

# **Local Plan Committee**

## **Tuesday, 16 December 2014**

**Attendees:** Councillor Elizabeth Blundell (Member), Councillor John Jowers (Member), Councillor Lyn Barton (Member), Councillor Bill Frame (Chairman), Councillor Martin Goss (Deputy Chairman), Councillor Gerard Oxford (Member)

**Substitutes:** Councillor Nigel Chapman (for Councillor Andrew Ellis), Councillor Dave Harris (for Councillor Kim Naish)

### **22 Minutes of the meeting on 23 October 2014**

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 October 2014 were confirmed as a correct record.

### **23 Essex County Hospital Site Brief**

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Commercial Services seeking the Committee's agreement to the Essex County Hospital Draft Development Brief as guidance to ensure that appropriate development of the historic hospital site was encouraged to help deliver its re-use within the Lexden Conservation Area.

Simon Cairns, Planning Project Manager, presented the report and explained that the views received from two local residents have been considered in the drafting of the brief, including:

- The retention and reuse of the listed buildings on site;
- The relationship with the surrounding area;
- A perceived shortfall of car parking in the vicinity;
- The creation of a walk-in medical facility or green space for public use;
- The retention/creation of adequate parking possibly in multi-storey format to serve the development and the neighbourhood;
- The laying out of the site as a series of public gardens.

The Essex County Hospital site would be vacated by the NHS throughout 2015. The site was located in a highly sustainable location within easy walking distance of the Town Centre in a location that was well served by bus services and on a key cycle route. The floor area of existing buildings on the site and potential areas for redevelopment presented a challenge to provide design solutions that complied with adopted policies concerning parking and amenity space. Given the highly accessible location, a relaxation of parking and amenity space policies was considered justified and it was recommended

that local concerns regarding parking were addressed through off-site provision. The site was located within an area identified in the adopted local plan as being predominantly residential. Whilst mixed uses would be supported, it was acknowledged that a predominantly residential solution was likely to emerge and that this could be compatible with the character of the wider area.

The key considerations were achieving a scheme that would successfully reuse the complex of listed buildings whilst delivering an appropriate level of new build to achieve a high quality environment. The National Planning Policy Framework provided support for the re-use of brown field sites and the conservation of heritage assets in a manner proportionate to their significance. The planned relocation of remaining services in 2015 would result in the creation of a potentially vulnerable vacant site which meant it was important that a solution was achieved that delivered the strategic aims and was attractive to potential developers.

The Development Brief included the following possible options:

- Option 1      Conversion of existing buildings to residential, complemented by new build apartments and a sheltered housing scheme to the rear;
- Option 2      A residential solution with a mix of housing types;
- Option 3      A mixed residential solution that satisfies adopted parking standards

A letter on behalf of Colchester Hospital University Foundation Trust had been circulated to Councillors prior to the meeting which stated that the Trust did not wish to offer detailed comments on the Development Brief at the current time other than to refer to their own work looking into the opportunities for the site which had indicated that the site had a higher potential capacity than that identified in the Brief.

Annesley Hardy addressed the Committee pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(3). She referred to the vision and boldness captured in the development brief and she welcomed the use of the listed buildings and the green space provision on the site as anchors for the plan. The concerns expressed locally for a doctor's surgery and for sufficient car parking reflected the general problems of insufficient parking for residents. Mrs Hardy was of the view that the future development of the site needed to reflect reality and she felt Option 3, in particular, was not realistic. Crouch Street traders had been adversely affected by the removal of hospital services from the site and she felt this needed to be compensated in an alternative part of the town centre. She considered the over-riding need was to create an environment in which people wanted to live. She also questioned the design solution which included a three storey block on the basis that she did not consider this to be suitable for the site.

Ian Budge addressed the Committee pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(3). He explained that he live three doors from the Hospital site and, as such, had a strong personal interest in its future use. He referred to the recent meeting which had taken place with representatives from the Hospital Trust which had

highlighted the difference in aspirations between the Trust, which needed to get as much from the site as possible, and local residents, who wanted the site utilised fairly. He was of the view that the residents wanted strong attention paid to traffic issues which required a lower density of development, in-keeping with existing buildings on the site. He also referred to the potential for damage to the fabric of the buildings once they were left vacant and sought assurances regarding comprehensive interim security measures.

Councillor Lissimore attended and, with the consent of the Chairman addressed the Committee. She referred to the need for security on a 24 hour basis to combat potential damage to the vacant site. She also questioned the health provision for Colchester and the surrounding area due to the relocation of services from the County Hospital site and the potential for lives to suffer as a result. She was of the view that the justification for the relocation of services had not been clearly identified. She sought assurances that planning policy standards would not be relaxed in relation to the future development of the site. She favoured the option for residential development but considered this needed to be alongside adequate on-site car parking provision. She explained that the suggestion for potential parking arrangements at St Mary's car park was not a viable solution for people returning to their homes late at night and, as such, was of the view that the number of residential units needed to be limited by the number of on-site parking spaces achievable. The report acknowledged that Colchester was a town dominated by cars and she felt it was unrealistic to not provide adequate parking spaces. She referred to the future service provision at the Colchester General Hospital site and questioned whether the proposals were supported by the community. She was firmly of the view that it was not appropriate for the Hospital Trust to seek to maximise their financial gain from the site, especially given the existing opportunity to seek further justification for Hospital provision in the town as a whole.

Councillor Cope attended and, with the consent of the Chairman addressed the Committee. He welcomed the opportunity to discuss the future of the Essex County Hospital site and he considered the report to the Committee had been well prepared. He wished to speak to the Committee to represent concerns expressed by local residents who wished to maintain the character of the listed buildings on the site. The site was in a sustainable location, being close to the town centre and with important cycle links close by. However, there were concerns about the impact on traffic congestion in Lexden Road which was already significant on typical school days. Local residents considered that the proposals for parking spaces was not sufficient, bearing in mind existing parking difficulties in the roads leading from Lexden Road and there was also concern about the impact on parking facilities at the Colchester General Hospital site as a result of the relocation of services from the County Hospital site. He was of the view that the development of a hotel on the site would be welcome use of the existing building and was concerned at the pressure being exerted to utilise all available sites for residential development in order to meet the Council's projected target for housing development to meet the anticipated local need. If the site were to be used for residential purposes he considered that the design would need to be of very high quality and he suggested the

possibility of conducting an architectural competition. He considered the Hospital was a landmark site, needing to be a beacon of quality looking into the future. There would need to be very robust traffic planning so that the impact on neighbouring residents was not adverse and the introduction of a competition to secure a high quality scheme may also lead to welcome rewards in terms of mitigation proposals.

In discussion members of the Committee raised the following issues:-

- The prominence of the listed and locally listed buildings within the development brief was welcomed;
- The likely negative impact on neighbouring residents if parking allocations were no greater than one per dwelling;
- The issues surrounding the relocation of services to the General Hospital site, particularly given known parking problems;
- Whether any possibility existed for the County Hospital site to be retained for health related service provision;
- The need for parking spaces to be allocated in accordance with the Council's parking standards and acknowledgement that residents would not choose to use parking facilities in St Mary's car park;
- The Garrison site was an example of a development which had successfully reduced the parking allocation to one and fewer spaces per dwelling where the units were situated close to the town centre;
- The Dutch Quarter was another example of a residential area with Conservation Area designation without any designated parking provision;
- The potential for a hotel development would need to be weighed against the current proposals for two/three hotel developments coming to fruition on East Hill;
- The problems associated with Option 3 in the development brief where compliance with parking standards would considerably limit the sympathetic redevelopment of the site and the ability to retain the character of the site and the buildings.

In response to the discussion, the Planning Project Manager explained:

- The Council's parking policy allowed for a relaxation of provision in highly sustainable, edge of town locations and this was likely to be adhered to by an Inspector at Appeal;
- An increased parking provision would mean that it would prove difficult to retain more of the existing buildings on the site and the redevelopment was likely to be challenging from a commercial perspective;
- The mixed use option within the design brief including B1 Commercial Use may be more appropriate if parking was considered to be a significant problem;
- The decision to relocate the services from the site to Colchester General Hospital was a matter for the Hospital Trust and had already been implemented;
- The suggestion for a design competition was one which was welcomed but it would not be possible to make such an element compulsory;
- Efforts had been made within the design brief options to retain many of the locally listed and listed buildings but any schemes submitted by developers may seek to reduce these elements;
- Any proposal for a hotel development would need to be considered in planning

terms, on its merits, however, inevitably, such proposals tended to deliver more substantial buildings than residential proposals

*RESOLVED* that the draft development brief be approved for adoption as Council guidance.

## **24 Draft Local Plan Issues and Options**

**Councillors Jowers (in respect of his membership of Essex County Council Cabinet with Strategic Plan responsibility) declared a non-pecuniary interest in this item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(5).**

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Commercial Services giving details of the Issues and Options Local Plan Paper together with the accompanying Sustainability Appraisal report which were due to be published for consultation for a six-week period from Friday 16 January to Friday 27 February.

Sarah Pullin, Planning Policy Officer, explained that in August the Local Plan Committee had authorised initial work on a new Local Plan for the Borough, and received an update on work carried out so far at its last meeting in October. The Council was now required to invite consultees to 'make representations to the local planning authority about what a local plan...ought to contain', and to take account of views when developing its plan.

The consultation document provided background on the plan-making process and posed a series of questions on key issues and high level options for growth. The document outlined the factors determining the need to find new sites for future development and proposed potential broad options for locating this development as follows:

### **Option 1A**

- 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**

- 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**

- 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**

- 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**

- A separate sustainable settlement to the east of Colchester town
- A significant urban extension to the north of Colchester town, crossing the A12
- Other urban development in and around the existing urban area
- Proportional expansion of Rural District Centres - Wivenhoe, Tiptree and West Mersea

### **Option 3B**

- A separate sustainable settlement to the east of Colchester town
- A significant urban extension to the north of Colchester town, crossing the A12
- 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.

Following this consultation, a detailed assessment of sites that would be included in the make-up of the growth options, including those submitted in the recent Call for Sites, would take place, the outcome of which would inform the production of the Preferred Options Paper forming the next stage of the public consultation process. The Local Plan Committee would be invited to approve the Preferred Options Paper in advance of consultation. The process also included Sustainability Appraisal process to test the environmental, social and economic performance of the Plan options and this had been published from 1 July to 5 August 2014. The comments received were used to help finalise the Scoping Report which then formed the basis for an initial assessment of high level options which would be published alongside the Issues and Options Paper.

The Council was required to prepare a summary of the representations made followed by further consultation on a Preferred Options Paper. Following this, a draft plan would be published, prior to submission to the Secretary of State and adoption by the full Council.

Carlo Guglielmi, Cabinet member for Planning and Corporate Services at Tendring District Council addressed the Committee pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(3). He provided an update on the current situation regarding

the Local Plan procedures at Tendring District Council explaining that a new timetable would be agreed and it was unlikely that the plan would be published before the Local Elections in May 2015. To this end the planning policy team were currently undertaking more work. He referred to the requirements under the duty of co-operation and applauded the work that was taking place between the officer teams in Colchester and Tendring.

Peter Hill addressed the Committee pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(3). He considered that the proposed development to the north side of Wivenhoe needed to be regarded as a settlement in its own right and he suggested it could be referred to as Wivenhoe Heath. He referred to the existing traffic problems in the Wivenhoe area and asked that a traffic impact study be undertaken and was of the view that a countryside barrier should be created. He supported proposals for Salary Brook to be designated a Nature Reserve, given the existing band of trees along the A133 and the network of cycle ways. He advocated proportional growth and the need for infrastructure to be in place to support future development and for a housing needs assessment to be undertaken in Wivenhoe.

Peter Hewitt addressed the Committee pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(3). He considered that the Local Plan processes were being driven by housing growth and he asked when the 'Call for Sites' would be available for consideration. He also requested that the Colchester Green Links and Open Space Group be formally accepted as a stakeholder for Local Plan consultation purposes. The Group was seeking to support non car accessible movement and he considered it important that the aspirations of the Group were fully represented.

Ted Benton addressed the Committee pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(3). He appreciated that the Local Plan processes were in the early stages but he was of the view that the main driver was the demand for greater numbers of houses in the Borough. He explained that the Plans referred to a vision for Colchester but this needed to be explained more clearly in terms of what it would mean for people's quality of life. He was seeking a physical framework which could be visualised. He considered that the green spaces in the Borough, which provided vital amenity for improved health prospects, needed to be preserved and even enhanced where possible. He considered that existing traffic problems were unsustainable and it was of vital importance to develop a network of non-vehicular links throughout the town which could be mapped to improve local awareness.

Councillor Cook attended and, with the consent of the Chairman addressed the Committee. He explained that he had been working with Joe Turner who was developing a list of local community assets and had formed a body to protect Salary Brook. Proposals for the future of the Salary Brook area had already been presented to Tendring District Council for consideration and Mr Turner would be seeking the support of this Council by inviting this Committee to consider his proposals.

Joe Turner addressed the Committee pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(3). He explained that the Colchester East Community Association's 'Save Salary Brook Valley' initiative had been formed to nominate the area bordered by the A133, Bromley Road and Salary Brook as an Asset of Community Value. The intention being for the area to be protected within Colchester Borough and Tendring District Council's Local Plans. The area had natural attributes with hillside views across the whole neighbourhood and supported the amenity of local residents and their quality of life. The vision was supported by Colchester, Tendring and British Telecom Ramblers Associations. He asked the Committee to support the designation of the area as a Country Park to prevent future development for building projects.

Councillor Smith attended and, with the consent of the Chairman addressed the Committee. He supported the views expressed by Peter Hills, Joe Turner and Councillor Cook in relation to the protection of a wildlife corridor in the area of Salary Brook. He was concerned that development had already taken place at the boundaries to the area and he considered the way to secure protection of the open space was for Colchester and Tendring to work together to protect the area's designation. He acknowledged the need for the Council to adopt a robust Local Plan which provided for the identification of areas for development and, in terms of the Options presented in the report, he considered Options 1 and 2 to have merit with Option 3 being of worthy of least support. He referred to the proportion of people who both lived and worked in Colchester having fallen to 65%. In terms of the Country Park proposals, he supported the creation of a cycle route to link the area to others which would give a practical alternative for transport.

In discussion members of the Committee raised the following issues:-

- The work of the officers in producing a well-researched document for consideration was welcomed;
- The importance of developing a Local Plan which is both realistic in terms of future growth yet sympathetic to the needs of communities and businesses;
- The use of drop-in opportunities, social media and the use of existing community groups, residents associations and neighbourhood groups for the consultation exercise was supported;
- In terms of the dualling of the A120, the need for the changes which would take place in local communities to be handled with sensitivity and for infrastructure proposals to be appropriately delivered;
- Colchester was bounded geographically by Ministry of Defence land, the Roman River Valley and the A12 and this boundary was considered worthy of protection such that future development beyond the route of the trunk road should be resisted;
- The need to comply with the duty of co-operation and as such to work jointly with Tendring and Braintree District Councils;
- The need for careful consideration to be given to preserving the character of the town of Wivenhoe;
- Acknowledgement that the small towns of West Mersea and Wivenhoe, as well as some of the villages, would need to accept a certain level of additional housing



- development in the future;
- The need for careful consideration to be given to the provision for Travellers within the County as a whole and the successful introduction of the Travelling Community at the site in Severalls Lane;
- The impact of growth on transport systems with the existing problems in the east of the town and the need to consider the development of the road networks to better accommodate the vehicle movements;
- Residents' concerns about the level of future house building and the need for infrastructure to be delivered at the right time and capacity;
- The necessary forward funding required to provide for the upgrading of routes like the A120 and the North Station area and the role of the Local Enterprise Partnership in identifying the schemes to which it would lend its' financial support;
- The reference in the report to 66% of people in the Borough owning their own homes and the problem associated with affordability, especially for younger people and in relation to housing in rural areas;
- The need for greater efforts to be made to communicate the issues about the Local Plan to the residents and the community groups;
- The importance of open spaces and green links for the benefit of residents but also for the diversity of flora and fauna.

In response to the discussion, the Planning Policy Officer confirmed that the proposals regarding the protection of Salary Brook were known.

Karen Syrett, Place Strategy Manager, also took the opportunity to explain that there were no targets in place for future housing development, rather there were indicative figures formulated on a number of pieces of evidence, such as the Strategic Housing Market Assessment, produced as part of the Local Plan processes. She went on to confirm that the 'Call for Sites' information would become available as part of the Issues and Options consultation and that it was important for as many groups as possible to get involved in this process. She explained that minor typographical and mapping errors would be corrected as they were identified. Work was continuing collaboratively with Tendring and Braintree District Councils as well as Haven Gateway LEP, who, in turn, were in consultation with the Department of Transport. Future plans for traveller provision would include discussion with the Manager at the Severalls Lane site, whilst the formulation of a vision for the development of the Borough was dependent to a large extent on the outcome of the forthcoming consultation exercise, rather than for the Council to be seen as dictating a view ahead of these outcomes.

*RESOLVED* that -

- (i) The content of the Issues and Options Local Plan Paper, together with the accompanying Sustainability Appraisal report be approved for public consultation for a six-week period from Friday 16 January to Friday 27 February;
- (ii) The Place Strategy Manager be given delegated authority to make minor revisions to the document prior to publication.

## 25 Annual Monitoring Report

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Commercial Services inviting the members to approve the 2013-14 Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) for publication on the Council's website.

Chris Downes, Planning Policy Officer, together with Karen Syrett, Place Strategy Manager, attended to assist the Committee in its discussions. It was explained that the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) provided key information to help establish what was happening now within the Borough, what may happen in the future and compare these trends against existing planning policies and targets in order to determine if any action needed to be taken. The format of the AMR was designed to clearly demonstrate how the Council was meeting targets and indicators arising from the adopted policies contained in its Local Plan and provide information that could be used in reviewing the plan. The AMR also had a wider role in helping the Council and its partners monitor the success of infrastructure delivery plans such as the Integrated County Strategy, and could also be used by other agencies wishing to amend their plans and actions. The AMR also included information on how the Council was working with partners to meet the duty to co-operate on cross-boundary strategic matters.

The AMR had been divided into a number of key themes and key findings related to:

- Planning applications
- Housing completions and delivery
- Affordable Housing
- Site designation
- Traveller accommodation
- Employment development
- Commercial activity
- Transportation
- Biodiversity
- Carbon emissions
- Special status sites

In discussion members of the Committee raised the following issues:-

- The fact that rural employment opportunities had increased whilst fewer new rural housing developments had taken place and this may create pressure on the Council to consider releasing more rural exceptions sites;
- Colchester was house building at a rate three or four times greater than other Local Authorities;
- Only 13% of Affordable Housing was being achieved

In response to the discussion, the Planning Policy Officer confirmed that the Government Exceptions scheme had been subject to changes and this may see more sites coming forward. He also acknowledged that circumstances had resulted in underperformance for some Local Authorities.

Karen Syrett, Place Strategy Manager, took the opportunity to add, in terms of house building rates here and elsewhere, that this Council's work on the Local Plan was providing certainty for developers. There was also a well-balanced housing market in Colchester such that local land values and building costs remained reasonable compared to other areas closer to London which, in turn, had an impact in relation to viability. She also responded to Colchester being referred to as a 'growth town' and that this was a reflection of Haven Gateway and its status as a 'growth point' which was designated some years ago.

*RESOLVED* that the 2013-14 Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) be approved for adoption and publication on the Council's website.