



Local Plan Committee

Item
9

22 February 2024

Report of	Bethany Jones	01206 282541
Title	Colchester Local Plan Review – Evidence Base and Call for Sites Update	
Wards affected	All wards affected	

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of the current progress of the Evidence Base required to support the Colchester Local Plan Review. The evidence is to be prepared through specific commissions to consultants and in house by the Planning Policy team, with input from other teams where required.
- 1.2 Officers have progressed work on a number of evidence base documents being prepared in house. The Settlement Boundary Review Stage One and Sustainability Appraisal Scoping work has commenced. The Call for Sites was launched on 20 October 2023 and closed on 5 January 2024. A total of 195 submissions have been received for consideration. In some instances, a site may have been promoted for multiple uses or the same site submitted by more than one individual.
- 1.3 For some evidence which requires specialist consultants, briefs have been prepared and will be put out to tender in the next few months.
- 1.4 In some instances, the evidence is not required until later in the plan making process, however the need for the evidence has been identified. Officers will keep this under review and seek to provide additional evidence if it is considered necessary, or review the need and scope as required.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 To note the submissions received through the Call for Sites process.
- 2.2 To note the updates for the evidence base documents required to support the Colchester Local Plan Review.

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 To keep Local Plan Committee informed of the progress of the evidence base for the Colchester Local Plan Review.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 No alternative options are proposed.

5. Background Information

- 5.1 A Local Plan is underpinned by an extensive evidence base which provides the justification for the policy approach taken and is considered as part of the Independent Examination which all Local Plans are subject to, as part of the Plan Making Regulations.
- 5.2 As work has progressed with the Local Plan Review, the table below sets out the evidence base that Officers currently consider necessary for the Local Plan Review and an indication of which are being, or likely to be undertaken in-house or whether specialist consultants are needed. An update for some of these individual evidence base documents is set out further in the report. In some instances, the evidence is not required until later in the plan making process. Officers will keep this under review and seek to provide additional evidence if it is considered necessary, or review the need and scope as required.

Evidence	Purpose	Inhouse, consultants or hybrid	Timetable/ Progress
Green and Blue Infrastructure Framework	To map the green network and waterways in the city and consider improvements to this as part of the spatial strategy	Inhouse	Ongoing – consultation on evidence complete in Winter 2023 Framework Spring / Summer 2024
Call for Sites	To identify potential sites for green infrastructure, Biodiversity Net Gain, housing, employment	Inhouse	Complete – Call for Sites undertaken Winter 2023
Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA)	To consider the suitability, availability and achievability of all sites proposed for development	Inhouse / hybrid / external input where required	Ongoing – Methodology agreed December 2023. Desktop Review commenced January 2024. Individual Assessments to commence February/March 2024.
Settlement boundary review	To review the boundaries of all settlements within the city and consider alongside the sites	Inhouse	Ongoing – Stage 1 commenced January 2024.

Evidence	Purpose	Inhouse, consultants or hybrid	Timetable/ Progress
	assessed through the SLAA.		Stage 2 to commence alongside SLAA
Climate Change Mitigation and Adaption	To justify policies and targets in relation to energy use and climate change.	Consultants commissioned by ECC	ECC have drafted recommended climate change policies supported by an evidence base for use across Essex.
Gypsy and Travellers Accommodation Assessment (GTAA)	To identify the need for gypsy and traveller plots/sites	Consultants – Essex wide commission.	Work underway, report due Quarter 2 of 2024.
Biodiversity Net Gain Study	To consider likely effects on biodiversity from potential allocations, and recommend mitigation and biodiversity net gain measures	Consultants	Brief prepared late 2023 / aiming to appoint a consultant February / March 2024
Local Housing Needs Assessment	To establish the housing requirement and mix of housing required. To establish and justify the affordable housing figure.	Consultants	Draft brief prepared and due to go out to tender imminently.
Infrastructure Delivery Strategy Including Infrastructure Audit	To document the infrastructure required to identify required mitigation to support the Plan. Initial work- Infrastructure Audit	Consultants	Work has commenced on the infrastructure audit. Brief prepared for consultants to go out to tender Feb/ March 2024. Needed during preferred options preparation & updated before submission
Employment study	To understand the amount and type of employment space needed in the plan period and help inform policy approach	Consultants	Brief being drafted with a view to going out to tender late Feb /early March
Town centre & retail study	To understand the quantum and policy	Consultants	Brief being drafted with a view to going

Evidence	Purpose	Inhouse, consultants or hybrid	Timetable/ Progress
	approach for retail and town centre uses needed in the plan period		out to tender late Feb /early March
Transport Evidence	To understand the transport requirements to support / inform the Local Plan Review	ECC / Consultants	Scope to be agreed Spring 2024. Required during Preferred Options preparation
Water Cycle Study	To demonstrate that water can be supplied, wastewater treated and development won't cause flooding	Consultants Potentially to be shared with neighbouring authorities	Brief to be prepared and advertised late Spring 2024. Required during Preferred Options preparation
Strategic Flood Risk Assessment	To identify areas at risk of flooding	Consultants – possibly ECC	Brief to be prepared and advertised late Spring 2024. Required during Preferred Options preparation
Heritage Impact Assessment	To consider likely effects on heritage assets from potential allocations, and recommend mitigation measures where required to inform policy	Consultants	Brief to be prepared and advertised late Spring 2024. Required during Preferred Options preparation and potential updates to inform submission
Landscape Character Assessment Review	To include a review of the coastal protection belt & define valued landscapes	Consultants	Brief to be prepared to confirm the scope of evidence needed- Spring 2024
Design Code	To ensure the Plan can deliver on National Policy requirements on beauty and design	Potential options being explored to include hybrid if possible	To follow later, required during preparation of Submission Plan
Health Impact Assessment	To consider the health impacts of the plan	Inhouse utilising work / engagement with the North East Essex Health and	Draft to be prepared during Preferred Options preparation. Update and finalise before Submission.

Evidence	Purpose	Inhouse, consultants or hybrid	Timetable/ Progress
		Wellbeing Alliance	
Viability Assessment	To demonstrate that the Submitted Plan is viable	Consultants	Brief to be prepared in mid-2024 as required during preparation of Submission Plan.
Sustainability Appraisal (SA)	Legal requirement for all DPDs	Consultants to be confirmed - but scoping inhouse	Scoping report drafted early 2024. SA will be ongoing throughout plan preparation. Draft SA at Preferred options & SA at submission. Anticipate appointing consultants early March 2024
Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA)	To confirm no adverse effects on the integrity of habitats sites	Consultants	Draft to support Preferred Options & final report at submission
Equality Impact Assessment	To determine if there is any adverse impact or illegal discrimination or any unmet need or requirements, in accordance with Equality Act 2010.	Inhouse	To be prepared prior to submission.

Green Network and Waterways Strategy / Framework

5.3 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. 373 comments received were about the existing green network, 13 comments were made about waterways and 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 and all comments have been shared with the Parks and Open Spaces team, Sustainability team, and,

where relevant, Essex County Council. All comments can be viewed on the consultation portal: [Colchester City Council - Green & Blue Spaces \(oc2.uk\)](https://www.colchester.gov.uk/oc2.uk).

- 5.4 In addition to incorporating these comments into the Local Plan Review and other Council workstreams, Officers are working with other Council teams to prepare guiding principles for Colchester's Green Network and Waterways. The Guiding Principles will be developed through an understanding of the city's green network and waterways baseline, the public engagement comments, and a review of Natural England's Green Infrastructure Principles, Essex County Council's Green Infrastructure Standards, and the objectives of the Colchester Woodland and Biodiversity Project. Once endorsed by Cabinet, the Green Network and Waterways Guiding Principles will inform all Council work related to green spaces and waterways.

Settlement Boundary Review

- 5.5 Officers have prepared a scope for the Settlement Boundary Review to be completed in house. The Review will be in two stages, the first providing an overarching profile of the existing settlement area and identify opportunities and constraints to growth. The second stage of the Review will include consideration of how the settlement boundary could logically be modified and a settlement level consideration of the sites assessed through the Strategic Land Availability Assessment.
- 5.6 The first stage of the Review has commenced and is scheduled for completion in February. Officers will be undertaking site visits to the settlements throughout March/April. The second stage of the Review will be progressed alongside the Strategic Land Availability Assessment throughout the next few months.

Biodiversity Protection and Biodiversity Net Gain Study

- 5.7 Officers prepared a brief in November 2023 for a study to support plan preparation by:
- identifying sites where development would significantly harm biodiversity;
 - making recommendations for mitigation and biodiversity net gain measures for potential housing, employment, and infrastructure sites; and
 - reviewing sites submitted as potential biodiversity net gain habitat banks.
- 5.8 It is hoped to appoint a consultant late February / early March 2024, and work will inform the Strategic Land Availability Assessment, green network work and the overall plan making process. This study will assist with ensuring a robust

evidence base for framing the plan around the creating a better environment agenda.

Sustainability Appraisal / Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 5.9 Sustainability Appraisals, incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessments, are a legal requirement for Local Plans. They are carried out alongside plan preparation and assess how sustainable the plan is and reasonable alternatives. Sustainability Appraisals are a useful tool to aid decision making and help justify the preferred strategy.
- 5.10 The first stage of the Sustainability Appraisal is scoping, and Officers are carrying this out inhouse. Scoping involves considering baseline information about the plan area, a review of relevant policies, plans and programmes, identifying sustainability issues that face the plan area and the establishment of a sustainability framework that will be used to assess the plan options as they emerge. The following stages of the Sustainability Appraisal work will need to be carried out by consultants which will be programmed with appointed consultants once confirmed.

Strategic Land Availability Assessment and Call for Sites

- 5.11 Following consultation, the updated Strategic Land Availability Assessment Methodology was revised and adopted by Local Plan Committee on 11 December 2023. In January 2024, Officers commenced the Desktop Review to identify sites in addition to those promoted through the Call for Sites for further assessment. Sites identified through the desktop study will be published as part of the Strategic Land Availability Assessment process.
- 5.12 The Call for Sites is an opportunity for the public, Members, landowners, developers and other stakeholders to promote sites for development across the City. This includes land for use of housing, employment, community facilities and/or infrastructure development. This also included a Green Infrastructure category to enable land to be promoted for offsite biodiversity net gain, country parks, open space and other green uses.
- 5.13 A total of 195 submissions have been received by a mixture of landowners, developers, agents, and members of the public. A full list of submitted sites is included in Appendix A below. The majority of submissions were promoting sites for residential uses; however some sites were promoted for other uses, including employment, open space, local nature reserve/local wildlife site and biodiversity. In some instances, a site may have been promoted for multiple uses. Similarly,

some sites have been promoted by more than one individual, for example Middlewick Ranges as a green use by several members of the public.

- 5.14 The list of sites is currently one composite list with brief details and map extract. These are ordered by Site ID reference rather than any geographical distribution. The easiest way to view the complete Call for Site coverage in any one geographical area, is using the [mapping tool](#). This enables the user to zoom in and out and identify further details as required.
- 5.15 The information provided in the Call for Sites as published is based on that which was submitted by the respondent/agent. As sites are assessed, it may be that further clarification needs to be sought in some cases. It is also worth noting that in some cases the site boundaries drawn cover the full extent of an area put forward for consideration, which may be larger the area intended for development i.e may include land within the same ownership or land available for biodiversity net gain, or an alternative supporting use.
- 5.16 The Call for Sites is an essential part of the plan making process, but it is only one part of the evidence base. It is important to remember that just because a site has been promoted through the Call for Sites, this does not necessarily mean that it will go forward as an allocation in the Local Plan or be supported for development of the proposed use.
- 5.17 Officers are currently comparing the list of sites generated from the Desktop Review and those submitted through the Call for Sites to remove any duplication. The next step is to commence the individual site assessments using the adopted Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) methodology. This will be ongoing for the next few months.

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 Whilst no consultation on matters in this report is required at this stage, it is proposed to engage with the Town and Parish Councils and key stakeholders for focused engagement as required to help inform some of the evidence base. Engagement with the Town and Parish Councils will include the Call for Sites and informing the Settlement Boundary Review. Future wider engagement and consultation will be undertaken at appropriate stages of preparation of evidence and plan making in accordance with the Planning Regulations and Statement of Community Involvement.

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

Appendix A – Call for Sites 2023/24 Report