

Local Plan - Spatial Strategy (summary)

The Spatial Strategy is central to the Local Plan. It sets out how land will be used and developed across a specific area by considering social, economic, and environmental factors, such as housing, jobs, and infrastructure. It guides decisions on where new development should be located and where it should be limited, with the goal of creating sustainable communities. In establishing a strategy for the growth of the City, there are a huge number of factors to consider. The Local Plan needs to balance the requirement of protecting the countryside and the natural environment, while accommodating the level of growth required across the City to 2041.

Officers developed seven spatial strategy approaches to accommodate growth, which were discussed with Members, the Residents Panel and others;

- 1) Substantial Growth in Garden Communities and Suburbs;
- 2) A Hubs and Spokes Model that focuses growth in larger settlements serving surrounding villages;
- 3) An Environment Led approach, which limits growth in those locations most constrained by environmental designations and instead focus's it where it could deliver enhanced environmental infrastructure;
- 4) An option where growth is focused in key Transport Corridors;
- 5) Expansion and Regeneration of Colchester Urban Area, which would also require growth elsewhere;
- 6) Proportionate Growth which delivers growth proportionately across all of Colchester's settlements;
- 7) A Community Gain option which would aim to deliver growth where the public benefits would be greatest ie provision of a new school or green infrastructure.

Officers then used these spatial strategy approaches to develop seven spatial strategy options to help determine where new development should take place. These were developed taking into account the emerging evidence base and early consultation. Some of these options combine more than one of the approaches detailed above. The options were; continuing the existing Spatial Strategy; a new Garden Community in addition to TCBGC; Garden Suburbs; Intensification in the City Centre; Transport Corridors; Hubs and Spokes; Environment Led.

Alongside this work and as part of developing the spatial strategy, it is necessary to review the settlement hierarchy. A settlement hierarchy ranks settlements by size and range of services and the potential opportunities they offer, such as a city at the top and a hamlet at the bottom. This classification helps guide development decisions, ensuring new development is placed in the most sustainable locations based on their current and potential role and function within the area.

The Colchester hierarchy retains the Urban Area, including the City Centre, at the top and this is where development will be directed in the first instance. It will enable greater use of brownfield sites and facilitate higher density developments in highly accessible locations.

Next in the hierarchy are Growth and Opportunity Areas. These Growth and Opportunity Areas include the Hythe, Magdalen Street, Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community and Marks Tey where there is scope for large scale development and regeneration.

Outside of the main urban area are a number of larger settlements which have some of the largest populations as well as many facilities, services, and travel choices, or they are well located in relation to key transport corridors. As such, it is proposed to group Tiptree, Wivenhoe and West Mersea as the next tier within the hierarchy; Large Settlements.

Medium Settlements include settlements with a range of community and social facilities but to a lesser extent than the infrastructure within the larger settlements. These medium settlements are capable of accommodating growth appropriate to the size, scale, infrastructure and constraints of the settlement.

Small Settlements include those known as 'other villages' in the adopted Local Plan. The Local Plan includes appropriate scale allocations in some of Colchester's small settlements reflecting the size and level of community and social infrastructure available as well as acknowledging constraints.

The countryside remains at the bottom of the hierarchy, recognising it needs to be protected.

The preferred spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy were informed through consultation [summary of the issues and options engagement](#) and assessment within the Sustainability Appraisal. In summary, the SA reported that continuing with the existing spatial strategy is expected to perform the most favourably in relation to the greatest number of sustainability objectives. Other emerging evidence was also used to inform the preferred strategy.

The preferred spatial strategy takes forward the existing spatial strategy, whilst incorporating some of the strengths and positives from a number of the alternative spatial strategy options. These include:

- Focus on growth in the existing city centre and urban area;
- Regeneration and intensification within growth and opportunity areas i.e. the Hythe;
- Significant scale of growth along transport corridors, including Langham;
- Longer-term, large-scale growth at Marks Tey;
- Growth in other settlements, to support communities, provide opportunities for people to remain in villages and to sustain and enhance facilities and infrastructure;
- Ensure protection and enhancement of the most sensitive environments.

The preferred Spatial Strategy is contained within Policy ST3 in the Preferred Options Local Plan. The Plan makes provision for growth and supporting infrastructure across the Colchester area to 2041. Enough homes have been provided for starting with the most sustainable and accessible locations in the urban area or close to transport corridors and existing centres, where there tends to be a range of employment opportunities, facilities, services and travel choices. Additionally, an appropriate level of growth is allocated within the large, medium and some small settlements, based on the opportunities and constraints of each settlement and informed by the wider evidence base.

The growth needs of Colchester are balanced against the need to protect and enhance biodiversity, landscape and heritage. The highest areas of sensitivity are receiving the lowest levels of growth in this Local Plan. This approach also ensures that existing settlements maintain their distinctive character and role by avoiding harmful coalescence between them and through conserving their setting.

The re-use of previously developed land and developments of higher densities (particularly in the Urban Area of Colchester) will be supported where this enables a more efficient use of land.