



Planning Services
Colchester City Council
CO1 1PJ

2nd January 2026

Dear Planning Services,

**Colchester Preferred Options Local Plan - Consultation Period: 26 November
2025 to 5.00pm on 14 January 2026**

**Promotion of the Former Mill Race Garden Centre, New Road, Aldham for a
Mixed-Use Commercial and Leisure Allocation**

Dear Sir / Madam,

On behalf of our client, Willow Park Group, we submit this representation to the Colchester Preferred Options Local Plan (Regulation 18) to promote the former Mill Race Garden Centre site, New Road, Aldham, as a mixed-use commercial site allocation.

The site represents a previously developed, commercially established location with extant planning permissions and a long-standing employment function. Its allocation would support the Local Plan's objectives for economic growth, rural employment, and sustainable patterns of development, whilst complementing significant planned residential growth in the surrounding area.

SITE LOCATION AND PLANNING CONTEXT

The site is located to the west of Ford Street, along the A1124 corridor, approximately 800m from Aldham village and around 1 mile from Eight Ash Green.

While Ford Street is not identified as a settlement within the adopted or emerging Local Plan, it nonetheless represents a recognisable community and cluster of development in a strategic location serving a wide rural catchment.

The site is previously developed land, containing an established retail garden centre unit, historically Class A1 and now within Class E, with a large warehouse unit and extensive hardstanding.

The relevant planning history includes:

- **F/COL/06/0495** – Demolition and replacement of existing retail garden centre with a new garden centre (approved 23/06/2006). This permission was commenced and remains extant, providing for approximately 3,200 sqm of retail floorspace.
- **101128** – Lawful Development Certificate confirming the existing use for importing, storage, distribution and manufacture of garden-related products (approved 01/03/2011).

The lawful and extant use position confirms the site's established commercial character, and its suitability for continued and diversified employment-generating uses.

SURROUNDING CONTEXT

The surrounding area contains a mix of commercial and employment uses, including former agricultural buildings and purpose-built commercial premises, with uses typically falling within Class B2 and Class B8.

The site therefore sits within an established employment corridor rather than an isolated rural location, and its further development would be compatible with surrounding land uses.

RELATIONSHIP TO THE PLANNED GROWTH

The emerging Local Plan proposes:

- 15 dwellings at Aldham village, approximately 800m from the site; and
- 430 dwellings at Eight Ash Green, across two allocations approximately 1 mile from the site.

In this context, the Mill Race site represents a valuable opportunity to provide local employment, leisure and community services and facilities that can:

- Reduce the need to travel longer distances for work and services;
- Support the sustainability of the new and existing communities; and
- Contribute to a more balanced pattern of growth across the rural western part of the district.

THE DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY

Willow Park Group seeks allocation of the site for a mixed-use commercial, leisure and community development, capable of being delivered flexibly over the plan period, comprising:

- Retention of the existing warehouse building;
- Retention of the existing retail unit for Class E commercial uses;
- Up to 2,000 sqm Class B8 warehousing;
- Up to 1,000 sqm of flexible commercial spaces within Class E(e), Class E(g) and Class B8 use;
- Up to 500 sqm Class E floorspace for food retail (e.g. local supermarket);
- Up to 750 sqm Class E(f) for a crèche, day nursery or day centre;

- Up to 1,000 sqm flexible floorspace within Class E(d) and Class F1, including indoor sport, recreation, fitness, education, exhibition or event space.

This mix would support SME businesses, rural services, community facilities and leisure uses, consistent with the Local Plan's economic and social objectives.

Allocation of the site would deliver a number of wider planning benefits, including:

- Supporting and developed SME and rural businesses;
- Enhancement and diversification of rural employment opportunities;
- Reuse and intensification of previously developed land;
- Support for nearby housing growth at Aldham and Eight Ash Green;
- Opportunities to enhance leisure and recreation provision, including improved access to the River Colne corridor;
- Opportunities to develop community uses, e.g. health facilities, crèche/day nursery, convenience shopping
- A development form that respects the character of the surrounding area while reinforcing an existing commercial cluster.

SUGGESTED POLICY ALLOCATION

To address this omission, it is respectfully requested that the Council considers allocating the site. Please see attached site boundary and illustrative masterplan in Appendix A.

Appendix A

We suggest that the new site could be allocated using the following draft policy wording:

Policy PPxx – Former Mill Race Garden Centre, New Road, Aldham

Land at Mill Race Garden Centre, as shown on the policies map, is allocated for employment, leisure and community uses. All land and premises within this area will be safeguarded for employment uses, primarily within E(e), E(f), E(g) and Class B8 uses to allow for provision of a range of additional jobs that serve the rural area and leisure and community uses within E(d), E(f) and Class F1. Other Class uses will be supported where they ancillary to the existing employment, leisure and community uses on the site and are intended to serve the primary function of the site.

In addition to the infrastructure and mitigation requirements identified in Policy ST7 and subject to compliance with all other policies, proposals for employment, leisure and community uses should provide:

- a) Safe and suitable site access to required highway design standards and point of vehicle access to be agreed with the Highway Authority and demonstration that proposal would not be detrimental to highway capacity;
- b) Development must conserve, and where appropriate, enhance the significance of heritage assets (including any contribution made by their setting).
- c) Development must not be located in the areas of the site that fall within flood zones 2 and 3.

Proposals for the allocated site will only be supported where they accord with a comprehensive masterplan in relation to the entire allocation, that has been agreed with the Council prior to submission of any planning application. The masterplan must be of sufficient detail to ensure optimal placemaking and housing delivery outcomes for the allocation and should be informed by an appropriate evidence base. The masterplan should be developed in collaboration with the Council.

CONCLUSION

The former Mill Race Garden Centre site represents a sustainable, deliverable and policy-aligned opportunity for mixed-use commercial development. Its allocation within the Local Plan would:

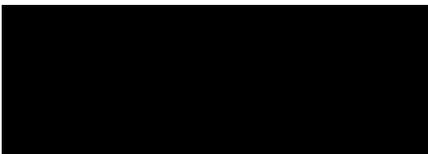
- Support economic growth in a rural location;
- Complement nearby residential allocations;
- Make efficient use of previously developed land; and
- Provide flexibility to respond to changing commercial and community needs over the plan period.

Willow Park Group therefore respectfully requests that the site be allocated in the Local Plan.

I trust these representations will be given due consideration as the Plan progresses.

Should any further information be required, please do not hesitate to get in contact.

Yours faithfully,



Andrew Ransome MRTPI
Planning Director

Appendix A: Site Location Plan and Illustrative Masterplan



LAND USE	Area in m2	Area in ft2	no. of buildings	Parking no.	Disabled Parking
COMMERCIAL					
New Commercial	3420	36813	9	57	
Existing Commercial	667	7180	1	11	
					2
LEISURE					
Bistro/ Cafe	120	1292	1	6	
Luxury Car Bike Experience	668	7190	1	33	
					3
TOTALS	4875	52474	12	108	5

Amendments

Client: David Thompson (Weeley Contracts Limited)

Project: Redevelopment of Mill Race, Aldham

Orig. Title: Strategic Sketch Plan

Purpose of issue: Preliminary Draft

Orig. No: 1438 . LAND USE . 04	Drawn: ADP	Checked: ADP
Scale: 1:500	Original Sheet Size: A1	Date: 24/11/25

Architecture - Design - Planning

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Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015 (CDM 2015) and Approvals:

- Please be aware of your role in relation to the regulations. Further information is available on the Health and Safety Executive website or contact your Principal Designer / Principal Contractor for more information.
- The Health and Safety Policy and Schedule of Abnormal Risks produced by ADP as Designer's are available from the Principal Designer / Principal Contractor.
- Any underground services and associated easements shown should be considered illustrative only. Further information must be sought from the Principal Designer / Contractor prior to any works being undertaken.
- Where any information shown on this drawing differs from the current Planning Decision to Grant Permission / Consent and / or Building Regulations Full Plans Approval Notice, these differences must be approved by the appropriate Authority prior to construction.