

**Colchester City Council  
Preferred Options  
Local Plan Topic Paper  
Healthy and Connected  
Places  
November 2025**



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## Executive Summary

The Council is preparing a new Local Plan for Colchester City which will set out how our communities and places will develop over the next 15 years. The draft Local Plan sets out a clear vision for the future of Colchester to shape how the city will evolve and seeks to meet the key challenges facing our communities up to 2041.

At the heart of the Local Plan is the ambition to create healthy and connected places. This means shaping environments that support physical and mental wellbeing, promote social inclusion and enable sustainable lifestyles. The policies within this theme are designed to ensure that Colchester's unique character is protected and enhanced.

Healthy and Connected Places is about the people and their connection to the place including the quality of design and the environment that encourages a healthy lifestyle through the following:

- Active & sustainable environments and active & sustainable travel
- Access to open green and blue spaces (natural environment)
- Design of homes including affordable housing & neighbourhoods (built environment & community facilities)
- Supporting Communities and Neighbourhoods (all ages & abilities)
- Access to Education, Employment and healthcare infrastructure
- Access to healthier food environments.
- Climate and Environmental Sustainability.

## 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 detail 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 Healthy and Connected Places Topic Paper. It provides the context for policies in the Strategic and Place and Connectivity chapters of the Preferred Options Local Plan. It signposts to other Topic Papers and summarises evidence base documents where relevant including:

- [Planning for Health and Wellbeing \(January 2025\)](#)
- [Indoor and Built Sports Facilities – Needs Assessment \(January 2023\)](#)
- [Indoor Built Sports Facilities – Final Strategy \(January 2023\)](#)
- [Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy - Assessment Report \(March 2023\)](#)
- [Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy – Strategy and Action Plan \(June 2023\)](#)
- [Open Space Report \(April 2023\)](#)

### Transport Evidence

- [Transport Evidence](#) (February 2025)
- [Transport Evidence Appendix A](#) (February 2025)
- [Transport Evidence Executive Summary](#) (February 2025)
- [Further Transport Evidence](#) (October 2025)

### Infrastructure Evidence

- [Colchester Infrastructure Audit and Delivery Plan Stage 3 Report \(October 2025\)](#)
- [Colchester Infrastructure Audit and Delivery Plan Appendix – Project Schedule \(October 2025\)](#)

- 1.3 These documents provide 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 to bridge the gap between the evidence and how it has informed the plan.
- 1.4 Other relevant Topic Papers include:

- Transport Topic Paper
- Infrastructure Topic Paper

## 2. Background

### **What is a Healthy Place**

2.1 Healthy places are environments designed and planned to actively promote and support the physical, mental and social health & wellbeing of their communities. The Local Plan can help influence health and wellbeing in our communities through both design and placemaking, and planning for healthcare infrastructure. This Topic Paper illustrates how the evidence in relation to health and wellbeing in relation to design and placemaking has influenced the policies in the Preferred Options Local Plan. The Infrastructure Topic Paper reviews the available evidence in relation to planning for healthcare infrastructure to support growth.

2.2 Creating healthy places and environments entails the consideration of the following key factors:

#### 2.3 **Connectivity**

- A place that is well-connected and integrated into the wider built and natural environments surrounding it as well as within it, where people want to go and by which mode.
- The environment is designed efficiently with buildings and services in the neighbourhood within walking and cycling distance, promoting active travel and reducing the unnecessary need for motorised travel.
- Healthy Streets that are accessible with inclusive footpaths, cycleways and public transport routes segregated to encourage active & sustainable travel.
- A well-connected place improves health and wellbeing as it can provide a sense of community and encourages physical activity and social interaction.

#### 2.4 **Green & Blue Infrastructure (GBI)**

Green & blue open spaces can provide multiple benefits for people.

- 'Green' spaces are referred to as an undeveloped open space with grass, trees or other vegetation e.g. parks, allotments, woodlands and wildlife habitats.
- 'Blue' spaces are referred to as natural areas with visible water such as SuDS (sustainable urban drainage systems) features, lakes, rivers, ponds, canals or coastal waters. *For the purposes of the Local Plan, the term 'green network and waterways' is used.*

- Access to these areas provide multiple benefits, including connection to nature, social opportunities for recreation and exercise for improved mental and physical health and wellbeing, environmental and economic benefits.

## 2.5 **Air Quality, Water and Healthier food Environments.**

- Planning and creating GBI not only provides Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), through tree planting and habitat creation, but increases air quality (decreased CO<sub>2</sub> emissions),
- Planning for a more sustainable and 'greener' environment with links between the home to key destinations, increases active travel and reduces emissions from motorised vehicles.
- Allotments and community gardens and kitchens provide the opportunity to grow and have access to healthier food.

## 2.6 **Quality Housing**

- Homes that are designed to the highest standards, accessible for all ages and abilities by having the opportunity to be adaptable.
- Homes with the most sustainable and energy efficient elements to improve quality of life.

## 2.7 **Safe & Inclusive Spaces**

People's needs can vary and the way the built and natural environments accommodate these changes across the life-course are key to providing a healthy place for all.

- Planning for multigenerational spaces for all ages that are accessible.
- Inclusive design for all abilities and conditions e.g. better spaces for people with dementia, child-friendly & age-friendly spaces.
- Natural surveillance for increased safety.

## 2.8 **Opportunities for employment and education**

- Access to employment can improve health and wellbeing, not only from an economic perspective but also in terms of quality of life and having a purpose.

- Access to education, skills and training can also have an impact on health and wellbeing.

## **National Context**

- 2.9 The [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF) is the overarching planning framework which provides national planning policy and principles for the planning system in England. The NPPF was originally published in March 2012 and has since been updated and revised several times. The most recent update to the NPPF was in December 2024.
- 2.10 The three overarching objectives of the planning system are set out in paragraph 8 of the NPPF, which should be pursued in mutually supportive ways so that net gains are achieved across each of the different objectives:
- 2.11 **“an economic objective** – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;
- 2.12 **a social objective** – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities’ health, social and cultural wellbeing; and
- 2.13 **an environmental objective** – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.”
- 2.14 The new Local Plan must be consistent with the requirements of the NPPF, which states:
- “Succinct and up-to-date plans should provide a positive vision for the future of each area; a framework for addressing housing needs and other economic, social and environmental priorities; and a platform for local people to shape their surroundings”.
- 2.15 The NPPF contains several sections that focus on promoting healthy and safe communities and place-shaping principles, with relevant paragraphs that address design, sustainability, wellbeing, and the role of planning in creating high-quality, accessible and inclusive places. Some of the key paragraphs relevant to healthy place-shaping are summarised below.



- 2.16 Paragraph 9 notes that the planning system should create environments where people want to live, work, and spend time, which links to place-shaping principles that consider the broader benefits of planning decisions.
- 2.17 Paragraph 20 states that 'strategic policies should set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and design quality of places (to ensure outcomes support beauty and placemaking) and make sufficient provision c) for community facilities (such as health, education and cultural infrastructure)'.
- 2.18 Paragraph 91 states that planning policies and decisions should aim to create healthy, inclusive and safe places. This includes considering the health, well-being, and safety of residents, promoting walking and cycling and ensuring access to services, green spaces and community amenities.
- 2.19 Paragraph 92 encourages planning policies that promote social interaction, community cohesion and accessibility to local facilities.
- 2.20 Paragraph 96 outlines criteria such as promoting social interaction, safe and accessible neighbourhoods and enable and support the community to live healthy lives through both promoting good health and preventing ill-health, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs and reduce health inequalities between the most and least deprived communities through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage walking, wheeling and cycling.
- 2.21 Paragraph 97 outlines criteria relating to hot and fast-food outlets and takeaways and their distance to places where youth congregate.
- 2.22 Paragraphs 103-107 focuses on the provision for open space, sports and recreational buildings and land. It highlights the importance of access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity for the health and wellbeing of communities. Developments that reduce the need for car travel and promote sustainable transport options, including walking, cycling and public transport. It stresses the need for development to be located in places where sustainable transport can be used effectively. This also has wider benefits for nature and addressing the impacts of climate change.
- 2.23 Paragraph 119 encourages efficient use of land by prioritising previously developed land for development, ensuring that land is used effectively and sustainably.
- 2.24 Paragraph 120 supports the re-use of brownfield land and the densification of areas, provided that the development is compatible with the area's character and existing infrastructure.

- 2.25 Paragraph 126 emphasises the importance of high-quality design in achieving sustainable development. It states that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development and that planning policies should support developments that create well-designed, attractive and functional places.
- 2.26 Paragraph 127 sets out the principles of good design, including ensuring developments are visually attractive, sympathetic to local character and contribute positively to the environment and community.
- 2.27 Paragraph 130-135 highlights that development should function well and add to the overall quality of the area. It also stresses the need for developments to be adaptable, integrate with their surroundings and planning policies should ensure developments create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and wellbeing, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience. It outlines the need for clarity and clear design expectations in the creation of high-quality places through design guides and design codes.
- 2.28 Paragraph 136 focuses on the requirement for tree planting along new streets, to help improve character of urban environments as well as contributing to mitigating and adapting to climate change.
- 2.29 Paragraph 137 discusses the need for design quality and style to involve the community.
- 2.30 Paragraph 170 states that planning policies should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing biodiversity, landscapes and habitats and by promoting the re-use of previously developed land in a way that enhances the environment.
- 2.31 [Planning Practice Guidance](#) (PPG) set out in '[Healthy and safe communities](#)' recognises that planning and health need to be considered together. Key principles around healthy place shaping and placemaking are summarised below.
- 2.32 Paragraph 001-013 set out the key areas in relation to healthy and safe communities within plan making and summarises the two ways planning can contribute to healthier communities. Firstly, in terms of placemaking and creating environments that support and encourage healthy lifestyles (primordial prevention). Secondly, in terms of identifying and securing the facilities needed for the wider health and care system (primary, secondary and tertiary prevention), considering the changing needs of the population. It emphasises the need for high-quality design that considers environmental, social, and economic sustainability. This includes green spaces, local character and the integration of buildings and infrastructure in a way that promotes well-being.

- 2.33 The PPG stresses the importance of involving the community in the placemaking process. It highlights that local people should be consulted and engaged in creating a vision for their place. The community's input should guide decisions regarding the development of new areas or the regeneration of existing ones. Placemaking should not only consider buildings but also the creation of spaces that promote social interaction, accessibility, safety and a sense of belonging. This means including local amenities, transport options and cultural facilities as part of a wider vision for the area.
- 2.34 The PPG encourages planners to consider the existing character of a place and how new developments can enhance or reflect this. Understanding the local context, be it historical, cultural or geographical is critical for successful placemaking. A key aim of place shaping is improving the health and well-being of people in the area. This can involve prioritising green spaces, promoting walking and cycling, ensuring access to services and fostering a sense of community.
- 2.35 Placemaking is a long-term process that should have a vision for the future, ensuring that new developments adapt to changing needs over time. This includes considering how the built environment can evolve to meet future social, environmental and economic challenges.
- 2.36 The [National Design Guide](#) also focuses on health and wellbeing in the following sections:

### **Identity**

Well-designed places, buildings and spaces have a positive and coherent identity that everyone can identify with, including residents and local communities, so contributing towards health and well-being, inclusion and cohesion.

### **Movement**

A well-designed movement network defines a clear pattern of streets that is safe and accessible for all and promotes activity and social interaction, contributing to health, well-being, accessibility and inclusion.

### **Nature**

Well-designed places provide attractive open spaces in locations that are easy to access, with activities for all to enjoy, such as play, food production, recreation and sport, so as to encourage physical activity and promote health, well-being and social inclusion.

## **Public Spaces**

Well-designed places include well-located public spaces that support a wide variety of activities and encourage social interaction, to promote health, well-being, social and civic inclusion.

## **Homes and buildings**

Well-designed homes and buildings provide good quality internal and external environments for their users, promoting health and well-being, and relate positively to the private, shared and public spaces around them, contributing to social interaction and inclusion.

## **Resources**

A compact and walkable neighbourhood with a mix of uses and facilities reduces demand for energy and supports health and well-being.

## **Local Policy and Guidance**

- 2.37 The adopted Local Plan recognises the impact of the built environment on health, requiring new developments to promote healthy lifestyles throughout life.
- 2.38 Colchester City Council have adopted the following Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) that promote best practice and have influenced the policies in the Preferred Options Plan.
- 2.39 The [Active Travel SPD](#) sets out the principles Colchester City Council expects to ensure that development proposals respond to the climate emergency by contributing towards a high quality cohesive network of active travel routes that support sustainable growth, health and wellbeing and placemaking.
- 2.40 The [Biodiversity SPD](#) sets out the principles Colchester City Council expects for integrating biodiversity into all developments proposals. It supports the Council's response to the climate and ecological emergency.
- 2.41 The [Climate Change SPD](#) sets out guidance for developers to ensure developments in Colchester responds effectively to the climate emergency.
- 2.42 The [Affordable Housing SPD](#) promotes the integration of affordable and market housing it must be of consistent design quality contributing to inclusive and attractive neighbourhoods.
- 2.43 Essex County Council's (ECC) [Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#) (JHWS) focuses on reducing the gap in life expectancy, increase years of healthy life expectancy and reduce the differences between health outcomes in the population. This strategy sets out how ECC wants to work collectively as a partnership to deliver against five priorities, the importance of working with our

communities, and how the JHWS links with other strategies and policies locally which are 'owned' by other partnership/s. To reach these long-term ambitions, the strategy identifies five key overarching priority areas:

- Improving mental health and wellbeing
- Physical activity and healthy weight
- Supporting long term independence
- Alcohol and substance misuse
- Health inequalities & the wider determinants of Health

- 2.44 [The Essex Design Guide \(EDG\)](#) includes a health and wellbeing theme, which was established to recognise how the positive characteristics and qualities of an environment can help people to achieve and experience better quality lifestyles. Community spaces, movement corridors and privacy and safety are key features of spaces and serve to shape how we feel about an environment. The goal is to construct spaces that deliberately deter crime through design and which – by means of natural surveillance, cohesion and a sense of community ownership – help to create socially inclusive, active communities and seek to build in opportunities for residents to be active through their everyday lives.
- 2.45 The Essex Design Guide (EDG) has chapters on 'Building for a Healthy Life' and 'National Modal Design Code' which provides detailed guidance on the production of design codes, guides and policies to promote successful design. It expands on the ten characteristics of good design set out in the National Design Guide.
- 2.46 The [Essex Planning Officers Association \(EPOA\) Essex Healthy Places Guidance](#) is a comprehensive set of advice notes aimed at integrating health and wellbeing considerations into planning and development across Essex. It recommends embedding health and wellbeing into all stages of planning and design, with early engagement of Public Health teams and alignment to national and local policy frameworks. Key themes include promoting active environments, inclusive and accessible design, access to green and blue spaces, healthier food options, and sustainable infrastructure. It requires that developments should incorporate Health Impact Assessments (HIAs) where applicable, support education and employment opportunities, and ensure adequate healthcare provision. The guidance also encourages developers to pursue Livewell accreditation to demonstrate commitment to creating healthier communities. The [Essex Healthy Places Updated Checklist 2023](#) supports and complements the guidance.
- 2.47 The Essex Healthy Places guidance outlines a comprehensive framework for integrating health and wellbeing into planning and development across Essex. It

emphasises the critical role of spatial planning in addressing public health challenges such as physical inactivity, obesity, mental health issues, and health inequalities.

- 2.48 The Joint Forward Plan of the North-East Essex Integrated Care Board (NEE ICB) states their commitment to deliver on three aims, termed 'Triple Aim' by improving public health, preventing ill-health, and reducing health disparities for our population.
- 2.49 [The Essex Healthy Weight Strategy](#) focuses on preventing and reducing excess weight and the risk of people being underweight. Both excess weight and underweight have extremely complex causes which are individual and environmental, and the two extremes will require a very different management approach. There are two themes for putting the strategy into action; Theme 1: 'Places' – changing the obesogenic environment and Theme 2: 'People' –helping people start and keep healthy weight behaviours. The Essex Healthy Weight Strategy recognises that place-based planning is essential. Obesogenic environments (those that promote unhealthy weight) are more prevalent in urban and deprived areas. Planning decisions should reduce exposure to unhealthy food outlets, improve housing quality, and enhance safe, walkable streets. Local plans must integrate green spaces, active travel infrastructure, and community assets to support healthy lifestyles. Planning must align with health, wellbeing, and economic strategies.

### **Consultation feedback**

- 2.50 The Council carried out an iterative Issues and Options engagement, which included a series of themed engagements between October 2023 and July 2024. Details of the Issues and Options engagement are included on the Council's website and summarised in a [collated report](#). The engagement themes were:
- Green network and waterways
  - Call for Sites, including offsite biodiversity net gain (BNG) sites
  - Vision for the city district
  - Net zero carbon homes and buildings
  - Placemaking
- 2.51 A Placemaking questionnaire was published on the Council's website to capture ideas and thoughts on the pattern, scale, character and design quality of places. The engagement took place from 13<sup>th</sup> June – 25<sup>th</sup> July 2024. Feedback from the Placemaking questionnaire highlighted the importance of enhanced cycle routes and active travel and emphasised the need for improved accessibility. There was

notable support for green infrastructure, ecological enhancements and public open space.

- 2.52 The engagement work on the vision highlighted the importance of green space, thriving communities and access to health care. One of the themes of the Vision is 'Healthy, vibrant and diverse places' - protect stretches of undeveloped countryside, enhance the quality of natural environment, and create net gains to biodiversity. The 'Well Connected' theme focused on enhancing public transport corridors to reduce congestion and promote active travel. This includes making walking and cycling more attractive, accessible and creating communities designed to minimise the need for car travel by ensuring that most daily needs can be met locally.
- 2.53 The Health and Wellbeing engagement work included consideration of EPOA Healthy Places Guidance, which identifies several key factors essential to promoting health and wellbeing. These include the creation of active and sustainable environments, access to green and blue open spaces, environmental sustainability and robust healthcare infrastructure.

### 3. Evidence Base

- 3.1 An array of local evidence has been collated on the health and wellbeing of the Colchester population along with national, county and local guidance on the impacts of growth from planning and development on the health and wellbeing of the population of Colchester. This is set out in the [Planning for Health and Wellbeing Evidence Report](#) (January 2025). A summary is provided below.
- 3.2 Working collaboratively with a Planning and Health Subgroup, which consisted of the North East Essex Alliance and ECC Public Health colleagues, three workshops were completed over the course of 6 months to discuss the evidence and increase the scope as per any recommendations. The final workshop in December 2024, was to help finalise the evidence base and to discuss early stages of the policy approach to 'Planning for Health and Wellbeing'; particularly where planning can influence health and wellbeing through placemaking and by supporting environments which contribute to healthy places and healthy lifestyles.
- 3.3 It was agreed that the framework and based on EPOA Essex Healthy Places Guidance, was used to structure and organise the report of evidence:
- Active & sustainable environments and active & sustainable travel
  - Design of homes including affordable housing & neighbourhoods (built environment & community facilities)
  - Access to open green and blue spaces (natural environment)
  - Supporting Communities and Neighbourhoods (all ages & abilities)
  - Access to healthier food environments
  - Access to Education, Employment and Healthcare infrastructure
  - Climate and Environmental Sustainability
- 3.4 Key Findings from the [Planning for Health and Wellbeing Evidence Report](#) are as follows:

#### **Health Inequalities:**

- Significant disparities exist in Colchester, with life expectancy varying by up to 8.6 years between the most and least deprived areas. Deprivation impacts health outcomes, particularly in wards like Greenstead and St. Anne's.

#### **Physical Activity:**

- 24.7% of adults in Colchester are inactive.



- Initiatives like Essex Pedal Power and the Colchester Orbital aim to increase physical activity, with evidence showing positive impacts on health and wellbeing.

### **Obesity and Food Environments:**

- 68.7% of adults are overweight or obese, higher than the national average.
- Childhood obesity is more prevalent in deprived areas, with targeted policies to limit fast-food density recommended.

### **Access to Green and Blue Spaces:**

- Colchester exceeds Essex averages in the provision of all Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards (ANGSt) size categories for accessible greenspace, but the city's rural areas remain underserved.
- Improved accessibility and connectivity to greenspaces are emphasised.

### **Housing and Infrastructure:**

- A rise in housing demand highlights the need for sustainable and energy-efficient homes and neighbourhoods.
- Local homelessness initiatives, such as rough sleeper support, show measurable success.

### **Community and Safety:**

- Social isolation affects 21.34% of residents, with safety concerns heightened after dark and knife crime recognised as a worry for young people.
- Initiatives like "Communities Can" promote community engagement and empowerment, enabling communities to build upon the strengths that exist within them.

### **Employment and Education:**

- 25.57% of the population experiences employment deprivation.
- Educational attainment and income disparities align with health inequalities.

### **Climate and Environmental Sustainability:**

- Policies focus on integrating active design, green infrastructure, and climate resilience to support health and wellbeing and reduce carbon emissions.
- Aspiration for the future of community health and wellbeing is looking at community assets (facilities) and services they provide sustainably.

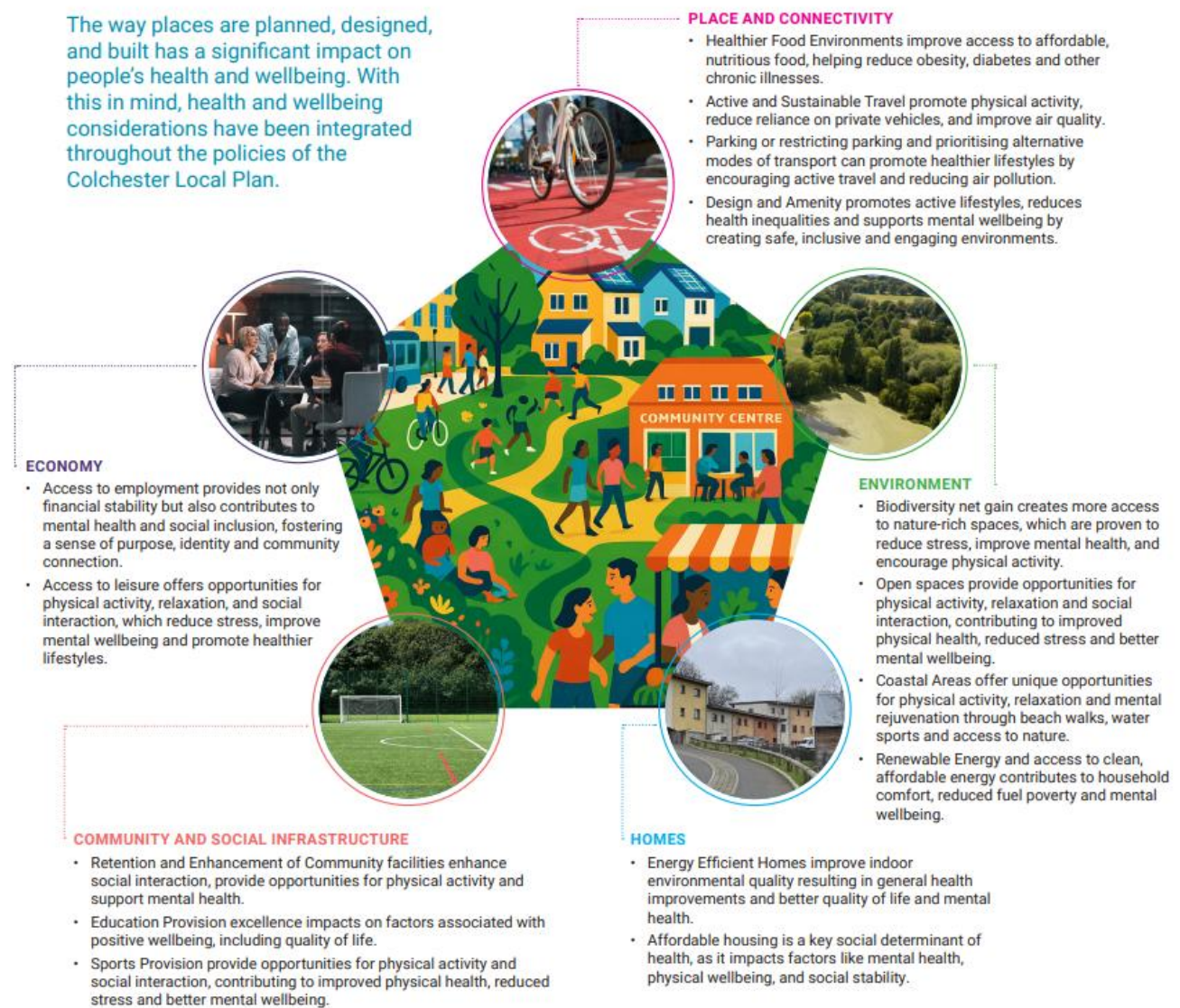
- 3.5 The Health and Wellbeing evidence finds that integration of health considerations into planning policies is vital for promoting equity, access, and improved quality of life. Recommendations include prioritising accessible infrastructure, fostering inclusive public open green and blue spaces, encouraging active and sustainable lifestyles. Collaborative strategies between planning and transport authorities and health stakeholders are essential for addressing systemic challenges like obesity, social isolation, and housing disparities.

### **Summary of other evidence base**

- 3.6 The NPPF recognises that access to a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and wellbeing of communities (NPPF 2024 paragraph 103). The [Indoor and Built Sports Facilities Needs Assessment \(2023\)](#) and [Indoor and Built Sports Facilities Strategy \(2023\)](#) provide an assessment of the current level of indoor and built sports facilities available and demand needs for future provision.
- 3.7 The [Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Assessment Report \(2023\)](#) and the [Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy and Action Plan \(2023\)](#) provide an assessment of all formal playing pitch and outdoor sport facilities across Colchester to assist the Council to strategically plan for the future and ensure that the provision meets the local community needs of both existing and future residents.
- 3.8 The [Open Space Report \(April 2023\)](#) provides detail on the provision of open space, its condition, distribution and overall quality and helps to inform direction on the future provision of accessible, high quality, sustainable provision for open spaces.
- 3.9 The [Transport Evidence Reports](#) (2025) set out a vision led approach to transport planning for development based on achieving well-designed, sustainable places and providing transport solutions to deliver those outcomes. It outlines a sustainable transport vision that aims to provide viable sustainable transport alternatives, is good for the environment and health and provides inclusive and affordable connections between places.
- 3.10 The [Colchester Infrastructure Audit and Delivery Plan](#) (IADP) identifies the infrastructure that is required to meet the growth anticipates in Colchester over the Local Plan period to 2041. The Stage 1 and 2 reports set out the baseline position for each infrastructure type, and the Stage 3 report identifies the demand which planned growth will generate for the different infrastructure types. The infrastructure types include education; indoor and outdoor sports and leisure facilities; playing pitches; open spaces; green infrastructure; playspace; youth services; community facilities; health services; adult social care; specialist and supported facilities for children; and transport.

## 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 way places are planned, designed, and built has a significant impact on people's health and wellbeing. With this in mind, **health and wellbeing considerations have been integrated throughout the policies of the Colchester Local Plan.**



- 4.3 The way in which places are planned, designed and built to support healthy and connected places is reflected in a number of policies in the Preferred Options Plan. Health and wellbeing is a recurring theme throughout the plan and several significant policies are outlined below as per the headings in the above diagram, in addition to the relevant Strategic Policies.

### **Strategic Policies**

- 4.4 The main Strategic Policies relevant to this topic paper are Policy ST1: Health and Wellbeing, Policy ST3: Spatial Strategy and Policy ST8: Place Shaping Principles.
- 4.5 **Policy ST1: Health and Wellbeing** provides a comprehensive framework for the overall integration of health and wellbeing into planning and development throughout the local plan, and aligns with the [Essex Healthy Places](#) guidance and the North-East Essex Integrated Care Board's Joint Forward Plan. The guidance recognises the critical role of spatial planning in addressing public health challenges such as physical inactivity, obesity, mental health issues, and health inequalities. These issues will be considered and addressed through this and other policies throughout the Local Plan and this policy requires Health Impact Assessments (HIA), which are recommended in the guidance and objectives set out in Section 8 of the NPPF, with support from Public Health teams, NHS partners, and Sport England, to evaluate the effects of developments on population health. The policy reflects the guidance, advocating a holistic, evidence-based approach to planning that prioritises health through design, infrastructure, and policy alignment, working together with health colleagues to understand, plan for and mitigate the proposed housing growth planned within local plans to ensure health care provision is adequate for the increased population.
- 4.6 **Policy ST3: Spatial Strategy** directs development to areas with good transport links and access to services encouraging active travel which supports physical health, aligning with the NPPF para 104-113. The policy has an emphasis on biodiversity, landscape and heritage protection contributes to mental wellbeing by preserving access to nature and attractive environments aligning with the NPPF para 189-208. The policy avoids harmful coalescence by maintaining distinct settlements identities fostering a sense of belonging and community cohesion which are important for mental and social wellbeing aligning with the NPPF para 92-97.
- 4.7 **Policy ST8: Place Shaping Principles** provides access to nature, reducing pollution and encouraging outdoor activity supporting mental and physical health. It prioritises walking, cycling and public transport and reduces car dependency aligning with NPPF para 92 and 104. The policy encourages inclusive and safe spaces, promotes social cohesion, accessibility and safety, all key themes both

in the NPPF and PPG. The policy emphasises design, quality and local character which align with the NPPF section 12 emphasising beauty, character and context. The policy supports vibrant, walkable communities with access to services, core to sustainable placemaking. The policy supports public realm enhancement encouraging social interaction and civic pride aligning with the NPPF para 93. The policy includes parking adaptability, future proofing development and supporting modal shift consistent with climate and transport goals.

## **Place & Connectivity**

- 4.8 **Policy PC1: Healthier Food Environments** PC1 directly supports the creation of healthy and connected places by promoting access to fresh, locally grown food and managing the location of fast-food outlets to protect public health. By safeguarding and encouraging the provision of allotments, orchards, community gardens/kitchens and food markets, the policy enhances opportunities for physical activity, social interaction and healthy eating within walkable neighbourhoods. It also introduces spatial controls on hot food takeaways, particularly near schools and youth facilities and requires Health Impact Assessments in sensitive areas, ensuring that planning decisions are informed by local health data. This approach helps reduce health inequalities, supports active lifestyles and contributes to the creation of inclusive, resilient communities. PC1 aligns with the NPPF chapter 6 'Promoting Healthy and Safe Communities'. A key finding from the Planning and Health Subgroup is that 68.7% of adults in Colchester are overweight or obese. This is higher than the national average and childhood obesity is more prevalent in deprived areas. The Planning and Health Subgroup recommended targeted policies to limit fast-food density. The Essex Healthy Weight Strategy recognises that reducing exposure to unhealthy food outlets is essential to support healthy lifestyles.
- 4.9 **Policy PC2: Active and Sustainable Travel** directly supports the creation of healthy and connected places by embedding active and sustainable transport into the design and delivery of new development. It prioritises walking and cycling, promotes inclusive and accessible infrastructure and ensures integration with wider transport networks including those identified in the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). By encouraging physical activity, reducing reliance on private vehicles and improving connectivity to key destinations, the policy contributes to improved public health, reduced emissions and more socially cohesive neighbourhoods. Measures such as school streets, car clubs and electric vehicle infrastructure further enhance the sustainability and accessibility of places, aligning with national and local objectives for healthier, more connected communities. This policy aligns with the NPPF chapter 6 'Promoting Healthy and Safe Communities' and PPG 'Healthy and Safe Communities' (ID: 53-001 to 53-013). The Essex Healthy Weight Strategy



recognises that many Essex residents lack access to safe walking and cycling routes. The Strategy says that planning should prioritise cycle-friendly and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure; accessible open spaces and leisure facilities; and safe environments, especially for women and vulnerable groups. The Strategy recognises that enhancing safe and walkable streets, integrating green spaces and active travel infrastructure are essential to support healthy lifestyles. One of the key findings from the Planning and Health Subgroup is that 24.7% of adults in Colchester are inactive – enhancing active travel routes will help to address this.

- 4.10 **Policy PC3: Parking Standards** Parking directly and indirectly impacts on the environment, communities and the economy. The lack of, or poor planning of, parking provision can have a negative impact on the public realm and the local highway network and can restrict the accessibility and mobility needs of people and businesses. The policy ensures secure cycle parking supporting active travel and reducing car dependency. Policy PC3 is designed to balance the need for parking with the wider goals of creating healthier, more connected, and more sustainable communities. It does this by prioritising active and sustainable travel and supporting efficient land use. PC3 aligns with Chapter 8 and 9 of the NPPF which supports healthy, inclusive and safe places and sustainable transport.
- 4.11 **Policy PC4: Development Density** plays a key role in shaping healthy and connected places by promoting development that is both efficient and responsive to its local context. By encouraging higher densities in accessible locations, the policy supports walkable neighbourhoods with good access to public transport, local services and amenities - reducing car dependency and fostering active travel. The emphasis on public space provision, landscaping and sustainable drainage contributes to physical and mental wellbeing, while the requirement for high-quality design and adequate residential standards ensures the increased density does not compromise quality. The policy's flexibility allows density to be moderated in less accessible areas, ensuring developments remain well-integrated with their surroundings and supportive of community cohesion. PC4 aligns with the principles of healthy placemaking by balancing housing delivery with environmental quality, accessibility and social infrastructure.
- 4.12 **Policy PC6: Design and Amenity** Good design is integral to good planning and a fundamental requirement of the NPPF for achieving sustainable development. Policy PC6 promotes active lifestyles, reduces health inequalities and supports mental health by creating safe, inclusive, high-quality and aesthetically pleasing environments by integrating both the physical design of buildings and spaces to establish a strong sense of place. The policy promotes safety and security by creating environments that reduce crime and support community cohesion. Feeling safe in your environment reduces stress, anxiety and fear which are key contributors of mental health. The [Planning for Health & Wellbeing Evidence](#)

[Baseline Report](#) shows Colchester rating the lowest in inclusive and welcoming environments, and second to lowest for feeling safe when exercising for Essex. Section 12 of the NPPF emphasises that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development and contributes positively to making places better for people.

## **Environment**

- 4.13 **Policy GN1 Open Space and Green Network and Waterway Principles** supports the creation of healthy and connected places by requiring major residential developments to provide multifunctional open spaces that enhance physical and mental wellbeing, promote active travel and improve access to nature. The policy ensures green infrastructure is inclusive, climate-resilient and well-integrated into the wider landscape, helping to connect communities and wildlife through a coherent green network. This policy incorporates Colchester's [Green Network and Waterways Guiding Principles](#) and aligns closely with Section 8 of the NPPF: Promoting Healthy and Safe Communities. The Planning and Health Subgroup emphasised the importance of improved accessibility and connectivity to greenspaces. Enhancing the green network and waterways and the 'creating a better environment' agenda has been a starting point for the new Local Plan. Further information is in the [Environment Topic Paper](#).
- 4.14 **Policy GN2 Strategic Green Spaces and Nature Recovery** supports the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy by creating and connecting biodiverse open spaces, such as the Roman River corridor. By restoring habitats and improving ecological networks, it delivers healthier environments, increases access to nature and provides green corridors for walking and cycling, helping to create places that are both healthy and well-connected for people and wildlife. More detailed information is in the [Environment Topic Paper](#).
- 4.15 **Policy GN3 Local Green Spaces** Designates specific areas (Land at Middlewick Ranges & Mount Bures village green) as Local Green Spaces due to their special significance to local communities. These spaces are protected from development, ensuring long-term access to natural environments, helping to maintain recreational opportunities that supports the identity, mental and physical health and wellbeing of the community. Reinforces the importance of accessible green space for everyday use, especially in areas where such spaces are vital for community cohesion and outdoor activity which was emphasised in the evidence and the Planning and Health Subgroup.
- 4.16 **Policy GN6 Retention of Open Space** protects existing open spaces from development unless strict criteria are met, such as proven redundancy or replacement with equivalent provision. Ensures that no deficiencies in open space arise from new development, safeguarding recreational and ecological

value. Recognises the role of open spaces in contributing to mental health, physical activity, and social interaction. It prevents the loss of small incidental green areas that enhance the character and amenity of residential neighbourhoods and supports the creation of resilient and healthy communities by maintaining access to green infrastructure across the city.

## **Homes**

- 4.17 **Policy H1: Housing Mix** Promotes sustainable and inclusive communities by requiring an appropriate mix of dwellings (size, type and tenure) tailored to local needs. Ensures access to appropriate housing for different groups, including older people, families, and low-income households. This supports mental and physical wellbeing by encouraging housing diversity that avoids over-concentration and fosters balanced, socially cohesive neighbourhoods. Helps reduce housing stress and overcrowding, which are linked to poor health outcomes. Research has commenced by the Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) on a Greater Essex Healthy Homes Research Strategy, which examines housing as a key determinant of health and is expected to inform and influence future policy development.
- 4.18 **Policy H2: Affordable Housing** This policy requires 30% affordable housing on qualifying developments, helping people access secure, quality homes. Prioritises social and affordable rented housing, which is critical for those most affected by housing insecurity. Promotes tenure-blind design, ensuring that affordable homes are not visually or socially segregated, supporting dignity and promoting social inclusion. Further detail can be found in the Housing Topic Paper. It also supports Building Regulations 2015 Part M4 (2) and M4 (3)(2)(b), improving mobility and independence for disabled and older residents, helps reduce housing-related stress, financial strain, and associated health inequalities.
- 4.19 **Policy H5: Specialist Housing** This policy addresses the needs of people with specific requirements, including older adults, those with disabilities and mental health needs. The policy encourages housing that is integrated into communities, reducing isolation and promoting social inclusion. It requires developments to be accessible by public transport and close to services, supporting independence and access to healthcare. This promotes healthy ageing by supporting housing types like extra care and retirement living and ensures design standards that support physical accessibility and safety, contributing to long-term health and wellbeing. Further detail can be found in the Housing Topic Paper.
- 4.20 **Policies NZ1 Net Zero Carbon Development (in operation) and NZ2 Net Zero Carbon Development – embodied carbon** goes further than Building Regulations and defines net zero carbon development in a way which delivers net zero (in operation) immediately, aligns with climate targets, and reflects the approach taken by frontrunner authorities in England and leading industry-led



initiatives. A key recommendation from the Planning and Health Subgroup is that policies focus on climate resilience to support health and wellbeing and reduce carbon emissions. Further detail can be found in the Net Zero and Embodied Carbon Topic Paper.

## **Community & Social Infrastructure**

### **4.21 Policy CS1: Retention of Community Facilities and Policy: CS2**

**Enhancement of and provision for community facilities** An important part of creating healthy and connected places is providing a suitable range of facilities in the right places. Community facilities make a fundamental contribution to quality of life and creating successful communities where social interaction can be enhanced, providing opportunities for physical activity and support mental health. A key finding from the Planning and Health Subgroup is that social isolation affects 21.34% of residents and the Essex Healthy Weight Strategy recognises that community assets are essential to support healthy lifestyles. Policy CS1 and CS2 ensure that existing community facilities are protected and enhanced and that new community amenities are provided in suitable locations, the Plan policies set out how the council seeks to retain all existing community and social infrastructure and how the loss will be assessed. The policy has been developed using evidence from the [Planning for Health & Wellbeing Evidence Baseline Report](#) which recognises the importance of the built environment and public realm, which is an important factor in improving health and wellbeing. The NPPF emphasises the importance of community facilities in several key paragraphs.

**4.22 Policy CS3 Education Provision** ensures that education provision remains at the heart of local communities, supporting health and wellbeing and social connectivity through accessible, sustainable and well-integrated facilities. A key finding from the Planning and Health Subgroup is that educational attainment and income disparities align with health inequalities. The policy safeguards existing and recently used education sites ensuring that communities retain local access to schools and learning opportunities which are vital for social well-being. The policy requires that new or replacement education facilities are accessible by walking, cycling and public transport, supporting active travel and reducing car dependency. Policy CS3 reflects the NPPF's presumption in favour of educational development and encourages collaborative planning to meet evolving community needs.

**4.23 Policy CS4 Sports Provision** plays a vital role in delivering healthy and connected places by safeguarding and enhancing access to sports and leisure facilities across Colchester. It ensures that all outdoor sports facilities and playing pitches are protected, unless robust evidence justifies their loss, and it promotes the delivery of new or improved provision where needed by the [Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy](#) (PPOSS). The PPOSS is undergoing an update, and its findings will be incorporated as the Local Plan advances to ensure alignment with

evolving local needs. The policy supports physical and mental wellbeing by encouraging active lifestyles and increasing participation in both formal and informal recreation. By requiring major residential developments to assess and meet local sport's needs, either through on-site provision or financial contributions Policy CS4 ensures that growth is matched with appropriate infrastructure. The inclusion of community use agreements for all new facilities promotes inclusivity and social cohesion, helping to create well-connected neighbourhoods. This policy aligns with the NPPF chapter 8: Promoting Healthy and Safe Communities.

## **Economy**

- 4.24 **Policy E1: Protection of Employment** helps create healthy and connected places by safeguarding local employment land, ensuring that jobs remain accessible to communities across Colchester. This reduces the need for long commutes, supports economic wellbeing and encourages active travel such as walking and cycling. A key finding from the Planning and Health Subgroup is that 25.57% of the population experiences employment deprivation. The policy also promotes the renewal and retrofitting of older employment sites, improving energy efficiency and workplace environments. Policy E1 helps protect local amenities and air quality by requiring that new uses do not cause unacceptable traffic, noise or pollution. This aligns with Section 6 of the NPPF - build a strong, competitive economy.

## **Place Policies**

- 4.25 In addition to the overarching policies, the Local Plan includes a set of Place Policies that apply to the preferred allocations across Colchester. These policies are tailored to reflect the unique characteristics, constraints, and opportunities of each site, while aligning with the five core themes of Place and Connectivity, Environment, Homes, Community and Social Infrastructure and Economy, as set out in the diagram above. Each Place Policy sets out detailed requirements for development, including criteria to ensure safe pedestrian access, sustainable connections and infrastructure that integrate new sites into the wider community. This includes provisions for active and sustainable travel, green infrastructure connections and recreational access to the countryside (biodiversity mitigation, enhancement and BNG measures), and access to services.
- 4.26 The Place Policies work alongside general infrastructure policies, particularly Policy ST7 to ensure that developments are supported by appropriate infrastructure at both the strategic and site-specific levels, helping to deliver healthy, inclusive, and well-connected communities. This is reflected in more detail in the Colchester Infrastructure Audit and Delivery Plan (IADP).

## **Healthcare Infrastructure**

- 4.27 Whilst this Topic Paper is focussed on how the Local Plan will shape environments that create healthy and connected places and support physical and mental wellbeing, promote social inclusion and enable sustainable lifestyles, it does not focus on healthcare infrastructure.
- 4.28 The [IADP Stage 3 Report](#) (October 2025) and [Appendix](#) (October 2025) includes a comprehensive overview of healthcare infrastructure needs in Colchester to 2041, based on planned housing and population growth, as far as information is available at this stage. More information about healthcare and other types of infrastructure can be viewed in the IADP and Infrastructure Topic Paper.