

CAUSE (Campaign Against Urban Sprawl in Essex)
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Essex
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26 February 2015

Dear Sirs

Colchester Sustainability Assessment Scoping Report and Issues & Options Consultation

We write in response to Colchester Borough Council's Local Plan Issues and Options consultation.

About CAUSE (Campaign Against Urban Sprawl in Essex)

We are a voluntary action group, formed in 2010 in response to the new settlement proposed at West Tey by West Tey Consortium, now Gateway 120. We have a committee of twelve members, all of whom live in Colchester Borough or Braintree District.

In general, we are against the scale of urban sprawl proposed in the new Colchester Borough and Braintree District Local Plans.

Our concerns

1. Lack of high level planning

- i. There does not appear to be any plan to manage population growth in Essex and the Borough other than through more housing. There is scant consideration for generating employment or building infrastructure to facilitate economic growth. It is a 'cart before the horse' approach.
- ii. There is no goal of protecting countryside and preventing urban sprawl.
- iii. The duty to co-operate under the Localism Act requires Local Planning Authorities to co-operate in the formulation of their local plans. The Colchester (and Braintree) consultation documents do not go far enough in spelling out the necessary capacity improvements in infrastructure.
- iv. We call for a moratorium on major developments between Marks Tey and Braintree until a dualled A120 is built and a route agreed.
- v. Any suggestion that it is not possible to plan for healthcare in the Borough is of grave concern. In light of the projected growth in population and the ageing population, it is

imperative that the Council engages with the challenges to healthcare services and the pressures on hospitals.

- vi. We do not accept there is very little land available around Colchester. Colchester should quantify the amount of brownfield land available across the Borough, including redundant farm buildings. In any event, councils with little brownfield land available should not be expected to build on greenfield land when brownfield land is available locally or elsewhere.
- vii. Colchester Borough Council should engage with local MPs, Essex County Council and central Government to resolve these issues.

2. The consultation process.

- i. In contrast to the Braintree consultation, which allows residents to make general representations, Colchester's consultation directs us to consider potential development at specific locations. We hope that this does not mean that Colchester's consultation is a rubber-stamping exercise with a pre-determined developer-led set of outcomes.
- ii. We do not believe that any of the promulgated Options is right and we present an alternative in our attached submission.
- iii. We are against *separate* settlements detached from the main urban area.
- iv. We think Garden Cities or new towns can only be built with the support of central government and considerable land and infrastructure investment. Marks Tey is not the right place for a new town, nor is the local council able to deliver a project of this magnitude.

3. Scale of West Tey/Gateway 120 Proposal and Option

- i. We strongly object to the proposal for a settlement of over 15,000 houses proposed at Marks Tey, also known as West Tey or Gateway 120. This is the same size as the Ebbsfleet development in Kent, without any of the advantages.
- ii. Braintree and Colchester planning officers previously indicated that the earlier, much smaller West Tey proposal was unacceptable. They reasoned that it would result in a dormitory settlement disconnected to the urban centre and would generate too much traffic on already congested local roads.
- iii. New towns and garden cities have struggled to sustain business and community life in recent decades. They do not generate sufficient business momentum, or sufficient demand for public transport, while those within easy commuting distance of London tend to become dormitory suburbs.

- iv. West Tey is at particular risk of becoming a dormitory suburb, with gridlocked roads and even more overcrowded trains at peak times at Marks Tey. Meanwhile, a few lucky landowners would get rich at the expense of first-time house buyers.

4. CAUSE proposed alternative, Option 4:

- i. **Protect the countryside** to prevent urban sprawl.
- ii. **Design new urban extensions.** These can accommodate growth and regenerate the town centre while protecting the countryside and the setting of surrounding villages. We do not accept that there is insufficient land to develop urban extensions around Colchester.
- iii. **Our preferred location** is to the east of Colchester, near to the University. The University is a major employer and the modern economy is based on knowledge and technology.
- iv. **Allow limited and proportional growth of rural settlements.**
- v. **Plan to limit car use.** Efforts to limit car use by creating safe cycle paths, footpaths and reliable and affordable public transport should be encouraged.
- vi. **Develop a strategy to stimulate local employment and build near the jobs.** Urban extensions can do just that.
- vii. **Look at modern examples of successful and innovative urban planning and design, including European examples.**
- viii. **There is a role for high-density, well designed housing to meet local housing needs in the public and private sector.** Colchester must continue to develop brownfield sites.

An ambitious housing programme is likely to fail without prior and long overdue improvements in infrastructure and job opportunities in the Borough. An ill-considered major development between Marks Tey and Braintree would undoubtedly lead to deterioration in the quality of life of current and future generations while enriching the few at the expense of the many. In other words, it would not be sustainable.

Yours faithfully

Rosie Pearson
Secretary, CAUSE