



Colchester Preferred Options Local Plan - Regulation 18 Representation

Policies EN5: New and Existing Trees & GN4: Tree Canopy Cover

Policies EN5 and GN4, as currently drafted, duplicate each other to a significant degree, repeat national and local guidance, and risk imposing onerous and inflexible requirements that could undermine deliverability, site efficiency and viability. A single, streamlined tree policy would be more effective and proportionate.

Duplication and Policy Overlap

Policies EN5 and GN4 both:

- Require retention and incorporation of existing trees;
- Promote new tree planting;
- Require consideration of species selection, management and maintenance; and
- Introduce canopy cover targets and compensatory planting.

This duplication risks confusion, inconsistent interpretation and unnecessary policy layering. There is no clear justification for maintaining two separate tree policies when a single, consolidated policy could more clearly set out the Council's expectations while retaining flexibility.

Policy EN5 – New and Existing Trees

The requirement for major development to consider new tree planting *in addition* to canopy cover targets set out elsewhere is unjustified and onerous. Policy GN4 already establishes a tree canopy framework, and there is no clear logic in requiring further planting beyond those standards.

The expectation that new trees should form “positive focal points or landmarks” is also overly prescriptive and not appropriate in all contexts, particularly on constrained sites or higher-density schemes where such outcomes may be unrealistic or undesirable.

The policy requirement that *all new development should incorporate existing trees* is supported in principle, but should be clarified to state “**where possible**”, recognising that retention will not always be feasible or appropriate due to site constraints, safety considerations or development objectives.

Similarly, the requirement for tree survey information with all applications where trees are present is accepted practice, but this procedural detail would be more appropriately addressed through validation requirements or supporting guidance rather than policy.

Policy GN4 – Tree Canopy Cover

While the objective of increasing tree canopy cover is supported in principle, the rigid application of minimum percentage targets risks unintended consequences:

- It may reduce achievable densities;
- Increase development costs; and
- Undermine scheme viability, particularly on brownfield or constrained urban sites.

The requirement that *new streets should be tree lined* is particularly problematic. In practice, Essex Highways object to planning applications with this feature and routinely advise against tree planting within the highway due to drainage, services, safety and long-term maintenance constraints.

While tree-lined streets may be an aspiration, applying this as a blanket requirement is at odds with established highway practice and risks making schemes undeliverable.

The policy also introduces extensive species selection, biodiversity, ecosystem services and climate adaptation requirements, much of which duplicates national policy, guidance and best practice.

While these considerations are important, they should be framed as matters to be addressed *where appropriate*, rather than as mandatory policy tests in all cases.