



Local Plan Committee

Item
8

22 February 2024

Report of	Sandra Scott, Place Strategy Manager	01206 282975
Title	Colchester Local Plan Review: Issues and Options Update	
Wards affected	All wards affected	

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Officers have commenced work on various aspects of the Local Plan Review. The committee agreed in October 2023 to work on the Review with a focus on enhancing the green network and creating a better environment.
- 1.2 This report provides an update on work undertaken as part of the Issues and Options stage and seeks agreement for the next stages of engagement.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 Members are asked to note progress made as part of Issues and Options for the Local Plan Review.
- 2.2 Members are asked to agree to publish a placemaking questionnaire, including the themes set out in appendix 1, following the close of the vision engagement.
- 2.3 Members are asked to agree to the approach outlined for the engagement on the Health and Wellbeing theme being primarily with the health professionals and partners, working together with the Alliance and other relevant stakeholders.
- 2.4 Members are asked to agree to publish Essex County Council's recommended climate change policies, included in appendix 2, for engagement.

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 The Local Plan Committee oversees work on the Local Plan, and it is essential that the Committee is kept up to date with progress.
- 3.2 Placemaking and Health and Wellbeing are important themes that encompass many issues, and it is important to get views on what the Local Plan Review should cover under these themes, including early input from health professionals.
- 3.3 Section 19(1A) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires local planning authorities to include in their Local Plans: *“policies designed to secure that the development and use of land in the local planning authority’s area contribute to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change”*.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 The alternative is to not consult with communities and stakeholders at this stage as part of placemaking, health and wellbeing or climate change. However, these are important themes that encompass many issues, and engagement at this stage will help to ensure that the Local Plan is genuinely shaped by communities and stakeholders.

5. Background Information

- 5.1 Local Plan Committee considered reports about the Local Plan Review at the June, August, October, and December 2023 meetings. The June report included a reminder of the current position with the development plan and the further work needed to review the Local Plan. The August report included a high-level programme for the Local Plan Review, including proposing an iterative Issues and Options engagement comprising multiple themed engagements rather than one composite Issues and Options consultation. The October report set out the approach to the Local Plan Review of using the green network and waterways and the 'creating a better environment' agenda as the starting point and key purpose of the Local Plan Review. The December report provided an update of work to date and asked the committee to agree engagement on the Vision for the Local Plan Review early in 2024, which has now commenced.

Issues and Options

- 5.2 Officers have previously recommended iterative engagement on the key themes of the green network and waterways; vision for the Colchester Local Plan Review; climate change mitigation and adaptation; call for sites; design and place; and health and wellbeing. This report provides an update on these themes.
- 5.3 A separate report is presented to the Committee summarising progress on the evidence base, which includes an update on the Call for Sites and next steps for the Strategic Land Availability Assessment.

Green Network and Waterways

- 5.4 Engagement on the green network and waterways took place from 9 November 2023 – 5 January 2024. Stakeholders were asked to comment on how they use existing green spaces and waterways, views about the current condition of spaces and suggest any improvements which could be made; and to suggest ideas for new green spaces.
- 5.5 The majority of comments (373 comments) received were about the existing green network. A further 13 comments were made about waterways. 82 comments were made suggesting ideas for new green spaces. All of these ideas will be considered as work progresses on the Local Plan Review. All comments can be viewed on the consultation portal.
- 5.6 A vast number of comments were about Middlewick Ranges and the adjacent Birch Brook and Weir Lane Grasslands. The Local Plan Review provides the opportunity to reflect on the implications of the latest evidence available to support plan making at the time. Consideration will be given to the appropriate approach to the Middlewick allocation, and other existing, unimplemented allocations, as part of the comprehensive review of the plan.

- 5.7 Colchester's green network and waterways provide multiple benefits and are multifunctional. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) defines green infrastructure as:

'A network of multi-functional green and blue spaces and other natural features, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental, economic, health and wellbeing benefits for nature, climate, local and wider communities and prosperity.'

Some comments to the consultation make the criticism that ecology was not listed in the multiple-choice options for how you use the space. The options were not intended to be exhaustive. Benefits for nature are part of the NPPF green infrastructure definition and Officers recognise that the multifunctional green network and waterways network is important for biodiversity. The October 2023 Approach to the Local Plan Review committee report states that: *'green network and waterways has multiple benefits including for wildlife, active travel, health and wellbeing, climate change adaptation, air quality, flood and water management'*. Officers recognise that an evidence base is needed regarding ecology and biodiversity, prepared by suitably qualified ecologists, and more details about this is included in the evidence base committee report.

- 5.8 Planning Policy Officers are working on the green network and waterways engagement with Officers from the Parks team and Sustainability team – recognising that the importance of the green network and waterways is much wider than planning and some of the comments made as part of the engagement will be best addressed by other teams. All comments have been shared and, where relevant, will be considered as part of their work. The Parks and Open Spaces team welcome the feedback from the engagement and will consider the comments and suggestions received regarding existing sites under our management. If appropriate, these will be incorporated into future management plans for the sites as these come up for review. Comments will also be shared with Essex County Council as the Highways Authority as many comments relate to Public Rights of Way. Planning Policy Officers will take into account all comments that can be actioned through the Local Plan Review and consider all ideas for new green spaces.
- 5.9 The Local Plan Committee agreed in October 2023 to the approach to the Local Plan Review of using the green network and waterways and the 'creating a better environment' agenda as the starting point and key purpose of the Local Plan Review. The part of the engagement most relevant to this approach, is the part of the engagement that asked for opportunities for new green spaces. All comments can be viewed on the consultation portal.

Vision for the city

5.10 Vision workshops took place with Members, Planning Officers, and Senior Leadership Board at the end of 2023. In December 2023, Local Plan Committee agreed public consultation on the vision. This consultation will use three of the questions used in the vision workshops:

- What 3 things do you like best about Colchester City (Local Authority Area) as a Place?
- What do you think are the most important opportunities for Colchester looking ahead to 2041?
- What 3 things would you most like Colchester to be known for in 2041 and beyond?

Officers have engaged with the Comms Team to help ensure this consultation reaches as many people as possible and is clear and understandable. A video has been prepared to explain the purpose of the Vision engagement and encourage the public to engage. The link to this can be widely shared to promote interest in participating in the engagement ([video](#) link).

5.11 Consultation commenced on 8 February 2024 and will close on 21 March 2024. All comments received will be reviewed, together with comments from the early engagement on the vision and will help to draft a Vision for the Local Plan. The Vision will serve as a golden thread through the entire Local Plan, with policies and allocations linking directly to delivering the outcomes set out in the Vision. A draft Vision will be presented to a future Local Plan Committee meeting.

Health and Wellbeing

5.12 Health and Wellbeing crosses many aspects of planning. Other themes including Green Networks, Climate Change and Placemaking are all intertwined with issues which relate to health and wellbeing. For the purpose of considering the issues and options at a high level to help inform the Local Plan Review, engagement will be focused on two key elements recognising the distinction between the two for planning considerations.

1. Health and Wellbeing through design and placemaking;
2. Planning for Healthcare infrastructure.

5.13 The Government's Planning Practice Guidance recognises that planning and health need to be considered together. Paragraph 001 of that guidance summarises the two ways planning can contribute to healthier communities;

- in terms of creating environments that support and encourage healthy lifestyles, and

- in terms of identifying and securing the facilities needed for primary, secondary and tertiary care, and the wider health and care system (taking into account the changing needs of the population).
- 5.14 The Planning Practice Guidance defines a healthy place as one which supports and promotes healthy behaviours and environments and a reduction in health inequalities for people of all ages:
- It will provide the community with opportunities to improve their physical and mental health, and support community engagement and wellbeing;
 - It is a place which is inclusive and promotes social interaction;
 - It meets the needs of children and young people to grow and develop, as well as being adaptable to the needs of an increasingly elderly population and those with dementia and other sensory or mobility impairments.
- 5.15 The Government's Planning Practice Guidance sets out the approach to engagement between relevant organisations in plan making. Working with the Director of Public Health it is necessary to involve the key groups in the local health and wellbeing system. The Integrated Care System approach brings together the Clinical Commissioning Groups responsible for planning and commissioning of healthcare services and facilities. These are now brought together for the Colchester City Council area under the North East Essex Health and Wellbeing Alliance.
- 5.16 The primary focus for engagement on this theme is therefore proposed to be through the North East Essex Health and Wellbeing Alliance. This will provide the opportunity for the health care professionals to be engaged at an early stage and throughout plan making to ensure the Local Plan adequately plans for healthcare infrastructure and shapes and influences placemaking for the benefit of health and wellbeing. The Board has agreed in principle to support engagement in this way as a vehicle to inform the Local Plan subject to the Local Plan Committee agreeing to this approach. It is also proposed to invite other key stakeholders such as Sport England to engage directly to help inform the issues and options linked to this theme.
- 5.17 Engaging with wider stakeholders and local communities on health and wellbeing matters is also important. Within the recommended Placemaking engagement (referred to below), it is proposed that question(s) are included to cover health and wellbeing under the topic of social and community. This will provide an opportunity for specific engagement on this topic from wider stakeholders including local residents, whilst recognising that focused engagement through the Alliance and other key stakeholders will help to balance the issues with the options, developing evidence and considering solutions which can potentially inform policy and place making in the Local Plan Review.

Placemaking

- 5.18 Officers previously referred to a 'design and place' theme. However, this theme is broad and encompasses multiple issues and Officers suggest renaming this theme to 'placemaking'.
- 5.19 Placemaking is about the pattern, scale, character and design quality of places. It includes the following:
- housing (including affordable housing)
 - employment, retail, leisure and other commercial development
 - infrastructure for transport, telecommunications, security, waste management, water supply, wastewater, flood risk and coastal change management, and the provision of minerals and energy (including heat)
 - community facilities (such as health, education and cultural infrastructure)
 - conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure, and planning measures to address climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- 5.20 Appendix 1 includes some example questions that Officers would like to publish to seek a wide range of views about placemaking. These will be developed further ensuring language is suitable to engage widely with all.

Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

- 5.21 Officers previously advised members that Essex County Council has drafted [recommended climate change policies](#) and recommended publication of these early in the new year and seek views on whether they should be incorporated in the Local Plan Review. These recommended policies reflect best practice and refer to the Low Energy Transformation Initiative (LETI) definition of net zero, which is the net zero standard recommended in the recently adopted Colchester Climate Change Supplementary Planning Document.
- 5.22 In December 2023, government issued a [Parliamentary Statement 13th December 2023](#), which effectively attempts to stifle the innovation and ambition of local government in setting planning policy on energy standards by imposing more hurdles to navigate, including the step of requiring policy to be expressed as a % reduction in a building's 'target emissions rate' rather than the LETI approach of using energy targets which are absolute, simple and effective. Essex County Council is working with a team of technical and legal experts, and the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA), LETI and other Councils, to help understand the full implications of the Parliamentary Statement and advise on options for a way forward. Officers will continue to work with Essex County Council Officers and seek to understand the implications from the Parliamentary Statement.
- 5.23 Your Officers and Essex County Council are of the view that the policies are evidence-led and align with climate targets. Furthermore, the Written Ministerial Statement is only a material consideration and is subservient to

primary legislation. Approval is requested to publish the policies for Issues and Options engagement and ask the question: *are these policies suitable and appropriate to include in Colchester's Local Plan Review?*

6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

- 6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been prepared for the Adopted Local Plan, and is available to view by clicking on this link:

<https://cbccrmdata.blob.core.windows.net/noteattachment/Equality%20Impact%20Assessment%20June%202017.pdf>

7. Strategic Plan References

- 7.1 The current Local Plan provides a key strategic delivery vehicle for many Strategic Objectives in the Council's Strategic Plan (April 2023-April 2026). In particular the following Strategic Objectives are particularly relevant; Respond the Climate Emergency through policies which seek to conserve and enhance biodiversity; Improve health, wellbeing and happiness, through placemaking and provision of appropriate infrastructure; Deliver homes for those most in need, through housing targets, site allocations and policies providing for affordable housing and a mix of evidenced housing needs; and Grow our economy so everyone benefits, through policy seeking to provide and manage economic growth throughout existing and new communities.

8. Consultation

- 8.1 Public consultation has commenced on initial engagement to inform a draft vision for the Local Plan Review. Future engagement and consultation will be undertaken as outlined at appropriate stages on preparation of evidence and plan making in accordance with the Planning Regulations and Statement of Community Involvement.

9. Publicity Considerations

- 9.1 None at this stage.

10. Financial implications

- 10.1 There is a significant financial implication in preparing a Local Plan. All evidence base documents that need to be prepared by consultants have an associated cost along with all consultation exercises and the eventual examination. An up-to-date local plan does however help avoid costly appeals.

11. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications

- 11.1 There are no specific health, wellbeing and community safety implications.

12. Health and Safety Implications

12.1 No direct implications.

13. Risk Management Implications

13.1 No direct implications.

14. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

14.1 The Council has declared a Climate Emergency and has committed to being carbon neutral by 2030. The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development as defined in the National Planning Policy Framework. Achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways. These are economic, social and environmental objectives.

14.2 The Local Plan Review will take account of any updated evidence and changes in legislation that help contribute towards achieving carbon neutral by 2030. Further consideration of future policy development on the environment, climate change, biodiversity, place making and active environments will seek opportunities towards Colchester becoming a greener city that is resilient to the climate change challenges.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Placemaking Questionnaire Example

Appendix 2 – Proposed Climate Change Mitigation and Adaption Policies

Appendix 1 Draft Placemaking questionnaire - Examples

It is proposed that questions along these lines under the themes identified will be asked of all stakeholders, focussing on local communities across the Colchester area. It is suggested that these be a mixture of open and closed questions. More focussed engagement on some elements with key audiences may also be carried out - such as on Design- with representatives of the development industry (agents, housebuilders etc)

Themes and examples of Questions to be asked;

Generic – Place

- What do you think makes a good place?
- What do you like about where you live and what can be improved?
- What is locally distinctive about where you live?

Homes

- What features do you expect from new homes and new, modern housing estates?
- What types and tenure of housing do you want to see?
- Do you think housing should be directed to urban or rural areas or a combination of both?
- What do you think about high density housing? Are there some places where you think high density housing would work well – if so where?

Community

- What do you think makes a good community?
- What social and leisure facilities make a community?
- What does a place need to promote healthy and active lifestyles?
- At what scale do you perceive your community?

Jobs

- Where do you think jobs should be created?
- What sort of jobs do you think are needed?
- How far would like to have to travel to work?

Environment

- What do you want to see from public spaces
- What elements of the existing environment should be conserved as a priority?
- How do you think heritage assets can best be enhanced|?
- How do you think the natural environment can best be enhanced?

Design

- What do you think is good design? (upload egs?)
- What does beauty mean to you?

City Centre

- What do you want from the City Centre?
- How do you think the City should evolve?
- Do you have any thoughts about building heights and density within the City Centre?