



Local Plan Committee

Item
7

11 December 2023

Report of

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Manager**

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Title

**Colchester Local Plan Review proposed Vision
Engagement and progress 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 Local Plan Review with a focus on enhancing the green network and creating a better environment.
- 1.2 Workshops were held in October and November with Members and Officers to start thinking about a vision for the Local Plan Review. Officers will use all ideas to help inform draft a vision, together with feedback from wider stakeholder engagement proposed in the new year.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 Members are asked to note progress made on the Local Plan Review.
- 2.2 Members are asked to agree public engagement in early 2024 to inform a vision for the Local Plan Review.

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 The Local Plan Committee oversees work on the Local Plan, and it is essential that the Committee are kept up to date with progress.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 The alternative is to not to consult with the communities and stakeholders at this stage, however, this is considered to miss an opportunity to ensure that the Local Plan Review Vision is genuinely shaped by communities which is considered important to be effective.

5. Background Information

- 5.1 Local Plan Committee considered reports about the Local Plan Review at the June, August, and October 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 development plan is at the heart of the planning system with a requirement set in law that planning decisions must be taken in line with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. It is essential that plans are in place and kept up to date. 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. An Engagement and Consultation Strategy, which sets out how stakeholders and the public will be engaged and consulted on the Local Plan Review, was included as a background paper and has been published on the [Council's website](#). 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 committee agreed to work on the Local Plan Review with a focus on enhancing the green network and creating a better environment.

Issues and Options

- 5.2 Members are aware that the iterative engagement could include the key themes of: the green network and waterways; vision for the city; climate change mitigation and adaptation; call for sites; design and place; and health and wellbeing. Since October, progress has been made on the call for sites, green network and waterways, and initial engagement to help inform a future vision for the next Local Plan.
- 5.3 The call for sites and consultation on the Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) methodology commenced in October. A separate report is presented to the Committee, which outlines the response to the SLAA methodology consultation and asks the Committee to agree the methodology.
- 5.4 Consultation on the green network and waterways is also underway and will be available for comments until early January 2024. Stakeholders have the opportunity 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. This consultation also enables stakeholders to suggest enhancements which could be made and suggest areas which may be considered suitable for new green spaces, which they can draw on an online map and will be asked to provide a justification to support this. Opportunities arising from this consultation will be considered as the work on the Local Plan progresses.

Vision

- 5.5 All members were invited to a workshop on 31 October 2023, the purpose of which was to start thinking about a vision for the Local Plan. A vision is required to provide high level principles upon which the plan is based. To be effective a vision should be focussed and specific; be genuinely shaped by communities and be informed by other stakeholders and baseline information. Members were asked, through different group exercises, to think about the best things about Colchester as a place, future opportunities, what success looks like, and what planning can do.
- 5.6 The best things about Colchester as a Place informed by the Member Workshop can be summarised as follows;
- Distinctive culture and heritage and the arts
 - Green and blue spaces
 - Inclusive communities
 - Quality of life
 - Environment and geography
- 5.7 Opportunities for Colchester up to 2041, informed by the Member Workshop can be summarised as follows;
- Better public transport corridors and routes and active travel
 - Sustainable communities – more social housing and diverse housing for lower incomes and better jobs
 - Future proofed infrastructure
 - Housing and infrastructure
 - Jobs
 - Tourism
- 5.8 The full list of points raised at the Member workshop is provided at Appendix A to this Report. All points raised will inform the work going forward to inform the Local Plan Review Vision, not just those listed as the best or most important.
- 5.9 The feedback from discussions at the Member workshop in response to questions about what success looks like and what planning can do, will also help shape the emerging thinking. The discussions demonstrated how intrinsically linked the themes identified as; Green Networks and Waterways, Climate Change, Design and Place and Health and Wellbeing are. Identifying successful outcomes under one theme also delivers positive outcomes for another. This will be important in ensuring the Plan's Vision and Objectives are effectively woven together recognising the connections between them.
- 5.10 Further key points arising from discussions about planning and success, at the Member workshop, relate to the importance of the Plan providing for the right infrastructure at the right time to support the growth and needs of the communities as they are identified by evidence to inform the Plan. Points were raised regarding housing numbers which is another matter that will be considered

following completion of the relevant evidence during 2024. Local Plan Committee will receive Reports on these issues at the appropriate time. These will be key considerations, informed by evidence as the Plan preparation progresses.

5.11 A Planning Officers workshop was held in November, and this raised similar responses in respect of the best things now and opportunities in the future. The best things about Colchester as a place identified below with the overall top 3 highlighted in bold;

- **Heritage**
- **Connectivity**
- **Diverse nature- Urban / Rural/ Coast**
- Green space and access to nature
- Leisure infrastructure

5.12 Opportunities for Colchester up to 2041, informed by the Officer Workshop can be summarised as follows;

- Improve transport infrastructure.
- Enhance public realm everywhere.
- Protect and enhance heritage.
- Balance infrastructure provision with growth
- Good quality housing
- Maximise city status
- Colchester as a destination
- Active environment and sustainable places
- Economic opportunities

5.13 To ensure the Local Plan Review Vision is genuinely shaped by communities and stakeholders it is proposed that high level, online engagement is also carried out with communities and stakeholders early in the new year. Building on the engagement with Members and Officers, it is proposed to invite thoughts on what should be included in the vision and what should be the main aims and objectives of the plan. It is proposed to host an engagement online, allowing the public and stakeholders to submit comments on the following questions. There will be background information provided to explain the context of this engagement and how it will be used to inform the Local Plan Review.

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?

- 5.14 Officers will consider all comments made at the Member and Officer workshops together with the feedback from wider public and stakeholder engagement to inform a draft vision, which will be incorporated in a Preferred Options Plan and subject to public consultation at the appropriate time next year.

Update on other work

- 5.15 In addition to work on the Local Plan Review vision, over the next couple of months, Officers will work on the Strategic Land Availability Assessment. More information about this is included in a separate report. Officers will commence work on a Settlement Boundary Review, which will review the boundaries of all settlements in the city. Meetings will be arranged with Town and Parish Councils and Residents Associations to discuss the planning for a better environment approach to the Local Plan Review, opportunities and constraints within the town/village, requirements for green spaces, the call for sites submissions received and neighbourhood planning. As set out at the August meeting, officers are also reviewing the existing evidence base and identifying which require updating. Officers will also publish the Essex County Council recommended climate change policies early in the new year and seek views on whether these should be incorporated into the Local Plan Review. More information on these matters will be available at a future Local Plan Committee early next year.

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 will commence in the new year on initial engagement to inform a draft vision for the Local Plan Review. Future engagement and consultation will be undertaken 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.

APPENDIX A

Member Workshop summary table

Responses to the best things about Colchester as a Place now and opportunities for 2041

Best Things Now	Opportunities - 2041
<p>Environmental</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geography / location • Countryside • Estuaries and the sea • Green space • Urban / rural mix / • separate identity of places 	<p>Environmental</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection of areas of ecological importance • Environmentally friendly • Less congestion • Improved links for active travel • Clean healthy and green • More efficient use of land (intensification / density in urban centre)
<p>Heritage and Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History / heritage • Distinctive culture / heritage • Arts 	<p>Heritage and Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximise potential of heritage and cultural qualities and opportunities
<p>Economic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economy (as a whole) • Castle Park • Regeneration • Diversity of hospitality • Urban district centres • Tourism – quality and range of destinations 	<p>Economic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse economy • Maximise opportunities from links between University and Military • Better quality jobs - Higher paid and higher skilled jobs • Jobs to be matched to housing in quantum and needs • Maximise potential of geographical position to promote and grow economy • Regenerated / thriving city centre
<p>Social and infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing / Infrastructure • Housing – relative affordability (compared to London) • Education opportunities • Quality of life • Transport connections 	<p>Social and infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organic growth in the villages • balance of growth between the town and countryside • Effective and adequate infrastructure • Better internal transport

Best Things Now	Opportunities - 2041
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No infrastructure deficit (catch up and maintain) • Infrastructure future proofed • Good housing supported by adequate infrastructure • Housing provision to match needs (Starter homes, retirement homes / villages/ mix of size and type) • better traffic links • Better public transport • Modern play parks • More opportunities for young people including access to sport and leisure • Intensification / higher densities in urban centre
<p>Quality / Cultural Characteristics of place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of belonging • Cultural – identify with places • Care about the place • Refugee action • Welcoming • Ambitious • Strong sense of identity 	<p>Quality / Cultural Characteristics of place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity recognised and celebrated • support for communities