

Our Ref: WV/COL01
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Head of Planning Policy
Colchester Borough Council
Rowan House
33 Sheepen Road
Colchester
Essex
CO3 3WG

Tel: 01206 392613
e: info@rosebuilders.co.uk
w: www.rosebuilders.co.uk

For the attention of: Head of Planning Policy

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: PREFERRED OPTIONS LOCAL PLAN CONSULTATION

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the Preferred Options version of the emerging Colchester Local Plan. As a medium-sized, locally based housebuilder with a long track record of delivering high-quality homes across the borough, we strongly support the Council's ambition to meet local housing needs, strengthen communities, and ensure that growth is delivered in a sustainable and coordinated manner.

However, we have significant concerns that several of the key development sites identified in the Preferred Options document remain effectively undevelopable due to unresolved constraints relating to wastewater treatment capacity - particularly at the Langham and West Bergholt Water Recycling Centres (WRCs). Unless these constraints are addressed early and decisively, the Local Plan risks allocating land that cannot be delivered within the plan period, undermining both housing supply and the credibility of the spatial strategy.

In addition, we believe the Plan should go further in recognising the challenges faced by medium-sized builders, particularly in relation to regulatory burden, development viability, and the cumulative impact of policy requirements. Without a more proportionate and enabling approach, the Plan risks reducing the diversity of the local housebuilding sector and slowing the rate of delivery.

Wastewater Treatment Capacity as a Binding Constraint on Housing Delivery

a) Current capacity limitations at Langham and West Bergholt WRCs

The Preferred Options document acknowledges that wastewater treatment capacity is a critical infrastructure dependency for several proposed allocations. However, the scale and immediacy of the issue is understated. Both Langham WRC and West Bergholt WRC are currently operating at or near their permitted capacity. We understand from engagement with Anglian Water that:

- No additional headroom exists to accommodate the scale of growth proposed in the Local Plan, particularly in the northern and western parts of the borough.
- Upgrades to both WRCs will require multi-year investment programmes, including design, consenting, and construction phases.
- Delivery of upgrades is not currently aligned with the Local Plan trajectory, meaning that several allocations cannot realistically come forward until the latter part of the plan period if at all.

These constraints are not theoretical. They represent a hard environmental and regulatory limit on development. Without confirmed investment, timing, and funding mechanisms for WRC upgrades, the affected sites cannot be considered “deliverable” or even “developable” under the NPPF definitions.

b) Impact on key allocations

A number of strategic and medium-sized sites in the Preferred Options document fall within the catchments of Langham and West Bergholt WRCs. These include sites that the Council is relying on to deliver early-to-mid-plan-period housing numbers. If wastewater capacity is not resolved, the following risks arise:

- Housing delivery will be delayed, potentially by several years.
- The five-year housing land supply will be undermined, exposing the Council to speculative development.
- The spatial strategy will become unbalanced, with growth pushed toward areas with fewer constraints but potentially less alignment with sustainable development principles.
- Developers will face prolonged uncertainty, making it difficult to commit to land acquisition, design work, and investment.

We strongly recommend that the Local Plan includes a clear, costed, and time-bound infrastructure delivery plan for wastewater upgrades, prepared in partnership with Anglian Water. Without this, the allocations dependent on Langham and West Bergholt WRCs should not be relied upon for early delivery.

c) Need for a coordinated, proactive approach

To avoid a situation where wastewater constraints stall the entire housing programme, the Council should:

- Work with Anglian Water to secure early funding commitments for WRC upgrades.
- Explore phased or modular upgrade options that could unlock partial capacity sooner.
- Ensure that the Infrastructure Delivery Plan is aligned with the housing trajectory, not treated as an afterthought.

A Local Plan that allocates undeliverable sites risks failing the tests of soundness. Addressing wastewater capacity is therefore essential to ensuring the Plan is effective and justified.

Supporting Medium-Sized Builders Through Proportionate Regulation

a) The importance of medium-sized developers

Medium-sized builders play a vital role in Colchester’s housing market. We:

- Deliver small-to-medium sites that larger developers often overlook.
- Build at a faster rate once on site.

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Directors: S W J Rose BSc FCIQB – A L Auger – A M Bowles BSc FCA – S D Brown BSc MCIQB – C M Wright – T W Rose MEng

- Provide design diversity and local character.
- Support local employment and supply chains.

However, the cumulative regulatory burden - particularly around nutrient neutrality, biodiversity net gain, design codes, and technical standards - has disproportionately affected medium-sized firms. Unlike national volume housebuilders, we do not have large compliance teams or the ability to absorb prolonged delays.

b) The need for a proportionate policy approach

We urge the Council to adopt a more flexible and enabling approach in the Local Plan, including:

- Clear, streamlined requirements for smaller and medium-sized sites.
- Avoiding unnecessary duplication between local policies and national standards.
- Ensuring that policy requirements are viability-tested, particularly where multiple obligations apply simultaneously.
- Providing template guidance and standardised methodologies to reduce the cost and complexity of compliance.

A Local Plan that is overly prescriptive risks excluding medium-sized builders from the market, reducing competition and slowing delivery.

Viability and Deliverability

a) Cumulative policy burden

The Preferred Options document includes a wide range of policy requirements relating to:

- Affordable housing
- Biodiversity net gain
- Sustainable construction
- Design quality
- Open space
- Infrastructure contributions

Individually, these policies may be justified. Collectively, they risk rendering many sites unviable - particularly in areas where land values are modest or where significant abnormal costs (such as wastewater upgrades) already exist.

b) Ensuring realistic viability assumptions

We recommend that the Council:

- Undertakes robust, site-specific viability testing, rather than relying on generic assumptions.
- Recognises the cost implications of wastewater constraints, including potential developer contributions.
- Avoids setting policy requirements at the upper limit of viability, leaving no flexibility for unforeseen costs.
- Allows for phased or reduced obligations on medium-sized sites where justified.

A plan that is not viable is not deliverable. Ensuring realistic viability assumptions is essential to maintaining a steady supply of new homes.

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Conclusions and Recommendations

To ensure that the Local Plan is sound, deliverable, and capable of meeting Colchester's housing needs, we recommend that the Council:

1. Address wastewater treatment capacity as a priority, with clear commitments and timelines for upgrades at Langham and West Bergholt WRCs.
2. Avoid relying on constrained sites for early delivery unless wastewater solutions are secured.
3. Adopt a proportionate regulatory approach that supports medium-sized builders and recognises their contribution to local housing delivery.
4. Ensure that policy requirements are viability-tested, realistic, and flexible enough to accommodate site-specific circumstances.
5. Strengthen the Infrastructure Delivery Plan to align infrastructure investment with the housing trajectory.

We remain committed to working collaboratively with the Council to deliver high-quality homes across the borough. With the right infrastructure and a supportive policy environment, medium-sized local developers can play a central role in achieving the ambitions of the new Local Plan.

Yours faithfully,



WILL VOTE