



Colchester Borough Council

**Independent Examination – Section 2 Colchester
Borough Local Plan 2017-2033**

Hearing Statement – Local Planning Authority

**Main Matter 12 – Policy DM5 – Tourism, Leisure,
Culture and Heritage**

April 2021

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Is the Tourism, Leisure, Culture and Heritage policy justified by appropriate available evidence, having regard to national guidance, and local context, and CLP 1?

Does policy DM5 provide clear direction as to how a decision maker should react to a development proposal?

12.1 Yes, Policy DM5 is justified by appropriate available evidence and has regard to national guidance, local context, and CLP1. Tourism, leisure, culture and heritage issues merit specific attention in planning policy given they raise particular issues around the balance between promoting new development and economic growth whilst safeguarding the assets that are being promoted.

12.2 NPPF 2012 Section 3 (para.28) Supporting a prosperous rural economy states that;

‘planning policies should support economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity by taking a positive approach to sustainable new development.’ To promote a strong rural economy, local and neighbourhood plans should ‘support sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit businesses in rural areas, communities and visitors, and which respect the character of the countryside.’

12.3 In urban areas, relevant national policy in NPPF Section 2, Ensuring the vitality of town centres includes guidance on the need to reflect the individuality of town centres and the sequential approach to main town centre uses.

12.4 The Council’s 2015 Employment Land Needs Assessment ([EBC 3.2](#)) identifies the important role played by tourism and the visitor economy in Colchester, noting that it draws on the Borough’s rich heritage and history as well as its role as a sub-regional cultural, leisure and retail destination;

‘According to East of England Forecasting Model data, the hospitality and entertainment sectors account for just under 10% of the Borough’s employment in 2014, having increased from 6% in 1991. The Borough has benefitted from a sustained programme of tourism development over the last 20 years which has seen the tourism sector grow in significance to the local economy through the local employment that it sustains and through visitor spending in the local economy.’

12.5 Since 2015, while Covid has clearly limited growth in the tourism and culture sector, longer term growth continues to be supported, through initiatives such as

redevelopment of the Mercury Theatre and a successful £18.2 million bid via the Towns Fund for Town Centre public realm, regeneration and enhancement projects.

- 12.6 Section 1 Policy SP3 provides the overarching spatial strategy for North Essex which is then detailed further in the spatial hierarchy for Colchester set out in Policy SG1. This guidance on sustainable locations for growth informs the consideration of tourism, leisure, culture, and heritage proposals in the Borough in terms of their relation to the size, function and services provided in each area. Proposals for main town centre uses will need to accord with the approach to such uses set out in the NPPF and applied to Colchester in policies SG6: Town Centre Uses and TC1: Town Centre Policy and Hierarchy. Policies for rural areas will need to accord with relevant policies on safeguarding and enhancing the natural environment, including Policies ENV1-4, and proposals affecting the Borough's built heritage will need to accord with Policy DM16.
- 12.7 The policy provides clear direction on how a decision maker should react to a development proposal. With general guidance provided by the policies noted in the previous paragraph. Policy DM5 provides more detailed guidance on scale function, accessibility and amenity specific to tourism, leisure, culture and heritage proposals. In particular, proposals that are likely to have an adverse impact on the integrity of European sites or the Dedham Vale AONB will not be supported. Policy DM5 specifies the type of visitor accommodation that will be supported in suitable locations to distinguish this form of accommodation from permanent residential accommodation, given that the impact of holiday accommodation can be reduced through conditions and legal agreements on use and occupation at certain times of year.
- 12.8 The issue of caravan parks at Mersea Island warrants its own policy, Policy SS12c, to address the particular issues arising from the location of a total of six caravan parks adjacent to coastal, internationally designated European sites. The section on Mersea Island policies in Matter 9 provides the Council's response on this specific issue related to tourism.
- 12.9 The policy is considered sound as submitted, with the addition of one recommended modification to strengthen wording in the first paragraph on safeguarding existing assets. This was proposed by Historic England, and is included in the Statement of Common Ground with the Council which will be added to the Examination Statements of Common Ground webpage and listed in the Schedule of Recommended Modifications ([CBC 1.6](#)). In addition to minimizing impact, it is now proposed to also require that tourism, leisure, culture and heritage proposals

should demonstrate how the development could make a positive contribution to neighbouring areas.