

Planning Policy
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Date: 14th January 2026

Dear Sir / Madam,

**Colchester City Council Regulation 18 Preferred Options Local Plan
Fairfields Farm, Fordham Rd, Wormingford, Colchester CO6 3AQ**

This representation is prepared on behalf of our client, co-owner of Fairfields Farm, with respect of the Colchester City Council Preferred Options Local Plan Regulation 18 Consultation.

Background

Fairfields Farm is a family-run farm that grows potatoes and other crops while also manufacturing hand-cooked crisps on site, The farming and production operations at Fairfields Farm are made up of two main businesses; Fairfields Farming Company Ltd and Fairfields Farm Produce Ltd. Between them, they have built a reputation for high-quality potatoes and crisps which have made their products highly sought after and fuelled business growth. Both the potato packing facility and the crisp factory produce a mix of branded and private label products. The two businesses have 80 permanent employees with a further 20 supported by on-site business tenancies. Based on current anticipated growth, it is anticipated that an additional 70 jobs will be created by 2030.

Fairfields Farm is also committed to sustainability and continues to aid in the production of renewable energy through an on-site anaerobic digestion plant, and plans to commit a further 400kwh of solar panelling on roof space in 2026, allowing greater on-site self-sufficiency.

Fairfields Farm thus represents a key rural business which makes a significant contribution to the local economy, provides a number of job opportunities and continues to contribute to sustainability and carbon reduction.

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With the above in mind, it is imperative that the Local Plan recognises the contribution afforded by Fairfields Farm in terms of its provision as an existing rural employment site that also has significant opportunity to expand and grow. The site is not designated within the currently adopted Local Plan and as such it is considered appropriate that it should be designated within the emerging Local Plan.

The Council's Employment Study (February 2025), which forms part of the evidence base to the emerging Local Plan, acknowledges that many existing rural employment sites are often characterised by rural isolation, limiting their connectivity to the strategic road network and public transport options. Similarly, access to amenities and services is often restricted.

By contrast, the Fairfield's Farm site is not in an isolated location, it is approximately a 15 minute drive from the A12 (J26) and Colchester railway station (with regular services to London Liverpool Street, Ipswich and Norwich) and a 7 minute drive to Bures railway station (with regular services to Sudbury and Marks Tey). There are also bus stops to the north of the site (Hillcroft Farm) with services to Colchester City Centre and Sudbury. Both Fordham and Wormingford contain a number of facilities and services including Post Office, village hall, primary school, village shop and public house. Although therefore in a rural location the site is not considered isolated.

The Employment Study also acknowledges: *"The rural economy in Colchester could provide significant economic opportunities for local people, and support the efficient use of land for economic development purposes. The Council should consider this when formulating Local Plan policies to support these objectives, while ensuring the sustainability of the agricultural sector is not compromised."* (paragraph 11.3.12). With this in mind, the site currently makes a significant contribution to the rural economy and should be supported into the future to allow its beneficial expansion.

Draft Policy E2 'Economic Development in Rural Areas and the Countryside' recognises the benefit offered by rural employment sites noting that such sites *"will be safeguarded for appropriate economic uses to ensure local residents have access to local job opportunities to reduce the need to travel."* The draft policy is therefore supported in terms of its overall objectives.

Support is also given to the draft Policy in terms of its recognition that, on certain sites, there may be a legitimate need for new rural employment buildings to meet local employment and business requirements, and for allowing the expansion of existing employment uses into the countryside where justified. These aspects of the Policy, together with its positive stance towards other employment-generating uses on such sites, are considered essential to ensuring continued support for rural businesses, avoiding undue constraints on their growth, and enabling them to adapt and expand in response to changing circumstances. In doing so, the Policy is consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework, which requires planning policies to support a prosperous rural economy by enabling the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through the conversion of existing buildings and the delivery of well-designed new buildings.

In order to ensure that the site at Fairfield's Farm can benefit from such Policy support, it is also recommended that the site is designated as a rural employment site. This would deliver multiple benefits beyond job creation and economic support. It would also promote sustainable rural diversification by enabling farm-based enterprises like crisp production to expand, reducing reliance on urban commuting and preserving agricultural heritage while integrating modern food processing. Such a designation would also ensure the long-term viability of the site.

Summary

Fairfield's Farm, located on Fordham Road serves as a vital rural employer by operating as an independent family farm while producing handcooked crisps on-site. It provides essential local jobs in planting, harvesting, cold



storage, washing, grading, cooking, and packaging. Allocating the site for its current operations and potential future expansion would safeguard these contributions, enabling growth in production capacity, job creation, and regional food supply chains while preserving the rural economy.

Given its scale, function, and strategic importance, the site aligns strongly with the ambitions of the emerging Local Plan to support rural economic growth. Fairfield's Farm is not an isolated rural enterprise: it benefits from relatively strong transport connections, including proximity to the A12, Colchester and Bures railway stations, and local bus services. Nearby settlements such as Fordham and Wormingford offer local amenities, further reinforcing the site's suitability as a designated rural employment area.

Designation of Fairfield's Farm as a rural employment site would ensure continued policy support for its current operations and future expansion. It would also help safeguard local jobs, enhance rural supply chains, promote sustainable farm diversification, and secure the long-term viability of a key contributor to Colchester's rural economy. The site exemplifies the type of rural enterprise that national and local policy seek to support - those capable of adapting, expanding, and contributing meaningfully to both economic and environmental objectives.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss the site, and how it could contribute to a sound, further with the Council.

Yours sincerely

Jessica Ferguson
Associate

Site Location Plan

