND LOCAL WILDLIFE RESERVE

Now you can help us save the orchard!

IRARA has learned that the property developers now in control of the ancient orchard at the rear of Irvine Road intend to submit a planning application for the building of 7 houses in the orchard. This will effectively destroy the area and remove forever any chance of it being available to the community as open space or to the local schools as a forest learning resource.

The developers are trying to get Colchester Borough Council (CBC) Planning Department to change the designation of the orchard from a local wildlife site and private open space to residential land, so they can build on it. You can stop this if you object now.

In the new Local Development Framework (LDF) consultation CBC are currently asking for potential building land. Objections to the orchard being developed should be emailed to: planning.policy@colchester.gov.uk



Before: The Chase leading to the orchard, once a rich habitat for Stag Beetles, Blackcaps and bats of various species. IRARA want to preserve this natural environment for the local community and schools.

IRARA will be emphasising the loss of an ancient orchard and the unique wildlife habitat as these attributes are what makes the orchard special, but property developers have become very proficient at defeating such objections, mostly by removing rare flora and fauna to 'alternative' locations, or simply leaving small unsustainable 'islands' of undisturbed areas as a sop to planning committees.

It is known that the orchard contains some very old and rare fruit trees, for example, but if preserved these would probably just be left intact and isolated until the properties are sold and the new owners begin the process of destroying them. Anyone who has lived in Colchester during the past 10 years knows exactly how this works.

Planning applications such as the one anticipated for the orchard can be defeated if there is sufficient opposition from the local community and if there are solid objections which are relevant in 'planning' terms, but we need to be aware that the planning process is heavily weighted in favour of housing development as a result of the current national obsession with 'building out of recession'.



After: The area adjoining The Chase has been cleared 'for access' as it is not covered by the Area Tree Preservation Order.

In this context, the 'relevant' points are:

- 1) This development will not benefit any local community housing need. The houses in question will certainly not be 'affordable housing' if the going rate for detached houses in the area is any guide and will typically be sold to people drawn into the area - not local people.
- 2) This development will not benefit the local community in any financial/employment respect. The only benefit will be to the developers who stand to make a considerable financial gain.
- 3) Even 7 houses will dramatically increase traffic and parking congestion in the street. IRARA has conducted surveys which showed that over 300 schoolchildren walk or cycle past the Chase in the mornings and evenings, so any additional road safety hazard should be rejected as there is no pressing need.
- 4) Even if you accept that mass house building and the consequent environmental destruction are justified, it is impossible to claim that this development would make any substantial difference to



local or national housing shortage, and the loss far outweighs the gain for the community,

- 5) The orchard has been designated as a Local Wildlife Site in the current Local Development Plan (LDP), a planning structure which is supposed to determine local planning policy for the foreseeable future.
- 6) The orchard has been designated as a Private Open Space in the current LDP. This means it has been specifically categorised as being not for development. The LDP was finalised after extensive local consultation and is a fundamental part of the democratic planning process. Passing property speculators should not be allowed to simply ignore this for personal gain. The CBC planning committee are duty bound to observe the designations contained in the LDP, otherwise it is a pointless failure.
- 7) The orchard is subject to an Area Tree Preservation Order (TPO). This means that the whole area, particularly the hedgerows, is protected. Any development at all would defeat the object of this, and any potential developer should be required to provide overwhelming evidence to overturn the TPO.
- 8) The Orchard is one of only 7 ancient orchards left in Essex, and the only urban orchard left. It appears on maps over 200 years old and as such is unique and deserving of preservation.
- 9) There is a considerable potential benefit to the local community, particularly local schoolchildren, if the orchard remains intact. Local residents have already attempted to buy it for use as a community orchard, but been outbid by the property speculators. However, preserving the orchard as a community resource remains the long term aim. Hamilton School have expressed a particular interest as their pupils currently have no green open space at all. If approval is given for even a small development, this possibility will be gone forever.
- 10) If this planning application goes ahead it will reveal a deeply worrying level of arrogance and thick skinned cynicism on the part of the developer. The CBC planning committee will need to be even more cowardly and indifferent than usual to approve it.

Consider:

- There is a full area TPO in place to protect the environment
- A full wildlife survey has been carried out which advised against development. The new owners are now conducting a new survey, which presumably will come up with a more 'convenient' result.
- The orchard is protected as a designated Local Wildlife Site
- The orchard is protected as a designated Private Open Space
- The orchard is not designated as residential land in the LDP
- The road entrance to the Chase (the only access to the orchard) does not meet current Highways requirements for safe access due to inadequate sight lines.

Any one of these considerations should be enough to prevent development, but the owners appear to be confident that they can somehow persuade/coerce the CBC planning committee to ignore all these objections.

Please help us save the orchard for the local community and schools by signing the petition when IRARA representatives knock on your door.

Thank you.

The IRARA experience of unwelcome planning applications has been that they can be defeated if our local community is sufficiently vocal and focussed. We managed to prevent the building of a Tesco store at the junction of Maldon Road and Butt Road (in the teeth of serious attempts by the property consultants to con local people) and the petition we organised against the infamous Philip Morant Access road forced the CBC planners to think twice about allowing the road.

This issue potentially affects a far greater number of people than those living in the immediate vicinity and differs fundamentally from the usual run of development applications in that it represents a blatant, full frontal attack on the local planning process.

It also offers a once in a lifetime opportunity to preserve a priceless resource which could be of immense benefit to the local community as a community orchard and educational facility.

New Local Development Plan

Almost as soon as the ink on the previous LDP has dried, everything is up for grabs again, with the new LDP consultation process beginning this year. The first stage in this process is Colchester Borough Council's call for landowners to offer new sites for consideration for development.

Needless to say, the new owners of the orchard have submitted a request to change its designation to residential land. This is a crucial first step towards getting planning permission and the local community needs to object in force before the closing date for submissions, **which is February 27th!**

If enough people object now we can head this off at the initial stages by preventing CBC from changing the orchard's planning designation from private open space to residential land.

Just email: planning.policy@colchester.gov.uk with your objections

We will be in touch within the next two weeks with more details of how to object and canvassing households in the area with a full explanation of the issues, but in the meantime visit www.irara.org.uk or contact us on the details below:

davidagkennedy@uwclub.net

or: info@irara.org.uk

Visit our Facebook page

IRARA has a Facebook page, the address is:

www.facebook.com/IrvineRoadAreaResidentsAssociation

