

Local Plan Committee

20 August 2015

Item
8

Report of	Head of Commercial Services	Author	Laura Chase ☎ 01206 282473
Title	Update on the new Local Plan		
Wards affected	All		

The Local Plan Committee is asked to note progress made on preparation of Preferred Options for the new Local Plan.

1. Decision(s) Required

- 1.1 To note the update on the process of preparing a new Local Plan for the Borough.

2. Reasons for Decision(s)

- 2.1 To ensure the Committee is aware of actions being taken to update Council planning policies and thereby provide a robust basis for guiding future growth and development across the Borough.

3. Alternative Options

- 3.1 No alternative options are proposed, as members need to be aware how the Council is carrying forward development of a new Local Plan. The alternative of not proceeding with a new Local Plan would leave the Council in a vulnerable position going forward with no clear steer for the future growth and development of the Borough. It would result in existing policy becoming outdated and not in accordance with national policy requirements.

4. Supporting Information

- 4.1 The Council is in the process of preparing a Preferred Options version of a new Local Plan which, once adopted, will set out the growth strategy, planning policies and land allocations for the Borough to 2032 and beyond. The previous meeting of this Committee (8 June 2015) considered a report on the outcome of the Issues and Options consultation on what the Local Plan should contain and noted the next actions required in advance of production of a Preferred Options document. The following sections of this report highlight progress on these points.
- 4.2 Agreement on the plan's vision and objectives – Officers are gathering views and evidence and are developing a draft vision and objectives which has regard to the Council's Strategic Plan. A series of three workshops on key issues for the future is programmed for September. The audience for these

workshops will be key public and private sector service delivery and infrastructure providers. Following a presentation on potential challenges and opportunities facing Colchester in 2032, attendees will be asked to contribute their views on implications for the Local Plan from the perspective of their particular organisation. The workshop details are as follows;

- Transport - 10 September
- Housing - 15 September
- Economy - date TBC in September.

4.3 Development of realistic housing and employment targets for the provision of a 15-year housing land supply

4.3.1 The Government requires local councils to undertake assessments to determine the levels of 'objectively assessed need' for housing to use to inform preparation of their Local Plans. Objectively assessed need (OAN) is the total number of net additional dwellings to be provided over the plan period, both in the market and affordable sectors, with the starting point being the household projections published by the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG). The OAN also incorporates relevant sensitivity tests, adjustments to those projections in the light of local circumstances, and the most recent demographic evidence. OAN is translated into housing targets by the local authority by adding in policy and supply factors particular to their local area, including cross-boundary unmet need; affordable housing need; supply capacity and authorities' policy objectives.

4.3.2 The Council, working in partnership with Braintree, Chelmsford and Tendring Councils commissioned independent consultants Peter Brett Associates to assist with this work for their areas for the period up to 2037. Their report has now been completed, following guidance on the appropriate methodology for calculating OAN, and has been made available on the Council's website (attached as Appendix 1.)

4.3.3 The study starts by establishing Colchester's Housing Market Area. National guidance provides that where housing market areas extend beyond administrative boundaries, housing needs assessments should cover these wider administrative areas. The study establishes that a Housing Market Area comprising Braintree, Colchester, Chelmsford and Tendring Council areas forms a sound basis for assessing housing need. All four authorities will accordingly need to work with each other to ensure their plans acknowledge the cross-boundary implications of the operation of the housing market.

4.3.4 The study then follows the approved methodology summarised above. It uses the latest official household projections and applies a series of tests and adjustments to arrive at the OAN. The study provides a clear picture of how different population and employment growth scenarios could affect the area, and does not find that any variables such as London overspill, job delivery, or constrained housing delivery levels provide justification for significant alterations to the basis demographic starting point.

4.3.4 The study made the following observations about the Colchester housing market:

- Housing delivery – Housing delivery in Colchester held up relatively well in the recession. In the reference period on which the official demographic projections were based, delivery fell below targets but not as fast as other areas. There is also a supply of land available should the market be willing to deliver more new homes, so there is no evidence of undersupply.
- House prices – Long-term changes in house prices closely followed the regional trend for the East of England. Since 2007 all other comparator areas outperformed Colchester (Essex, East of England, England)
- Affordability – Colchester has relatively good affordability when compared to county and regional benchmarks.
- Objectively Assessed Need - The OAN for Colchester is 920 new homes a year. This figure will serve as the baseline for determining housing targets in the emerging local plan for Colchester.

4.3.5 The authorities within the agreed Housing Market Area will now need to carry out additional work on the following specific areas to allow them to set the housing targets in each of the areas:

- The tenure, size and type of housing required over the plan period to meet the projected demographic changes identified within the OAN report, reflecting the current market situation and the expectations of local households
- The housing needs of different groups in the community
- The assessment of the need for affordable housing which can then be compared to the OAN figure to inform decisions on adjusting those figures when setting targets alongside other policy and supply factors

The four authorities are in the process of undertaking this work which will inform the Preferred Option document.

4.4 Sustainability Appraisal and evaluation of potential development sites, and preparation of a Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment.

Sites received by the Council from interested parties in its Call for Sites, plus any additional sites identified, are being assessed through the Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA). The SLAA will appraise the suitability, availability and achievability of sites with the aim of objectively determining which sites will be deliverable over the plan period. In addition to the SLAA process, sites and broad locations for growth will be subject to Sustainability Appraisal (SA). The framework for carrying out this work is the subject of a 6-week consultation period ending on 7 September (the draft framework was agreed at the 8 June Local Plan Committee). The outcomes from this assessment process will inform which sites are allocated in the Local Plan.

4.5 Completion of a range of evidence base work needed to inform policies and allocations.

4.5.1 In addition to the Objectively Assessed Need work noted above, the following studies are currently underway, with scheduled completion by October:

- Environmental Audits – Chris Blandford Associates has been commissioned to prepare 2 new Environmental Audits which will update earlier work carried out in 2005 to support the development of the

Council's adopted Local Plan. In particular, they are considering the implications of any large new settlements to the East and West of Colchester, as identified as options in the Issues and Options document.

- Local Wildlife Sites – Essex Ecology Services Limited, Essex Wildlife Trust's ecological consultancy, is updating work on the Local Wildlife Sites study, carried out in 2008.
- Strategic Flood Risk Assessment – AECOM Environment & Infrastructure UK Limited is updating 2007 work on flood risk. A small number of major landowners and developers are assisting with the costs of carrying out this study.

4.52 Additionally, work on archaeology as well as a Water Cycle Study update will be completed to inform the Preferred Options document.

4.5.3 A Settlement Boundary Review will also be underway, which will consider the need for changes to settlement boundaries. This will consider the urban boundaries as well as possible expansion in villages, based on their particular needs and characteristics as well as sustainability considerations. Officers are in the process of meeting with larger Parish Councils where there is potential for proportionate growth to discuss potential new sites to include within the settlement boundary.

4.6 Development of draft spatial strategy and associated policies and site allocations

Officers have initiated work on drafting policies, ensuring that they align with national policy as well as the evolving overall spatial strategy and the local evidence base. This work will also need to address issues raised in the Issues and Options consultation.

5. **Proposals**

5.1 To note progress on the Local Plan development process.

6. **Strategic Plan References**

6.1 The Strategic Plan Action Plan includes a commitment to make Colchester a vibrant, prosperous, thriving and welcoming place. The new Local Plan will contribute to the attainment of this commitment through new development, conservation and regeneration.

7. **Consultation**

7.1 Public consultation will be carried out on the draft Local Plan in 2016 in accordance with The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 and the Council's Statement of Community Involvement.

8. **Publicity Considerations**

8.1 There is likely to be continued interest as the Local Plan progresses resulting in publicity for the Council.

9. Financial Implications

- 9.1 A budget has been identified for production of the Local Plan.

10. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

- 10.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been prepared for the Local Plan and is available to view on the Colchester Borough Council website by following this pathway from the homepage: Council and Democracy > Policies, Strategies and Performance > Diversity and Equality > Equality Impact Assessments > Commercial Services > Local Plan.
- 10.2 There are no particular Human Rights implications.

11. Community Safety Implications

- 11.1 None

12. Health and Safety Implications

- 12.1 None

13. Risk Management Implications

- 13.1 Production and adoption of a new Local Plan will reduce the risk of inappropriate and unsustainable development from coming forward in the Borough.

14. Disclaimer

- 14.1 The information in this report was, as far as is known, correct at the date of publication. Colchester Borough Council cannot accept responsibility for any error or omission.