

Colchester Borough Local Plan Issues and Options Sustainability Appraisal Report: Non-technical summary

Introduction

Under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended), Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is mandatory for Local Plans. SA is about asking at various intervals during plan preparation: “how sustainable is my plan?”. A range of objectives are established and all options are assessed against these objectives to compare their environmental, economic and social effects and ultimately to assess how sustainable an option is.

In addition to SA, Local Plans must also undergo a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in accordance with European Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes. The SA incorporates the requirements of the SEA Directive.

A Scoping Report was prepared and consulted upon for five weeks between 1 July and 5 August 2014.

We welcome your comments on this SA Report. Please email comments to: planning.policy@colchester.gov.uk. The closing date for this consultation is 27 February 2015.

Review of relevant plans, programmes & sustainability objectives

A review of relevant plans and programmes was undertaken. The list of documents reviewed is outlined below.

International

Review of the European Sustainable Development Strategy (2009)
European Community Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 (2012)
Environment 2010: Our Future, Our Choice (2003)

National

Adapting to Climate Change: Ensuring Progress in Key Sectors (2013)
National Planning Policy Framework (2012)
National Planning Practice Guide (2014)
DECC National Energy Policy Statement EN1 (2011)
DCLG: An Introduction to Neighbourhood Planning (2012)
JNCC/Defra UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework (2012)
Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England’s wildlife and ecosystems services (2011)
Mainstreaming Sustainable Development (2011)
National policy for travellers (2012)
PPS 5 Historic Environment Guide (2010)
Flood and Water Management Act (2009)
Safeguarding our soils (2009)

Community Infrastructure Levy Guidance (April 2013)
UK Marine Policy Statement, HM Government (2011)
Planning Policy Statement 10: Planning for Sustainable Waste Management (2011)
The Rights of Way Circular 1/09, Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, October 2009
Encouraging Sustainable Travel, Highways Agency
A12/ A120 Route based strategy, Highways Agency (2013)
East of England Route Strategy Evidence Report, Highways Agency (2014)

Regional

Haven Gateway: Programme of Development: A Framework for Growth, 2008 -2017 (2007)
Haven Gateway: Integrated Development Plan (2008)
South East LEP Investment and Funding (March/April 2014)
Anglian Water Business Plan (2015-2020) (2012)
Draft Water Resource Management Plan (2014 – 2039) (2014)
River Basement Management Plan (2014/2015) (2009)
Catchment Abstraction Management Plan
Haven Gateway Water Cycle Study: Stage 1 Report (2008)
Atkins A120 Wider Economic Impacts Study (2008)

County

Commissioning school places in Essex 2013/18 (2014)
ECC developer contributions document (2010)
Education contributions guideline supplement
ECC Corporate Plan 2013 – 2017
Vision for Essex 2013 – 2017: Where innovation brings prosperity (2013)
Corporate Outcomes Framework 2014 - 2018 Essex County Council (2014)
Essex and Southend Waste Local Plan (2001)
Essex and Southend-on-Sea Replacement Waste Local Plan (expected to be adopted 2016)
Essex Minerals Local Plan (2014)
Colchester draft Surface Water Management Plan (2014)
Essex Biodiversity Action Plan (2011)
Essex Transport Strategy: the Local Transport Plan for Essex (2011)
Highway Authority's Development Management Policies (2011)
Economic Growth Strategy (2012)
Integrated County Strategy (2010)
Essex Wildlife Trust's Living Landscapes
Combined Essex Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy (2013)
Essex Design Guide (2005)
North Essex Catchment Flood Management Plan (2009)
Essex and South Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan (second phase) (2011)
Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Management Plan 2010 – 2015

Essex Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan, Essex County Council
Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for Essex 2007 – 2032
(2008)

Local Flood Risk Management Strategy, Essex County Council (2013)

Local

Creative Colchester Strategy & Action Plan (2012)
Colchester Borough Council Strategic Plan 2012-2015 (2012)
PPG17 Open Space , Sport & Recreation (2008)
Safer Colchester Partnership: Strategic Assessment of Crime and Annual
Partnership Plan 2012-2013 (2012)
Townscape Character Assessment (2006)
Landscape Character Assessment (2006)
Scott Wilson Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2008)
Affordable Housing SPD (2011)
Communities Facilities SPD (updated 2012)
Better Town Centre SPD (2012)
Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (2011)
Colchester Borough Council Housing Strategy (2012)
Local Air Quality Management Progress Report (2013)
Colchester Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2014-2019 draft (2014)
Colchester Borough Council's Comprehensive Climate Risk Assessment
(2010)
Colchester Borough Council Landscape Strategy (2013)
Water Cycle Study (2008)
Colchester Cycling Strategy SPD (2012)
Core Strategy (2008)
Development Policies DPD (2010)
Site Allocations Policies DPD (2010)
Habitat Regulations Assessment Survey and Monitoring Programme, Final
Report, Colchester Borough Council (December 2013)
Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) (2014)
Retail and Town Centre Uses Study Colchester Borough Council: Retail
Update 2013 (2013)
Colchester Borough Green Infrastructure Strategy (2011)
Colchester Borough Historic Environment Characterisation Project, Essex
County Council, 2009

Neighbouring authorities

Tendring economic development strategy (2013)
Tendring's SHMA (2013)
Braintree's Adopted Core Strategy (2011)
Babergh Adopted Core Strategy and Adopted Policies (2011 – 2031) Local
Plan Document (2014)
Braintree District Core Strategy (2011)
Braintree's SHMA (2014)
Maldon's SHMA (2014)
Braintree District Economic Development Prospectus 2013/2026 (2013)

Baseline Environment

Data from the 2011 Census put the Borough population at approximately 173,100 with a density of 5.3 people per hectare. The predominant ethnic group is White British with 87.5% of the population describing themselves as such. The ethnic minority population was 12.5% which in terms of numbers equates to a population of approximately 21,500 people. This is lower than the national average of 20.2% but higher than the Essex average of 9.2%.

The whole population of Colchester is expected to grow by 15.7% (from 2011 Census numbers) to just over 200,000 by 2021. Recent decades have seen a trend towards an ageing population in Colchester and this will continue into the next decade. The percentage of over 65s in Colchester is slightly less than the county and regional percentages. The number of people aged over 65 years is projected to increase by 37.6% between 2012-2032. Under 5s will account for a very similar proportion of the population in 2021 at 7.4% compared to 7.5% in 2013.

According to the 2011 Census there were 71,634 households in Colchester. 10% were 1 bed, 27% were 2 bedrooms, 39% of households were 3 bedrooms, 17% were 4 bedrooms and just under 5% were 5 bedrooms or more. Of these, 66.3% were privately owned; 13.5% socially rented; 18.7% privately rented; 0.5% in shared ownership; and 1% living rent-free. County wide 71.4% of homes were privately owned in 2011. Average household size was 2.3 people in 2011, which is slightly less than the county, regional and national averages of 2.4 people. The average number of rooms was 5.5 according to the 2011 Census.

Under current policies an average of 830 dwellings are expected to be built in the Borough each year. A net of 617 homes were built between 1 April 2012 and 31 March 2013. A net of 3870 dwellings were built over the past five years (2008/9 – 2012/13), which averages 774 per annum. This is higher than any other local authority in Essex. Neighbouring Tendring and Braintree districts had an average of 278 and 339 completions per annum respectively over the past five years. The net number of completions in Essex over the past five years was 20291, which averages at 4058 per annum.

133 units of affordable housing were completed between April 2012 and March 2013. A total of 76 were classed as affordable rent, 10 intermediate tenure (shared ownership) and 47 units were built through the Homebuy Direct scheme which offers equity loans towards the purchase of a new build home on selected developments.

The average household price in April 2013 in Colchester was £202,717. This illustrates a 1.7% decrease from £205,666 in April 2012. The 2007 Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) observed that few households aspiring to home ownership had access to enough money to purchase a home in Colchester, and annual updates since 2007 have not found any change to this position.

The 2014 SHMA found that meeting the affordable accommodation requirements of families and those with priority needs should be as important as the larger scale numerical need for smaller units for single and couple households. It recommended continuing to develop housing strategies to make best use of the existing housing stock by providing positive incentives to improve the turnover of houses to address the needs of overcrowded and waiting list families to address the under occupation of around 800 social housing units across the Borough. It also recommended that new social housing should be closely linked to the needs of older tenants and in resolving the under occupation of family sized properties.

In terms of older persons housing the 2014 SHMA found that there is an inextricable link between ageing and frailty and the forecast rise in the retired population means that the housing and support needs of older and disabled households is important to consider at a strategic level. In line with the strategic priorities already established, resources should focus on the provision of home based support services and adaptations for older people living at home in both social rented, private rented and owner occupied housing.

The likely evolution without a Local Plan would be: planning by appeal, very limited numbers of new affordable homes, dispersed patterns of development that would increase the need to travel, failure to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change, loss of biodiversity, infrastructure shortfall, adverse impacts on landscape character, increased risk of flooding, adverse impacts on wildlife and recreation, pressure on school places and adverse impact on the historic environment.

Key Sustainability Issues

The following is a list of social issues facing Colchester Borough:

- The provision of housing to meet local needs.
- Meeting the demand for affordable housing, including allocation of sites for gypsies and travellers.
- Ensuring that Colchester does not lose its identity.
- Matching the population growth with economic growth within the Borough.
- Unsustainable pressure on all services across Essex, particularly health and care services.
- Ensuring that school places, including early years, are available in the right locations. It is also important to ensure that there is good accessibility to schools via safe direct routes by sustainable modes of transport.
- Areas of deprivation.
- Poor air quality.
- Rural isolation.
- Access to recreation, leisure and open space, including a well connected public rights of way network.

- Tackling fear of crime.

The following is a list of economic issues facing Colchester Borough:

- Attracting investment into those parts of the local economy that offer the greatest potential growth while helping existing businesses to overcome barriers to success.
- The rate of job creation is less than the rate of growth of the working age population.
- If Colchester's District Centres continue to expand this could have an adverse impact on the Town Centre.
- There is a need to support the revitalisation of the rural economy including diversification and training schemes.
- Improved transportation and attractive travel links are a major issue for Colchester and it is essential that planning for transport is an integral part of the Local Plan to reduce congestion into and around Colchester.
- Supporting the growth plans of the University of Essex.

The following is a list of environmental issues facing Colchester Borough:

- Maintaining and enhancing the natural and built environment of the Borough (including the historic and built heritage).
- Preservation of countryside areas and strategic green gaps between settlements.
- Protecting the setting of important landscapes, particularly the Dedham Vale AONB.
- There is pressure for the development of greenfield land in order to meet Colchester's objectively assessed housing need.
- Climate change is increasing the magnitude and frequency of intense rainfall events that cause flooding and the risk of flooding from the River Colne is also heightened by increased winter precipitation.
- Climate change is leading to more frequent droughts, with consequent reduced water availability.
- Climate change is leading to higher average temperatures and more extremely hot days.
- Water quality.
- The amount of waste produced in Colchester is increasing as the Borough grows, and at the same time the land available to dispose of this waste (landfill sites) is reducing.
- Rise in carbon dioxide emissions from domestic, commercial and transport sources.
- Large scale renewable energy schemes.

Sustainability Framework

The SA Framework, below, is used to appraise options and compare sustainability effects.

Colchester Borough Council Local Plan Issues and Options Sustainability Appraisal Report:
Non-technical summary

Objectives	Assessment Criteria	Indicators	SEA Themes
1. To provide a sufficient level of housing to meet the objectively assessed needs of the Borough to enable people to live in a decent, safe home which meets their needs at a price they can afford	Will it deliver the number of houses needed to support the existing and growing population?	The number of net additional dwellings	Material assets Climatic factors
	Will it provide more affordable homes across the Borough?	Affordable housing completions	
	Will it deliver a range of housing types to meet the diverse needs of the Borough?	Percentage of residential completions that are two or three bedroom properties	
	Will it deliver well designed and sustainable housing?	Number of zero-carbon homes completed	
2. To ensure that development is located sustainably and makes efficient use of land	Will it promote regeneration?	Number of new homes completed at ward level within Growth/Regeneration Areas Amount of new employment development completed at ward level in Growth/Regeneration Areas	Material assets Landscape
	Will it reduce the need for development on greenfield land?	Percentage of new and converted dwellings on previously developed land	
	Will it provide good accessibility by a range of modes of transport?	% of new development within 30 minutes of community facilities	
	Will densities make efficient use of land?	Amount of development > 30 dwellings per hectare	
	Will a mix of uses be provided?		
3. To achieve a prosperous and sustainable economy that improves opportunities for local businesses to thrive, creates new jobs and improves the vitality of centres	Will it improve the delivery of a range of employment opportunities to support the growing population?	Amount of floorspace developed for employment, sq ^m	Material assets Population Cultural heritage
	Will it maintain an appropriate balance between different types of retail uses and other activities in the Borough's centres?	Amount of completed retail, office and leisure development delivered in the town centre Amount of completed retail, office and leisure development across the Borough	
	Will it support business innovation, diversification, entrepreneurship and changing economies?	Amount of floorspace developed for employment, sq ^m	
	Will it support tourism, heritage and the arts?	Amount of completed retail, office and leisure development delivered in the town centre Amount of completed	

Colchester Borough Council Local Plan Issues and Options Sustainability Appraisal Report:
Non-technical summary

		retail, office and leisure development	
	Will it help sustain the rural economy?	Number of jobs created in rural areas	
4. To achieve more sustainable travel behaviour, reduce the need to travel and reduce congestion	Will it reduce the need to travel?	% of new residential development within 30 minutes of public transport time of a GP, hospital, primary and secondary school, employment and a major retail centre	Population Climatic factors Air Human health
	Will the levels of sustainable travel increase?	Percentage of journeys to work by walking and cycling and percentage of journeys to work by public transport	
	Will it improve sustainable transport infrastructure and linkages?	Percentage of journeys to work by walking and cycling and percentage of journeys to work by public transport	
5. To build stronger, more resilient sustainable communities with better education and social outcomes	Will it provide equitable access to education, recreation and community facilities?	Financial contributions towards community facilities	Population Human health Biodiversity Flora Fauna
	Will it place pressure on school places, including early years?		
	Will existing open spaces be protected & new open spaces be created?	Contributions received towards open space	
	Will it improve the skills of the Borough's population?	Number of people qualified to level 2 Number of people qualified to level 4	
6. To improve and reduce inequalities in health and wellbeing and tackle crime issues by keeping our communities safe and promoting community cohesion	Will it reduce actual crime and fear of crime?	All crime – number of crimes per 1000 residents per annum	Population Human health
	Will it provide equitable access to employment opportunities?	% of new residential development within 30 minutes of public transport time of a GP, hospital, primary and secondary school, employment and a major retail centre	
	Will it encourage healthy lifestyles?	Number of people participating in sport	
7. To conserve and enhance the townscape character, and the heritage and cultural assets of the Borough	Will it protect and enhance the heritage and cultural assets of the Borough?	Number of listed buildings demolished	Cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage
		Number of locally listed buildings demolished	
		New Conservation Area Appraisals adopted	
		New and extended Conservation Areas	

Colchester Borough Council Local Plan Issues and Options Sustainability Appraisal Report:
Non-technical summary

		Number of Buildings at Risk	
	Will it create a high quality and coherent public realm linking the town's assets and spaces; connecting the heritage and contemporary?		
	Will it protect and enhance the historic character of the Town Centre?		
8. To value, conserve and enhance the natural environment, natural resources and the biodiversity of the Borough	Will it maintain and enhance the landscape character of the borough?		Landscape Biodiversity Flora Fauna Soil Water
	Will it protect and enhance designated areas of the countryside and coastal environment?	Amount of development in designated areas Number of SSSIs in favourable condition	
	Will it protect and improve biodiversity?	Amount of development in designated areas Number of SSSIs in favourable condition Area of land offset for biodiversity	
	Will it improve environmental quality in terms of water, air and soil quality?	Quality of Rivers (number achieving ecological good status) Number of Air Quality Management Areas Contaminated land brought back into beneficial use, hectares	
9. To make efficient use of energy and reduce, reuse or recycle waste	Will it reduce pollution and greenhouse gas emissions?	Total CO ₂ emissions	Climatic factors Air
	Will it support the delivery of renewable energy schemes?	Renewable Energy Installed by Type	
	Will it help to reduce, reuse and recycle resources and minimise waste?	Amount of domestic waste recycled	
10. To reduce climate change impacts, support mitigation and encourage adaptation	Will it reduce the risk of flooding?	Number of planning permissions granted contrary to the advice of the Environment Agency on either flood defence grounds or water quality	Climatic factors Water Soil Biodiversity Flora Fauna
	Will it deliver effective SUDS and improve drainage?	Number of SUDS schemes approved by ECC	
	Will it affect the amount of water available for extraction?		

	Will it promote water efficiency and reduce water usage levels per household?	Number of zero carbon homes delivered	
	Will it improve water quality?	Number of SUDS schemes approved by ECC	

Likely significant effects of growth options

Options

There are six growth options identified in the Issues and Options Paper, which are as follows:

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

Summary

This stage of the SA has enabled the growth options included in the Issues and Options document to be compared. All options are very similar and it has been difficult to draw out differences between the options. Owing to the very strategic level and early stage in the Local Plan process it has also been difficult to have a degree of certainty over potential impacts. At this stage only very broad locations are known and the exact level and type of development is unknown. The SA does not yet make a recommendation of a preferred option, nor does it discount options from further consideration. This will be done as part of the next stage of the SA once options have been progressed, statutory consultees have commented on the options and the evidence base has developed further.

The SA has used the evidence base and past experience of planning within the Borough to accurately predict the likely effects of the six different options. Further SA work, at a more detailed level, will help to refine options and ensure that mitigation and enhancement measures are incorporated. Positively, the SA has identified important issues that will need to be addressed in developing options further, suggested mitigation and enhancement measures and suggested policies that will be needed in the Local Plan.

All options will deliver the number of houses needed to support the growing population and ensure a 15 year housing land supply. However, there is a risk with options 2A and 2B that with such a large proportion of the total land supply being tied up in one large site (the sustainable settlement to the west) which would be for a completely new settlement, that there could be a point in the plan period where the Council could struggle to maintain a 5 year land supply, as a result of the lead-in time required for a large and completely new settlement, before housing could start coming forward. The settlement to the west would also not be entirely aligned with the plan period as development of such a large scale would involve development over a period in excess of 15 years.

All options include separate settlements, which will include a mix of uses, including employment, leisure and community uses. The option of a settlement to the east is likely to deliver employment uses linked to the University of Essex. This will contribute to Colchester's economy and job market, and should help to retain skilled workers.

Wivenhoe Park, which is on the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens, is located within the broad search area for the development to the east. Development south of the A133 has the potential to adversely affect the setting of this Historic Park and Garden and it is considered that if options 1A, 1B, 3A or 3B are taken forward, land south of the A133 would be an appropriate barrier to development.

All options will lead to adverse effects on landscape character. It is likely that the landscape impact would be less severe for the development of a settlement to the west, than a development on the east and the northern urban extension. The Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) includes a sub-area of the Easthorpe Farmland Plateau, which comprises a linear settlement corridor extending westwards from the western edge of Colchester. The LCA states that the landscape character to the west of Colchester is disturbed by visual, movement and noise intrusion of cars on the A12 and frequent trains on the main line.

All options could adversely affect the integrity of the Borough's European Sites through an increase in population leading to increased recreational disturbance. This is documented in the Habitat Regulations Assessment Screening Report and an appropriate assessment will be carried out. At this stage a negative impact on the Borough's European Sites under all options cannot be ruled out.

The potential area of growth to the east includes a number of Local Wildlife Sites and a Local Nature Reserve. Owing to the extensive area covered by Wivenhoe Park, development south of the A133 would have a negative impact on biodiversity. There is concern that Thousand Acres Local Wildlife Site and Home Wood Local Wildlife Site would be adversely affected by development in this area as they are located centrally within the broad area of search. Particularly Home Wood, which has species rich ground flora. The potential area of growth to the west of Colchester includes fewer nature conservation areas than land to the east of the town. However, it includes Marks Tey Brickpit, which is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in addition to a Local Wildlife Site. SSSIs are nationally important areas of nature conservation. Development close to the SSSI has the potential to lead to adverse effects through increased levels of disturbance. The northern urban extension area of search includes two Local Wildlife sites: Langham Road Grassland and Kiln Wood, although it is likely that these sites could be avoided.

All options show generally positive impacts in relation to the provision of housing and employment and negative impacts in relation to landscape and biodiversity. The SA objectives are not weighted and are all important. However, significant weight must be given to the need to identify and allocate the Borough's objectively assessed need for housing as set out in paragraph 47 of the NPPF. If any of the options are unlikely to result in a 5 year supply of deliverable sites or a 15 year supply of developable sites they must be discounted as non-reasonable options.

District settlements

Development on the edges of all of the Borough's district settlements will result in adverse effects on landscape character. However effects as a result of development on the edge of Tiptree are likely to be less severe than development on the edge of Wivenhoe and West Mersea. Wivenhoe and West Mersea are bounded by the current coastal protection belt, which is a designation made in the existing Local Plan. The coastal protection belt exists to protect the open and rural nature of the County's undeveloped coastline.

Essex County Council has identified Mersea Island as a place which is very difficult to accommodate in terms of the provision of school places. Conversely, there may be spare capacity within Tiptree to accommodate some future growth in this location.

The Borough's Rural District Centres are all bounded in part by nature conservation sites. Expansion of the Rural District Centres will have an adverse impact on these nature conservation sites through increased levels of disturbance. The extent of the damage will depend on the amount and specific location of development. It may be possible to mitigate damage by avoiding the allocation of sites within a 15 minute walk of the nature conservation sites and provision of high quality open space. This will need to be explored as part of future work.

Owing to the sensitive environmental designations surrounding Mersea any expansion should be small scale rather than proportional. The planning guidelines from the Landscape Character Assessment must be taken into account to minimise the landscape impacts of new development.

Rural communities expansion

Housing development within rural communities could help to ensure the delivery of affordable housing across the Borough rather than this being concentrated within urban areas. However, it could have the opposite effect by reducing the number of rural exception schemes coming forward owing to landowner aspirations for predominantly market housing schemes.

Whilst proportional expansion of rural communities largely relates to housing development new housing in villages may lead to the development of new employment uses. For example, growth in one of the Borough's villages may lead to the need for additional classrooms in the local school, which would lead to short term construction jobs and full time teaching jobs.

Small scale housing development could be difficult to accommodate within existing schools. Essex County Council as the Education Authority has confirmed that there is very little existing spare capacity in the Borough's school provision in terms of primary and secondary school provision. The provision of school places could therefore be a major issue for proportional development of the Borough's rural communities.

Existing residents in the Borough's villages rely heavily on the private car owing to poor accessibility by alternative modes of transport and so development within the rural communities will not provide good accessibility by a range of modes of transport.

There are numerous Local Wildlife Sites around the Borough, which may be effected by development within the rural communities.

Mitigation and enhancement measures

It will be essential when planning the detailed design of large scale new development that education, recreation and community facilities are located at accessible locations within the site and can be conveniently accessed by foot and cycle. Sustainable transport connections should be the starting point for the design of large scale development and a range of sustainable transport infrastructure is expected.

Employment areas will need to be planned into any new settlement from the outset. Locations should be at the most appropriate locations within the settlements to provide good access by a range of modes of transport, to ensure good accessibility. Every opportunity should be taken to ensure links to the knowledge gateway as part of a development to the east. If options 1B, 2B or 3B are taken forward, consideration should be given to requiring an element of employment uses and/or services in addition to housing as part of the proportional expansion of rural settlements to provide a more significant positive impact on the rural economy.

Wherever possible new development should ensure connections to existing areas of open space, to improve the Borough's green infrastructure network. Green infrastructure has multiple benefits, including recreation, transport, habitat enhancement and flood alleviation.

There are areas of open space in the potential growth areas for the sustainable new settlements and it will be essential that no development takes place within these open spaces (e.g. Salary Brook nature reserve and Wivenhoe Park in the east and various sports grounds in the west).

If options 3A or 3B, which include an urban extension north of the A12, are taken forward it will be important to ensure that new development maintains a gap between surrounding villages to protect landscape character.

The Local Plan should address design, including sustainable design, through a specific policy. The sustainable design policy should consider including requirements relating to energy efficiency, water efficiency, renewable energy and district heating.

An open space policy should be included within the Local Plan including detail on the amount and type of open space required by development and the protection of existing open space.

Next steps

Following the close of the Issues and Options consultation on Friday 27 February, the Spatial Policy team will collate and summarise the representations received through the Issues and Options consultation, including comments to this SA Report. 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.

The SA will be used to develop Preferred Options and a SA Report will be prepared to support the draft Local Plan.