



**Colchester Borough Council**

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

**Hearing Statement – Local Planning Authority**

**Main Matter 6 - South Colchester (Policies SC1 to  
SC3)**

**April 2021**

**Are the policies and site allocations for South Colchester justified by appropriate available evidence, having regard to national guidance, and local context, including the meeting the requirements of the CLP 1?**

**Background**

- 6.1 South Colchester is one of 5 geographical areas which together comprise the urban area of Colchester. Policy SG1 defines the spatial strategy for the CLP with the urban area of Colchester at the top of the spatial hierarchy. Over previous plan periods development to the south of Colchester has been significant following the relocation of the Colchester Garrison. The CLP 2 includes site allocations on 2 smaller sites at Gosbecks Road and Berechurch Hall Road, as well as the largest single allocation in the section 2 CLP on land at Middlewick Ranges following the confirmation from the Defence and Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) of their intention to dispose of part of this Ranges site for development.
- 6.2 The allocations in South Colchester directly reflect the sustainable development principles underpinned by the NPPF, being at the top of the spatial hierarchy. Development within the urban area of Colchester achieves all three dimensions of sustainable development that is: economic, social and environmental as defined in the NPPF (paragraph 7). The Council's Hearing Statement covering an Introduction to Place Policies explains the process the Council followed, with reference to the evidence base, in allocating sites. In accordance with the NPPF the allocation of sites also took account of the evidence base which includes a Strategic Land Availability Assessment ([EBC2.17](#)) as well as the Sustainability Appraisal as required by legislation. The Sustainability Appraisal (SA) ([CBC2.2](#)) identifies, describes and evaluates the likely significant effects on the environment of the plan and reasonable alternatives. More details about the SA and how it has influenced the site selection process for allocations in principle is contained in the Introduction to Place Policies Statement. Appendix 1 of the SA report includes tables for each site allocation policy justifying why the preferred option (site) was selected and why reasonable alternatives were rejected. A table summarising the appraisal of the preferred sites and reasonable alternatives is included to provide a comparison of likely effects. Commentary is included on the cumulative and synergistic effects of the allocation(s).

- 6.3 The CLP 2 Policy SG1 provides the Spatial Strategy for Colchester. The Town Centre is the most sustainable location for new development given its central location and good access to public transport, walking and cycling routes. Although there is scope for development to be provided at higher densities in the Town Centre, there remain limited opportunities for further growth with demand on land for a mix of uses, Matter 4b covers this further. The surrounding built up area of Colchester which includes land in the South provides the next level of sustainability due to its urban location, public transport routes and pedestrian and cycle connectivity. The site allocations in South Colchester accord with the Spatial Strategy as set out in Policy SG1.
- 6.4 The allocation of sites for growth in South Colchester is consistent with the CLP Section 1. The 'Vision for North Essex' in the Colchester Local Plan Section 1 identifies that *'Sustainable development principles will be at the core of the strategic area's response to its growth needs...'* and that *'... the undeveloped countryside and the natural and historic environment will be conserved and enhanced. Key to delivering sustainable development is that new development will address the requirement to protect and enhance the historic environment and settlement character'*.
- 6.5 Policy SP3 in the CLP Section 1 states that *'Existing settlements will be the principal focus for additional growth across the North Essex Authorities area within the Local Plan period.'* It further provides clarity for each authorities Section 2 Plan: *'In Section 2 of its Local Plan each local planning authority will identify a hierarchy of settlements where new development will be accommodated according to the role of the settlement, sustainability, its physical capacity and local needs'*. The urban area of Colchester is at the top of the Spatial hierarchy making these allocations compliant with the CPL Section 1.
- 6.6 The Updated Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) identified that this site has moderate suitability to support qualifying bird species and a modification is recommended [see Updated HRA ([EBC4.70](#)), Matter 1 Hearing Statement paragraph 1.5.20, Introduction to Place Policies Hearing Statement paragraphs 1.23-1.24 and Statement of Common Ground with Natural England (SCG1)].
- 6.7 Policy SC1 refers to requirements which apply to the two separate allocations as well as reference to requirements that are relevant to both sites. A minor amendment is proposed to correct an omission in respect of a requirement for a Mineral Resource Assessment which was omitted in error. The following minor addition to policy SC1 is included in the schedule of recommended Modifications ([CBC 6.1](#)) - **Any proposals will also take into account the Essex Minerals**

**Local Plan and the developer will be required to submit a Minerals Resource Assessment as part of any planning application. Should the viability of extraction be proven, the mineral shall be worked in accordance with a scheme/masterplan as part of the phased delivery of the non-mineral development.**

***Policy SC1 – Land at Gosbecks Phase 2***

- 6.8 The allocation at Gosbecks provides an extension to an earlier phase of development under the current Adopted Local Plan. The Settlement Boundary Review ([EBC2.17](#)) identified the opportunities for an urban extension in this area with land around Gosbecks being one of two Broad areas of search. The Settlement Boundary Review concluded that the site at Gosbecks adjoins the settlement boundary and is suitable for development. The site is open with views across it from the adjacent road. It is in a sustainable location on the edge of the Colchester urban area and is accessible to a range of services and facilities. Care would need to be taken if any development goes ahead because of the archaeological significance of the area. The SLAA Assessment ([EBC2.17](#)) concluded the site was suitable, deliverable and available. The policy requirements for the allocation recognize the need to contribute to the Gosbecks Archaeological Park as well as requirements linked to the number of dwellings up to 150, additional bus stop provision and improvements to sustainable transport links to the town centre and public realm improvements. In addition to the requirements of Policy PP1 which includes reference to Archaeological investigations.
- 6.9 There were very few representations received to this allocation. The few that were made, referred to concerns related to safeguarding archaeology interests and traffic impacts. Both of these matters are considered to be adequately addressed by the policy requirements in SC1 and other policies in the Plan.
- 6.10 Planning permission has been granted for this site and work commenced.

***Policy SC1 Berechurch Hall Road***

- 6.11 Land at Berechurch Hall Road formed the second broad area of search for development identified in the Settlement Boundary review ([EBC2.17](#)). It was concluded that development in this location would provide a sustainable urban extension to Colchester's southern boundary. Within this broad area three parcels

of land were assessed through the SLAA ([EBC2.17](#)) and concluded that the sites were suitable, available and deliverable with benefits identified to them being combined as one allocation. The Settlement Boundary Review concluded that the three adjoining sites together would be a logical extension to South Colchester as part of a comprehensive allocation for up to 150 dwellings across the whole site allocation. The policy requirements reflect the need for comprehensive planning as well as requiring improvements linked to public transport provision, sustainable transport and the local road network.

- 6.12 There is a resolution to grant full planning permission for one of the smaller parcels and the legal agreement is expected to be signed this month (ref. 191093 – 32 units). The largest of the three sites is subject to a current full application for 153 units and is expected to be determined in the next 2 months following receipt of amended plans which are currently being consulted on. The masterplan shows how the sites will be developed comprehensively and it is likely there will be an additional 35 units on these 2 sites alone compared to the allocation of 150 units.
- 6.13 There is only one representation which refers specifically to Berechurch Hall Road together with Gosbecks Road, raising concerns regarding the impact on traffic and the local road network. The policy requirements in SC1, SC3 and other places in the Plan are considered to adequately address any impacts ensuring mitigation and improvements as necessary to serve the development.
- 6.12 A representation from the Ministry of Defence refers to a mapping error in respect of land at Merville Barracks which is used for military purposes. This is incorrectly shown as public open space on the Policies map. The map will be corrected and added to the proposed modifications.

#### ***Additional allocation SC1 ABRO site Land at the Garrison description***

- 6.14 The schedule of recommended modifications includes reference to the omission from a site to be carried forward from the Adopted Local Plan (part of the Garrison Masterplan). The detailed wording for this will be added to the schedule of recommended modifications, once the draft Development Brief has been finalised to take into account of representations made to the public consultation. It is envisaged a net residential density area of between 45-80 dwellings per hectare (equating to 171-304 dwellings) could be accommodated; this is a reflection of the site's urban context and its close proximity to the town centre and public transport hubs. There are a number of constraints on the site including contamination, TPO's and part of a roman circus running through it.

The draft Development Brief can be viewed here;

<https://cbccrmdata.blob.core.windows.net/noteattachment/CBC-Consultations-ABRO-Development-Brief-Draft-ABRO%20Site%20Development%20Brief.pdf>

### **Policy SC2 Middlewick Ranges**

- 6.15 The Council's [Topic Paper 5](#) provides an update in respect of the Middlewick Ranges allocation and should be read in conjunction with this section of the Hearing Statement.
- 6.16 The allocation at Middlewick Ranges is the largest single allocation in the CLP 2 for up to 1000 dwellings. The site is currently owned by the DIO and the area allocated totals 76ha which will also need to provide for a mix of community infrastructure, significant areas of open space, and accessible natural greenspace. The site is on the edge of the built-up area of Colchester situated between Mersea Road and Abbots Road. As an urban extension enclosed by existing residential development to the north, east and west it is considered to be a sustainable location which is well located for further growth.
- 6.17 The site was assessed in the initial SLAA ([EBC2.17](#)) and received an overall amber rating influenced by the lack of confirmation at the time of its availability and the continued requirement for the MOD's operational needs. Towards the end of the CLP Preferred Options consultation the DIO submitted a representation which is attached to this Hearing Statement as Appendix A. It is evident from this that, in September 2016, the DIO confirmed the intention to dispose of the Middlewick Ranges site as part of its Estate Optimisation Strategy. It is also clear that the release of this site along with others throughout the country is intended to contribute to the Government commitment to provide land for 160,000 homes in this Parliament and the MOD's target to provide land for 55,000 houses. As stated in Appendix A *"The Estate Optimisation Strategy will reduce the size of the MOD estate through the sale of sites for which there is no longer a long-term Defence requirement and allowing the co-location of similar functions. This will not only reduce unnecessary estate running costs for Defence, but also free up space for up to 55,000 homes across the UK. It goes on to state "Land at the 13 sites covers more than 1,200 hectares and is expected to provide space for up to 17,000 new homes"*.
- 6.18 The timing of the updated position for the DIO with this site and the willingness to engage in the Local Plan process, which is a preferred approach to the release of land for any site, particularly of this scale, it was appropriate to include the site as an allocation in the Publication Draft Local Plan. Not only does this provide the opportunity for engagement with the community and proper masterplanning, it also gives the Council the ability to influence development and to be clear in the Local Plan about the requirements for bringing the site forward.

- 6.19 It will be noted in the DIO Preferred Options representation (Appendix A), that they were proposing the site provide 2000 dwellings. Recognising that there are a number of constraints which apply to the site, it is considered that the allocation area provides significant land offering the necessary flexibility to deliver up to 1000 houses and satisfactorily manage the constraints and provide mitigation as necessary. The site is a Local Wildlife Site (LWS) and as such the Publication draft plan acknowledged the need for further ecological surveys to further inform the opportunities for development on the site. The site is also a popular well used area of informal open space. Development of the site presents opportunities to enhance the quality of the open space and green infrastructure in this area offering benefits to existing residents as well as those of the new development. [Topic Paper 5](#) provides more information in respect of the constraints and opportunities which are relevant to this site. In addition, the Highway Authority advised at the time of allocation that there was no reason why satisfactory access to the site could not be achieved. They also confirmed the need for a transport assessment to identify the impact of any development on the local road network and to determine necessary mitigation as part of any planning application.
- 6.20 Topic Paper 5 sets out updates relating to further work which has been carried out by the DIO, working with the Council, which provides additional evidence to inform the Examination and identify potential minor modifications to the relevant policies to improve the wording. As indicated in the Topic Paper building on this work the DIO, ECC and CBC are progressing a Highways and Transport Statement of Common Ground which will set out the impacts and opportunities for mitigation. It will confirm that the Highway Authority are satisfied that satisfactory access to the site and appropriate mitigation to the surrounding network can be achieved and suitable sustainable transport measures can also be provided as well as detailing further proposed modifications if these are considered necessary.
- 6.21 The Middlewick allocation has attracted a considerable level of objection with many representations from local residents and other stakeholders. The Topic Paper summarises main issues raised at paragraph 2.6 and 2.7. It also sets out in Appendix A (to Topic Paper 5) a series of recommended modifications to Policy SC2 and the supporting text. These include further guidance and requirements in respect of masterplanning for the development of the site. In addition to these, representations from Essex County Council (ECC) have resulted in further recommended minor modifications summarised below.
- The ECC representation identified that change to Policy SC2 is required to ensure provision of a primary school and early years and childcare facilities as a direct result of the development and to meet education needs arising from other Local Plan allocations in South Colchester. This requirement will be detailed in the CBC Infrastructure Delivery Plan and is covered more broadly in policy PP1 and DM2 but is recommended that it needs to be

included in the site policy itself. Proposed amendments to the Policy wording will be added to the schedule of recommended modifications. The following wording has been agreed with ECC and will be referenced in the SoCG as a recommended minor modification to add new criteria;

**A new primary school with co-located 56 place early years and childcare nursery on 3 hectares of suitable land allocated for education and childcare use and a new 56 place stand-alone early years and child care nursery on 0.13 hectares of suitable land allocated for education and childcare use;**

**Financial contribution to early years and childcare, primary and secondary education provision as required by the Local Planning Authority primarily through Section 106 Planning Obligations or the Community Infrastructure Levy**

- 6.22 The allocation at Middlewick Ranges is justified by appropriate available evidence and it considered to be sound. The numerous recommended modifications to Policy SC2 benefit from additional evidence available enabling the Council to be more prescriptive about the requirements and process for delivery. The schedule of proposed modifications attached as Appendix A to Topic Paper 5 sets out minor amendments in this respect and further recommended amendments referenced above will be added to the schedule.

### ***Policy SC3 Transport in South Colchester***

- 6.22 Policy SC3 is justified by appropriate available evidence, having regard to national guidance, and local context, including meeting the requirements of the CLP1. Strategic transport modeling has been undertaken ([EBC 5.5](#)) which identifies locations in South Colchester where improvements to, and investment in, the transport network are required. Development will add pressure to the transport network and measures will be required to help mitigate this impact, as required by Policy SC3.
- 6.23 The assessment of the modelling identifies potential solutions on the highway network resulting from proposed development. These potential solutions have been reflected in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) ([EBC5.3](#)) The Highways and Transport SOCG which is being prepared in respect of Middlewick may recommend further minor amendments in which case these will be added to the schedule of recommended modifications.
- 6.24 Policy SC3 as submitted is considered sound and no minor modifications are recommended at this stage.

**Do the housing land site allocations in South Colchester show how they will contribute to the achievement of the overall housing requirement of the CLP Section 1 (14720 new homes) and its timescale for delivery?**

6.25 The allocations at South Colchester will contribute to the CPL 1 overall housing requirement with more information provided below for each allocation to confirm that development on these sites will be delivered in the plan period.

***Policy SC1 – Land at Gosbecks Phase 2***

6.26 Since the submission of the CLP in October 2020 this site has been granted planning consent. The Full permission (190552) was granted in July 2020 for 144 units. Since that time many of the pre-commencement conditions have been discharged and development has commenced on site. Having regard to this progress and the planning status of the site, there are no concerns regarding delivery and implementation of development on the allocated site at Gosbecks. It will contribute to housing delivery in the borough.

***Policy SC1 South Colchester Berechurch Hall Road***

6.27 Since the submission of the CLP in October 2017 two separate planning applications have been submitted on parts of the land within the Berechurch Hall Road allocation as follows;

- Land South of Berechurch Hall Road 32 dwellings 191093 (Full)
- Land South of Berechurch Hall Road 153 dwellings 202025 (Full)

6.28 Both of the above applications are pending determination. The smaller of the applications has received a resolution to grant, the S106 agreement is at an advanced stage and it is hoped to complete this month to allow commencement on site in June. The housebuilder (Harding Homes) is simultaneously actioning works to allow a prompt commencement.

The larger of the two sites has been submitted by Persimmon Homes. It is anticipated that a decision will be issued in the next few months. There are no issues which are not capable of resolution enabling the grant of planning consent. An update can be provided at the Examination Hearings if it is required.

***Proposed Modification ABRO Site Land at the Garrison- Policy SC1***

6.29 In November 2020 the Defence Infrastructure Organisation wrote to the Council and advised that it was bringing forward the disposal of the ABRO site (also known as the DSG site) This will now take place in 2021. It is expected that a housebuilder

will purchase the site informed by the Councils Development Brief. There has been nothing identified which would prevent the delivery of this site during the plan period.

***Policy SC2 – Land at Middlewick Ranges***

- 6.30 Topic Paper 5 provides an update in respect of the timing of disposal of the Middlewick site as well as confirmation that the MOD activity will be relocated to Fingringhoe, for which planning permission has now been secured. The additional evidence submitted and summarised in the Topic Paper provide a better understanding of the constraints and opportunities which apply to the site and illustrate one potential option of a scheme confirming the ability for delivery of up to 1000 dwellings together with supporting infrastructure and any necessary mitigation required in respect of ecology, biodiversity net gain and highways and transport. Although the requirements for development on this site include further assessments and masterplanning, including engagement with the local residents, there are no matters which cannot be addressed through this approach and through appropriate mitigation as required. There is nothing identified which would prevent the delivery of this site during the plan period.

**APPENDIX A Representation from DIO to Preferred Option Colchester Local Plan**



**Defence  
Infrastructure  
Organisation**

Ministry of Defence  
Building 49  
Kingston Road  
Sutton Coldfield  
West Midlands B75 7RL  
United Kingdom

Telephone [MOD]: +44 (0)121 311 2265

Facsimile [MOD]: +44 (0)121 311 2265

E-mail: DIOSEE-EPSTCP2@mod.uk

Ms Laura Chase,  
Planning Policy Manager,  
Colchester Borough Council,  
Rowan House,  
33 Sheepen Road,  
COLCHESTER,  
Essex  
CO3 3WG

12 September 2016

BY E-MAIL ONLY

Dear Ms Chase

**COLCHESTER PREFERRED OPTIONS LOCAL PLAN – MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
REPRESENTATIONS – MIDDLEWICK RANGES AND MERVILLE BARRACKS,  
COLCHESTER.**

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) wishes to make the follow representations on the Colchester Preferred Options Local Plan which has been published for public consultation until 16 September 2016.

### **Middlewick Ranges, Colchester**

The MOD is seeking the inclusion of an area of land at Middlewick Ranges, Colchester within the Local Plan as a housing allocation site for up to 2,000 dwellings. The site, which is currently used as a firing range, extends to an area of 84.695 hectares and is shown outlined in red on the attached plan.

### **Background**

Middlewick Ranges was one of 13 sites across the Defence Estate that was the subject of a Ministerial Announcement on 6 September 2016.

The MOD is nearing the completion of an ambitious Estate Optimisation Strategy programme which will provide a plan for a smaller, but significantly better Defence Estate to meet the needs of the Armed Forces. It is expected that the MOD will announce the finalised Estate Optimisation Strategy later this year; however it was confirmed on 6 September that Middlewick Ranges was one of another 13 sites to be released. Land at the 13 sites covers more than 1,200 hectares and is expected to provide space for up to 17,000 new homes.

Last week's announcement is part of the department's strategy to reduce the size of its estate by 30% by 2040, resulting in a smaller, but better Defence estate to cater for the future Armed Forces, and delivers upon the commitments made in the Strategic Defence & Security Review 2015 (SDSR15).

The Estate Optimisation Strategy will reduce the size of the MOD estate through the sale of sites for which there is no longer a long-term Defence requirement and allowing the co-location of similar functions. This will not only reduce unnecessary estate running costs for Defence, but also free up space for up to 55,000 homes across the UK.

It is anticipated that these will contribute some £225 million toward the MOD's £1 billion target for land release sales as set out in the SDSR.

These sites will also contribute to the Government commitment to provide land for 160,000 homes in this Parliament and the MOD's target to provide land for 55,000 houses as set out above.

The MOD has only therefore very recently been in a position to promote the site at Middlewick Ranges for housing development, and that is the reason it has not submitted representations earlier in the Local Plan process.

The MOD would welcome an on-going dialogue with the Council in order to determine how best the outcomes of the Estate Optimisation Strategy can be accommodated in the Colchester area.

## Supporting Information

### Site Location and Description

The previously developed site of Middlewick Ranges comprises a military live firing range and training area. It extends to approximately 85 hectares and is adjacent to the Colchester settlement boundary with predominately residential uses to the east, west and north. The site is bounded to the north and northeast by Abbots Road and to the northwest by Mersea Road and it forms a logical extension to the existing built up area of Colchester.

The site is mainly flat with some minor ground undulations. There are military earthworks to provide firing points and stop butts.

### Colchester Borough Council Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment August 2016

It is noted that Middlewick Ranges is included in the Council's published Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) dated August 2016 (site reference COL71); due to the site having been assessed in an earlier study by the Council.

The overall rating for the site (page 66 of the SLAA document) is shown to be 'amber'.

It is stated on page 23 of the SLAA that:

*'Sites assigned an amber rating had an issue or issues which whilst not significant enough to rule out development completely, were nonetheless significant enough to be highlighted in the site's overall rating. Sites were given an amber rating if the issues affecting the site were able to be overcome through reasonable mitigation measures. For example sites with no current availability may have been given an amber rating if the site's suitability and achievability rated highly (in the expectation that the site would become available in the near future). Essentially an amber rating means the site needs further consideration of key issues before being allocated for development in the Local Plan.'*

The Middlewick Ranges site is shown to have been rated 'green' with respect to stage two of the assessment relating to suitability and sustainability and the criteria used to assess sites for this stage of the assessment process are set out on pages 12 to 18 of the SLAA.

It is stated on page 12 of the document that:

*'Stage 2 of the site assessment had the purpose of assessing sites' suitability and sustainability. A site is considered to be suitable for development if it is free from constraints, or where any constraints affecting the land can be overcome through reasonable mitigation. Suitability constraints include physical constraints such as the site's relationship to the relevant settlement boundary and the capacity for highways access to site. Additionally there are environmental constraints to assess such as the impact on landscape character and the effects of development on wildlife sites. A site's suitability is also affected by its sustainability level, that is*

*how close it is located to existing services and facilities or whether development of the site could accommodate new services and facilities within its boundaries.'*

It is clear therefore from this assessment that the Council already considers the site to be 'suitable' for development and in a sustainable location.

In terms of the sites 'availability' Middlewick Ranges is given an amber rating in the SLAA. Given the very recent announcement by the MOD that the site is to be released for development in order to contribute to the Government's target for the MOD to provide land for 55,000 new homes; this status can be amended to 'green'. Although the site is currently used as a firing range, this is no obstacle to the sites development and it is anticipated that the site will be available for development within the next five years.

With respect to the sites 'achievability' Middlewick Ranges is again rated amber. A site is considered to be achievable if it is feasible to actually develop the site and whether it is financially viable to do so. The Middlewick Ranges site is subject to a local wildlife site designation but is otherwise free from any known major constraints to development, and there is no evidence to suggest that development of the site would not be viable. It is acknowledged that some improvements are likely to be needed to the surrounding highway network, and it is noted that Colchester Borough Council intend to prepare an Infrastructure Delivery Plan in the near future which will provide details of the required main items of infrastructure to deliver the Local Plan, including highways.

#### Policy SG1: Colchester's Spatial Strategy

Policy SG1 stipulates that growth in the Borough will be located at the most accessible and sustainable locations in accordance with the spatial strategy for North Essex set out in Policy SP6 and with the Settlement Hierarchy set out in Table SG1.

The MOD **supports** the Spatial Hierarchy of SG1 which focuses growth on the urban area of Colchester reflecting its position as the main location for jobs, housing, services and transport.

The Middlewick Ranges site is immediately adjacent to the built up area of Colchester and the redevelopment of the site for residential purposes would be in accordance with the spatial hierarchy set out in Policy SG1. If the site were to be brought forward for housing it would reduce pressure on the need to develop greenfield sites in less sustainable locations away from the urban area and having a lower priority order in the spatial hierarchy.

## Policy WC4: West Colchester

Policy WC4 safeguards allocations on the policies map for residential uses, subject to satisfying specific requirements.

The MOD **objects** to the omission of the Middlewick Ranges site from policy WC4. The previously developed site is considered to be in a suitable location; and forms a logical extension of the Colchester settlement boundary given the surrounding residential land use. It is located in a sustainable location with good links to transport and key facilities.

## Merville Barracks, Colchester

The policies map for West Colchester shows an area of land to the north of Earlswood Way (and bounded to the east by Berechurch Road) as designated public open space. Part of the area shaded green on the map forms part of Pegasus Camp, the northern section of Merville Barracks, and is not public open space.

The MOD therefore **objects** to the West Colchester policies map as currently drafted.

## **Summary**

The MOD is seeking the allocation of land at Middlewick Ranges for residential development in the Colchester Local Plan for up to 2,000 dwellings, subject to detailed assessment.

The release of the site was announced on 6 September 2016 as part of the Estate Optimisation Strategy which will reduce the size of the MOD estate through the sale of sites for which there is no longer a long-term Defence requirement. The aim is to have a smaller, but better Defence estate to cater for the future Armed Forces. The release of sites such as Middlewick Ranges will also contribute to the Government commitment to provide land for 160,000 homes in this Parliament and the MOD's target to provide land for 55,000 houses as part of that target.

This very recent announcement regarding the release of the site is the reason that the MOD has not promoted the site for development at an earlier stage in the preparation of the Colchester Local Plan.

The Council's Strategic Land Availability Assessment concludes that the site is suitable for development and in a sustainable location. The issue of 'availability' is resolved by the Ministerial announcement that the site is to be released, and it will be available for development within the next five years. In terms of the 'achievability' criteria there are no known major constraints to development or any reason why the development of the site would not be viable.

The Middlewick Ranges site forms a logical extension of the Colchester settlement boundary given the surrounding residential land use and the site is previously developed; located in a sustainable location with good links to transport and key facilities. Its development accords with the spatial hierarchy of the Preferred Options Local Plan which prioritises the urban area of Colchester for development. The development of Middlewick Ranges could help to reduce the need to build housing on greenfield land in less sustainable locations remote from the urban area.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you should have any queries or require further information on the above.

The MOD would welcome a meeting with the Council to discuss the issues surrounding the potential residential development at Middlewick Ranges when further details become available.

Yours sincerely

*(By Email)*

Christine Ide

Senior Town Planner

BA (Hons), MRTPI