Colchester City Council
Preferred Options
Local Plan Topic Paper
Retail, Leisure and Town Centre

November 2025

Colchester
Local Plan

Contents

Executive Summary

Consumer demands and shopping patterns have changed significantly within the last few years, impacted by Covid-19 and the cost-of-living crisis. Online shopping has continued to increase, as has shopping in out-of-town retail parks.

This shift has led to town centres needing to diversify in order to retain footfall. This is supported by amendments to the Use Classes Order that are making changes of use between different use types easier. This is increasing the flexibility of uses within shopping areas, enabling town centres to increasingly become places for leisure and residential uses alongside retail. There is still a role for smaller district and local centres to provide convenience shopping for local day-to-day needs as well as for out-of-town shopping centres to provide space for comparison goods shopping. However, this needs to be managed to ensure new development proposals do not negatively impact upon the viability of the town centre.

For planning purposes, and as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), references to ‘town centres’ or ‘centres’ apply to city centres, town centres, district centres and local centres but exclude small parades of shops of purely neighbourhood significance. Unless they are identified as centres in the development plan, existing out-of-centre developments, comprising or including main town centre uses, do not constitute town centres.

A Retail, Leisure and Town Centre study was commissioned to understand how each of Colchester’s key shopping areas were performing economically and their capacity to support population growth and resulting expenditure in relation to comparison goods, convenience goods and leisure uses across the plan period. This was supported by site inspections and household telephone surveys.

The study showed that the vacancy rate of units in the town centre had increased, so that 18.6% of all units were vacant, (as of August 2023), which is above the national average. Much of this is due to increased vacancy in comparison retail units. Greatest spends in relation to comparison and convenience goods were seen at Tollgate, with the Stane Retail Park being a notable addition to the retail offering near this centre.

Forecasts for expenditure and available floorspace showed an oversupply of floorspace for convenience and comparison goods up until 2036, demonstrating there was no immediate need to support growth of new development proposals within the various centres and shopping areas in Colchester.

Leisure uses were seen to be increasing in Colchester, with the food and beverage sector performing well. With existing development at Northern Gateway Leisure Park and committed development at Tollgate Village, no immediate need was forecast for leisure uses like ten pin bowling and cinemas. However, the growth of gyms and sports facilities was noted as an area where extra capacity may be required.

This evidence, alongside relevant chapters of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) informed Policy E4: Retail and Town Centres. The policy emphasises the 'town centre first' approach to development, and recognises that a diversity of uses, including leisure and residential uses, need to be supported in town centres to support their vitality and viability.

Criteria for the application of a sequential test to development proposals are outlined, which aim to ensure proposals do not negatively impact the vitality and viability of the designated centres in Colchester, particularly the town centre. Additionally, a 280sqm (or 350m sqm gross) threshold for retail and leisure development within edge of centre or out of centre locations is detailed, meaning developments over this size need to complete an impact assessment to show how they will not impact on the offering within relevant centres.

1. Introduction and Purpose

1.1 To help with the consideration, interpretation and consultation on the Preferred Options Regulation 18 Plan and later stages of plan making, a series of Topic Papers have been prepared which summarise the evidence base and details how this evidence has helped shape the policies in the Preferred Options Local Plan. These Topic Papers are 'live' documents and will be updated as the plan making process progresses.

1.2 This is the Retail, Leisure and Town Centres Topic Paper. It provides the context for policies in the Economy chapter of the Preferred Options Local Plan, particularly Policy E4: Retail and Centres.

1.3 This Topic Paper summarises the relevant evidence base documents, which are:

- Retail, Leisure and Town Centre Study 2024

This document provides recently prepared, comprehensive and robust evidence sources that are drawn on at various points throughout the paper and have informed the Plan. Much of the evidence is lengthy, technical, and in part complex. The Topic Papers aim to help make the evidence clearer where necessary and also bridge the gap between the evidence and how it has informed the plan.

1.4 This topic paper has particular overlap with the Employment topic paper.

2. Background

Background

2.1 Consumer demands and trends in relation to retail have changed massively within the last few years, impacting the shopping patterns within town centres and other retail environments. The Covid-19 pandemic combined with the cost-of-living crisis negatively impacted many sectors, particularly leisure, fashion and hospitality. The growth of online shopping has continued, and this has led to many retailers closing large stores within town centres. This leaves town centres with many vacant buildings, particularly larger ‘department’ stores which, in their current format, offer limited viable uses. In Colchester, specific examples include the closure of Debenhams, Marks and Spencer, Next and Wilko stores in the city centre. Out of town retail parks continue to experience growth across the UK, with many retailers choosing to relocate stores to these locations. Stane Retail Park which opened in Stanway in phases from 2021-2022 supports this trend.

2.2 Conversely, other sectors such as convenience stores, grab and go food shops and health and beauty are experiencing growth, mainly led by the fact that the services they provide are difficult to access online. The leisure sector has also bounced back to some degree, particularly food and drink establishments. An increasing demand, particularly among younger generations, has also been seen for ‘experience-based activities’ such as escape rooms and sports bars. Leisure activities are growing in Colchester to support this, notably with the creation of the Northern Gateway Leisure Park which includes a Hollywood Bowl.

2.3 Town centres therefore need to adapt to changing shopping patterns and trends to ensure they continue to receive footfall.

2.4 Colchester is seeking to do this, creating a City Centre Masterplan, delivering several projects which aim to offer new experiences, improve the city’s accessibility and connectivity and showcase its rich heritage. The investment, totalling over £40 million in central government grants and millions more from other grants and private investment, is being delivered over the next 5 years.

National Context

2.5 The national policy context for retail and town centres is set out in The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), most recently updated in 2024, and supported by the ‘Town centres and retail’ National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), updated in 2020.

2.6 For planning purposes, the NPPF defines ‘Town Centre’ as an ‘Area defined on the local authority’s policies map, including the primary shopping area and areas predominantly occupied by main town centre uses within or adjacent to the primary shopping area. References to town centres or centres apply to city centres, town centres, district centres and local centres but exclude small parades of shops of purely neighbourhood significance. Unless they are identified as centres in the development plan, existing out-of-centre developments, comprising or including main town centre uses[1], do not constitute town centres.'

2.7 Paragraph 90 of the NPPF outlines that planning policy should promote the long-term vitality and viability of town centres by enabling them to diversify to respond to change in retail and leisure industries. The PPG expands on this outlining that "A wide range of complementary uses can, if suitably located, help to support the vitality of town centres, including residential, employment, office, commercial, leisure/entertainment, healthcare and educational development".

2.8 Both the NPPF and PPG identify that residential development is recognised as often supporting the vitality of centres and that this should be encouraged on appropriate sites. The PPG also outlines that improvements to the accessibility of the town centre via improvements to transport links and public spaces like public squares and gardens also contribute to town centre vitality and viability.

2.9 The NPPF states that a hierarchy of town centres and primary shopping areas[2] should be identified, with boundaries and a range of uses for each area outlined.

2.10 It also outlines that plans should allocate a range of suitable sites to meet the scale and type of development likely to be needed within town centres, looking at least ten years ahead.

2.11 Chapters 91-93 of the NPPF identify the need for the 'sequential test' to be followed when assessing development proposals. The sequential test means following an approach whereby proposals for main town centre uses should be directed towards town centres first before considering accessible edge of centre locations[3] and, if required, out of centre sites[4].

---

[1] These uses are defined as Retail development (including warehouse clubs and factory outlet centres); leisure, entertainment and more intensive sport and recreation uses (including cinemas, restaurants, drive-through restaurants, bars and pubs, nightclubs, casinos, health and fitness centres, indoor bowling centres and bingo halls); offices; and arts, culture and tourism development (including theatres, museums, galleries and concert halls, hotels and conference facilities)

[2] These are defined areas within a centre where retail development is concentrated

[3] For retail, this concerns locations that are well connected to, and up to 300 metres from, the primary shopping area. For other main town centre uses, a location within 300 metres of a town centre boundary.

[4] A location which is not in or on the edge of a centre, but not necessarily outside the urban area.

2.12 Chapter 94 of the NPPF states that where retail and leisure development are proposed for outside the town centre, and exceed a locally set floorspace threshold, developers should complete an impact assessment. The impact assessment should consider the impact of the development on public and private investment within the area it is located, alongside its impact on the vitality and viability of the town centre. In the proposed policy, the floorspace thresholds for impact assessments have been revised and are referred to in section 4.

2.13 Since the last plan, key legislative changes have been made to support town centres to diversify namely:

- Change to the Use Classes Order: The Use Classes Order 1987 puts uses of land and buildings into categories known as use classes. A new use class (class E) was introduced in September 2020 bringing together several separate uses under one broader 'Commercial, Business and Service' heading. Other uses have also been categorised under different use classes. The re-arrangement of uses is outlined in appendix 1. Changes of use between different uses within a use class (e.g. within use class E) are allowed without planning permission, subject to meeting other criteria[5]. This change to the Use Classes Order increases the flexibility of uses of buildings to maintain the vitality of town centres, for example allowing shops to change to restaurants as both are now within use class E. However, this also affects how primary shopping areas are determined, given that these areas are considered as those 'where retail development is concentrated'.
- Introduction of a new permitted development right allowing changes of use from Class E uses to residential without requiring planning permission, subject to other criteria being met[6]. This supports the NPPF in that it speeds up the process through which commercial buildings can be changed to residential use where this is appropriate and supports the viability and vitality of the town centre. These changes to permitted development rights are outlined in appendix 2.

[5] For example significant external changes to the building as a consequence of the change of use may require planning permission

[6] These include the change of use being allowed below a size limit of 1,500 sq metres of floorspace to avoid the loss of larger units such as anchor/ department stores. The building must also have been in a commercial, business, or service use for at least two continuous years previously.

Local Policy and Guidance

2.14 In addition to establishing the City Centre Masterplan, the Colchester Economic Strategy 2022-2025 and the Business Improvement District (BID) Future of Retail Strategy outline areas of growth and development for Colchester. The Economic Strategy identifies Colchester's growth potential, noting key investment to support retail in recent years including improvement of public spaces such as around the Mercury Theatre, and the rollout of Ultrafast gigabit broadband and 5G networks. The Future of Retail Strategy identifies 4 key pillars for growth; creating attractive public realm, supporting alternative uses of empty space, embracing environmental sustainability and improving communications about growth of the city.

2.15 To align with the NPPF, Colchester's adopted Local Plan outlined a hierarchy of town centre and retail environments which detail where certain types of development should be supported. The adopted Local Plan hierarchy is outlined below:

- Town Centres – This covers Colchester City Centre as the main area for shopping, service, culture, leisure and other commercial activities and is top of the hierarchy.
- District Centres – These areas are more locally focussed, providing access to a range of shops and services for the day to day needs of local populations. In Colchester the district centres are Highwoods, Peartree Road, Tollgate, Turner Rise, Tiptree, West Mersea, Wivenhoe.
- Local Centres – These areas provide a series of small shops and services specifically to meet the needs of local neighbourhoods. These are shown in shown on the Policies map in the Adopted Local Plan.

2.16 A proportion of each of the town centre and district centres are designated as primary shopping areas (PSAs). The boundaries of the primary shopping areas within the town centre and district centre boundaries determine whether a site or building is considered as within the primary shopping area, edge of centre or out of centre areas. These boundaries are important for the application of the sequential test and determining if an impact assessment is required as referenced in paragraph 2.9 and 2.10 of this topic paper. The boundaries of the PSAs, town centre and district centres have been reviewed as part of the Retail, Leisure and Town Centre study completed and are discussed in more detail in sections 3 and 4 of this topic paper.

2.17 There are also several key retail and leisure facilities located on the edge of centre or out of centres. These include Stane Park, Colchester Retail Park (off Sheepen Road), Colne View Retail Park (off Cowdray Avenue), Northern Gateway Leisure Park and other select warehouses and large retail stores. Two of these, Stane Park and Northern Gateway Leisure Park have grown significantly since the last evidence review for the adopted Local Plan.

3. Evidence Base

3.1 CPW Planning were commissioned to complete a Retail, Leisure and Town Centre Study to support the plan preparation. The consultants completed a review of trends in the retail and leisure sectors alongside conducting 'health check reviews' to determine how the town and district centres areas were faring economically. Supporting this, market share of expenditure has been analysed for most of the key centres (bar West Mersea and Wivenhoe due to their small catchment for local residents) which informs an updated assessment of retail capacity.

3.2 The boundaries of the primary shopping areas in the adopted Local Plan were also reviewed in line with national planning policy and recommendations for alterations were made, particularly in light of changes to the Use Classes Order. The study also considered baseline and future capacity of floorspace in town and district centres for comparison (stores selling clothing, footwear, DIY goods, furniture, toys etc) and convenience (food, alcohol, perishables) goods.

Health check reviews and market share expenditure

3.3 Health check reviews provide evidence on how our retail centres are performing. These reviews sought to assess the current performance of centres, and how this might inform planning for the future. To assess the health of the centres, the study considered a range of indicators including diversity of uses, proportions of vacant property, customer experience and pedestrian flows amongst others which are all identified in paragraph 006 of the PPG. The health check review was informed by site inspections and a household telephone survey. Key findings of the health checks for the Centres as defined in the adopted Local Plan are presented below.

Colchester City Centre (defined as a 'town centre' in the Retail hierarchy)

3.4 Since the last survey of use categories in the town centre (e.g. comparison retail, convenience retail, retail, leisure, finance and business and vacant), there has been a significant increase in vacant buildings in the town centre, increasing from 93 units in November 2019 to 120 in August 2023. 18.6% of units were vacant at the time of the survey, above the national average of 14%. This is mainly reflected in the loss of many comparison retail units, including M&S, Wilko, Debenhams and Next.

3.5 Much of this comparison goods shopping is now done online or in out-of-town retail parks such as Tollgate and Stane Park, particularly for items such as audio-visual equipment, household appliances and furniture and flooring amongst others. Despite this loss of comparison retail units, the city centre still retains highest market share of comparison goods for those located within central

Colchester, although has a lower market share than Tollgate when the overall Colchester catchment is considered.

3.6 Improving cleanliness of streets, alongside reducing the number of empty shops were noted as the main suggested improvements from telephone surveys with residents using the city centre for shopping and services. This would improve both the environmental quality of the environment and improve perceptions of safety.

3.7 However, there has been growth in retail and leisure services uses, particularly the number of independent stores. The offering of good cafes/restaurants were noted in surveys completed by the consultant as something which consumers liked about the town centre.

3.8 The environmental quality of the city centre was noted as attractive in many parts, with a mix of historic and modern environments, many of which are pedestrianised. It is anticipated the environmental quality would continue improving with the planned investment into the public realm. This would have the positive effect of both attracting increased footfall and more businesses to set up in Colchester, with the two factors influencing each other.

District Centres

Tiptree

3.9 Tiptree continues to serve a role as a place for convenience shopping for local residents, with several key supermarket chains supporting this. These also help support the mix of independent businesses in the centre. No significant issues were identified in relation to the area's perceived safety, environmental quality or vacancy rates and the centre was noted as "performing well in relation to many indicators and appears to be vital and viable".

West Mersea

3.10 West Mersea was noted to have a range of retail, service and community facilities suitable for the day-to-day needs of local residents and visitors. The centre supports a mix of independent and chain stores. The centre was said to be displaying "relatively strong performance in relation to many indicators".

Wivenhoe

3.11 Wivenhoe has one main convenience store and is supported by a range of independent shops and services supporting the day-to-day needs of residents and visitors. Notably, there were no vacant premises in the centre and was one of the only negative factors raised in the health check review as it could be a barrier to business investment.

Tollgate

3.12 Tollgate is dominated by comparison retail stores, making up 72% of all units. Occupancy rates remain unchanged since the last survey in 2020. Although lying outside of the district centre boundary, Stane Retail Park is a notable addition nearby to Tollgate, providing many new convenience and comparison goods offering.

3.13 Household surveys revealed that visits to the centre have increased post-pandemic, with the benefits of the centre being its closeness to home, free parking and good range of shops.

3.14 The expenditure analysis revealed that Tollgate was Colchester's strongest convenience goods shopping destination and secured significant share of comparison goods as well.

3.15 However, the surveys also revealed that the main improvement to be made would be to reduce traffic congestion and improving access by bus. The site inspection also noted the congestion as negatively impacting travel across the centre and the pedestrian experience.

Peartree Road

3.16 The main uses in this centre are based at the area known as the Stanway Retail Park with some convenience stores, alongside several retail warehouses and trade outlets. No significant issues were raised in relation to accessibility or safety.

Turner Rise

3.17 The centre is mainly comprised of comparison retailers and one large convenience superstore. The site has no vacant units, appeared well maintained and well used with the car park operating at 75-85% capacity.

Highwoods

3.18 This centre is dominated by the Tesco Extra store, mainly selling convenience goods. A small number of local services are located nearby, accessed by a thoroughfare which was noted as having the potential to be improved and made more welcoming to pedestrians. The centre was noted to secure a significant proportion of spend on convenience goods across Colchester.

Retail capacity forecasts

3.19 Building on the health checks, an assessment of future retail capacity was completed for both convenience and comparison goods considering the amount of floorspace available within the town centre and district centres (except West Mersea and Wivenhoe due to their scale and localised catchments). This includes current floorspace occupied by convenience and comparison goods, as well as that committed in future developments.

3.20 Expenditure in each of Colchester's main centres based on telephone surveys were used to estimated current and forecast sales, with the forecast sales used to assess trading performance and ability to support additional comparison and/or convenience goods floorspace.

3.21 Forecasts were made at 5 year intervals from 2026-2041. Various assumptions and considerations were taken into account including making allowances for visitor expenditure and expenditure through online retail sales. It is noted that the factors affecting the forecast are changeable so should be treated with caution, particularly when looking beyond 5 years ahead.

3.22 For convenience goods, there is a forecast oversupply of floorspace of 2750 sqm net sales area in 2026, decreasing over time until there is no oversupply in 2041 as population and expenditure grows. Greatest levels of oversupply are within the City Centre and Turner Rise, but oversupply exists across all the modelled town and district centre areas (bar Highwoods and non-central stores in Colchester[7]).

3.23 For comparison goods, there is a forecast oversupply of floorspace of 12,100 sqm net sales area in 2026. However, this does decrease to some capacity being needed by 2041, albeit forecasting towards the end of the plan period becomes less certain. Additionally, the floorspace modelled up until 2036 does not take into account current vacant comparison goods floorspace. In this essence, the study concluded that there is no need for new comparison goods floorspace in Colchester, but the reduction or repurposing of comparison goods floorspace should be considered to ensure the town centre retains its vitality and viability.

Local Centres

[7] Non central stores included stores not within a specified centre within Colchester including various retail parks (such as Stane Park) and other select supermarkets.

3.24 Colchester's existing Local Centres are defined under Policy SG5 of the adopted Local Plan. The adopted Local Plan notes that Local Centres are categorised as containing at least one food store or convenience store and a small range of other shops/services/community facilities of local importance. While smaller retail areas and neighbourhood parades fulfil an important role for local communities, they do not form part of the centre's hierarchy.

3.25 The Colchester Retail, Leisure and Town Centre Study did not consider Colchester's Local Centres in detail. However, the report did make some recommendations in relation to individual Local Centres. Based on the evidence, and as set out above, the report suggested that it is appropriate to define Peartree Road as a Local Centre as it no longer serves the function as a District Centre. It also suggests that it may be appropriate to designate the small-scale retail and service uses in North Colchester, namely Eden Drive and Leda Way respectively, as Local Centres given their role serving basic local needs. A separate Evidence Report on Local Centres provides more information and maps showing the location of these in the Preferred Options Local Plan.

Leisure needs

3.26 Leisure uses and activities are important in the functioning of town centres, increasing dwell times and spend. These uses include food and beverage uses, cinemas, bingo/casinos, gyms and other sports facilities, commercial leisure facilities (such as ten-pin bowling, indoor golf, trampolining, axe throwing) and non-commercial leisure attractions (such as theatres, museums and events). A consideration of current supply of leisure uses was completed, with potential gaps identified.

3.27 The food and beverage sector in the city centre has remained strong, despite issues faced during Covid-19 and the cost-of-living crisis, with a mix of chain and independent operators. There is not forecast to be a substantial need in other commercial leisure uses including cinemas, ten pin bowling and/or indoor golf (with the planned facilities to be built at Northern Gateway Leisure Park and/or Tollgate Village).

3.28 However, the growth in the use of gyms and sports facilities combined with the lack of provision within the city centre, suggests there is an opportunity for additional facilities where appropriate. Demand for commercial leisure should continue to be monitored with population increase and changes in consumer trends, with these uses directed to 'town centre first' in line with the sequential test. This will also help support existing and new food and beverage outlets.

4. Approach to the Local Plan

4.1 To develop the preferred policy approach, the adopted Local Plan policies have been reviewed, and National Policy, National Planning Practice Guidance and the findings from the evidence base have been taken into account.

4.2 The main policy developed in relation to retail is Policy E4: Retail and Centres. Policy CC1: City Centre Place Policy is also relevant.

4.3 Aligning with the NPPF, the main aim of the policy is to ensure that development contributes to the viability and vitality of the town centre. Practically, this means ensuring the city centre continues to attract footfall through having a wide variety of uses that respond to changing consumer demands. The city centre should also remain accessible by various forms of transport and provide an attractive public realm.

<u>Hierarchy of centres</u>

4.4 The Retail, Leisure and Town Centre Study supported the hierarchy of centres as outlined in Policy E4. The town and district centres are shown in Appendix 3. The hierarchy is shown below:

- Town Centre: Colchester City Centre. This is at the top of the hierarchy.
- District Centres:
    - Highwoods
    - Tollgate – The study considered that although Tollgate has a significant retail offer, it does not offer a comparable range of service and community uses compared to the city centre so is retained as a district centre.
    - Turner Rise
    - Tiptree
    - West Mersea
    - Wivenhoe
- Local Centres: These are identified on the policy maps. They are also listed along with maps illustrating the location in the Local Centres Evidence Report.

4.5 Peartree Road has been changed from a district centre (as it currently is in the adopted Local Plan) to a local centre within the hierarchy due to it contributing little to market share in convenience and comparison good expenditure as referenced in surveys completed in the Retail, Leisure and Town Centre Study.

4.6 Policy E4 outlines that main town centre uses will be directed towards the town and district centres to ensure these retain their vitality and viability, with a focus on development following a ‘town centre first’ approach. The Retail, Leisure and Town Centre Study clearly outlined the increase in the quantity of large vacant premises in the city centre, such as the former Debenhams and M&S buildings and that alternative uses should be considered that align with changing consumer trends and creating a diversity of uses.

4.7 Policy CC1 adds to this, outlining that residential development in the city centre, particularly on upper floors to premises, will be supported where they complement other uses in the centre. This reflects guidance on the support of residential development outlined within the ‘Town Centre and Retail PPG’. The application of this element of the policy will support the planned redevelopment of St Botolph’s and surrounding areas, including plans for residential development in Vineyard and Britannia car parks.

4.8 Policy E4 also has overlaps with considerations within Policies PC1: Healthier Food Environments and PC2: Active and Sustainable Travel.

4.9 For example Policy PC1 outlines that hot food takeaways and fast-food outlets will be supported in centres, but only if they are deemed to avoid adverse impacts on “local health, pollution or anti-social behaviour”.

4.10 Policy PC2 identifies that development should support the provision of infrastructure to encourage active and sustainable modes of travel and improve connectivity to key destinations (which would include visits to relevant centres).

Primary shopping areas

4.11 The boundaries of the primary shopping areas within the town and district centres have been amended following recommendations in the Retail, Leisure and Town Centre Study. These are shown in Appendix 3. Additionally, primary and secondary shopping frontages[8] are no longer included within the retail policies for the city centre. This is because the study considered that these could restrict the introduction of non-retail uses into centres, hindering the diversity of uses that support town centre vitality including retail uses. However, Policy CC1 outlines

[8] Frontages are areas where specific development uses were identified. The NPPF previously defined primary frontages as likely to include a high proportion of retail uses including food, drinks, clothing and household goods. Secondary frontages were defined as providing greater opportunities for a diversity of uses such as restaurants, cinemas and businesses.

that non-retail uses will not be supported where a build up of these in one area affect the “established retail character in the locality”.

Sequential and impact tests

4.12 The policy clearly outlines the approach to following the sequential test to ensure the vitality and viability of the town centre is retained. A set of requirements have also been laid out that need to be met by a development proposal following adherence to the sequential test. These are to ensure that the proposal does not negatively impact the character of the centre, or affect the balance of the centres hierarchy, to ensure the town centre remains the central destination for shopping and leisure.

4.13 A key alteration made in policy E4, as recommended by the Retail, Leisure and Town Centre Study, is the criteria for which an impact assessment is required for retail and leisure development occurring within edge-of-centre or out-of-centre locations. The threshold for which an impact assessment is required has been lowered to 280sqm (or 350sqm gross). This is following changes to the use class orders whereby shops selling essential goods where they are not more than 280sqm have been assigned a new use class (F2), differentiating them from other shops (E). Shops of 280sqm or less are thus considered to not have a significant negative impact within a centre, whereas shops of a greater size are unlikely to be just serving local populations and could affect trade from existing shops in town centres. Additionally, the retail capacity forecasts outlined in the Retail, Leisure and Town Centre Study show an oversupply of floorspace, so these proposals are not strictly required to support local expenditure.

4.14 However, the policy clearly outlines that the impact assessment required for a proposed development above the 280sqm threshold will be appropriate to the scale and nature of the proposal.

Local Centres

4.15 Policy E4 sets out that Local Centres are identified on the Policies Map and also outlines the important role that local centres play in providing shops and community services for day-to-day needs of local residents. It outlines that these centres will be protected by outlining that proposals for changes of use within these centres will need to show how they enhance the retail, leisure or service offering to the local community.

4.16 Supporting expansion of these centres will be viewed favourably where proposals are suitable for serving the community’s basic needs and will not negatively impact the use of the area such as through increased noise.

4.17 Policy E4 also makes links with policies in the ‘Place and Connectivity’ chapter of the Preferred Options Local Plan, stating that local centres should be made accessible within new residential allocations and that proposals should aim to promote active and sustainable travel.

Appendix 1: Changes to the categorisation of use classes following amendments to the Use Classes Order

Use	**Use class up to August 2020**	**Use class from 1 September 2020**
Shop	A1	E
Financial and professional services (not medical)	A2	E
Cafe or restaurant	A3	E
Pubs, wine bars or other drinking establishments	A4	Sui generis[9]
Hot food takeaways	A5	Sui generis
Offices	B1a	E
Research and Development	B1b	E
For any industrial process (which can be carried out in any residential area without causing detriment to the amenity of the area	B1c	E
Industrial	B2	B2
Storage or distribution	B8	B8
Hotels, boarding and guest houses	C1	C1
Residential Institutions (for people in need of care e.g. a nursing home)	C2	C2

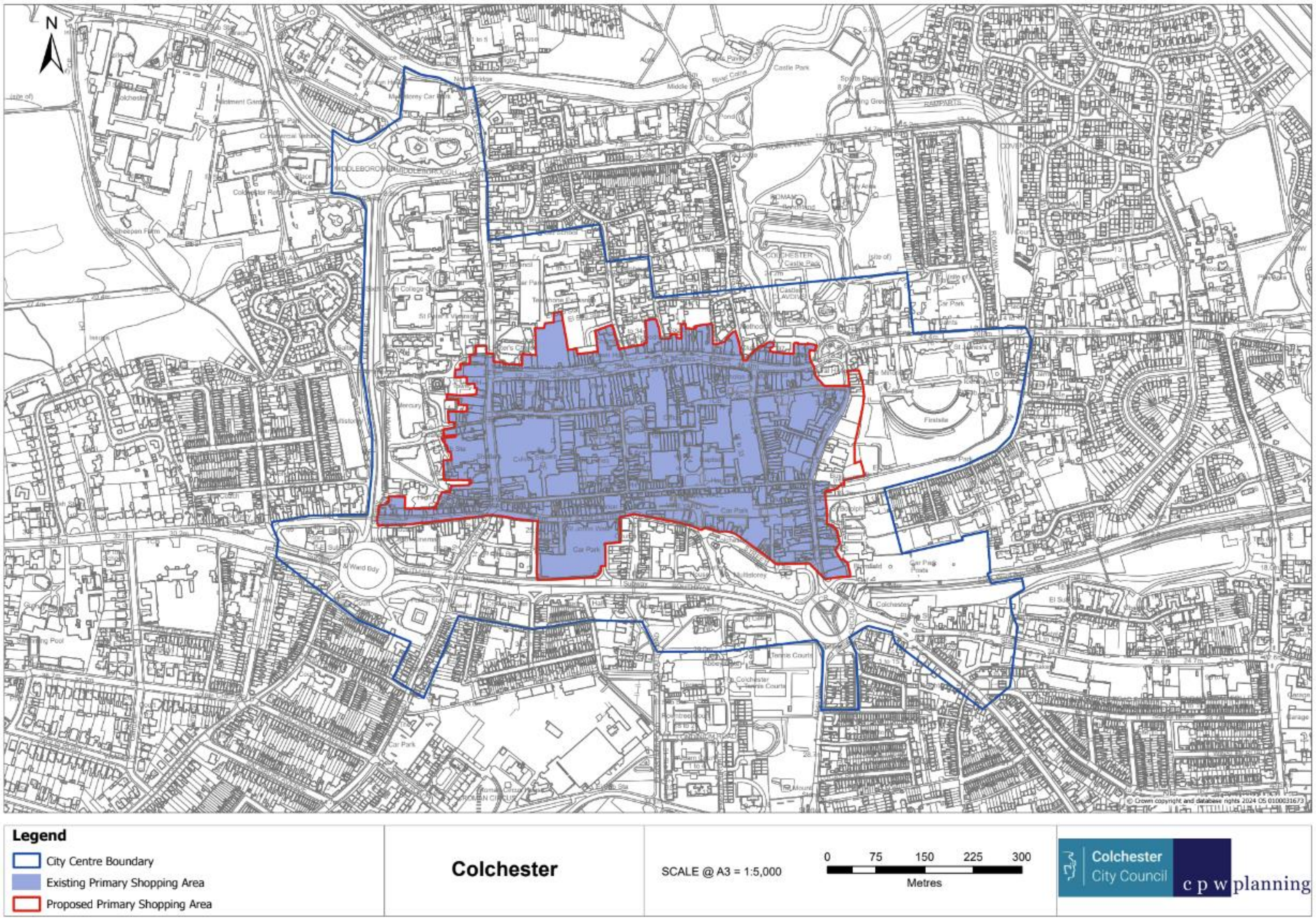
[9] Sui Generic is a category for various use classes which cannot be categorised under one of the other standard use class categories. It includes a variety of leisure a

Use	Use class up to August 2020	Use class from 1 September 2020
Secure residential institutions (e.g. prisons, detention centres)	C2a	C2a
Dwelling houses	C3	C3
House in multiple occupation	C4	C4
Clinics, Health Centres, day nurseries	D1	E
Schools, non residential education, museums, public libraries and halls, places of worship	D1	F1
Cinemas, concert halls, bingo halls and dance halls	D2	Sui generis
Gymnasiums and other indoor sport recreation	D2	E
Hall or meeting place for local community	D2	F2
Swimming baths, skating rinks and outdoor sports or recreation	D2	F2

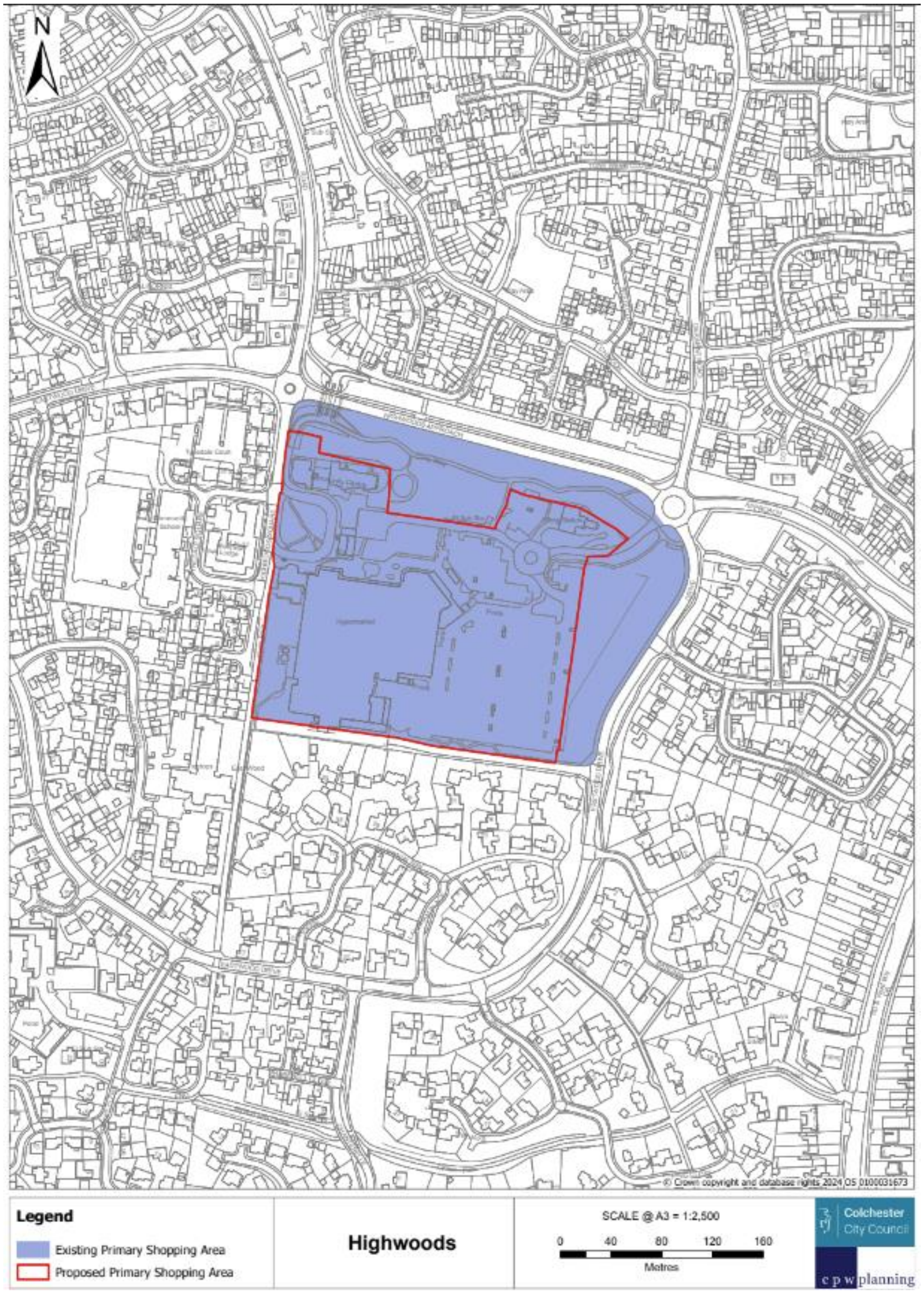
Appendix 2: Changes to permitted development rights for use class changes to residential uses.

Current Use Class Order from 1 September 2020	Permitted change to development (permanent)
Class E Commercial, Business and Service Use, or part use, for all or any of the following purposes: *a) Shop other than for the sale of hot food* *b) Food and drink which is mostly consumed on the premises* *c) services principally to visiting members of the Public including;* *i. financial services* *ii. professional services (other than medical services)* *iii. any other services which it is appropriate to provide in a commercial, business or service locality* *d) Indoor sport and recreation (not swimming pools, ice rinks or motorised vehicles or firearms)* *e) Medical services not attached to the residence of the practitioner* *f) Non-residential creche, day centre or nursery* *g) Business and research* *i) office* *ii) the research and development of products or processes* *or iii) any industrial process, (which can be carried out in any residential area without causing detriment to the amenity of the area)*	To C3 (Dwelling Houses), subject to prior approval (PD Class MA) To a mixed use for any purpose within Class E and as up to 2 flats, subject to prior approval (PD Class G) To a mixed use for any purpose within Class E and as up to 2 flats to a use for any purpose Class E (PD Class H) To a state-funded school falling within Class F.1 (Learning and non-residential institutions) (a) (PD Class T) (and back to previous lawful use (PD Class U)

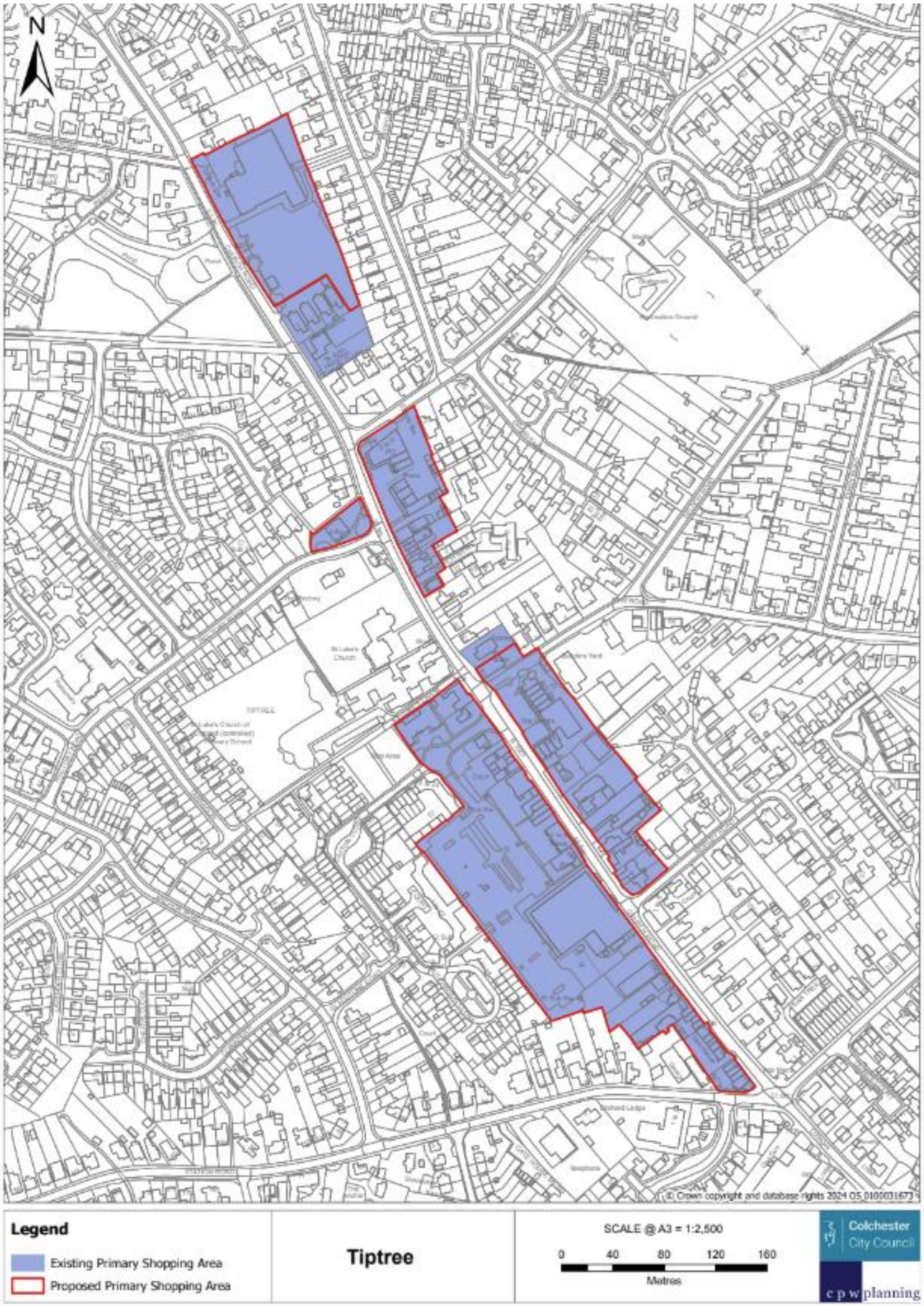
Appendix 3 – Primary Shopping Areas within Town and District Centres



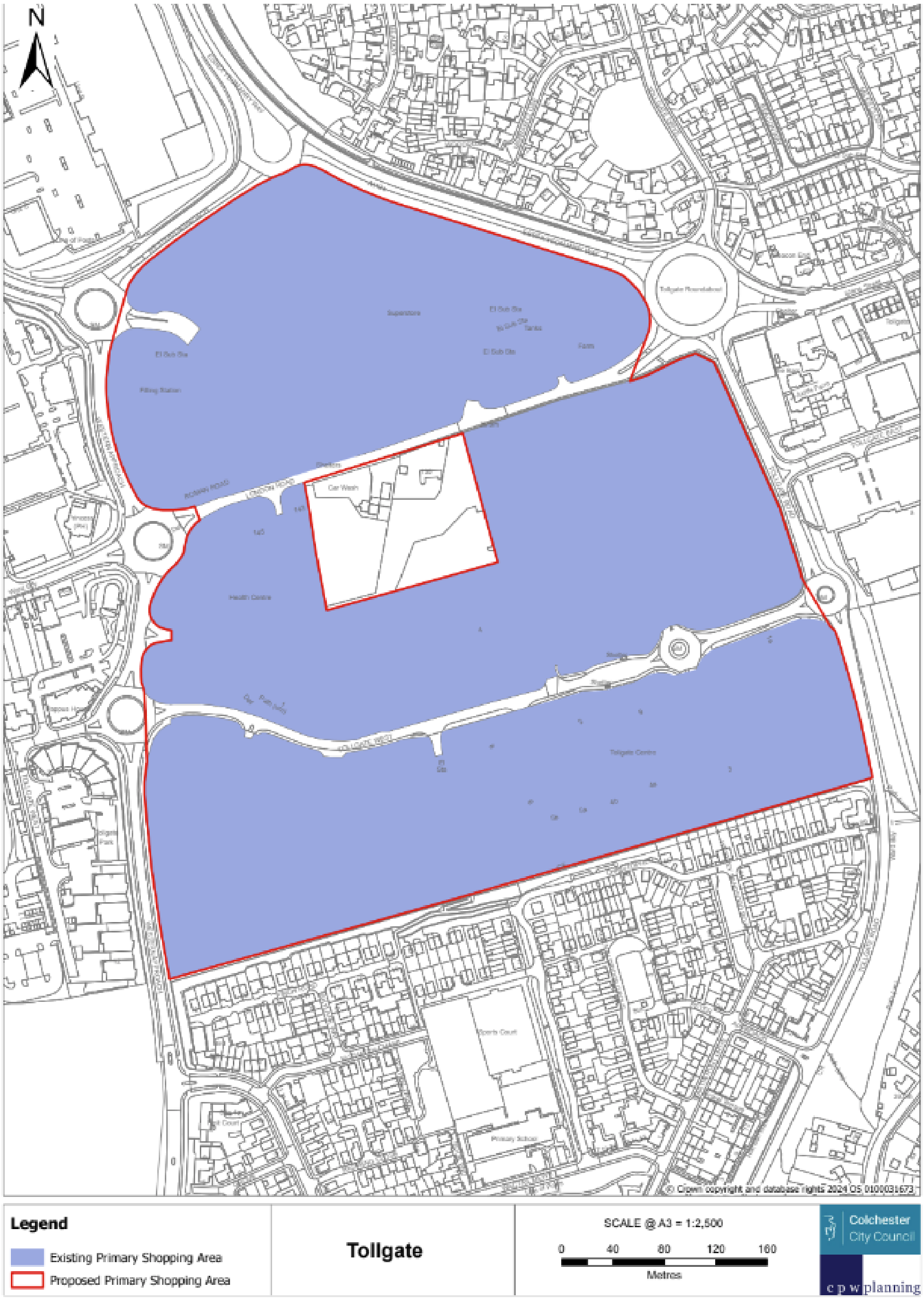
Colchester Town Centre – Primary Shopping Area (existing and proposed)



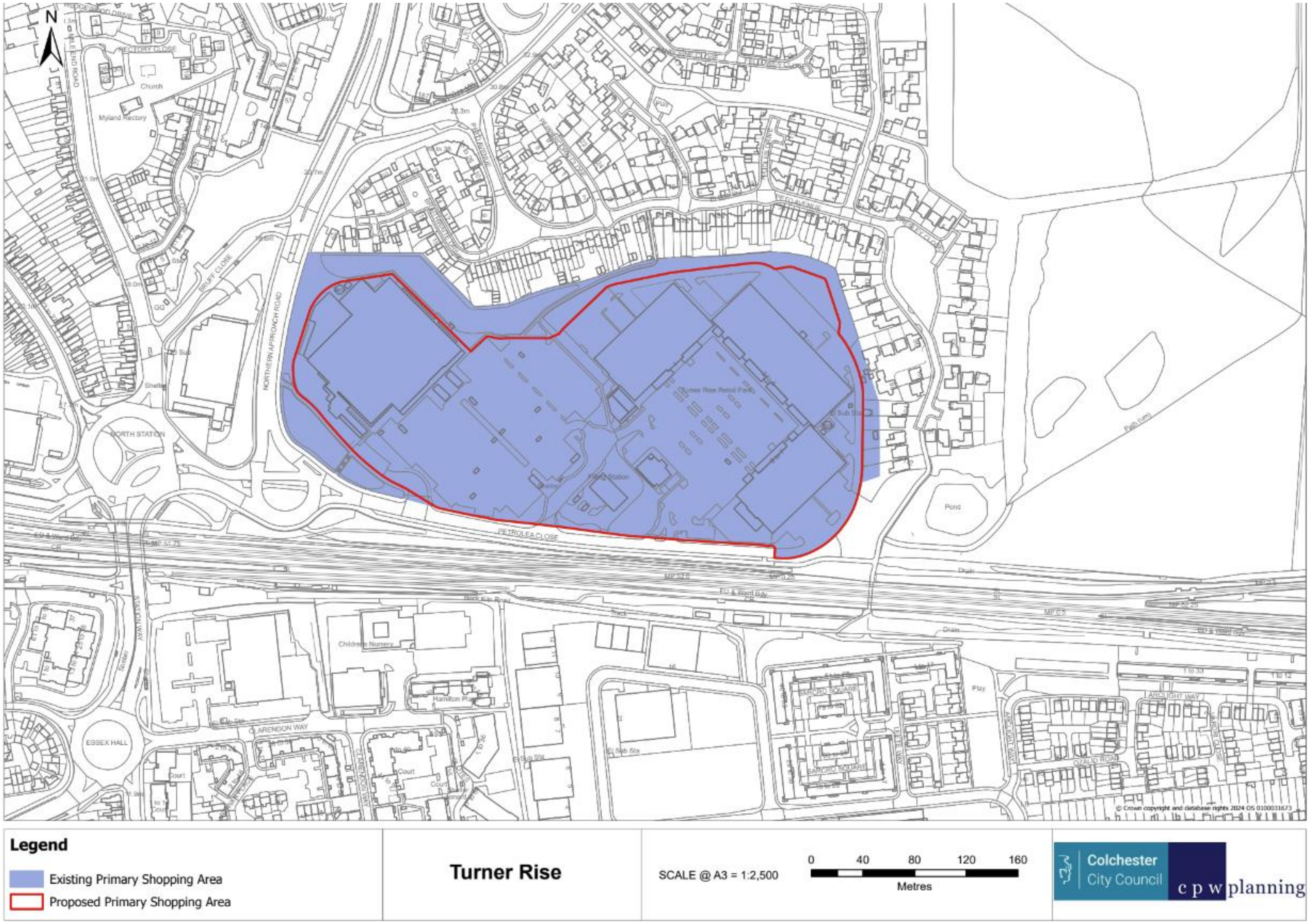
Highwoods District Centre – Primary Shopping Area (existing and proposed)



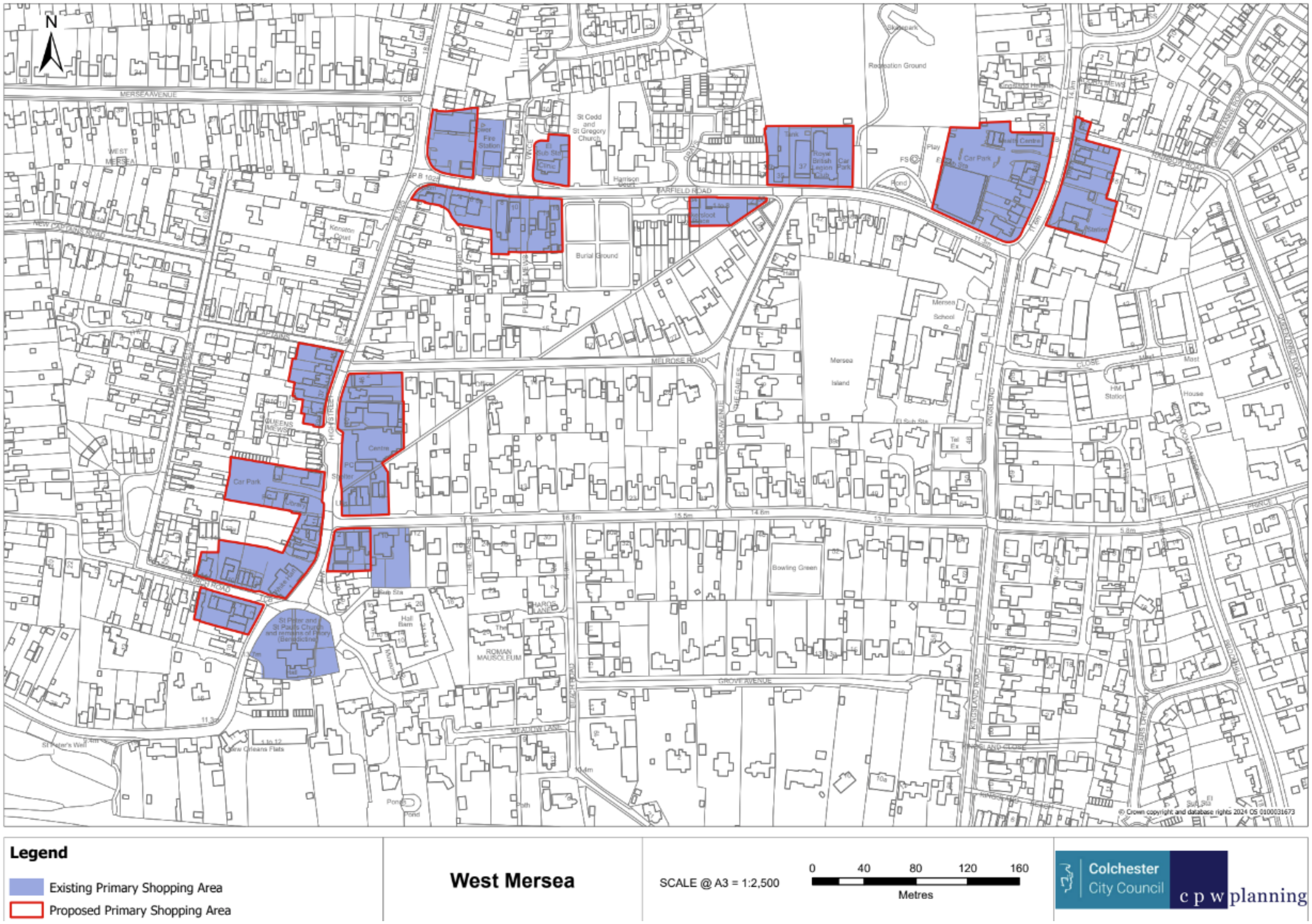
Tiptree District Centre – Primary Shopping Area (existing and proposed)



Tollgate District Centre - Primary Shopping Area (existing and proposed)



Turner Rise District Centre - Primary Shopping Area (existing and proposed)



West Mersea District Centre - Primary Shopping Area (existing and proposed)

Wivenhoe District Centre - Primary Shopping Area (existing and proposed)