



# Issues and Options

January 2015

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## INTRODUCTION

### **What is the new Local Plan?**

The new Local Plan is an important document which will determine the way forward for Colchester. It will provide the strategy for the growth of the Borough, setting out what development will take place and where, to 2032 and beyond. Once adopted, the new Local Plan will replace the Borough's existing local planning policies.

The new Local Plan will set out a vision for the area, establishing the long term aims and aspirations for the Borough going forward. The Plan will include policies and allocations that help to deliver these aims and aspirations.

### **What is the purpose of this consultation?**

The purpose of this consultation is to identify the issues that we should address in the new Local Plan for Colchester and some of the options for addressing them. This includes the key issue of identifying where the future growth of the Borough might be located.

This consultation is your opportunity to identify any planning issues that you think the new Local Plan should address, and comment on possible ways that the Plan might deal with those issues. The more input we have at this initial stage, the better; it will help us to ensure that the Local Plan sets off in the right direction and covers the things that it should cover. So please do send us your comments, we want to know what you think – this affects everyone and every organisation in the Borough, now and in the years to come.

### **Why is the new Local Plan needed?**

The planning system has undergone extensive reform under the Coalition Government. Two of the significant changes to planning policy are the abolition of regional planning policies and the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The NPPF was published in March 2012, replacing and consolidating the previous suite of national planning policy documents (Planning Policy Statements and Planning Policy Guidance notes). The Government intended that the consolidated policy document would make the planning system less complex and more accessible, with the aim of promoting sustainable development.

Local Plans must be produced in accordance with national planning policy. As is the case for most local plans across the country, Colchester's existing local plan was produced prior to the existence of the National Planning Policy Framework, in accordance with previous national planning policy. It is for this reason that it is necessary for the Council to produce an updated local plan, in accordance with current national planning policy.

The abolition of the regional tier of planning policy means that targets, including housing numbers, job creation and renewable energy contributions, are no longer set for local planning authorities. This does not mean that local authorities can reduce their housing targets and constrain growth and development. In fact, in most cases it has meant the need for local authorities to increase their level of growth above previous targets, sometimes significantly so. The reason for this is that the National Planning Policy Framework introduced the requirement for local planning authorities to objectively assess the need for housing in their housing market area and "*to ensure their Local*

*Plan meets the full, objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing...including identifying key sites which are critical to the delivery of the housing strategy over the plan period" (paragraph 47).*

The Council will have to assess and identify the need for housing in the area in order to comply with the requirements of the NPPF. Given Colchester's location in the south east of the country, it is extremely unlikely that the current housing target (830 per annum) would be reduced as a result of this work and, if anything, the expectation would be that the need identified would be higher than the existing Core Strategy target. In order to help identify the need for housing in the Borough, the Council has undertaken a Strategic Housing Market Assessment. This work provided an initial estimate of 1,065 new homes per annum needed in the Borough over a 20-year period. However, further work is required in order to determine the housing need figure for the Borough.

### **Why 2032?**

The National Planning Policy Framework states that Local Plan 'should be drawn up over an appropriate time scale, preferably a 15-year time horizon, take account of longer term requirements, and be kept up to date'. When planning for the growth and development of an area it is appropriate to do this over the long term in order to ensure that the growth can be planned comprehensively. It also means that the relevant implications of development can be taken into account and managed, and that appropriate provisions can be made in order to ensure that development coming forward is as sustainable as possible. It is for these reasons that the new Local Plan will be looking to 2032 and beyond.

The reason we are using the word 'beyond', specifically, is because all of the growth options set out in this Paper include one or more sustainable settlements, detached from the existing urban area. This means that there is potential that those settlements can accommodate growth well beyond 2032 and it is important that they are planned at a comprehensive way from the outset, rather than being expanded in a piecemeal way in decades to come. More information on this is set out in the Growth Strategy Options section.

### **Colchester's current Local Plan**

Colchester Borough Council adopted its Local Plan documents following changes made to the planning system by the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act. The new Local Plan will replace the current suite of planning documents, which consists of the Core Strategy (2008), the Site Allocations Development Plan Document (2010), the Development Policies Development Plan Document (2010), the Tiptree Jam Factory Plan (2013) and the latest addition - the Local Plan Focused Review (2014).

Following the publication of the NPPF, Colchester Borough Council assessed its local plan documents against the requirements of the NPPF in order to identify any areas of inconsistency. The Council then embarked on a two-stage process to review its Local Plan; the 2014 Local Plan Focused Review is the outcome of the first stage of that review.

The Focused Review involved a limited review of the Council's Core Strategy and Development Policies to revise those policies that could be readily amended to be consistent with the provisions of the NPPF, without the need to prepare further

extensive evidence. Revisions did not include any amendments to the spatial strategy, housing and employment targets, or allocations.

Production of a new Local Plan forms stage two of the review process; it involves a complete review of the Borough's planning policies. This Issues and Options consultation forms the first formal stage in the plan production process. Once adopted, the new Local Plan will supersede Colchester's current suite of Local Plan documents.

### **What is the role of planning and how does it affect me?**

The role of the planning system is to contribute towards the achievement of sustainable development. The process of planning involves weighing up economic, social and environmental factors, good and bad, to find the most balanced, sustainable way forward. Planning is inherently controversial because it affects all of us, in all aspects of our lives – the places we live, work, use and travel through. This is why it is important that we have input from residents, businesses, community groups and organisations across the Borough.

The Borough needs to work with a variety of organisations and relevant parties in producing a plan. At the area-wide level, the Government requires the Council to work closely with neighbouring authorities and public bodies to address strategic, cross-boundary issues. The Council also engages with the South-East Local Enterprise Partnership which promotes economic development and directs Government funding to the Partnership area. At the local community level, neighbourhood planning was introduced by the Government in 2012, in order to give communities the opportunity to take a greater level of control over planning in their own area. Neighbourhood plans can deal with local planning issues, while matters of strategic, or Borough wide, importance must be addressed through the Local Plan. In producing the Local Plan, the Council is engaging with, and will continue to engage with, Parish and Town Councils.

Planning is about achieving the best possible balance between different interests. Everyone has a particular view or interest, whatever that may be. It is the role of planning to weigh up all of the relevant information in order to reach solutions that best contribute to sustainable development for the greater good of the Borough, its people (residents and workers), the environment and its economy.

Viability is a factor which plays a significant role in the formation of planning policies and the shaping of development. The Council must ensure, in producing the new Local Plan, that the Plan is deliverable. This means that the costs of meeting the requirements of the policies in the Local Plan (such as the provision of affordable housing), combined with the costs of other national requirements and standards (such as building regulations), do not threaten the ability of development to come forward. Paragraph 173 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that in order to ensure the deliverability of the Local Plan and the viability of development, it is necessary to ensure that, with all costs taken into account, development would provide competitive returns to a willing land owner and willing developer. In addition to weighing up all of the relevant factors and information with the aim to achieve the most sustainable way forward, viability and deliverability must also be taken into account in forming the policies for the new Plan.

In order to give some background and help give some context for the consultation, a 2011 Census Factsheet is available as Appendix A of this Paper (or via this link -

<http://www.colchester.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=9616&p=0>). This sets out some basic statistics for the Borough which we thought may be useful in helping to inform your thoughts and responses.

### **Why growth?**

The Government has a strong agenda to increase the supply of housing in order to meet the intense national housing shortage that has been identified, which has been widely reported on in the media. The Government are using a variety of tools in order to help alleviate the housing shortages, including schemes to help people buy their own home. Planning is a key focus for the Government in addressing the housing shortage; in producing local plans, local planning authorities are required to plan for the objectively assessed need for housing to be met 'in full'. This means that the Local Plan will need to set out a growth strategy and identify land to accommodate large scale development, including housing development.

Understandably, there is a great deal of concern over large scale development, and many argue that Colchester should not continue to grow. However, preventing further growth and development is not an option that we have. Colchester is a popular and successful town in the south east of the country. This means that housing need in the area is high, with a substantial number of homes required, over and above the existing stock.

With a bigger population, an ageing population and changes in household make-up, the need for housing is high and increasing. New development is an important responsibility that we have in order to help ensure that our children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews can find homes of their own in the future. Many existing residents have benefitted from new development as the town has grown by an average of 800 new homes each year over the last 40 years, and it is important that families, couples and individuals in similar circumstances are provided with the same opportunity to find a home.

One of the consequences of not providing sufficient housing is that our children will have to look elsewhere for a home in the future. This would result in an increase in the average age of the Borough's population, meaning the working age population would decrease, and ultimately the Borough's economy would decline, with businesses moving out and closing down, and a decline in the Borough's services and facilities. This paints a bleak picture, but these would be very real consequences of not planning to meet our housing need.

### **What would happen if we didn't have a new plan for the Borough?**

It is a statutory requirement for the Council to produce planning policies for the Borough. The policies must comply with national planning policy unless there is overwhelming evidence to demonstrate why this is not the case. One of the significant national policy requirements is the requirement to plan to meet the objectively assessed need for housing, in full. Another of the significant requirements is that the Council works with other public bodies, including neighbouring authorities, to jointly address strategic issues which cross administrative boundaries. This includes the supply of land for housing, jobs and supporting infrastructure.

In the event that we don't produce a new plan which is national policy compliant, including a strategy for growth which will accommodate the objectively assessed need

for housing, then the Plan will not be successful when it is examined by the Planning Inspectorate, on behalf of the Secretary of State. In this instance we would need to revisit the plan and make significant changes, or start the process again.

The consequences of not having an up-to-date national policy compliant Plan for the Borough would be serious and far reaching. It would put the Borough in a situation of 'planning by appeal', rather than plan-led development. With no plan to guide development, the Council would have very little control over the location of development and development could come forward through the planning application process on an *ad hoc* basis, with the risk that sites anywhere in the Borough could come forward for development.

This lack of a coordinated approach to development would result in a lack of certainty for the Borough's residents and businesses alike. Amongst the problems with this piecemeal approach to development, would be the provision of infrastructure, for example appropriate sites for schools and health care facilities would not have been identified. This lack of certainty and direction could also have a negative impact on the economy, with the risk that potential new employers choose to not come to the Borough, and the potential loss of existing employers who choose to move somewhere that can provide certainty. Having an up-to-date plan is also important because it sets standards which ensure that new development is built to a high quality of design.

#### **What information will be used to inform the Plan?**

The Council has already started collecting and producing the evidence work that will inform the production of the Local Plan. This work will continue to be built on following the Issues and Options consultation and running up to the Preferred Options consultation. The evidence will include the following:

- Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment
- Strategic Housing Market Assessment
- Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Needs Assessment
- Employment Land Needs Assessment
- Employment Land Availability Assessment
- Retail Study
- Strategic Flood Risk Assessment update
- Water Capacity Study
- Surface Water Management Plan
- Green Infrastructure Strategy
- Open Space Study
- Landscape and Townscape Character Assessment Update
- Wildlife Study
- Historic Characterisation Study
- Sports Facilities Strategy
- Settlement Boundary Review
- Sustainability Appraisal
- Appropriate Assessment
- Viability Assessment
- Traffic and transport assessment work

## **Sustainability Appraisal**

The Local Plan will be supported by a Sustainability Appraisal, incorporating a Strategic Environmental Assessment. The Sustainability Appraisal tests the sustainability of the Plan options throughout the production process. It does this by considering how different policy choices perform against a range of 'sustainability' criteria. For example, it looks at whether they would provide new jobs, make efficient use of land and help to improve health and wellbeing. The Sustainability Appraisal also helps to identify amendments to policies, or measures that could help to minimise any negative impacts identified and maximise the sustainability of the Local Plan.

A Sustainability Appraisal report will be prepared and published at each of the Plan consultation stages to give all the opportunity to comment on the findings. The Sustainability Appraisal report that accompanies this Issues and Options document provides an appraisal of the high level options in this document. Further detail will be added to the appraisal as the options progress.

## **Habitats Regulations Assessment**

A Habitat Regulations Assessment is the process for determining whether a plan or project will have adverse effects on a European habitat site. The first stage is to screen the plan or project, following the precautionary approach, to determine whether adverse effects are likely to arise from the new Local Plan. The next stage is an Appropriate Assessment, which will conclude whether or not the plan or project will significantly affect a European site.

Colchester Borough Council has carried out a Habitat Regulations Assessment screening opinion, which is published alongside this consultation paper, and has concluded that a high level of growth, regardless of location, has the potential to lead to adverse effects on European sites in the Borough, primarily owing to increased levels of recreational disturbance. For example, Abberton Reservoir is one of the European sites identified by the screening opinion. The next stage will be an Appropriate Assessment of the draft Local Plan. This will be prepared and published alongside the draft Local Plan.

## **Over what timescale will the Local Plan be produced and adopted?**

The adopted Local Development Scheme provides the overall milestones for the Plan production process, including the various member approval, consultation and publication stages that lead up to examination and adoption of the plan in 2017. The main stages of Local Plan production process are anticipated to take place as follows:

Issues and Options consultation (this stage)	January/February 2015
Consultation on the draft Local Plan (Preferred Options)	March/April 2016
Publication of the Submission Local Plan	August/September 2016
Submission to Secretary of State	November 2016
Examination	February 2017

## HOW TO RESPOND TO THE CONSULTATION

This Issues and Options Paper identifies a number of issues in each section and asks questions in relation to those issues. There is no requirement for you to comment on every issue or to answer every question; we would like you to submit comments on any areas that you wish to. Please note that it is important to comment on things that you may be in support of as well as aspects that you do not support. This is because the matters that you are in support of may change as the Plan progresses, as a result of responses from others who do not support the same things as you. Please ensure that you support all of the comments that you provide with an explanation and justification.

**The consultation will run from Friday 16 January to Friday 27 February (all responses must be received before the close of consultation at 5pm).**

We request that responses are submitted electronically. **Text documents must be submitted in Word format** - pdf and other file types will not be accepted. Supporting documents, which are not text based, such as maps or diagrams, can be submitted in pdf or other file types.

Please make sure that your response clearly sets out which section, page and/or paragraph number each of your comments relate to. Please also make sure that your name and contact details are included, as anonymous responses will not be accepted.

Please note that following the close of the consultation and once all of the comments have been processed, all responses will be made publicly available.

**Representations should be emailed to: [planning.policy@colchester.gov.uk](mailto:planning.policy@colchester.gov.uk)**

If you do not have access to a computer or the internet, representations can be posted to:

Spatial Policy Team  
Colchester Borough Council  
FREEPOST RL5L-ZTSR-SGYA  
Colchester  
Essex  
CO1 1ZE

If you have any queries or problems in relation to the Local Plan Issues and Options consultation, please contact the Planning Policy team using the contact details below:

Email: [planning.policy@colchester.gov.uk](mailto:planning.policy@colchester.gov.uk)  
Telephone: 01206 282473 or 01206 508639

### Next steps

Following the close of the Issues and Options Consultation on Friday 27 February, the Planning Policy team will collate and summarise the representations received through the Issues and Options consultation. The comments will then be used alongside the evidence we will be gathering to produce the Local Plan Preferred Options Paper for consultation. The preferred Options Paper will be in the form of a draft Local Plan.

## Questions

In this Issues and Options Paper we have identified a number of issues in each section and asked questions in relation to the issues identified. The following box sets out the key issues and questions that we would like you to consider in relation to the Introduction section. A similar format will be used for each of the sections that follow in this Paper.

### INTRODUCTION

#### Key Issues

- a) Whether the proposed plan period is appropriate.
- b) Whether the scope of the evidence base is appropriate and sufficient.

#### Questions

- 1. Do you agree that the Plan should cover the period to 2032 and beyond?
- 2. Do you agree with the scope of the evidence base set out under the heading '*What Information will be used to inform the Plan?*', is there anything that you think is missing from the list, or that you think is not needed?

Once you have finished reading the Paper, we have three further questions that we would like you to consider - set out in the box below.

### OVERARCHING LOCAL PLAN ISSUES AND OPTIONS

#### Key Issues

- c) Whether the Issues and Options Paper has covered all of the key issues that the new Local Plan should seek to address.
- d) Whether there are any other issues or considerations that we need to take into account or to be aware of in the process of formulating a new Local Plan for the Borough.

#### Questions

- 3. Do you think we have identified all of the key planning issues facing Colchester and which the Plan should address? If not, please set out any additional issues that you have identified, along with your thoughts on how the Plan could address them.
- 4. Do you think we have identified all of the strategic cross-boundary issues? If not, please explain what issue(s) we have missed and include supporting evidence.
- 5. Are there any other issues or considerations that we should take into account, or be aware of in formulating the new Local Plan.

## LOCAL PLAN VISION

### **What is the vision?**

The vision will form the critical starting point for the new Local Plan. It is vital that the vision encompasses the aims and aspirations that we, collectively, have for the Borough, looking to 2032 and beyond. Once the vision has been composed, it will be translated into policies that direct how our land and spaces are used. For example, if there were aspirations for the Borough to become a regional leisure attraction, the Local Plan would need to contain suitable policies and allocations for the provision of those leisure uses so that there was somewhere for them to be developed and to take place.

### **What informs the vision – how is it worked-up?**

The previous spatial vision, set out in the Core Strategy (2008), took its lead from the Local Strategic Partnership's Colchester 2020 document. This Partnership no longer exists, meaning, in its absence, that it is vital for organisations and individuals to feed in their thoughts and ideas through this Local Plan consultation process in terms of what the Borough should be aiming for and aspiring to.

The Council is in the process of producing a new Strategic Plan for the Borough that will cover the period 2015 to 2018; setting out the Council's aims and objectives for the next few years, the Strategic Plan will play an important role in informing the spatial vision. The Local Plan vision will, however, need to look much further ahead, with the aims and aspirations for the Borough to 2032 and beyond.

It is important that whilst being aspirational, the vision is also achievable, in order to ensure that it is meaningful and realistic. It is the spatial context of the vision that will be important in formulating the policies in the Local Plan. What we mean by 'spatial' is the way in which things are located on the ground. It is about using land in the most appropriate ways to develop and maintain places that are sustainable and that function well. In other words, it is about creating places where people want to be. For example, if there is an aspiration for new developments to be supported by local centres which provide local residents with access to shopping, services and facilities, spatially, it will be important for these centres to be located so that they are easily accessible, with good walking and cycling links.

The existing Core Strategy vision is set out below. The new vision for the Local Plan can include all, none, or some elements of the Core Strategy vision. This is included here to give an idea of the kinds of thing the vision might include. We are looking for your ideas on what you think the new Local Plan vision for the Borough should say.

### **The 2008 Core Strategy Vision**

By 2021, Colchester will be a prestigious regional centre. The historic Town Centre will be the cultural and economic heart of the Borough, surrounded by thriving suburbs, villages and countryside. New cultural, retail, office and mixed use developments will be delivered through regeneration of the Town Centre and its fringe. Urban Gateways to the Town Centre will be regenerated to present attractive entry points to Colchester and stimulate sustainable development. Key community facilities will be delivered and expanded, including the University of Essex, Visual Arts Facilities, General Hospital, Colchester Institute, and Community Stadium.

The focus of new development will be on Colchester Town and Stanway. Sustainable and inclusive communities will be created through regeneration in the north, east and south, and sustainable urban extensions to the north and south-west of town. These developments will deliver affordable housing, employment, open space, and community facilities and will achieve a high standard of sustainable design and construction. New and existing communities will be supported by a network of district and local centres which will provide local residents with easy access to shopping, employment and services. Public transport, walking and cycling links will be improved to better connect residents with local and regional destinations.

Tiptree, Wivenhoe and West Mersea will be key district settlements that provide essential services and facilities to their rural hinterland. The historic character and distinctiveness of these settlements and other villages will be protected and enhanced.

The natural environment, countryside and coastline will be conserved and enhanced and strategic green spaces will be secured to meet the recreational and health needs of Colchester. Sustainable development will also help protect the biodiversity, cultural and amenity value of the countryside and coast and will minimise use of scarce natural resources.

## **VISION**

### **Key Issues**

- e) Establishing a vision that is aspirational yet achievable
- f) Establishing a vision that is fit for purpose for the next 15 plus years
- g) Bottoming out what we want for the future of the Borough; how it should develop; what it should offer; what key things it should be good at or well known for, etc.
- h) Establishing what, in addition to the Council's Strategic Plan, could help inform the vision for the new Local Plan

### **Questions**

- 6. What would you like to see for the Borough's future, what do you think should be included in the Local Plan vision for the Borough, what should we be aiming and aspiring to achieve and why?
- 7. Are there any other documents or visions that you think might help to inform the vision for the new Local Plan?

## LOCAL PLAN THEMES - HOUSING

Allocating land for housing is a key role of the Local Plan. As part of this process, the Council will need to set housing targets for both market and affordable housing and allocate sufficient land to ensure that these targets can be met.

It is vital that new developments which accommodate the housing growth required create sustainable, well-designed communities, supported by the appropriate infrastructure. This wider objective will be key in the production of the Plan policies.

Over the last four decades, Colchester has been expanding. Growth has, of course, been influenced by the peaks and troughs of the wider UK economy and housing cycles, but over the period 1974/75 – 2012/13, housing growth has averaged 831 dwellings per year. This figure matches precisely with top-down target that was set through the national planning process. The now abolished Regional Spatial Strategy set a target for Colchester over the 2001-2021 period of 830 per annum. This number was incorporated in the Council's Core Strategy, adopted in 2008, which set out allocations and policies for that period.

Following abolition of regional strategies and the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework in 2012, it is now the responsibility of the Council to set their housing target, in cooperation with neighbouring planning authorities. National policy requires that local planning authorities identify the objectively assessed need for housing in their areas, and that Local Plans allocate sufficient land to accommodate that level of development.

Colchester has accordingly carried out work assessing housing demand, working jointly with other Essex authorities (Braintree, Brentwood, Chelmsford and Maldon to commission a Strategic Housing Market Assessment. This piece of work assists the Councils in determining their housing market areas, and the level and nature of demand for different types of housing. This work will be fed into the development of the housing target. The Strategic Housing Market Assessment uses Government population figures which are then translated into household estimates and consequential demand for housing.

Initial work from the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) provides an estimated requirement of 1,065 new homes per annum needed in the Borough over a 20-year period (view the SHMA via this link - <http://www.colchester.gov.uk/article/12944/Strategic-Housing-Market-Assessment-2014>). This would represent a significant increase over the Core Strategy target of 830 houses per year. Further work will be carried out to develop a target for the Plan, reflecting the most up-to-date evidence available on population growth, and housing supply and demand.

The Options section of this paper sets out possible scenarios for delivering these numbers, whilst other sections of the document highlight a range of policy areas or themes - from jobs, to design, to environmental enhancement - needed to support the delivery of housing within sustainable communities.

The mix of housing with other uses has an important bearing on the overall character of an area. In the Town Centre in particular, increases in residential dwellings resulting

from new residential infill, recent conversions of office buildings to residential, and re-use of upper floors all support other commercial uses in the town and give rise to higher levels of street-level activity. Elsewhere in the Borough, residential areas are enhanced by the proximity of local shops, accessible open space, community facilities, and public transport access. Equally, the built character of the Borough is rich and diverse and new development provides an opportunity to sustain and reinforce these defining qualities.

The existing functions of the Borough's towns and villages is set out in the settlement hierarchy, which places the town centre at the top, followed by the Urban Rural District Centres of Wivenhoe, Tiptree and West Mersea, and the Borough's smaller villages at the bottom. In producing the new Local Plan it will be important to consider whether the existing hierarchy remains fit for purpose and should be carried forward into the new Plan, or whether it requires amending for the new Local Plan.

Within the overall demand for housing, the Council will need to specifically address the demand for different sizes and tenures of housing arising from different sections of the community. While for many years household sizes decreased due to an increase in the number of single person households, this trend now seems to be slowing as the cost of housing limits the choices of those wishing to set up a new home. Evidence in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment indicates it would be reasonable to consider providing policy guidance for future delivery in the market sector of 60% one and two bedroom properties to meet the needs of single, couple and small family households. The remaining 40% of market units should be three and four bedroom houses to address the needs of larger families, and to provide a balanced market sector stock.

In addition to a target for the number of market homes to be built each year, the Local Plan will need to establish a target for affordable housing. Development of more affordable housing is particularly challenging since any targets attached to market housing developments need to reflect viability considerations. For example, an affordable housing target that was too high a proportion of dwellings could compromise overall housing delivery and/or the delivery of infrastructure to support development on market housing sites. The Strategic Housing Market Assessment model identified a requirement for 344 affordable units per annum over a 20 year period.

Options for delivering housing are expanding, with a return of the option for local authorities to, themselves, build housing. The Council will, therefore, need to consider the extent to which it wants to get involved in the housing market by developing public sector land, or to allocate specific types of housing land in the Local Plan, such as for retirement housing.

Policy support for self-build housing is increasingly seen as a way of providing a lower-cost flexible option to address the need for more housing. Pilot schemes around the country are currently underway to help develop practical means of implementing this, currently small, sector of the housing market, and the Council will need to have regard to evolving best practice in this area.

In Colchester, projections from the Government indicate that the number of people aged over 65 years in the Borough is likely to increase from 29,000 in 2012 to 46,000 in 2032; an increase of around 50%.<sup>1</sup> Planning for these increasing numbers will challenge us to

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<sup>1</sup> Office of National Statistics, 2012 Sub-National Population Projections.

develop new and expanded options for all the different needs within this group. Older people will require different types of housing in varying sizes and tenures. Options could include sheltered and assisted living accommodation as well as smaller flats for elderly downsizers. Addressing the need to increase provision of these different categories will require us to have a good understanding of our local needs. The Strategic Housing Market Assessment notes that the increase in the over-80 population will have particular implications for specialised forms of housing that include an element of care and which are suitable for those with mobility impairments.

The Essex Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Assessment (September 2014 update) found that 15 pitches would be required over the period 2013 and 2033 to accommodate gypsy and traveller needs (view the study via this link - <http://www.colchester.gov.uk/article/13329/New-Evidence-Base-Documents--Studies>). The Council will identify allocations within the Borough to meet that need.

Planning regulations have tended to steer clear of prescribing detailed design and space standards, but planning policy can have a role in assisting the delivery of well-designed, spacious and sustainable homes that are fit for purpose for a wide range of ages. The Government began a review of housing standards in 2012 to cut down on the number of overlapping and conflicting standards for new homes. This review proposed that basic standards could be strengthened, if backed by evidence, through more stretching optional requirements for water efficiency in areas of water stress, and for wheelchair user and adaptable homes. These optional requirements would be introduced through local plans.

## HOUSING

### Key Issues

- i) Development of realistic housing targets for both market and affordable housing.
- j) Allocation of new housing sites in the most sustainable locations.
- k) Integrating new housing into the community by getting the right densities and character appropriate to the Borough's diverse neighbourhoods ranging from the Town Centre.
- l) Building housing of different types and sizes to cater for the full range of ages and needs, with particular regard to the needs of specific groups including students, families, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities such as gypsies and travellers, and older residents.
- m) Addressing the issue of supporting people who want to build their own homes.
- n) Achieving high quality sustainable housing design with policies that strike a balance between ensuring quality through standards and supporting innovation through a flexible approach.
- o) Seeking to ensure, in addressing all of the issues above, that the end result is the creation of high quality, sustainable places.

### Questions

- 8. Have the correct issues been identified, are there any missing?
- 9. Do you have any thoughts on how the Plan could or should address these issues?
- 10. Do you have any further comments to make on housing related issues?

## LOCAL PLAN THEMES - CENTRES AND EMPLOYMENT

Planning for sustainable development involves building a strong local economy that is well connected to global markets. This includes trying to provide local jobs for residents moving in to new housing to minimise their need to travel. Colchester's location in the south east near London means that a small but significant proportion of its residents commute to Greater London (7.2% in the 2011 Census), but the large majority of residents (62-69% in the 2011 Census) both live and work in the Borough. Recognising both these trends, Local Plan allocations will need to include further land to support the delivery of jobs in Colchester as well as acknowledging the continual role of London as a 'world city' drawing longer distance commuters. Major local employers include the Army and educational institutions, including the University of Essex. The University is currently developing a research park which will provide new employment opportunities linked to University areas of technical expertise.

Colchester is part of the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). The South East LEP covers a large area which includes Essex, Kent and most of East Sussex. It is a partnership between local government, the business sector, and further and higher educational institutions. The role of the LEP is to stimulate economic growth, and support the delivery of infrastructure, jobs and homes. The aim set out in the Partnership's Strategic Economic Plan (2014) is to create 200,000 private sector jobs, complete 100,000 new homes and lever investment totalling £10billion to accelerate growth, jobs and home building, by 2021. The LEP has secured £442.2 million in funding from central Government to boost economic growth, with a particular focus on transport schemes that will bring new jobs and homes up to 2021. Some of this funding has been allocated to projects in Colchester, including funding towards broadband provision for business parks in the northern growth area.

Guidance from the Government is clear that local authorities' aspirations for economic growth need to be realistic and evidence-based, particularly given that if high rates of economic growth are assumed, it should be accompanied by equivalently high levels of housing growth. To help develop this realistic understanding of economic prospects, the Council commissioned an Employment Land Needs Assessment (ELNA) that identified current and potential economic growth sectors and their associated land requirements. The study also evaluated the demand and quality of existing employment land allocations

The Employment Land Needs Assessment found that Colchester has recorded reasonably strong levels of employment growth over the last 23 years (20%), outperforming regional and national rates but falling behind the rate of growth recorded across Essex as a whole. The proportion of commercial 'B class' jobs (which consists of jobs in offices, research and development, light industry and general industry) has remained largely the same during this period, with declining industrial employment being offset by growth in office based jobs.

Workplace wages in Colchester lag behind resident wages, indicating that the types of jobs available locally are less well paid than elsewhere in the sub-region, with many residents commuting to higher paid jobs elsewhere. The Borough's self-containment rate (the share of residents also working within the borough) was equivalent to just under 63%, having declined from about 71% at the time of the previous Census in 2001. It should be noted, however, that a further 8% of Colchester's working residents were

classified by the 2011 Census as having no fixed place of work. This group includes sole traders and skilled trade workers who undertake their work at various sites on a job-by-job basis. Given that some of this work would be expected to be within the Borough, the self-containment rate is likely to be higher than 63% in reality.

The Borough has seen moderate amounts of new development over the last few years, mainly relating to industrial and storage and distribution uses (planning use classes B1c, B2 and B8) uses and driven by a small number of large developments. At the same time, the Borough has been losing significant amounts of B class space, to the extent that net development rates have been negative in recent years. This has also been driven by a handful of large redevelopments such as the Flakt Woods development which involved the movement of the company to smaller new premises at Cuckoo Farm.

The Employment Land Needs Assessment considered that Colchester is still contending with an oversupply of office space following the economic downturn, which is reflected in the current (2014) relatively high office vacancy rate (15%). This does, however, vary across the Borough's employment sites with the limited market demand focused upon high calibre, small scale schemes that have good access to the A12. The Town Centre, however, is judged to suffer from a concentration of dated, poorly specified office space. The Borough's industrial market is considered to have weathered the recession better, with market feedback indicating that the supply and demand for industrial accommodation is relatively well matched. Demand is generally for small to medium sized industrial premises up to 1,000 sqm and mainly from local firms. The study's assessment of the current supply of employment sites concluded that in general, the range of sites comprised good quality, well maintained stock with low vacancy levels meeting the requirements of the local market.

In planning for the future, the study advised that it will be necessary not just to focus on how much land is required, but to think about the opportunities and risks that flow from particular policy approaches. The emerging Local Plan should seek to plan for a choice of sites and locations to meet the needs of particular sectors and occupier needs. This will involve providing for new inward investment while stopping protection for employment allocations that are no longer meeting market needs. Planning for employment will need to be balanced against pressures from other land uses, as well as other Local Plan objectives such as planned housing, retail and leisure growth.

The adopted Core Strategy sets out a hierarchy of retail centres which puts the town centre at the top. This existing hierarchy will now need to be evaluated to ensure its continuing appropriateness in the light of changing retail trends, particularly the growth of internet shopping. Additionally, the wording of national guidance makes it difficult to prioritise one type of centre over another, although the pre-eminent role of the town centre is acknowledged in general terms. The current policy labels and functions of Colchester's centres will, accordingly, need to be reviewed to ensure relevant policy is compliant with national guidance, and appropriate to the function of each centre.

Existing policies include restrictions on non-retail uses in shopping areas. In the 'inner core' of Colchester's town centre, 85% of ground floor frontages are required to be retail, with 50% in the 'outer core'. These policies will need to be reviewed in the light of the Government's deregulation of town centre uses and the changing balance of uses in

centres, which increasingly provide a focus for leisure time uses such as eating out and personal care (e.g. hairdressers).

The changing balance of uses in centres is particularly evident in the evening and night-time economy. Recently, there has been an increase in the diversity of offer in the town centre with planning applications for an art house cinema, new boutique hotels, and restaurants aimed at an older market. This broadening away from 'vertical drinking' establishments should help support a town centre that is more welcoming to families and older people after dark.

Tourism is a key part of the Colchester economy, and was worth £244m to the economy of the Borough economy in 2012. Development of this sector, in planning terms, relies on sensitive new development that enhances the attractiveness of the Borough's historic built and natural environment whilst providing improved access and facilities for a growing number of visitors. In recent years, the council has prioritised the growth of hotel accommodation in line with significant developments and investments in visitor attraction in and around Colchester (view the Study via this link - <http://www.colchester.gov.uk/article/13646/Humberts-Hotel-Study>). The Borough has now been successful in seeing a growth in new hotels and any future growth in this sector will need to be considered in the context of an increased supply.

The attractiveness of Colchester's environment to tourists is linked to a growing and thriving cultural and creative sector. The Creative Colchester Strategy (view the Strategy via this link - <http://www.colchester.gov.uk/article/13972/Creative-Colchester>) highlights that approximately one in six Colchester jobs are in businesses related to the creative sector, including design, film, arts and crafts, advertising, and publishing. The vision of the strategy focuses on strengthening this sector by 'making the most of what makes it unique, its assets and distinctiveness'.

## **EMPLOYMENT**

### **Key Issues**

- p) Ensuring the delivery of well-located sites to support employment with particular regard to growing sectors of the economy.
- q) Development of policies to support new investment and help existing businesses overcome barriers to success and to help train new workers.
- r) Ensuring there is sufficient land across the plan period to support housing growth
- s) Development of a retail hierarchy which safeguards the pre-eminence of the Town Centre while supporting appropriate levels of growth in other areas.
- t) Review of existing Town Centre boundary, primary shopping area and primary shopping frontages.
- u) Development of policies for the Town Centre that help to create a balanced mix of activities in the daytime, evening and night time.
- v) Development of policies which support tourism, leisure, culture and the arts.

## Questions

11. Have the correct issues been identified, are there any missing?
12. Do you have any thoughts on how the Plan could or should address these issues?
13. Do you have any further comments to make on employment related issues?

## LOCAL PLAN THEMES - RURAL COLCHESTER

The main urban centre of Colchester is surrounded by a large rural hinterland comprising the smaller towns of Tiptree, West Mersea and Wivenhoe and a number of smaller villages and hamlets. Approximately 30% (51,000) of the Borough's population live in the Borough's rural areas.

There is a need to deliver sufficient numbers of housing and jobs in the rural parts of the Borough to create sustainable rural communities and to prevent the creation of stagnant commuter villages. Currently, Council policy provides for a restrictive approach to new development in villages. Infill growth is allowed within the closely-drawn settlement boundaries of villages, with limited provision for rural exception sites composed primarily of affordable housing adjacent to those boundaries.

The Council last reviewed the Borough's settlement boundaries as part of developing its current adopted policy framework. This framework directed growth to the urban area of Colchester as it was demonstrated to be the most sustainable solution to the provision of the housing numbers required, so a significant revision of village boundaries was not supported. The Council, in consultation with town and parish councils, will, however, now need to revisit this issue to see if the overall preferred options for growth in the Borough, as well as the particular needs of villages, warrant minor or major changes to settlement boundaries. This review will balance growth pressures with the need to protect the countryside from inappropriate or unsustainable development.

The provision of affordable housing in the rural areas is low, which reflects the difficulty in bringing forward rural exception sites under previous national Government policy.

In 2011, rural jobs accounted for 23% of all jobs in the Borough, a growth from 15% in 2001. Agriculture, leisure or tourism activities make a significant contribution to the rural economy however income derived from farming has been declining.

The Employment Land Needs Assessment reports that demand for rural employment space in Colchester is 'steady'. It recommends that planning policy supports sustainable rural based employment development and responds positively to proposals that encourage the re-use of redundant agricultural buildings to meet future industrial and office based need.

A key issue for the Local Plan will be to ensure that there are positive policies in place to support the revitalisation of the rural economy, including opportunities for farm diversification schemes in response to changes in farming. There is also a need to consider changes in working patterns driven by improvements in technology.

With such a large rural hinterland, isolation can be an issue in some areas. Rural areas often have limited services and facilities including poor broadband access. This, coupled with poor public transport links, can prevent those without access to a car from accessing the facilities they need. A challenge for the new Local Plan will be to improve the provision of community facilities and community infrastructure, as well as access to services.

## **RURAL COLCHESTER**

### **Key Issues**

- w) Increasing the delivery of rural housing, including affordable housing, to create sustainable rural settlements.
- x) Increasing the delivery of rural jobs.
- y) Improving the provision of and access to community facilities in rural areas to support community needs and reduce social isolation.
- z) Defining settlement boundaries to allow sustainable levels of growth in rural villages/hamlets without adversely impacting on the character of the villages/hamlets and surrounding countryside.
- aa) Protecting the countryside for its own sake.

### **Questions**

14. Have the correct issues been identified, are there any missing?
15. Do you have any thoughts on how the Plan could or should address these issues?
16. Do you have any further comments to make on issues related to the Borough's rural area?

## LOCAL PLAN THEMES - PROMOTING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Producing a new Local Plan provides us with the opportunity to strengthen the connection between land use and the health of our communities. The National Planning Policy Framework states that 'the planning system can play an important role in facilitating social interaction and creating healthy, inclusive communities.' This includes the provision of safe, accessible places for social interaction, physical activity and interaction with the natural world, all of which contribute to healthy lifestyles.

On a national level Colchester Borough scores very low on measures of social deprivation, however there are small areas in the Borough that do score highly. In affluent areas, these pockets of deprivation are often exacerbated by the marked differences of neighbouring communities. It is, therefore, important to encourage social inclusion through the design and build of new communities and to ensure people have good access to adequate community facilities and services.

In promoting healthy lifestyles, access to recreation, leisure and open space is as important as access to formal health facilities such as hospitals, doctors' surgeries and NHS dentists. A general increase in population will have impacts on the number of schools, nurseries and recreation facilities needed. The delivery of a green infrastructure network which offers opportunities for residents to participate in informal recreational activities and which includes linked walking and cycling routes will help promote healthy lifestyles across the Borough. Green infrastructure includes open space, pedestrian/ cycle/bridleway routes and rivers.

Initiatives which integrate small scale food production into existing and new neighbourhood green spaces are on the increase around the country, and could be given greater impetus through the support of planning policies. Local food production projects such as community gardens; hedgerows planted with fruiting trees/shrubs; urban hydroponic gardens; and community orchards provide a variety of benefits including the creation of a community meeting point and an outlet for exercise, as well as providing a source of healthy food.

A key challenge will be to ensure that the correct amount and type of facilities are delivered as part of future growth proposals in the Borough to meet community needs. An aging population will increase demands on health and social care services, particularly the need for residential nursing care, and will also have wider impacts for the local economy, housing demand, public transport and other key services.

Tackling the fear of crime in Colchester and reducing actual crime needs to be considered. Through design, the planning system can help ensure that new development reduces the incidence of actual crime and the fear of crime.

## **PROMOTING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES**

### **Key Issues**

- bb) Building inclusive and healthy communities with good and equitable access to well located high quality key services (health, social, care, education) and community facilities.
- cc) Promoting healthy lifestyles through support for initiatives such as provision of sports and recreation facilities, improved access to green infrastructure and local small-scale food production schemes.
- dd) Protecting existing community facilities and the delivery of new facilities to meet community needs.
- ee) Protecting existing areas of public and private open space and ensuring development delivers adequate levels of new public and private open space.

### **Questions**

- 17. Have the correct issues been identified, are there any missing?
- 18. Do you have any thoughts on how the Plan could or should address these issues?
- 19. Do you have any further comments to make in relation to the promotion of healthy communities?

## LOCAL PLAN THEMES - SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT AND ACCESSIBILITY

New development impacts on travel demand. Weekday trips, by all types of travel, are expected to grow 20% by 2032 (including trips that will be generated by development expected to take place over the Plan period).<sup>2</sup> The geographical relationship of different uses, for example where people live, work, study and shop, affects how many journeys are made, how long they are and what means of transport is used. This travel demand impacts on the economy, environment and the local community. The challenge is to provide a sustainable transport system in Colchester, while providing good access to jobs and services.

The main transport issues that the Local Plan will need to explore are: how a high quality, efficient and accessible transport network can be delivered in the future; how the location and planning of new development can help to reduce the need to travel; and how new communities can be planned in a way that can help to influence a change in people's travel behaviour, towards more sustainable modes of transport.

### Travel patterns

Travel to work makes up around a third of journeys each week day. Colchester has a high level of people living and working locally, with approximately 62% to 69% of employed residents working within the Borough (2011 Census). This reflects the Borough's ability to offer local employment. However, the high level of self containment results in a large number of short trips to work, many of which are still undertaken by the car. The car dominates the mode of transport to work, representing 55% of all journeys in the Borough (2011 Census). When broken down, in rural areas, 62% of journeys to work are made by car, while the average in urban areas remains high at 53%.

The average total time for all trips travelled per person, has remained constant over the past 30 years, close to one hour per day, but the length of the journey has increased and there has been a reduction in the number of walking trips. National forecasting suggests that car travel will continue to dominate movement patterns.<sup>3</sup>

Colchester is also a key destination for employment, education, health, leisure and retail. The main inward movement into the Borough for employment is from the east, with 38% of people coming into the Borough from Tendring, for work. Of these trips, 82% are made by car. The key destinations for those commuting out of the Borough are London (25%), Braintree (15%) and Tendring (15%). Within the Borough, there is a diverse range of destinations for commuting from each local ward, resulting in complex short journeys. However, the town centre (Castle Ward) is the main destination for work and education.

The combination of travel patterns result in peak congestion on the road network. Traffic congestion delays all road users, and businesses are likely to take this, and the perceived economic cost, into account when deciding whether to locate within the Borough.

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<sup>2</sup> National Trip End Model Temprow v6.2, Colchester Trip Productions.

<sup>3</sup> National Trip End Model Temprow v6.2.

Colchester has a number of air quality management areas and the main source of air pollution is motor vehicles. The main declared area is in and around the town centre. Vehicles emit, amongst other things, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide and fine particular matter. Particular problems arise where traffic is slow moving through narrow streets near the historic centre of the town. Road transport vehicles are one of the most significant sources of poor air quality. Public Health England estimates that 5.5% of all deaths in Colchester are attributable to poor air quality.<sup>4</sup>

It will be particularly important to improve and maintain Colchester's transportation infrastructure, provide travel options and change how people travel, so that the Borough can continue to attract businesses, retailers, tourists and home buyers, therefore boosting the local economy and contributing to the delivery of sustainable growth.

### **The inter-urban road network**

Nationally, the growth of car traffic has slowed, and in urban areas, traffic levels have remained fairly static over the last 20 years, even though the population and economy has grown. However, across all types of roads, traffic has begun to grow again. On the inter-urban road network, traffic levels have increased with parts of the A12 around Colchester carrying 90,000 vehicles per day, which is high for an A class trunk road. Most of the inter-urban road network, particularly the capacity of the A12, is constrained by the operation of the junctions.

The Highways Agency A12/A120 Route Based Strategy (March 2013) sets out current flows and stress levels on both roads and illustrates that in peak periods, the A12 between Junction 25 at Marks Tey and Junction 29 at the A120/Crown Interchange is at capacity. Theoretically, the road has no spare capacity at peak times to accommodate more vehicles, and additional traffic results in a reduced level of service with increased queuing, congestion and decreased journey reliability.

The Department for Transport statistics show that the A12 performs poorly in terms of reliability and delay compared to other trunk roads. Alternative routes are also limited and if an incident occurs on the A12, the A120 west from Marks Tey to Braintree can act as an alternative route. However, as stated in the Highway Agency's Route Based Strategy, it is currently wholly unsuitable for this purpose.

The Route Based Strategy identifies areas for targeted investment in the short and longer term. In the short term, schemes are identified to improve reliability on the route. In the longer term, a strategy for improving junctions is proposed, in order to solve the operational issues on the route and investigate the potential for releasing land for growth. In the Colchester area, localised capacity improvements between Junctions 28 and 29 are proposed for investigation to help facilitate growth in North Colchester. Similarly, capacity improvements are proposed for investigation to enable planned growth in Stanway.

The A120 is the key route linking Stansted airport in the west to Harwich port in the east. Many sections of the road are of low standard with heavy congestion, high accident risk and, above all, poor journey time reliability. To support economic and housing growth, improvements to the A120 between Marks Tey and Colchester are also identified for further investigation. There is a significant level of support from local

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<sup>4</sup> Estimating Local Authority Mortality Burdens Associated with Particulate Air Pollution (PHE, 2014).

authorities, the Haven Gateway sub-region and businesses along the route. However, it is recognised that this would require substantial investment.

### **The local road network**

Modelling of traffic growth in the Colchester urban area (Colchester Area Saturn Model, AM and PM Forecasting Report, February 2010), including the housing and employment growth up to 2023, suggests an 18% growth in trips in the peak hours between 2007 and 2023 (an average growth of 1.1% per annum).

### **Public transport, walking and cycling**

Approximately 30% of people use alternative forms of transport (walking, cycling and public transport) to travel to work (or work at home). This is important in managing congestion and there is capacity in most of the alternative forms of transport to accommodate sustainable growth in the Borough. However, these local routes are not always continuous and they are often of variable standards. The bus network is comprehensive in urban Colchester and most places in the urban area have good access to bus services. However, the bus network is currently under utilised and the County Council wishes to address this through a new passenger transport strategy. By promoting travel by sustainable modes there are wider benefits to local people such as personal health, less pollution and using less resources (including land), and they are cost effective.

The rail network is heavily used by passenger trains and through freight from the Haven Ports. Whilst there are few capacity issues in the Colchester area on the rail network, improvements are required along the line to accommodate growth and provide a faster more competitive service across the region. The Great Eastern Mainline Prospectus and the Anglia Rail Study identify a range of measures for delivery in the future to support growth. Locally, access to rail stations and integration with growth is a challenge.

In the rural areas car travel dominates but for those without access to the car rural isolation and access to major services such as health and education is particularly difficult. The 2011 Census showed that in rural areas, 15% of employed residents work from home compared to 8% of employed residents in urban areas.

### **Delivery**

There are a number of different partners delivering transport in the Borough. Essex County Council is the local transport and highway authority and manages the local road network and Park & Ride services. Essex County Council also publishes parking standards for new developments and the 2009 standards have been adopted by Colchester. These are currently a mix of maximum and minimum standards depending on the type of development.

The Highways Agency manages and maintains the national strategic road network which includes the A12 and the A120 which pass through the Borough. Network Rail is responsible for the railway network and Abellio Greater Anglia (until October 2016) provides the rail services from our six stations (Colchester, Colchester Town, Hythe, Marks Tey, Wivenhoe and Chappel & Wakes Colne). Various bus and community transport operators provide bus services across the Borough. Colchester Borough

Council manages on and off-street parking. There are also a number of commercially operated public car parks in the Borough.

## **SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT AND ACCESSIBILITY**

### **Key Issues**

- ff) Balancing new development with traffic and congestion.
- gg) Managing congestion and minimising the impact of traffic on our communities.
- hh) Promoting alternative ways of travelling around the Borough.
- ii) Balancing the different transport needs of urban and rural areas.

### **Questions**

20. Have the correct issues been identified, are there any missing?
21. Do you have any thoughts on how the Plan could or should address these issues?
22. Do you have any further comments to make on transport related issues?

## LOCAL PLAN THEMES - HERITAGE AND DESIGN

'Quality of place' is a term that describes the idea that a town has locally distinctive qualities of design, character and atmosphere which inspire pride in its residents, and appreciation by its visitors. Colchester has a good basis for a high quality of place since its character reflects a multi-layered legacy of over two thousand years of human building and creativity. Safeguarding this legacy and improving the quality of Colchester Borough's places, however, will rely on sustaining and reinvigorating the Borough's heritage assets with new uses; interpretation of the heritage to promote its appreciation; and the creation of new well-designed buildings that will become the legacy for the future.

The richness of Colchester's heritage is reflected by the statutory protection awarded to many of the Borough's heritage assets. Colchester has 22 conservation areas and 2,056 listed buildings. The Borough also has 4 parks on the National Register of Special Historic Interest, as well as Scheduled Monuments at Gosbecks and around the Iron Age dyke system. The Council works closely with English Heritage, Essex County Council and conservation groups to ensure that archaeological and historic assets are identified, documented and preserved. The Council has adopted a Local List to ensure that the historic value of locally important heritage assets is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. Additionally, the Borough has a wealth of undesignated sites of high archaeological potential.

National and local policy on design and heritage has provided consistent support in principle, over the years, for high quality design and enhancement of the historic environment. At a local level, however, more specific national policies, such as those concerned with high densities and low parking standards, which were intended to support greater sustainability, have instead often been seen to have the unintended consequence of lowering design quality, limiting the provision of open space, and creating parking problems.

The challenge in planning for design and heritage in Colchester is accordingly about matching clear broad policy aspirations for a high quality of place with effective detailed policies that actually deliver on this promise. One part of this challenge is to actively support innovation by avoiding overly prescriptive policies. Mechanisms for achieving this balance could include design codes, characterisation studies, design review panels and development briefs. A particular issue is the increasing awareness of the importance of the indirect impacts of new development on the wider setting of heritage assets. For example, development adjoining a Conservation Area or a Listed Building may change the way in which the asset is experienced or appreciated.

The potential for improvement of the many spaces and places that, together, make up our townscape, is most apparent in the public spaces used and shared by Borough residents and visitors. These include the town centre, rail and bus stations, parks and open space, and community facilities. The public areas they provide could be enhanced through increased levels of appropriate usage; integration with new and existing features in the surrounding environment; better access; innovative approaches to telling the stories of the Borough's past; and consistent maintenance. The Council's Better Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document and associated Public Realm Strategy (view the documents via this link - <http://www.colchester.gov.uk/article/13321/Adopted-Guidance>) provide a basis for energising these spaces, and the Council will seek to use

its planning policies to further support new, high quality design and active spaces, throughout the Borough. In particular, it will be important that larger new developments meld seamlessly with urban fabric and are designed to provide attractive public areas that can serve as a focus for new communities.

## **HERITAGE AND DESIGN**

### **Key Issues**

- jj) How to support enhancement of the historic environment.
- kk) Development of policies to support specific methods of delivering high quality design, including design codes, characterisation studies, design review panels; inclusion of historical interpretation; and development briefs.
- ll) The potential for adding to and improving the quality of our public spaces

### **Questions**

- 23. Have the correct issues been identified, are there any missing?
- 24. Do you have any thoughts on how the Plan could or should address these issues?
- 25. Do you have any further comments to make on design and heritage related issues?

## LOCAL PLAN THEMES - NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

The natural environment of the Borough has evolved over a long time, in response to physical process and land management. These have created a diverse range of habitats and high quality landscapes that support a diverse range of species. The coastline habitats are particularly important ecologically and include extensive tracts of saltmarsh, coastal grazing marshes, mudflats and economically important oyster fisheries which are protected under international and national statutes. Two Special Protection Areas (Colne Estuary and Blackwater Estuary) help protect the coastal habitats and the species living in them and they have further protection through designation as Ramsar Sites, as a Special Area of Conservation (Mid Essex Estuaries), and through the Colne Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The Colne Estuary has also recently been designated (2013) as part of a larger Marine Conservation Zone. These are designations designed to protect species and habitats under international agreements.

The Borough's coastline is given added protection through the Coastal Protection Belt designation in our existing Local Plan. This seeks to protect the open character and undeveloped sections of the Borough's coastline against inappropriate development. The Council is proposing to review the boundary of the Coastal Protection Belt as part of the Local Plan to ensure that it remains fit for purpose and continues to protect those sections of coast that require protection.

Inland, Abberton Reservoir is a designated Special Protection Area. The northern part of the Borough falls within the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, offering the highest level of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. In addition to these, there are currently 168 designated Local Wildlife Sites, covering 1,957 hectares.

River corridors and green spaces make a significant contribution to the Borough's green infrastructure network. Green infrastructure is a term used to describe networks of natural features that provide benefits to people. The features range from street trees to woodlands and from ponds to rivers. As well as contributing to the character of the Borough, these areas provide additional habitats for the Borough's wildlife.

A key challenge in relation to the natural environment is balancing the delivery of new development against the need to protect the Borough's rich biodiversity and geodiversity. New development has the potential to lead to the loss of habitat and species and to indirectly affect internationally protected sites through increased water usage, increased wastewater and recreational disturbance. It is important to note that brownfield sites that have been vacant for longer periods are also sites where development could have an adverse impact on biodiversity.

The Government is proposing to introduce 'biodiversity offsetting'. Under the current proposal, developers would be able to create new habitats to offset the loss of habitats where a development is proposed. This could expose some habitats that historically would have been protected from development, to the risk of being developed. A challenge, therefore, will be to ensure that the most important habitats in the Borough continue to be protected.

There is also a need to protect the significance and setting of important landscapes, particularly the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), whilst also enabling appropriate development to take place within its boundary to support the economy and communities living in them.

There is significant pressure for the development of greenfield land in order to meet Colchester's objectively assessed need for housing. Many of the Borough's brownfield sites have been built out or are already allocated for development. Countryside areas and strategic green gaps between settlements are likely to come under increasing pressure within the plan period.

## **NATURAL ENVIRONMENT**

### **Key Issues**

- mm) Protecting and enhancing the countryside.
- nn) Developing a multi functional green infrastructure network across urban and rural Colchester by protecting, enhancing and extending landscapes, biodiversity and geodiversity sites, heritage sites, green spaces and river corridors.
- oo) Defining the extent and function of the Coastal Protection Belt.

### **Questions**

- 26. Have the correct issues been identified, are there any missing?
- 27. Do you have any thoughts on how the Plan could or should address these issues?
- 28. Do you have any further comments to make about issues related to the Natural Environment?

## GROWTH OPTIONS / DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

### INTRODUCTION

This section looks at growth options for the Borough for the longer term - 2021-2032 and beyond. The growth strategy will be central to the Local Plan. In establishing the strategy for the growth of the Borough, there are a huge range of considerations to take into account; the overarching issues are covered in the previous sections of this document. This section of the document will set out the more specific issues relating to the growth options.

A key challenge in the process of producing a new Local Plan will be protection of the countryside for its own sake, whilst recognising the need for growth, given that much of the Borough's brownfield land has already been built on, or allocated for development. There will also be challenges in preventing the coalescence of settlements and the protection of rural character, whilst allowing villages to grow sustainably to meet local needs for housing, employment and infrastructure.

The growth options set out are included on the basis that they are the most reasonable, or realistic, options. An explanation of the key issues that have influenced the generation of these options is set out below.

### CONSIDERATIONS TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN GENERATING THE GROWTH OPTIONS

#### **Objectively assessed need**

As set out in the Introduction and Housing sections of this document, the National Planning Policy Framework requires local planning authorities to meet objectively assessed housing need *in full*. This means that the starting point for each of the options is that they must be able to accommodate the fully objectively assessed need. As explained in the Housing chapter, we do not yet know exactly what our objectively assessed need is, but we expect that it will be in the region of 1,000 or more dwellings per year. This equates to a total of 15,000 new homes over the plan period.

However, with existing land already identified and allocated for growth through the existing Core Strategy and Site Allocations Development Plan Document, we have an existing supply of allocated land that can contribute towards accommodating this growth. As a result, the Local Plan will need to identify sufficient additional land to accommodate in the region of 10,000 dwellings in order to meet the objectively assessed housing need over the 15 year Plan period (2017-2032).

The options set out in this paper are included on the basis that it is expected that they are each capable of accommodating Colchester's required level of growth. This will, however, be subject to full and detailed testing and analysis.

#### **Five year housing supply**

The five year housing supply is another factor that needs to be taken into account in considering growth options. The NPPF requires Councils to maintain a five year supply

of specific deliverable housing sites on a rolling basis.<sup>5</sup> When looking at growth options it is important to ensure that a wide range, or large number, of sites can be allocated in a variety of locations in order that a five year housing land supply can be maintained throughout the Plan period. The reason for this is that, regardless of the size of a site, there is a limit to the number of dwellings that can or will be completed on that site each year. This means that if only a handful of large sites were allocated, the Council would be unable to maintain its five year land supply; it would be evident at examination that the Plan would fail to meet this fundamental requirement of the NPPF and on this basis the Plan would not be able to progress to a successful outcome.

The options set out in this paper are included on the basis that they will allow for the allocation of a range of sites to enable the consistent provision of a five year housing supply throughout the Plan period. This will be the subject of a detailed analysis of site options.

### **Duty to Cooperate**

As a result of changes to the planning system, the Government introduced a duty to cooperate as a mechanism to deal with overarching, strategic issues, which were previously addressed by regional plans. The duty to cooperate requires all local planning authorities to cooperate with a range of public bodies on issues of a strategic nature, including housing provision. The duty is not a duty to agree, however, the local planning authority would need robust evidence to support its position if it wanted to follow a different approach to its neighbours. In the event that the Council was not able to provide this robust evidence, it would have failed to meet the duty to cooperate and its plan could not proceed through the examination process. It is, therefore, essential that the Council works with its neighbouring authorities and other public bodies, throughout the plan making process, in order to ensure that the duty to cooperate is satisfied and that the Plan can be drawn to a successful conclusion.

The options in this Paper take into account the duty to cooperate, although some may not satisfy the duty; where it is possible that this could be the case for an option, this risk is highlighted. In instances where the option may not fully satisfy the duty to cooperate, it is important to bear in mind that the Council may not be able to proceed with that as the preferred option, even if it is the option with the most public support. The reason for this is that if a neighbouring authority or another public body identify that the option fails to meet cross-boundary and/or strategic priorities, the Council is required to do everything that it can to find a resolution. This is likely to involve identifying an alternative option for growth which does address strategic issues and thereby satisfies the requirements of the duty to cooperate.

Any cross-boundary development identified as part of a preferred option for the growth of the Borough would only come forward with the support and cooperation of the relevant neighbouring authority. Cross-boundary developments would need to accommodate the joint requirements of both authorities. The result of this is that the total housing numbers to be built in and adjacent to the Borough boundary would be higher than the Borough's own housing target. So, for example, if a cross-boundary development could or would accommodate in the region of 10,000 homes, the likelihood

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<sup>5</sup> To be considered deliverable, sites should be available now, offer a suitable location for development now, and be achievable with a realistic prospect that housing will be delivered on the site within five years and in particular that development of the site is viable.

is that approximately half of this number would contribute to accommodating Colchester's housing needs, while the other half would contribute to the needs of the other planning authority. Collectively, therefore, the total number of homes being built will be higher than just Colchester's target figure. So, while Colchester needs to find land to accommodate in the region of 8,000-10,000 dwellings, with cross-boundary allocations, the total figure may be 15,000-20,000. This would include land in neighbouring authorities which borders Colchester.

It is also possible that the Council will allocate land to accommodate a higher number of homes than the level of housing need identified, in order to plan comprehensively for the longer term - post 2032. This would help to ensure maximum sustainability of development, by minimising the need to find additional sites on a piecemeal basis in the future. This could also provide a wider range of sites, which would help the Council to ensure that it could maintain a five year land supply of deliverable sites throughout the Plan period, as required by the National Planning Policy Framework.

Under the duty to cooperate, the Council has been engaging with Braintree and Tendring District Councils and they are aware that we are consulting on options which involve potential development of land in their areas. Both Councils are agreed, in principle, to work cooperatively in respect of any potential cross-boundary developments, should either, or both, cross-boundary development options be identified as a preferred option. The Council will also engage with other authorities, bodies and organisations under the duty to cooperate in order to ensure that any strategic issues are identified and addressed.

### **Infrastructure provision**

As part of the initial evidence gathering work for the Local Plan, the Council has been meeting with providers of key infrastructure to identify any major constraints or issues to consider in the generation of growth options and the identification of a preferred option. We have spoken to providers of roads, rail network and rail services, bus services, education, health, water and sewerage, environmental protection, electricity, and gas. For most types of infrastructure there are no differing considerations between options at this early stage in the process, where no site specific detail is available. A summary of the relevant infrastructure information is set out below. Some of the transport infrastructure information available is more specific and detailed; this information is set out after the options.

### ***Water and sewerage infrastructure***

The Anglian Water Services catchment area is under 'serious water stress'. In terms of the growth of Colchester, no specific issues have been identified at this stage, in relation to the provision of the additional capacity required to accommodate new development in the Borough. Growth at the scale required will mean that network upgrades are needed. Anglian Water have advised that there is investment proposed within their Asset Management Plan 6 (2015-2020) to increase capacity at Colchester Water Recycling Centre (formerly known as Sewage Treatment Works), in order to accommodate future growth. This was due to be subject to final determination by Ofwat, the financial regulator, in December 2014. Anglian Water are keen to work together with Colchester Borough Council, and advise on the provision of water supply and foul drainage, along with any issues or constraints, once options for the growth of the Borough have been determined.

### ***Electricity infrastructure***

There is a good level of electricity infrastructure capacity available across the Borough. In the longer term, as development progresses, some reinforcement of the electricity network would be required and UK Power Networks would programme in all necessary work, as appropriate. This work would potentially be more difficult in the east than elsewhere in the Borough, due to the potential need to drill under the river. However, this is a constraint that can be overcome and would not pose a threat to the deliverability of any particular site or growth location. Depending on the circumstances relating to any site specific need for reinforcement of the electricity infrastructure network, developers would be required to cover all or part of the cost of the works.

### ***Gas infrastructure***

As with all of the growth options, high level analysis indicates that the existing low pressure infrastructure surrounding the Colchester area may require reinforcement to provide sufficient capacity to accommodate growth in terms of gas supply. Similar analysis on the medium pressure infrastructure indicates that there should be sufficient capacity to meet the needs of the level of growth required. Further work will be needed once a preferred growth option has been identified, in order to identify the specific gas infrastructure requirements of particular areas and sites.

### ***Education infrastructure***

There is very little existing spare capacity in the Borough's schools, both in terms of primary and secondary provision, and the County Council is increasing school places to cater for the growth currently taking place. Any additional growth would require new provision either through new schools or expansion of existing facilities, although it is thought that expansion opportunities in the Borough are limited. In terms of the provision of new school places, it is much simpler for the education authority to meet the required need on larger sites (at least 700 dwellings) than it is smaller sites which, in themselves, do not generate sufficient numbers to warrant a new school.

The location of school provision would need to be properly considered and incorporated into the master-planning of any new sites allocated to accommodate the Borough's growth. Mersea Island has been identified as a place where it would be very difficult to accommodate an increase in the requirement for school places. Tiptree has been identified as a location with some spare school place capacity, which could accommodate some future growth.

With regards to early years education provision, there are significant variations in terms of capacity across the Borough. This would need to be looked at in more detail when a preferred growth option and potential development sites have been identified.

### ***Health infrastructure***

Health infrastructure providers have been and continue to be undergoing sweeping changes in structure which includes changes to the structure of the provision of health services going forward. For this reason, little information is available in relation to the provision of health infrastructure to service growth over the Plan period. The Council will continue to engage with the sector throughout the plan making process, in order to ensure that the provision of healthcare infrastructure is properly accounted for in the development of the Plan and the allocation of sites.

### ***Drainage/flood infrastructure***

The Colne Barrier is located just south of Wivenhoe and Rowhedge on the Colne Estuary and it provides essential protection to these settlements as well as Colchester Town from tidal flooding. There are also a number of river walls and earth embankments that provide flood protection for communities living adjacent to the Colne Estuary. The Environment Agency is responsible for maintaining the barrier and some of the sea walls. The Council will continue to work in partnership with the Environment Agency throughout the plan making process in order to ensure that the new development remains protected from all types of flooding through the development of the Plan and the allocation of sites.

### ***Infrastructure for non-motorised users***

Non-motorised users are considered to be pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians. It will be important to consider the needs of these users in the design of any new development. Encouraging modal shift, particularly to walking and cycling, has a very important role to play in delivering sustainable growth options.

### ***Infrastructure for walking***

In any new development, including new settlements, it will be important to ensure that they are designed to be accessible to pedestrians from the outset. Footways need to be direct, well lit and incorporate quality surfaces. Key services such as education, health, employment and food retail should be located with direct pedestrian routes from residential areas. Where paths cross roads, pedestrians should be given priority and the expectation is that new developments would restrict road traffic to 20mph. As any new settlement or large development grows, and when it is not possible to provide services within walking distances, it will be important to encourage residents to cycle or use public transport. Depending on location, good access to a rail station will be important.

In existing urban areas, new developments will largely rely on making good connections with the existing urban footway and footpath network. As with large new developments outside of the existing urban area, new development must also be permeable and deliver direct routes between facilities. Pedestrian crossings should to be maintained and provided, to ensure good pedestrian access to services and facilities.

### ***Infrastructure for cycling***

Any large new development, including new settlements, should be cycleable throughout, from the outset. It is important that development is designed to ensure people can cycle throughout the development and feel safe in doing so. All of the key services should be accessible by bike, and measures should be taken to promote and encourage cycling. Routes should be direct, traffic free, continuous, safe, have a quality surface and have priority at road crossings. Street design should allow for segregation from vehicles and cyclists, especially where the flows are high. Secure cycle parking should be provided and appropriately located close to the entrance of buildings. Depending on location, good access to a rail station will be important.

Development in the existing urban area would largely rely on making good connections with the existing local road network, with improvements around retail areas, schools and employment areas. 20mph road traffic limits should be introduced in new development which will help to encourage cycling.

### **Type of land identified for growth**

The bulk of the land identified in all of the options is land that has not been previously developed, otherwise known as greenfield land. The reason for this is that Colchester has a strong history of making use of, or redeveloping previously developed, or brownfield, sites. As a result of this, the Borough has a very limited and diminishing supply of brownfield sites that can contribute to the accommodation of the additional growth requirements. Colchester's objectively assessed need is at a level which means that brownfield development can only reasonably accommodate a very small proportion of the Borough's total growth requirements.

All of the growth options identified include an element of urban development, and as part of the process of identifying sites that can contribute to this element of the growth strategy, the Council will explore all possible brownfield site options, including the potential re-use of existing employment sites.

All of the options include separate sustainable settlements, detached from the existing urban area. The reason for this is that there are significant constraints, natural and otherwise, around the urban edge of Colchester town, including Sites of Special Scientific Interest, archaeological features, topography and flood zones. This means that it is not considered feasible for urban expansion to accommodate the majority of the Plan's growth. As a result of this, sustainable settlement development is considered the only reasonable or realistic option for accommodating the majority of the Borough's post-2021 growth, at this point in time.

The Council would aspire for new development of any new settlement to be as sustainable and as high quality as possible. The Town and Country Planning Association's Garden City principles provide a useful framework for achieving this. These Garden City Principles are set out below:

- land value capture for the benefit of the community;
- strong vision, leadership and community engagement;
- community ownership of land and long-term stewardship of assets;
- mixed-tenure homes and housing types that are affordable for ordinary people;
- a strong local jobs offer in the Garden City itself, with a variety of employment opportunities within easy commuting distance of homes;
- beautifully and imaginatively designed homes with gardens, combining the very best of town and country living to create healthy homes in vibrant communities;
- generous green space linked to the wider natural environment, including a surrounding belt of countryside to prevent sprawl, well connected and biodiversity rich public parks, and a mix of public and private networks of well managed, high-quality gardens, tree-lined streets and open spaces;
- opportunities for residents to grow their own food, including generous allotments;
- strong local cultural, recreational and shopping facilities in walkable neighbourhoods; and
- integrated and accessible local transport systems with walking, cycling and public transport being the most convenient and affordable – with a series of settlements linked by rapid transport providing a full range of employment opportunities (as set out in Ebenezer Howard's vision of the 'Social City' in his book – *To-Morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (1898)).

The exact land or sites that would be included in the make-up of the growth options set out in this paper have not been investigated or determined at this stage in the process. Once a preferred growth option has been identified, following this consultation, a detailed assessment of sites will take place. The outcomes of this will be included in the Preferred Options Paper which will form the next stage of the public consultation process. The purpose of this Issues and Options stage of the process, in relation to the growth strategy, is to identify the preferred broad locations for growth, post-2021. More detailed work will follow on from this.

A factor that may have an impact on the overall land take of growth is density; higher densities result in a reduced land take. Higher densities are typically more appropriate in central, built-up areas where there is good access to jobs and services, and where there are strong public transport links. In Colchester, with many brownfield development site opportunities already built out or in the process of being built out, there are likely to be limited opportunities for high density growth to be located in the existing urban area. However, there may be opportunities for higher densities to be located at the heart of any new settlement, as this would help to provide the critical mass required to support the provision of public transport.

## GROWTH STRATEGY OPTIONS

### **Option 1A Development to the East and West**

A separate sustainable settlement to the west of Colchester town

A separate sustainable settlement to the east of Colchester town

Urban development on sites in and around the existing urban area

Proportional expansion of the Rural District Centres - Wivenhoe, Tiptree and West Mersea

### **Option 1B Development to the East and West**

A separate sustainable settlement to the west of Colchester town

A separate sustainable settlement to the east of Colchester town

Urban development on sites in and around the existing urban area

Proportional expansion of the Rural District Centres – Wivenhoe, Tiptree and West Mersea

A proportional element of rural growth across the Borough's villages

### **Option 2A Development to the West**

A separate sustainable settlement to the west of Colchester town

Urban development on sites in and around the existing urban area

Proportional expansion of the Rural District Centres – Wivenhoe, Tiptree and West Mersea

### **Option 2B Development to the West**

A separate sustainable settlement to the west of Colchester town

Urban development on sites in and around the existing urban area

Proportional expansion of the Rural District Centres – Wivenhoe, Tiptree and West Mersea

A proportional element of rural growth across the Borough's villages

### **Option 3A Development to the East and North**

A separate sustainable settlement to the east of Colchester town

A significant urban extension to the north of Colchester town, crossing the A12

In addition to an extension to the north, other urban development in and around the existing urban area

Proportional expansion of Rural District Centres – Wivenhoe, Tiptree and West Mersea

### **Option 3B Development to the East and North**

A separate sustainable settlement to the east of Colchester town

A significant urban extension to the north of Colchester town, crossing the A12

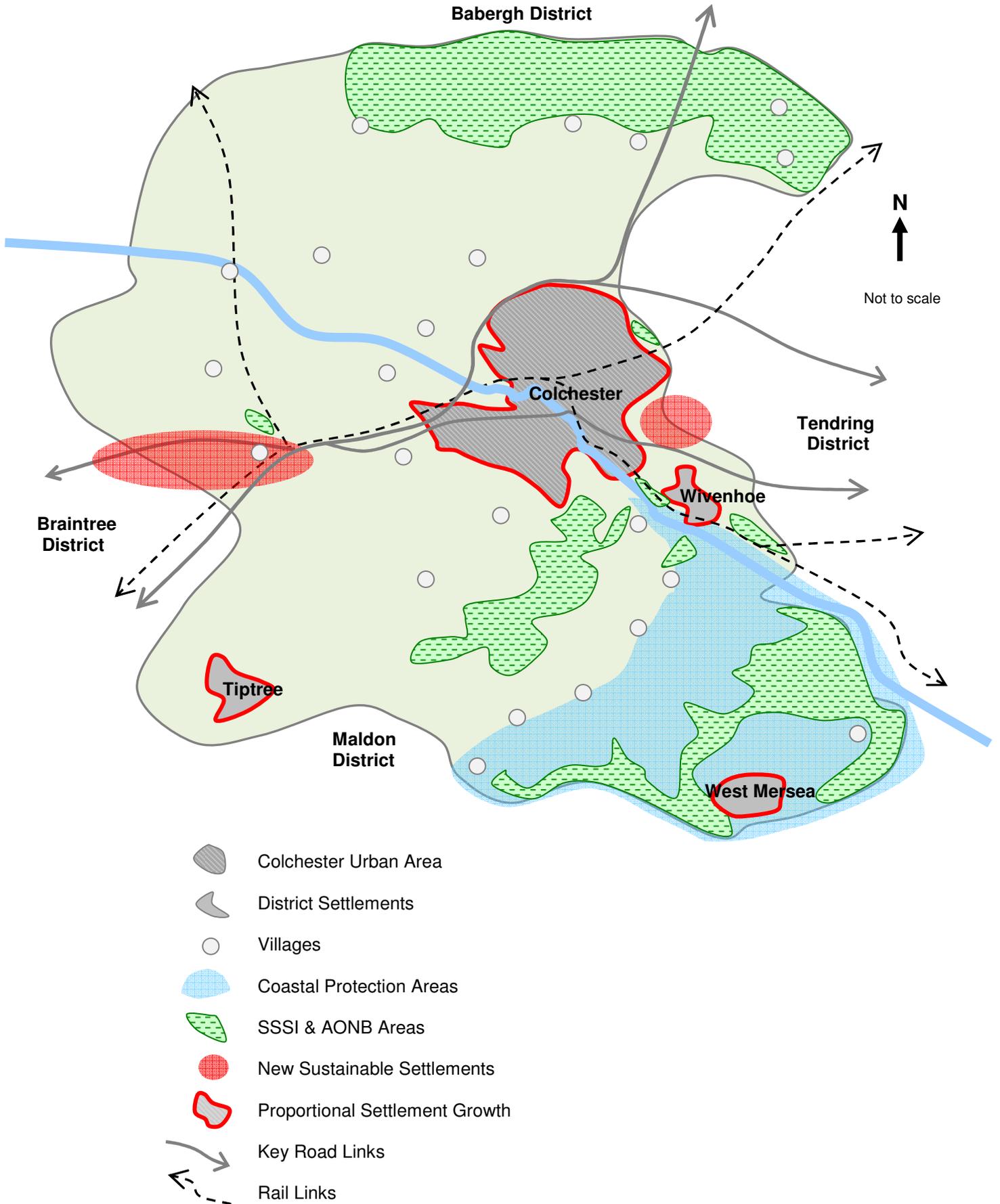
In addition to an extension to the north, other urban development in and around the existing urban area

Proportional expansion of Rural District Centres – Wivenhoe, Tiptree and West Mersea

A proportional element of rural growth across the Borough's villages

# Options 1A and 1B

Diagram for indicative purposes only



## **Options 1A and 1B**

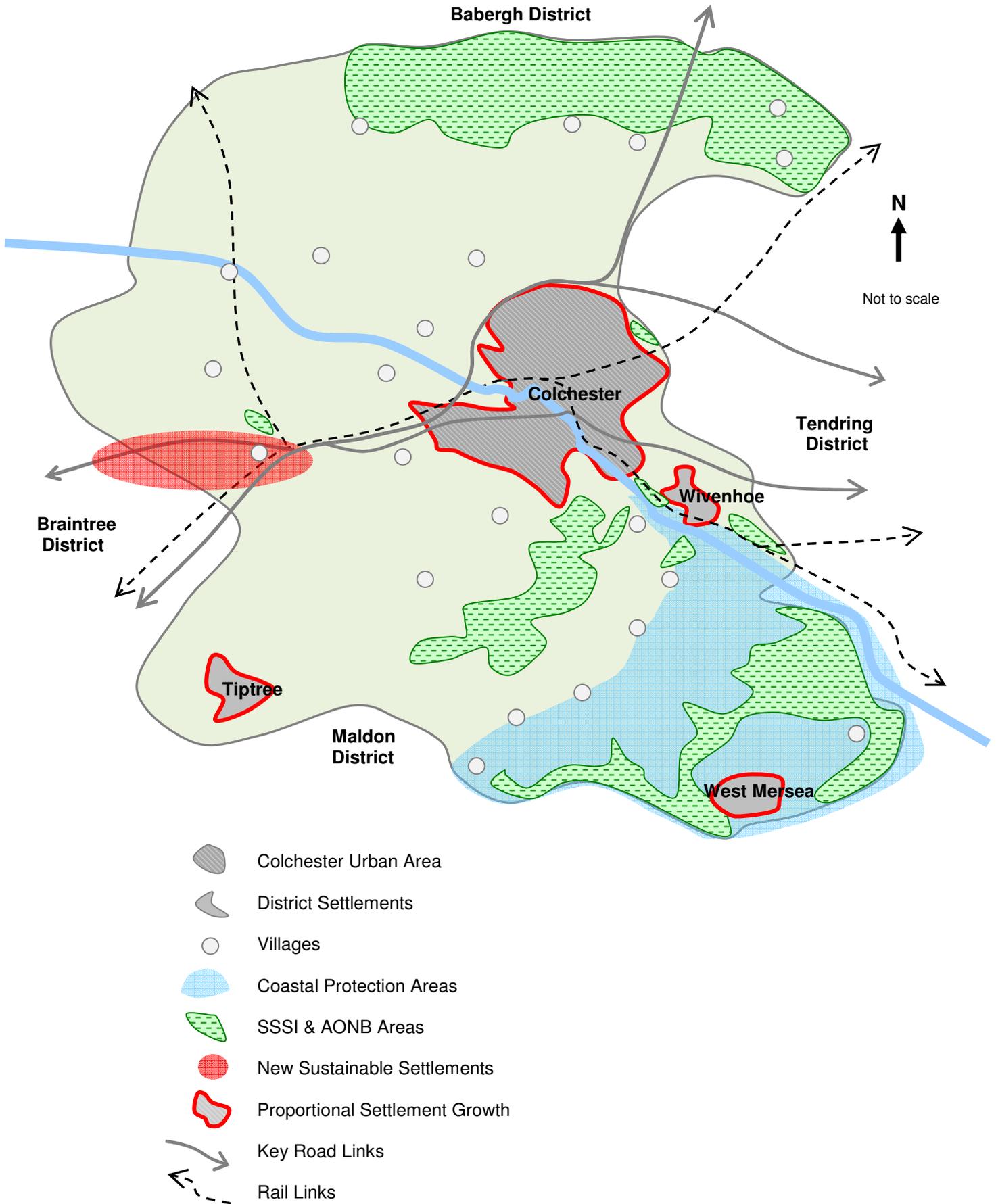
### **Description**

This option involves the development of two sustainable settlements; development to the west would be likely to be larger than development to the east, due to the land constraints on the east. Early estimates are that a development to the west could potentially accommodate in the region of 15,000 homes in the longer term (approximately 7,500 to contribute towards Colchester's housing supply and the same for Braintree) and a development to the east could potentially accommodate in the region of 6,000 dwellings (approximately 3,000 to contribute towards Colchester's housing supply and the same for Tendring), but clearly these figures would be subject to analysis and testing if options 1A or 1B were identified as the preferred option. It is important to remember that these figures would be shared by both authorities on either side of the border, so the total number of homes that the developments could potentially accommodate to contribute towards Colchester's housing numbers would be expected to be approximately half of the total, although this would be subject to discussion and agreement between the respective authorities.

As with all the options, Options 1A and 1B would also comprise development of sites in and around the existing urban area, as well as proportional increases in Rural District Centres. The settlements currently designated as Rural District Centres are Tiptree, West Mersea and Wivenhoe. The difference between options A and B is that option B allows for a proportion of growth of the Borough's villages (as is the case for all sites, this would be subject to site assessment and Sustainability Appraisal); Option A does not include this option for the expansion of villages.

# Options 2A and 2B

Diagram for indicative purposes only



## **Options 2A and 2B**

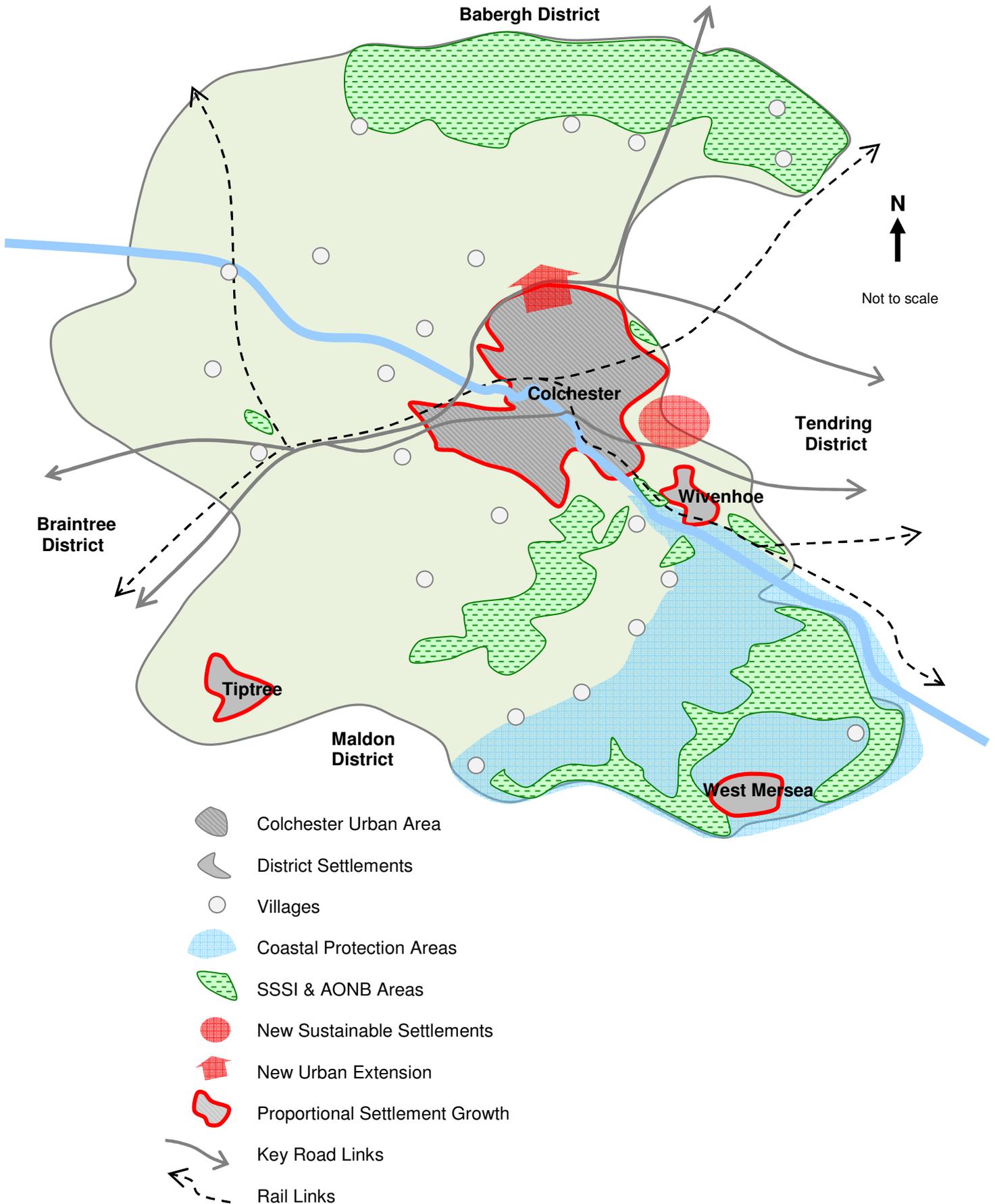
### **Description**

This option involves the development of a sustainable settlement to the west of the town, crossing the border with Braintree. Early estimates are that a development to the west could potentially accommodate in the region of 15,000 homes in the longer term (approximately 7,500 to contribute towards Colchester's housing supply and the same for Braintree), but this figure would be subject to analysis and testing if options 2A or 2B were identified as the preferred option. It is important to remember that the dwellings figure would be shared by both authorities, so the total number of homes that the development could potentially accommodate to contribute towards Colchester's housing numbers would be expected to be approximately half of the total, although this would be subject to discussion and agreement between the two authorities.

As with all the options, Options 2A and 2B would also comprise development of sites in and around the existing urban area, as well as proportional increases in Rural District Centres. The difference between options A and B is that option B allows for a proportion of growth of the Borough's villages (as is the case for all sites, this would be subject to site assessment and Sustainability Appraisal); Option A does not include this option for the expansion of villages.

# Options 3A and 3B

Diagram for indicative purposes only



## **Options 3A and 3B**

### **Description**

This option involves the development of a sustainable settlement to the east of the town, crossing the border with Tendring. Early estimates are that a development to the east could potentially accommodate in the region of 6,000 homes, but this figure would be subject to analysis and testing if options 3A or 3B were identified as the preferred option. It is important to remember that the dwellings figure would be shared by both authorities, so the total number of homes that the development could potentially accommodate to contribute towards Colchester's housing numbers is expected to be approximately half of the total, subject to discussion and agreement between the two authorities.

Options 3A and 3B also include an extension to the town, north of the A12. In order to achieve the numbers likely to be required in order to meet the objectively assessed need, it is likely that this would need to accommodate in the region of 3,000 new dwellings. As with the sustainable settlement, this would be subject to analysis and testing if options 3A or 3B were identified as the preferred option.

As with all the options, Options 3A and 3B would also comprise development of sites in and around the existing urban area, as well as proportional increases in Rural District Centres. The difference between options A and B is that option B allows for a proportion of growth of the Borough's villages (as is the case for all sites, this would be subject to site assessment and Sustainability Appraisal); Option A does not include this option for the expansion of villages.

## **Information on specific issues raised by the options**

### **Duty to Cooperate**

Options 1A and 1B are the options most likely to satisfy the duty to cooperate. This is because these options allow for cross-boundary development on both the east and the west of the Borough, meaning that it can jointly contribute to the fulfilment of the growth requirements of Colchester, Tendring and Braintree local authorities. In the event that the other authorities are unable to identify other sustainable options for development, it may be necessary to develop on both the east and west borders in order to satisfy the duty to cooperate. Options 1A and 1B would ensure that the duty could be satisfied in this respect.

There is a risk that Options 2A and 2B could fail to satisfy the duty to cooperate in the event that Tendring District Council had evidence to demonstrate that there was a strategic need to jointly accommodate growth across the Colchester/Tendring border. In the event that there is a strategic need for cross-boundary development to the east, then, under the duty to cooperate, Colchester Borough Council would need to reconsider its growth option in order to ensure that it could demonstrate that the duty to cooperate had been satisfied at examination.

There is a risk that Options 3A and 3B could fail to satisfy the duty to cooperate if Braintree District Council had evidence to demonstrate that there was a strategic need to jointly accommodate growth across the Colchester/Braintree border. In the event that there is a strategic need for cross-boundary development to the west, then, under the duty to cooperate, Colchester Borough Council would need to reconsider its growth option in order to ensure that it could demonstrate that the duty to cooperate had been satisfied at examination.

### **Five year land supply**

In relation to Options 1A and 1B, in order to ensure that a rolling five year land supply can be maintained, it will be important for the Council to ensure that a sufficient range of smaller sites are allocated in addition to the two sustainable settlements. This is because large developments can take longer to come forward, with more complications and issues to be dealt with before development can begin. Even once development has begun, larger sites can only support the delivery of a limited number of dwellings per year. The allocation of a range of smaller sites will help ensure that this does not pose a threat to the Council's rolling five year land supply.

In terms of Options 2A and 2B, with such a large proportion of the total land supply being tied up in one wider site - a completely new settlement, there could be a point in the plan period where there was potentially a risk that the Council could struggle to maintain a five year land supply. This is due to the lead-in time required for a large and completely new settlement, before housing could start coming forward. If this was the preferred option, the Council would need to ensure that there was a sufficient supply of smaller sites, to avoid problems with the maintenance of a rolling five year land supply.

In relation to option 3A and 3B, it will be important for the Council to ensure that a sufficient range of smaller sites are allocated in addition to the large extension to the urban area and the new sustainable settlement. This is because large developments can take longer to come forward, with more complications and issues to be dealt with before development can begin. Even once development has started, larger sites can

only support the delivery of a limited number of dwellings per year. The allocation of a range of smaller sites will help ensure that this does not pose a threat to the Council's five year land supply.

### **Public transport infrastructure**

Public transport needs to be affordable, and greater innovation is needed so that developments incorporate a public transport service from the outset. Bus operation needs to be given greater priority to overcome traffic congestion. The network needs upgrading and measures introduced that make using the network easier such as information, cashless transactions and transferable ticketing. Good walking routes are important to access public transport.

In terms of the development of a new settlement to the west, the railway station at Marks Tey provides a great opportunity and should be used as a focal point for growth. Additional capacity improvements would be required at the station to allow for growth and to create a much improved passenger transport interchange for public transport, walking and cycling. Capacity and journey time improvements have been identified for the Great Eastern Mainline in the Anglia Rail Study. A new bus network would be needed for any new settlement on the west. A new development should have access to a new Park and Ride facility in west Colchester.

On the east, the rail line from Clacton-on-Sea/Walton-on-the-Naze to Colchester has capacity to accommodate growth. However, access to the rail line is difficult and the nearest stations are Wivenhoe and the Hythe. Larger scale sustainable development in the east would provide a good opportunity to create a new public transport system linking the development area, the University and the existing urban area of Colchester. The system should combine a high frequency quality rapid transit system, linking into new and/or improved rail stations, an improved transport interchange, and an eastern park and ride site.

In the north, existing bus services are limited and would need to be enhanced. With the construction of the NAR busway new rapid services could be developed to serve this area through to the hospital, railway station and the town centre. Colchester Station would be the nearest train station and access to the station from development in the north would be served by bus.

Urban development has the potential to make the best use of the existing network of public transport services as long as it is accessible and frequent. The current network is based around serving the town centre which is constrained by limited capacity, congestion and air quality issues.

In relation to Rural District Centres, bus service improvements linking new development to the town centre and key services would be needed. The level of new growth in the Rural District Centres will influence the extent to which bus services can be expanded to meet the cost of the additional services in terms of user numbers. In terms of access to rail in the Rural District Centres, Marks Tey and Wivenhoe are on the rail line and improved access to the station would be important at these locations, along with improvements to the level of service and the availability of car parking.

In relation to the Borough's villages, much of the public transport network is supported by public subsidy. Service provision is subject to changes by the operator with a risk

that there would be no replacement service if the change resulted in a loss of service. Community Transport type services could meet some of the need, but these rely on volunteer drivers and grant funding.

### **Road infrastructure**

For any new development on the west, external road movements would be heavily reliant on improvements to the A12 and the A120. The A120 is currently a single carriageway trunk road carrying 23,000 vehicles per day between Marks Tey and Braintree, and serves as access to existing villages including Marks Tey. It has been identified for further investigation in the Highways Agency Route Based Strategy. This route requires substantial investment to perform its role as a trunk road and support economic growth across the Haven Gateway sub region.

Any proposal for growth to the west would require capacity improvements to the A12 which is already at capacity with 90,000 vehicles per day using the section to the east of Marks Tey. Growth in this location would also require improvements to the A120 between the A12 and Braintree, and to the A120 junction with the A12. This would allow for improved access to Marks Tey train station and would help alleviate through traffic from the existing village. Any improvements to these routes must include measures that enable pedestrians and cyclists to cross these routes safely, and maintain good access to key services and facilities.

In relation to any development on the east it is likely that development in this location would impact on the section of the A120 east of Colchester which carries 34,200 vehicles per day. It is also likely to impact on the A12 Junction 29 Crown Interchange, which provides the main access point for vehicles into north east Colchester and to the North Colchester Business Park. Development will also impact on the local road network in Colchester, especially on the A133 Clingoe Hill (carrying 30,000 vehicles per day), the A133/A134 Greenstead Roundabout along Colne Causeway and St Andrews Avenue. The package of public transport measures associated with new development would be used to help control traffic impact. The development may predicate the need for a new road to link together the A120 and the A133 to allow a new vehicle access to the development and the University.

In terms of development to the north, the A134 crosses the A12 to the south of Great Horkesley and carries 8,500 vehicles per day. The other existing road crossings are unclassified roads - Boxted Road and Severalls Lane. These routes would need to be upgraded. Access to the A12 would be via Junction 28 and/or Junction 29 Crown interchange. Measures would be needed to restrict vehicle movement northwards towards the designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

In relation to the roads in the urban area, traffic did not increase from 2001 to 2011, despite the level of growth delivered during that period. This reflects changes in lifestyles and working patterns, such as more people working from home. Despite this, in peak hours, the road network across the urban area suffers from congestion. The performance of junctions is limited by the high peak demands, the complexity of movements and interaction between junctions. This congestion is perceived to restrict the economic performance of Colchester; impacts on individuals' health through poor air quality and the high traffic volumes deter the use of alternative forms of transport. The cumulative impact from development adds to this congestion. Without significant urban

land purchase it will only be possible for smaller scale improvements to be made at certain junctions, through better traffic management.

In the Rural District Centres, even though smaller in volume, there is greater and necessary use of the car for travel to work, typically 65%. Growth in the Rural District Centres would result in more use of the B road network and some lower level roads to access the main A road network. Park and Ride could be used to help manage the impact of rural car trips on urban area congestion.

In relation to new development in the Borough's villages, there is little congestion, but there would be a reliance on the smaller roads to gain access to the A road network.

## **GROWTH OPTIONS / DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

### **Key Issues**

- pp) Determining the broad locations to accommodate the Borough's required level of growth.
- qq) Allocation of sufficient land to accommodate the objectively assessed housing need.
- rr) Allocation of a sufficient variety of sites in order to maintain a five year land supply throughout the Plan period.
- ss) Provision of the infrastructure required to support development.

### **Questions**

- 29. Which option do you think would form the most appropriate strategy for the growth of the Borough and why?
- 30. Are there other reasonable/realistic options which could meet the necessary requirements (including their ability to accommodate the objectively assessed need and ensure the maintenance of a five year housing supply) that you think we have missed and would provide a more preferable option?
- 31. Should any new sustainable settlement aspire to the Garden City principles?
- 32. Should we look to have high densities if possible, if so, where do you think higher densities would be appropriate and why?

These are the final questions in the Paper; please return to page 7 to consider the overarching questions set out in the Introduction section (questions 3-5).

## GLOSSARY

This glossary of terms is only intended to provide a guide. It is not a statement of the law, nor does it make any claim to be an official definition.

**Affordable Housing** – This is broken down into two sub-categories: *social housing* where rent levels are set in line with the Government’s rent influencing regime and *intermediate housing*: a mix of low cost home ownership products (e.g. shared ownership) and other reduced-cost rental products primarily in the form of key worker housing.

**Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)** – An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty contains landscape of national importance as designated by the Government on advice from Natural England.

**Biodiversity** - “Biodiversity is the variability among living organisms from all sources including, among other things, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems, and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes the diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems” (EU Convention on Biological Diversity Definition).

**Brownfield Site** (also known as **Previously Developed Land**) – Previously developed land that is unused or may be available for development. It includes both vacant and derelict land and land currently in use with known potential for redevelopment. It excludes land that was previously developed where the remains have blended into the landscape over time.

**Community Facilities** – Buildings or areas which enable a variety of local activity to take place including, but not limited to, the following:

- Schools, Universities and other educational facilities
- Libraries and community centres
- Doctors surgeries, medical centres and hospitals
- Museums and art galleries
- Child care centres
- Sport and recreational facilities
- Youth clubs
- Playgrounds
- Places of worship
- Emergency services

Some community activities can also be provided via privately run facilities (e.g. Public houses and village shops).

**Duty to Cooperate** – The duty to cooperate is a legal requirement which obliges all local planning authorities to cooperate with a range of public bodies on issues of a strategic nature, including housing provision.

**Green Links** – Areas of land which are a vital part of the public realm. Green links provide attractive, safe and accessible spaces which contribute to positive social, economic and environmental benefits, improving public health, wellbeing and quality of life. Green links also provide the opportunity for sustainable travel between areas and are also rich in biodiversity. Strategic green links provide a buffer between urban areas and ensure these areas do not become one.

**Greenfield Site** – Land which has never been built on before or where the remains of any structure or activity have blended into the landscape over time.

**Employment Sites** – Sites within the Borough that are considered appropriate for uses which fall within the B1, B2 and B8 Class.

**Heritage Asset** – A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. Heritage asset includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing).

**Infrastructure** – The basic facilities, services, and installations needed for the functioning of the community, such as transportation and communications systems, water and power lines, and public institutions including schools and post offices etc.

**Local Development Scheme (LDS)** – This is the project plan for a three year period for the production of all documents that will comprise the Local Plan.

**Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)** – A body, designated by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, established for the purpose of creating or improving the conditions for economic growth in an area. The relevant LEP for Colchester Borough is the South East LEP.

**Local Plan** – The plan for the future development of the local area, drawn up by the local planning authority in consultation with the community.

**Local Wildlife Site** – Non-statutory designation for a site of county-wide significance for wildlife or geology that is afforded special protection through the Local Plan.

**Mixed Use Development** – A well-integrated mix of land uses (retail, employment, leisure and other service uses) with decent homes of different types and tenures to support a range of household sizes, ages and incomes.

**National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** – Government planning policy which replaces a large number of Planning Policy Guidance notes and Planning Policy Statements with one single document. It sets out new planning requirements and objectives in relation to issues such as housing, employment, transport and the historic and natural environment amongst others.

**Neighbourhood Centre** – Centres are mixed use places where we shop, work, learn, relax and live. A Neighbourhood Centre is a collection of local shops, services and community facilities at the centre of both villages and urban neighbourhoods. Neighbourhood Centres could range from a small parade of shops through to larger commercial areas providing a variety of services and facilities.

**Neighbourhood Plan** – A plan prepared by a Parish Council, Neighbourhood Forum, or other locally constituted community group, for a particular neighbourhood.

**Objectively Assessed Need** – This is the full housing need and demand within an area normally based upon population and housing market trends.

**Planning Gain** – the principle of a developer agreeing to provide additional benefits or safeguards, often for the benefit of the community, usually in the form of related development supplied at the developer's expense.

**Previously Developed Land (PDL)** (also known as **Brownfield land**) - Previously developed land that is unused or may be available for development. It includes both vacant and derelict land and land currently in use with known potential for redevelopment. It excludes land that was previously developed where the remains have blended into the landscape over time.

**Ramsar Site** – An area identified by international agreement on endangered habitats.

**Rural Diversification** (also known as **Farm Diversification**) – The alternative use of land or buildings which were once used for farming purposes or rural activity such as grain store, stables or poultry shed. The Local Plan definition is “alternative use of land or buildings that remains within the farming unit in the ownership of the farmer and run from the existing house.

**Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)** – Sites designated by Natural England under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

**Spatial Planning** – “Spatial planning goes beyond traditional land use planning to bring together and integrate policies for the development and use of land with other policies and programmes which influence the nature of places and how they function. This will include policies which can impact on land use, for example, by influencing the demands on or needs for development, but which are not capable of being delivered solely or mainly through the granting of planning permission and may be delivered through other means.” (PPS 1 ODPM, 2004, p3).

**Special Area of Conservation (SAC)** – A site of European Community importance designated by the member states, where necessary conservation measures are applied for the maintenance or restoration, at favourable conservation status, of the habitats and/or species for which the site is designated.

**Special Protection Area (SPA)** – A site designated under the Birds Directive by the member states where appropriate steps are taken to protect the bird species for which the site is designated.

**Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)** – A document produced by the Council to add further detailed guidance and information on a particular subject such as Affordable Housing or Open Space, Sport and Recreational Facilities. An SPD is subject to a formal consultation period and then is used as a material consideration when determining planning applications.

**Sustainability Appraisal (SA)** – An appraisal of the economic, social and environmental effects of a plan from the outset of the preparation process, so that decisions can be made that accord with sustainable development.

**Sustainable Communities** – Places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. They meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, are sensitive to

their environment, and contribute to a high quality of life. They are safe and inclusive, well planned, built and run, and offer equality of opportunity and good services for all.

**Sustainable Construction** – The name given to building in an energy efficient way. The incorporation of many new technologies and energy saving techniques into a building can dramatically reduce the CO2 emissions and carbon foot print of a building. Initiatives include grey water recycling systems, solar panels, home recycling, wind turbines and ground water heating systems.

**Sustainable Development** - Development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

**Sustainable Transport** – sustainable transport refers to walking, cycling and public transport, including trains and buses. Sustainable transport is transport that makes efficient use of natural resources and minimises pollution. In particular, sustainable transport seeks to minimise the emissions of carbon dioxide as well as nitrogen oxides, sulphur oxides, carbon monoxide and particulates, all of which affect local air quality.

**Town Centre** - The town centre is cultural and commercial heart of the Borough. Colchester's town centre includes the historic core of Colchester, as well as the surrounding fringe areas that are characterised by a mix of retail, residential, office, community facilities and other uses often found in other centres.





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