

COLCHESTER LOCAL PLAN  
**STATEMENT TO EXAMINATION**

**Main Matter 2 – Sustainable Growth Policies (Policies SG1 to SG8)**

*Are the Sustainable Growth Policies justified by appropriate available evidence, having regard to national guidance, and local context, including Section 1 of the CLP?*

- *Do CLP Section 2 Policies SG3 and SG4 make adequate provision to meet Colchester's economic growth requirements for the plan period and its timescale for delivery?*

**MRPP RESPONSE TO MAIN MATTER 2**

**POLICY SG3 – ECONOMIC GROWTH PROVISION**

Since 2017, the Council has adopted Section 1 of the Local Plan which in terms of the employment land requirement at Policy SP 5, identifies for Colchester a baseline figure of 22ha and a Higher Growth Scenario figure of 30ha. Within the submission version Plan the Higher Growth Scenario was stated at a figure of 55.8ha. The adoption of a lower figure has consequential implications for the quantum of employment land that needs to be allocated in Section 2.

Table SG3 within Section 2 of the Plan lists the proposed employment allocations for the plan period. Included within the table is a figure of 15.6ha allocated within the Stanway Strategic Economic Area. The Stane Park Phase 2 site, identified on the plan at Appendix 1, is included within this figure.

Further to the content of our 2017 representations (extract at Appendix 2), planning permission for a retail park at Stane Park (Phase 2) was granted on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2021 (application ref. 202105). The scheme comprises a retail terrace and a standalone retail unit at the entrance to the site, a standalone foodstore unit to be occupied by Aldi along with a circa 11,000sqm unit to be occupied by B&Q and ancillary café facilities. The scheme is limited to a maximum gross area of 24,016sqm.

Relevant conditions have been discharged and the scheme has been implemented and is currently under construction. It forms a complementary facility to the Phase 1 leisure park to the south west which comprises five restaurant units and one public house.

Bearing in mind the retail consent granted on the Phase 2 site and that this is being constructed, the site can therefore no longer be included as an allocation for employment purposes.

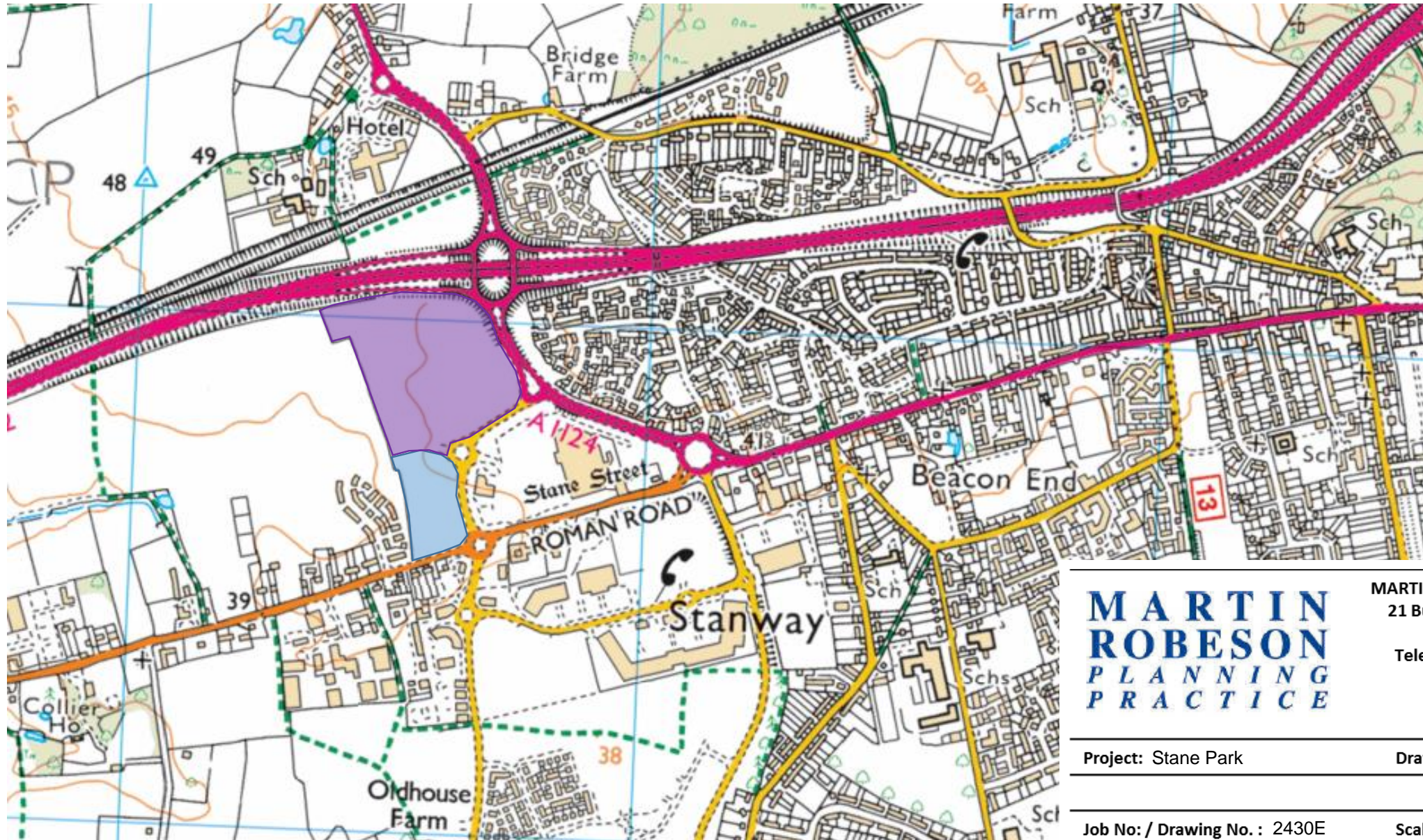
In light of events that have therefore taken place since the Plan was submitted in 2017, it is necessary therefore to amend Table SG3, to reduce the figure for the Stanway Strategic Economic Area from 15.6ha to 8.71ha to take into account the 6.89ha of land at Stane Park Phase 2. It is also consequently necessary to remove the employment allocation from the site as indicated on the Policies Map.

The removal of the site from the land allocated for employment purposes within Table SG3 will not impact upon the Council's ability to meet the requirements of Policy SP 5, given the figure of 30ha adopted for the Higher Growth Scenario. Deducting the site area of 6.89ha from the total land allocated (39.7ha) within the Strategic and Local Economic Areas in Table SG3 would still leave a total of 32.81ha.

The Plan as currently drafted is not therefore justified or effective, given it does not represent the current situation. Land at Stane Park cannot be allocated for employment purposes given the consent for and ongoing construction on the site for a retail park.

**MRPP**

**6<sup>th</sup> April 2021**



## KEY



Stane Park  
Phase 1



Stane Park  
Phase 2

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Project: Stane Park

Drawing Title: Location Plan

Job No: / Drawing No. : 2430E

Scale: NTS



presume that reference to SP6 in Policy SG1 is an error as it certainly does not provide a spatial strategy for North Essex.

### **EMPLOYMENT: POLICY SG3, TABLE SG3**

Paragraph 21 of the NPPF states that local planning authorities should “*set criteria, or identify strategic sites, for local and inward investment to...meet anticipated needs over the plan period*”. It only requires a quantum of land to be identified to meet anticipated needs, and does not require an LPA to provide an oversupply or a “buffer” of sites over and above this. Whilst it is recognised that one must allow for choice and flexibility in the market, here there would be a “buffer” of 100% or more. We don’t know what a suitable buffer may be to provide for choice and flexibility, but would argue that a buffer more than double the anticipated needs in an inefficient and unsustainable use of scarce land resources.

The lower of these figures, 22 hectares, comes from NLP’s ELNA 2015 study reflecting the baseline job growth figure, which we argue is the most accurate scenario and accurately reflects needs. The Council is also reminded of its position when deciding on the resubmitted Tollgate Village application in late 2016 following the appeal decision for Stane Park Phase 1, where it accepted that take-up of employment land is circa 1 hectare per annum, and therefore a supply of 22 ha provides a more than adequate supply of land for the plan period.

The figures in Table SG3, informed in part by Lichfield’s Employment Land Supply Delivery Trajectory (May 2017) includes sites that have a total combined supply of double the identified requirements. However, in fact when the worked example below is taken into consideration, the requirement numbers are incorrect, so the supply is some 2.5 times what is required.

The take-up of employment land is qualitative and very location specific. Businesses will go where they want to go, according to occupier demand, supply chains, access to the markets etc. Flooding the market with employment land does not necessarily reduce the price and render sites more viable. Stanway, and in particular Stane Park, as the Council is well aware, has significant barriers to deliver including significant infrastructure costs and a growing residential neighbouring site to the west, which not only affects the viability of bringing forward the site for employment purposes but also limits the types of employment occupiers that would be consider the site suitable for its purposes.

### WORKED EXAMPLE:

76,000 sq.m of office floorspace is required (Lichfield's 2017 Trajectory):

- If 60% is in lower density business park developments at a plot ratio of 0.4, then 45,600 sq.m on 0.4 uses 11.4 ha of land.
- If 40% is in higher density town centre locations at a plot ratio of 2.0, then 30,400 sq.m on 2.0 uses 1.52 ha of land

Therefore the total land requirement is  $11.4 + 1.52 = 12.92$  ha, compared with the proposed supply of 24.5 ha (Appendix 2 in Lichfield's 2017 Trajectory) or 15.4ha as at Table 6.13 (paragraph 6.62) of NLP's ELNA 2015

However, a plot ratio of 0.4 is that applied to industrial (B1c/B2/B8) development. It produces a single storey building covering 40% of the site. Applied to offices that would be an enormously land hungry way of making provision and thus unsustainable. Co-incidentally, the undeveloped part (60%) could provide parking at a ratio of 1 space per 16.67 sq.m (using the site planning convention of 1 space needs the equivalent of 25 sq.m in aggregate).

A plot ratio of only 0.8 (rather than 0.4 for "business park" development), would halve this part of the office requirement from 11.4 ha to 5.7 ha.

Then, the total land requirement to accommodate office floorspace identified needs would be  $5.7 + 1.52$  ha = 7.22 ha.

So a total of 7.2 ha required instead of 15.4 ha (NLP 2015) for offices (compared with a supply of 24.5 ha, i.e.: more than 3 x).

Making the total land requirement **7.2 + 6.6 (but now in 2017 a negative, at best 13.8 ha) = 15.2 ha rather than 22 ha** (in Table 6.13, NLP 2015).

### RETAIL HIERARCHY: POLICY SG5

Paragraphs 12.42 – 12.69 provide the reasoned justification for Policy SG5. The relevant national policy advice on drafting positive policies to promote competitive town centres is set out at paragraph 23 of the NPPF. It explains ten important roles.

The operation of such policy to the determination of planning applications is set out at paragraphs 24 – 27 of the NPPF. This is relevant to the drafting of Policy SG6 since it deals with the key retail policy tests – sequential testing and impact assessment. But the Council's approach to Policy SG5 must also be relevant to what is expected of places in the retail hierarchy and how policy should be applied to them.

It would be wholly inappropriate for the Centres hierarchy to be based on an interpretation of the Development Management Policy that is unjustified and inconsistent with National Guidance.