

Date: 27 February 2015  
Our ref: 7926/142405  
Your ref:



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Dear Sir/Madam

### **Colchester Local Plan – Issues and Options and Sustainability Appraisal**

Thank you for your correspondence in respect of the above consultation document, seeking the views and comments of Natural England on the above dated.

Natural England is the Government agency that works to conserve and enhance biodiversity and landscapes, promote access to the natural environment, and contribute to the way natural resources are managed so that they can be enjoyed now and by future generations

Natural England has previously commented on this Consultation document, this response will be in response to the areas in respect of the issues affecting Natural England's remit.

The document indicates that a Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA) is to be submitted with the Issues and Options document and is referenced in the appendix in respect of Natural England's earlier comments. I was not able to locate or identify the HRA nor is there reference to the:

Habitats Regulations 2010 and Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)

Could you please indicate the status of this document, and include reference to the above legislation in the Review of Relevant Plans and Programmes and Sustainability Objectives – Appendix 1 refers.

#### Housing

Natural England has no substantive comments to make in respect of this issue, however the following is offered as general advice and information.

Natural England believes that local authorities should consider the provision of natural areas as part of a balanced policy to ensure that local communities have access to an appropriate mix of green-spaces providing for a range of recreational needs, of at least 2 hectares of accessible natural green-space per 1,000 population. This can be broken down by the following system:

- No person should live more than 300 metres from their nearest area of natural green-space;
- There should be at least one accessible 20 hectare site within 2 kilometres;
- There should be one accessible 100 hectares site within 5 kilometres;
- There should be one accessible 500 hectares site within 10 kilometres.

This is recommended as a starting point for consideration by local authorities and can be used to assist with the identification of local targets and standards. Whilst this may be more difficult for some urban areas/authorities than other, Natural England would encourage local authorities to identify the most appropriate policy and response applicable to their Borough.

#### Sustainable Transport

Natural England has no substantive comments to make in respect of this section; however, the Council should consider the possibility of linking walking and cycling routes into the Green Infrastructure provision of the borough. This could be linked to the section on the Natural Environment, strengthening both sections further

#### Natural Environment

Natural England acknowledges and welcomes the references to the Natura 2000 sites, Special Protection Areas (SPA's), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC's) and Ramsar.

The submission of a Habitats Regulation Assessment will be required to screen for Likely Significant Effect in respect of development within the Borough.

Reference to the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) management Plan is welcomed as is the references to green and blue ribbon networks.

Paragraph 117 of the NPPF states that planning policies should:

- Plan for biodiversity at a landscape-scale across local authority boundaries...
- promote the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species populations, linked to national and local targets, and identify suitable indicators for monitoring biodiversity in the plan.

The issues identified under this section are relevant and refers to the issues we would expect to see considered.

#### Growth Options: Development Strategy

Infrastructure is mentioned in this section pages 35 to 37 refer, however this is no reference to green infrastructure.

Open Space and the Natural Environment provide a variety of benefits, including health benefits that green and open spaces can provide, together with promoting sustainable transport options such as walking and cycling and alleviating heat island effects and surface water runoff.

Under the type of land identified for growth there is reference to the Garden City principles including, generous green space linked to the wider natural environment, well connected and biodiversity rich public parks and open spaces. This is to be welcomed and supported and is in line with our comments on green infrastructure provision above. This could be more explicitly drawn out on the document.

#### **Sustainability Appraisal**

The Sustainability Framework lists ten objectives which can be broadly supported, especially Objective 8 "To value, conserve and enhance the natural environment, natural resources and the biodiversity of the Borough."

Under the Environmental Characteristics section, there is reference to Dedham Vale AONB, SAC's, SPA's, Ramsar and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's) which is welcomed and encouraged and should be seen as a material consideration.

Mitigation and Enhancements measures refers to the provision/inclusion of an open space policy, in respect of development proposal, this is welcomed and supported – see our comments above under Housing.

We really value your feedback to help us improve the service we offer. We have attached a feedback form to this letter and welcome any comments you might have about our service.

For clarification of any points in this letter, please contact David Hammond on 0300 0601373. For any new consultations or issues, please contact [consultations@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:consultations@naturalengland.org.uk).

Yours faithfully

**David Hammond**

**Lead Advisor**

**Land Use Ops Team**

**For and on behalf of Beds, Essex, Northants, Cambs, Herts**