

Full Report and Modelling to follow.

Executive Summary

Introduction

The aim of this study is to assist Colchester City Council (CCC) in developing and assessing preferred site allocations from the perspective of transport for its Local Plan. This has been achieved through reviewing the sustainability of locations for development, consideration of mitigation approaches and using transport modelling to gauge the impact of the preferred allocations.

The study finds that there is a need for a proportion of private car trips to shift to sustainable travel modes of walking, cycling, bus or rail above current Business as Usual (BAU) levels where this is possible. This is considered achievable through continuing to invest in walking, cycling and public transport improvements and consistent with national and local policies. There will still be a need to invest in key highway infrastructure in parallel, some of which will support access to Park and Ride, access to rail stations and reliability of buses.

Current position

Current car mode share as a proportion of all trips is high across the whole of the Colchester borough resulting in congestion problems on the A12 and A120 strategic routes; but also, on local roads within the city area including the A133 Cymbeline Way, A1124 Lexden Road, and A1232 Ipswich Road. Sustainable transport options vary across the borough with bus, cycling and walking alternatives better in the city centre and urban fringe areas when compared with rural areas of the borough. The city benefits from three rail stations in the urban area – Colchester, Colchester Town and Hythe stations – and Marks Tey station to the west.

The study has identified committed development in order of 5,300 new homes and 4,200 new jobs, which are excluded from the preferred site allocations. Committed growth includes the Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community and is being accompanied by transport improvements including the A1331 link road, a new P&R facility to the east, a new bus rapid transit system and delivery of walking and cycling schemes.

Supporting identification of the preferred site allocations

In order to assess the impact of committed growth and the proposed Local Plan preferred site allocations, ECC has enhanced and extended the existing Colchester Transport Model to take account of travel behaviour changes following the pandemic. The new North Essex Model (NEMo) has a base year of 2023.

Using the updated model to understand existing network pressures and the impact of proposed growth, ECC has supported CCC in their consideration of the potential transport impact of the emerging allocations. This work included considering the quantum of housing able to be allocated around Marks Tey without the proposed A120 scheme. It is considered possible that Marks Tey could continue to grow beyond the new plan period of 2041 if the proposed A120 Braintree to A12 scheme went ahead.

CCC has considered the transport evidence alongside evidence from other disciplines in arriving at the preferred site allocations. The preferred allocations were then tested in the new NEMo model and a practicable mitigation strategy developed.

Preferred site allocations and mitigation

The preferred allocations are expected to create a further 11,000 homes and, approximately, 11,000 jobs in addition to the committed development growth. To put this in perspective, committed and preferred allocations would grow homes by 20% above the current amount and employment by 16%.

Forecast reference and assessment case 2041 models were set up in NEMo using car trip rates reflecting current local travel behaviour – business as usual (BAU). The reference case model reflecting committed developments indicates that that level of growth can be accommodated on the transport network if it is accompanied by investment in transport improvements. However, the highway network would not be able to accommodate additional car trips generated by preferred allocations using BAU car trip assumptions.

A practicable mitigation strategy was then developed in line with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to consider opportunities for sustainable travel and reducing travel need before expanding highway capacity. It was considered impracticable to mitigate impact of growth by solely expanding highway capacity. It is expected that the integrated package of mitigation measures would include:

- Extension of RTS and high quality bus routes
- Extension of walking and cycling programme
- Interchange improvements i.e. mobility hubs, rail station improvements
- Travel planning and travel behaviour changes
- Key strategic highway schemes including the A12 J19-J25 widening

- Local highway improvements

An achievable level of switch to sustainable travel has then been identified to reduce the growth in car trips. The reduced level of car trips was then run through the NEMO transport model, which demonstrated that the impact of growth could be appropriately mitigated using this strategy.

It is expected that the required switch to sustainable travel to facilitate growth would be a combination of reduction from BAU car trips at preferred allocations, committed development and existing settlements. The report provides examples and precedents to support the strategy to accommodate growth partly through a switch to sustainable travel. Examples include evidence from Hull, Brighton and Nottingham in the UK as well as from continental Europe.

Next steps and further testing

The highway authorities ECC and National Highways have been working closely throughout the Local Plan transport assessment process. This has included a review of the new NEMO base year and a review of forecast modelling is commencing.

The ongoing review of modelling with National Highways is expected to include sensitivity tests, one of which will test the preferred allocations without the A12 J19-25 widening scheme for which funding, at the time of writing, is uncertain. These sensitivity tests will improve the levels of certainty on transport modelling findings.

Ongoing work with National Highways will also consider the proposed A120 Braintree to A12 scheme and when it may be required to support further growth at Marks Tey. ECC has previously identified its favoured route for a new and improved A120 between Braintree and the A12 south of Kelvedon in June 2018. The scheme was one of the Government's Road Investment Strategy 3 (RIS3) 'pipeline projects', however in a Ministerial Statement to Parliament in March 2023, the government announced that work on the future pipeline of schemes earmarked for RIS3 will now be considered for delivery as part of RIS4 (beyond 2030). ECC, and Local Planning Authorities, are continuing to lobby for a committed A120 scheme as early as possible. Following the General Election all committed road schemes, not yet under-construction, are subject to the Spending Review. Consequently, it is unclear when any firm commitment will be provided for this scheme.