

Colchester Local Plan

Examination of Section 2

Councils Opening Statement

Good morning Sir. I am Karen Syrett, the Council's Lead Officer for Planning, Housing and Economic Growth at Colchester Borough Council.

In the first instance I would like to welcome you, albeit virtually, to the borough of Colchester. I would also like to thank Andrea for her management of the examination process so far. We have worked with Andrea for many years but have never dealt with a virtual examination, so we are particularly grateful for her help and support.

The Council has had a good track record of plan making and was one of the first to adopt a full suite of documents under the LDF process. We are fortunate to have many people both here and at the county council who have been involved in plan making throughout the intervening time. We acted quickly to address changing circumstances in relation to viability by undertaking a partial review of the LDF and produced a site-specific plan for Tiptree. These plans have ensured we remain an authority where development is truly plan led. The importance of having an up to date Local Plan cannot be underestimated.

This Local Plan is the culmination of years of hard work, during which time there have been significant changes and challenges in planning policy and legislation. The Plan was submitted in 2017 and is therefore being examined under the 2012 NPPF. Updates have been made to the evidence base and have been proposed to the plan itself.

The Colchester Local Plan sets out a positive strategy to meet the development needs of the borough, including the objectively assessed need for housing and economic growth to support the growing population. It is an integrated strategy, that will deliver genuinely sustainable growth across the borough.

The plan is based on a strong and extensive evidence base, which has been found to be sound by Mr Clews in his examination of Section 1. Sir, you will also have to satisfy yourself that the evidence is robust and fit for purpose and justifies Section 2.

Mr Clews also found the North Essex Authorities had met the Duty to Co-operate. The date for testing this legal requirement is 2017, but even since that date non statutory co-operation has continued and this is reflected in the various hearing statements.

Land Use Consultants (LUC) have undertaken a review of the SA and found it had been carried out to a good standard in line with the SEA regulations. Whilst they acknowledge that there are aspects that could be improved in order to further strengthen its robustness, these can be addressed in the final update which will be prepared along with any modifications you might want to make to the Plan.

Planning is never easy and rarely are decisions made that are universally popular. We have consulted and sought to engage residents, businesses and stakeholders and we have taken on board comments received but there are still concerns and objections, some of which will be covered over the next two weeks.

For many years the Council has delivered against its targets and until recently a high proportion of new development was on brownfield land – sometimes more than 90%: very little development has taken place outside of the urban area of Colchester. However, brownfield land is not infinite and neither is it desirable to redevelop everything, so there is no option but to look at greenfield land. The local plan proposes a strategy which identifies sustainable settlements where growth is considered appropriate because of location and range of services and facilities.

The commercial market and national planning policy for those uses has probably seen most significant change recently and this is even more so in Colchester. Since the plan was submitted three permissions have been granted in Stanway which has and will introduce significantly more retail and leisure uses rather than traditional employment. There is however still a good supply of employment land in a number of locations across the borough, which can meet the need to provide jobs for the growing population. Limited modifications have been proposed to address the changed circumstances.

Colchester is a special place to live and we want to keep it that way. An important point that can often be forgotten is that planning is not just about development. This plan also seeks to protect those areas and assets that are valued by residents. These include the Dedham Vale AONB, the countryside more generally, listed buildings, open space and community facilities.

The rich heritage and biodiversity of the Borough needs to be protected and enhanced wherever possible. New green infrastructure will be incorporated into development to address climate change whilst also improving ecological connectivity and providing new spaces for sport and recreation.

New and improved infrastructure is a pre-requisite and the evidence base demonstrates joined up working with service providers, including the county council as well as developers to ensure delivery. The quality of our towns and villages should be improved, by focusing on more sustainable transport options and improving accessibility.

The Council would welcome the Inspector making recommendations to the Colchester Local Plan.

The Council is satisfied that the draft Plan as submitted successfully reconciles often competing issues to deliver sustainable development. We are confident that the Plan is positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy. The Local Plan and supporting documents meet the legal and procedural requirements as set out in the relevant legislation and I commend the Colchester Local Plan to you.

Attendance for the Council

- Karen Syrett – Lead Officer: Planning, Housing & Economic Growth – BA (hons), DMS, MRTPI
- Sandra Scott – Spatial Policy Manager - BSc (Hons) Environmental Planning MRTPI
- Laura Chase – Planning Policy Manager – PhD, MRTPI.
- Shelley Blackaby – Planning Policy Officer BSc (Hons) Environmental Planning, PG Dip Environmental Planning, MA Environment, Science and Society, MRTPI.
- Rachel Forkin – Planning Policy Officer - BA (Hons) in Planning, Masters Degree (MSc) in Transport Planning
- Catherine Bailey – Landscape Architect and Planning Policy Officer - BSc Hons MPhil MA CMLI
- Bethany Jones – Planning Policy Officer BSc (hons), MSc, MRTPI
- Simon Cairns – Head of Development Management, Dip TP, Dip Bldg Cons (RICS), MRTPI, IHBC

Essex County Council (Planning and Highways/Transportation) –

- Matthew Jericho, Spatial Planning and Local Plan Manager, BTP, MPIA.
- Alan Lindsay, Transportation Planning and Infrastructure Manager, BEng (Hons).
- Martin Mason, Strategic Development Engineer, MSc DIC MILT.

Legal representation is provided by Dentons;

- Stephen Ashworth, Partner
- Katie Scuoler, Senior Associate

Other consultants;

- Chris Watts MRTPI of CPW Planning
- Tamsin Cottle, Director of Planning at JLL, BA(Hons), MTP, MRTPI
- Tim Allen, Director Land Development, Stantec, CTPP,
- Elaine Richmond, Director Environmental Services, Stantec BSc (Hons) MSc CEnv CEng
- Chris Bowden, Navigus Planning
- Laura Easton, Three Dragons
- Jonathon Pearson and David Green of LUC