



Colchester Preferred Options Local Plan - Regulation 18 Representation

This representation raises strategic concerns regarding the structure, complexity, deliverability and policy alignment of the draft Colchester Local Plan as a whole. While the ambition of the Plan is acknowledged and supported in principle, we consider that the current draft risks being undeliverable in practice and insufficiently aligned with both market realities and the emerging national policy direction.

1. Definition and Treatment of “Major Development”

Throughout the draft Plan, policies repeatedly refer to “major development” without acknowledging the very low threshold at which development becomes ‘major’ in planning terms (i.e. 10 or more dwellings).

We strongly recommend that, throughout the Plan, references to “major development” are explicitly defined as 10 or more dwellings, with a clearer distinction made between:

- **Small development: 1 – 9**
- **Medium major development: 10 - 49** – *as per NPPF 2025 with reduced policy requirements*
- **Strategic development 200+**

This distinction is critical. Many of the policy expectations placed on “major development” are disproportionate when applied to small and medium schemes. Without this differentiation, the Plan risks over-burdening small and medium sites, which are essential to maintaining housing delivery in the early and middle parts of the plan period.

2. Excessive Policy Complexity and Internal Conflict

When read as a whole, the draft Local Plan is overly complex, repetitive and difficult to navigate. Policies are generally very lengthy, highly prescriptive, and frequently duplicate or restate requirements found elsewhere in the Plan.

There is a clear lack of distinction between:

- **Strategic policies**, which should set high-level objectives and priorities; and
- **Development management policies**, which should be concise, flexible and practical to apply.

As currently drafted, many policies blur this distinction, resulting in:

- Repetition of the same requirements across multiple topic-based and site-specific policies;
- Overlapping and sometimes conflicting obligations (for example, between design, green infrastructure, open space, active travel, BNG, heritage, and water management policies);
- A cumulative policy burden that is difficult to reconcile within a single scheme.

This approach increases uncertainty for applicants and decision-makers alike and is likely to lengthen determination times, increase costs, and lead to inconsistent decision-making. A clearer hierarchy and simplification of policy wording is urgently required.

3. Deliverability and Market Reality

The Plan does not sufficiently respond to current housing market conditions in Colchester. The Council's own reporting confirms that housing delivery fell by approximately 40% in 2024/25, with only 659 new dwellings completed. The Council's own housing need evidence also acknowledges that the local housing market is currently sluggish and unlikely to return to previous delivery rates in the short to medium term. There is a strong likelihood that 2025/26 delivery will be similar or worse.

Against this backdrop, the Plan introduces a very substantial increase in:

- Policy requirements;
- Evidence expectations;
- Technical assessments; and
- Front-loaded obligations.

Even where sites are allocated, the cumulative effect of the policies is likely to make schemes:

- More expensive to prepare;
- Slower to determine; and
- More difficult to deliver.

This risks undermining the Plan's ability to maintain a rolling housing land supply and to achieve delivery across the plan period, particularly in its early years when smaller and medium-sized sites are most critical.

4. Alignment with Emerging National Policy (Draft NPPF 2025)

The draft consultation version of the NPPF 2025 signals a clear direction of travel towards:

- Simplification of plan-making;
- A stronger emphasis on deliverability and viability;
- Greater flexibility in how policy objectives are achieved; and
- Reducing unnecessary barriers to housing delivery.

In this context, we urge the Council to undertake a full review of the draft Local Plan policies to ensure they are better aligned with the emerging national framework. Without such alignment, there is a real risk that the Plan will quickly become out of date, overly rigid, and difficult to defend at examination.

5. Summary and Requested Actions

In summary, while the objectives of the draft Local Plan are broadly supported, we request that the Council:

- Clearly distinguish between different scales of “major development” and apply policy requirements proportionately;
- Simplify and streamline policy wording, removing duplication and internal conflict;
- Rebalance the Plan to place greater emphasis on deliverability, particularly in the early years;
- Reduce unnecessary prescription and allow greater flexibility at development management stage; and
- Review the Plan in light of the draft NPPF 2025 to ensure consistency with national policy direction.

Addressing these issues at Regulation 18 stage will significantly improve the Plan’s soundness, effectiveness and realism, and will better support the delivery of much-needed homes in Colchester.