



STANFORDS

ESTABLISHED 1879

**Colchester City Council Preferred Options Local Plan  
Regulation 18 Consultation 2025**

Draft Planning Policy Comments For and on Behalf of Stanfords Colchester LLP

**Section: 9**

**Policy E2: Economic Development in the Countryside**

Policy E2 seeks to safeguard allocated rural Employment Areas and support economic activity in rural Colchester, including conversion, extension, and replacement of rural employment buildings. While the principle of promoting rural enterprise is supported, the policy lacks clarity in several areas and could be strengthened to encourage sustainable growth.

**Issues Identified**

**1. Recognition of Non-Designated Employment Sites**

The policy appropriately acknowledges allocated rural Employment Areas but only briefly references other rural locations that provide a similar economic function. This recognition is positive but should be more explicit and proactive to ensure these sites are safeguarded and supported in decision-making.

**2. Criterion (c) on Replacement Rural Employment Buildings – Restrictive Wording**

The current wording states that replacement buildings will only be supported where the existing development is “visually intrusive or otherwise inappropriate.” This is overly restrictive and may discourage investment in upgrading outdated facilities. A more positive approach would encourage proposals that enhance rural character and reduce landscape impact.

**3. Vagueness Around Evidence for New Rural Employment Buildings**

The requirement to “adequately demonstrate meeting local employment and business need” and to show that “there are no appropriate existing buildings or employment land available in the locality” is vague. Without clear guidance, applicants face uncertainty, and decision-makers risk inconsistency.

## Recommendations for Improvement

- **Strengthen Support for Non-Designated Sites**

Amend wording to actively safeguard and encourage employment-generating uses on rural sites that provide a similar function to allocated Employment Areas, ensuring flexibility for rural economic resilience.

- **Positive Wording for Replacement Buildings**

Revise criterion (c) to:

*“Replacement buildings will be supported where the proposal enhances the character of the area and reduces visual landscape impact.”*

This encourages high-quality design and environmental improvements rather than limiting replacement to cases of harm.

- **Clarify Evidence Requirements for New Rural Employment Buildings**

Specify what applicants must provide, including:

- **Demonstrating Local Employment and Business Need:**
  - A business case or economic statement showing job creation, skills alignment, and contribution to rural economic resilience.
  - Letters of support or expressions of interest from local businesses.
- **Evidence of Lack of Suitable Existing Buildings or Employment Land:**
  - A marketing report showing active search for suitable premises within a defined radius (e.g., 5 miles)
  - A site availability assessment listing existing employment sites considered and reasons for rejection.
- **Geographic Scope and Timeframe:**
  - Define “locality” clearly (e.g., within 5 miles or nearest rural service centre).
  - Require evidence to be current (within the last 12 months).