



Colchester Preferred Options Local Plan - Regulation 18 Representation

Policy ST4: Development in the Countryside

We support the principle of having a dedicated policy to guide development in the countryside and recognise the need to balance development needs with the protection of rural character, landscape quality, biodiversity and settlement identity. However, we consider that Policy ST4, as currently drafted, would benefit from greater clarity, flexibility and a more criteria-based approach to development management.

1. Need for a Clear Criteria-Based Policy Framework

Policy ST4 is currently framed in largely descriptive and aspirational terms, with repeated references to avoiding harm, protecting character, and conserving the countryside. While these objectives are supported, the policy would be strengthened by a clearer set of positive criteria against which development proposals—both residential and commercial—can be assessed.

In particular, the policy should:

- Clearly identify the circumstances in which development in the countryside will be supported, rather than focusing predominantly on restraint; and
- Provide a transparent and consistent framework for decision-making.

We recommend that the policy is redrafted to include explicit criteria supporting development where it:

- Makes effective use of previously developed land in the countryside; and
- Involves the reuse or conversion of existing buildings;

2. Recognition of the Distinct Nature of Rural Development

The policy would benefit from clearer recognition that development patterns, accessibility, and sustainability considerations in rural areas differ from those in urban locations.

In particular:

- A more flexible approach to accessibility and sustainable travel should be acknowledged, recognising that rural locations may not have the same level of public transport provision as urban areas; and
- The policy should avoid applying urban assumptions or expectations to rural development scenarios.

This approach would align with national policy, which recognises the need to support the vitality of rural communities while taking account of their distinct characteristics.

3. Alternative Approach

We agree that relying solely on national policy and spatial strategy policies would be insufficient, and that a dedicated countryside policy is appropriate. However, the current approach would benefit from greater flexibility and a stronger emphasis on enabling sustainable rural development. A refined policy that provides clear criteria, recognises the distinct nature of rural areas, and allows appropriate development to come forward would better meet the Plan's objectives while remaining consistent with national policy.