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MAIN MATTER 2:

SUSTAINABLE GROWTH POLICIES

POLICY SG1:

COLCHESTER'S SPATIAL STRATEGY

& POLICY SG2:

HOUSING DELIVERY

April 2021

Introduction

1. Colchester's Spatial Strategy in Policy SG1 and Housing Delivery in Policy SG2 are closely allied - the former Policy providing a framework in the form of a Spatial (Settlement) Hierarchy for the distribution of Housing Delivery in the latter Policy which distributes and quantifies growth within the various settlements. The importance of providing a sound Spatial Hierarchy is therefore key to securing and delivering sustainable development.
2. It is submitted in this case, however, that the Settlement Hierarchy as it appears in Policy SG1 is inadequate in many ways as it does not provide a robust framework to justify the quantum of future housing as then proposed in Policy SG2. As a consequence of its deficiencies, it is submitted that the Spatial Strategy will not deliver housing in the most sustainable locations within the Borough. Clearly, this goes to the heart of whether the Plan is sound or not.

The Spatial Hierarchy's Deficiencies

3. The Plan's Spatial Hierarchy comprises 5 categories: Urban Area of Colchester, Garden Communities, Sustainable Settlements, Other Villages and Countryside as set out in Policy SG1: Table SG1. All the settlements outside Colchester and the remaining Garden Community - both urban and rural - are divided into the latter three categories. The Other Villages category generally relates to the smaller villages whilst the Countryside category relates to the smallest villages, hamlets and housing clusters which are not listed and are washed over by countryside protection policies. Above these in the hierarchy, Sustainable Settlements include both towns and villages. Thus the towns of West Mersea and Wivenhoe and the large village of Tiptree (which functions as a small town) fall into the same Sustainable Settlements category as the medium-sized and larger villages - thereby covering a disparate range of settlements with a wide and differing range of functions. In fact the populations of Sustainable Settlements range from over 9,000 in Tiptree and between 7,000 - 8,000 for West Mersea and Wivenhoe on the one hand to only just over 800 at Fordham and 900 at Great Tey on the other. Between, there are the larger villages with populations of between 2,000 - 3,500 such as Great Horkesley, Marks Tey, Rowhedge and West Bergholt. With regard to accessibility to services, on the one hand villages such as Fordham and Great Tey do not have a village shop whilst Tiptree has a large Tesco's and shopping centre. (The only thing the Sustainable Settlements have in common is that they all have primary schools). With regard to accessibility, West Mersea is 15 miles from Kelvedon station for London commuters whilst Marks Tey and Chappel & Wakes Colne are the only villages with their own station. Many of the Sustainable Settlements lie close to the main A12 and A120 trunk roads whilst other are far less accessible by road. Finally, and crucially, some of the Sustainable Settlements are close to the higher tier services in Colchester and have good public transport links to the town whilst other are much further distant and have limited access to public transport.

4. Grouping settlements of such a range in size and function does not therefore provide a sufficiently clear picture of relative accessibility to day-to-day or higher tier services which is such an important factor in determining the relative sustainability of settlements. This does not assist in determining what is "appropriate growth" as referred to in Policy SG1 or an "appropriate level of new development" in Policy SG2. A radically amended and more sophisticated approach is required if the Spatial Strategy and Hierarchy is to provide a robust framework for directing growth to sustainable locations in future.

A Different Approach

5. A document entitled "An Alternative Growth Strategy for North Essex" (September 2019) was submitted by my Practice in relation to the Joint Section 1 Plan which endeavoured to provide a sustainable Spatial Strategy for North Essex without the need to rely on large scale Garden Communities. A standardised Settlement Hierarchy was devised for the whole of North Essex as depicted in the Key Diagram now submitted as Annex EGA1.
6. The main objective of the Alternative Growth Strategy is to make North Essex as a whole and its individual settlements more self-contained - reducing the need to travel whilst promoting the use of public transport. This means ensuring that growth is directed to those locations which are most accessible to local and higher tier community services, including health and education facilities, to employment hubs and to existing and improved public transport. The Alternative Growth Strategy therefore identifies, inter alia, locations and settlements which have a high level of accessibility to the higher tier services in Colchester and to the main strategic road and rail network, namely the A12 and A120 trunk roads and the main London-Norwich railway line. The resultant pattern is a ring of growth points in the form of satellite villages around Colchester and within the main linear transport corridors. Extracting the settlements within Colchester Borough from the Key Diagram (Annex EGA1), an Alternative Spatial Hierarchy is shown in Annex EGA2.
7. Rather than just an amalgam of Sustainable Settlements of different sizes and performing different functions, the Alternative Spatial Hierarchy in Annex EGA2 groups settlements which have a range of factors in common by taking account of size, function, location - particularly proximity to higher tier services, and access to public transport and the main lines of transportation. These factors determine the relative sustainability of settlements and their ability to absorb sustainable growth and contribute to sustainable transportation in future. It also provides an indication of the level of growth which would be appropriate for a settlement within each category ranging from strategic scale growth in Large Towns to minor infilling in the Countryside. It also reveals settlements that have particular growth attributes because they lie in more than one category, namely Copford, Eight Ash Green and Langham. Importantly, therefore, the Alternative Spatial Hierarchy provides a cascade of categories which not only assist with the choice of location for future growth but also where future investment in community services and public transport could be best directed.

Conclusion

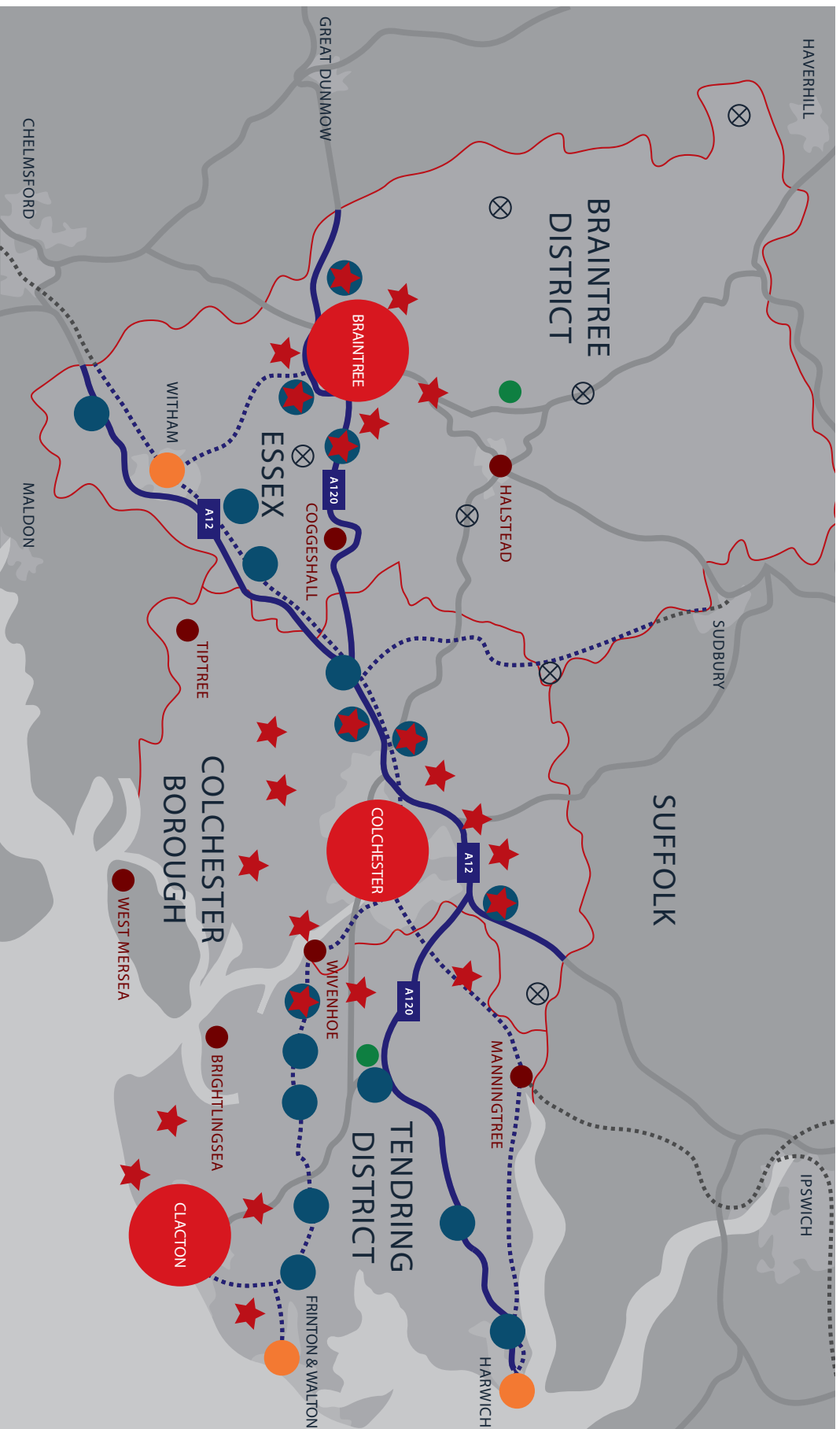
8. It is submitted that the Alternative Spatial Strategy and Hierarchy addresses many of the deficiencies of the Spatial Strategy in Policy SG1 and represents a more robust basis for the apportionment of housing provision in Policy SG2. The Plan's Spatial Strategy fails to provide an adequate framework to underpin and justify the location and amounts of future growth which is so crucial to the soundness of the Plan as a whole. Accordingly, it is considered that the Spatial Strategy in its current form is deficient and requires major modification in order to provide a robust template for future housing provision throughout the Borough. Without these modifications and a subsequent review of the housing provision in the context of those modifications, it is considered that the Plan is unsound.

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ANNEX EGA1

AN ALTERNATIVE GROWTH STRATEGY FOR NORTH ESSEX



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- LARGE TOWNS
- MEDIUM-SIZED TOWNS
- SMALL TOWNS
- ★ KEY SATELLITE VILLAGES CLOSEST TO LARGE TOWNS
- TRANSPORT CORRIDOR VILLAGES
- GARDEN VILLAGES NOT EXCEEDING 5,000 DWELLINGS
- X LARGE VILLAGES
- NORTH ESSEX AND DISTRICT COUNCIL BOUNDARIES
- ROAD
- - - RAIL

ANNEX EGA2

ALTERNATIVE SPATIAL HIERARCHY FOR COLCHESTER BOROUGH

LARGE TOWNS

Large Towns are defined as urban areas with a population of over 40,000 and offering higher tier services and employment opportunities accessible by public transport. They provide the main focus for strategic growth.

Colchester*

SMALL TOWNS

Small Towns are defined as urban areas with a population of under 15,000 offering a wide range of local services and employment opportunities accessible by public transport. They provide opportunities for non-strategic growth.

Tiptree+

West Mersea

Wivenhoe*

KEY SATELLITE VILLAGES

Key Satellite Villages are defined as free-standing rural settlements closest to the edge of Large Towns offering a reasonable range of local services but with easy access to higher tier services by public transport. They provide opportunities for growth which is proportionate to the existing size of these settlements

Abberton & Langenhoe

Birch

Boxted

Copford

Eight Ash Green

Great Horkesley (Horkesley Heath)

Langham

Layer de la Haye

Rowhedge

West Bergholt

PRIMARY TRANSPORT CORRIDOR VILLAGES

Primary Transport Corridor Villages are those villages lying on or close to the main lines of road and/or rail transport offering a range of local services with ease of access to Large Towns or other large centres farther afield by public or private transport. They provide opportunities for growth which is proportionate to the existing size of these settlements.

Copford

Eight Ash Green

Langham

Marks Tey*

LARGE VILLAGES

Dedham

Large Villages are important rural settlements which lie outside the immediate vicinity of Large Towns or Primary Transport Corridors but offering a reasonable range of local services and access to public transport. They may provide opportunities for small scale growth in the form of infilling, rounding-off and rural exception sites subject to environmental considerations.

OTHER VILLAGES

Other Villages are all other smaller villages and hamlets not included above which have only a limited range of local services and often minimal or no access to public transport. They provide limited opportunities for minor infilling, rounding-off and rural exception sites subject to environmental considerations.

Footnotes:

+ Tiptree is a village but functions as a Small Town

* Settlements with railway stations

Settlements in bold are those in more than one category.

The Colchester Tendring Borders Garden Community could be variously argued to be inserted in the Small Town, Satellite Village or Primary Transport Corridor category, (but would not sit comfortably with the Large Village of Dedham), or otherwise simply regarded as a new neighbourhood forming part of the Large Town of Colchester.
