



11 December 2023

Report of	Bethany Jones Principal Planning Policy Officer	01206 282541
Title	Colchester Local Plan Review – Strategic Land Availability Assessment Methodology	
Wards affected	All wards affected	

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Draft Strategic Land Availability Assessment Methodology was subject to consultation for four weeks from 20 October to 17 November 2023. A total of 12 representations were received.
- 1.2 The Call for Sites was also launched on 20 October and will close on 5 January 2024. An update will be provided to Local Plan Committee in the new year to summarise which sites have been promoted for which uses.
- 1.3 The Strategic Land Availability Assessment Methodology has been updated to take account of the comments received during the consultation and following an officer workshop held with colleagues across the planning service and Essex County Council.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the summary of consultation responses and agree the Strategic Land Availability Assessment Methodology.

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 To enable progression with work on the Local Plan Review.

4. Alternative Options

4.1 The Council could delay work on the Local Plan Review, but failure to keep the Local Plan up to date would leave the Council vulnerable to speculative planning applications.

5. Background Information

5.1 Following agreement at Local Plan Committee in October, the Call for Sites and Draft Strategic Land Availability Assessment Methodology Consultation have been launched. The Strategic Land Availability Assessment Methodology was available for comment for a four-week period (20 October to 17 November 2023). The Call for Sites also opened on 20 October and is due to close on 5 January 2024.

5.2 Both the Call for Sites and the Draft Strategic Land Availability Assessment Methodology Consultation have been advertised on the Councils website, the Planning Consultation Portal, social media, a Press Release was issued on 26 October 2023 and notifications sent to all Statutory Consultees, Parish Councils, Councillors and those on our Local Plan Database.

5.2 As the Call for Sites is still open, an update to Local Plan Committee will be provided in the new year on the details of sites that have been submitted.

5.3 The Draft Strategic Land Availability Assessment Methodology follows guidance set out in the national Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). This appraises sites for their suitability, availability and achievability with the aim of objectively determining which sites will be deliverable over the plan period.

5.4 A total of 12 representations were submitted to the Draft Strategic Land Availability Assessment Methodology Consultation. These are summarised in Appendix A. The representations have been published in full and are available to view via the Council's [Consultation Portal](#).

5.5 Officers held a workshop with colleagues from across the planning service and Essex County Council to discuss the Draft Strategic Land Availability Assessment Methodology.

5.6 Taking into account the representations received and the debate at the October Local Plan Committee, the following changes have been made to the methodology:

- Clarity that sites below the site size threshold are not precluded from coming forward via the planning application process
- Initial Survey (Stage 1) now only applies to sites proposed for residential and commercial uses. Any sites proposed for infrastructure (including green infrastructure) will be assessed from Stage 2 of the process.

- The Initial Survey has been updated to clarify the survey takes into account national policy and designation to determine whether a site is suitable or not for future development. Wording has been updated to clarify the use of desktop review data sources to prevent predetermination.
- Update Initial Survey criteria to remove ambiguity of when a planning application may be submitted for sites already allocated in the Development Plan. Replaced “near future” with “2033” to align with the end of the plan period for the Adopted Local Plan.
- Update Initial Survey criteria to remove reference to existing settlements to align with the NPPF approach to development in the countryside
- Update Initial Survey criteria to be more specific that sites wholly within Flood Zone 3 will be considered unsuitable and not progress to the next stage of assessment to ensure more consistent approach to all physical constraints
- Further clarification added to access related criteria in both Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the assessment.
- Removal of criteria regarding landscape harm and key views as these are considered too specific and subjective to enable a consistent assessment and may be influenced by details not available at this stage. These matters will be considered through the Sustainability Appraisal and other evidence base documents as part of the plan making process.
- Update justification in relation to Minerals Safeguarding Area and Minerals and/or Waste Consultation Area to align with Minerals and Waste Local Plans.
- Clarify RAG Assessment for identifying issues that would prevent or limit the developable area of a site and agricultural land classification
- Access to key services is now measured via four questions (primary school, secondary school, supermarkets/convenience stores and GP surgeries) as opposed to one which captured a number of services. To enable a more consistent and comprehensive understanding of infrastructure, facilities and services for the Local Plan Review, this will be analysed at the settlement level within the Settlement Boundary Review, as opposed to individual sites. As identified through the debate at Local Plan Committee in October, this approach can easily be applied outside of the urban area of Colchester due to existing parish and settlement boundaries. Officers have considered how this can also apply to the urban area of Colchester, given that this is such an expansive geography, it is considered most appropriate to use ward boundaries. This enables data to be collected from Census 2021 and will enable all Members to input their knowledge of existing facilities and services across the administrative area.

- All data sources have been reviewed and updated where necessary to clarify what evidence will be used for each criterion.
- Delete reference to publication of Call for Sites Forms and SLAA Site Assessments. It will be considered further how and when the information will be published in the most user friendly way in accordance with GDPR.
- Clarification has been added into the introduction, prior to the Stage 2 Site Assessment section, and in a new section to clarify the overall outcome of the RAG Assessments and how the assessments will be used to inform the Local Plan Review.

5.8 The updated Methodology is outlined in Appendix B.

5.9 Subject to agreement of the revised Methodology, the first step will be for officers to begin the desktop study to identify additional sites for further assessment. Once the Call for Sites has closed on 5 January 2024, and the desktop study is complete, officers can begin assessing the sites. Local Plan Committee will continue to be updated on progress.

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 There is no requirement for further consultation on the Strategic Land Availability Assessment Methodology.

9. Publicity Considerations

9.1 There is likely to be continued interest in the new Local Plan preparation, particularly the proposed allocation of land for development. It will be important to manage publicity carefully, to help minimise misconception and concerns.

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

A – Summary of Consultation Responses to Draft Strategic Land Availability Assessment Methodology

B – Strategic Land Availability Assessment Methodology and Assessment Proforma