



**Rochford District  
Council**

**PLANNING POLICY COMMITTEE**

**27 JULY 2023**

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	New Local Plan Position Statement
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	Director of Place

**REPORT SUMMARY**

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary on progress in developing the New Local Plan to date, and current and planned activity.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

R1. That the Planning Policy Committee notes the New Local Plan Position Statement.

**SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

**1.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

1.1 This position statement has been prepared to inform Members of progress made on the Local Plan to date and outline key considerations.

**2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

2.1 There are no formal decisions attached to this statement and no reasonable alternative options

**3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

3.1 The Council took a decision to review its Local Development Framework in 2015. This review has taken the form of developing a new Local Plan for the District.

3.2 Unlike the Local Development Framework, which consists of a suite of documents setting out planning policies (including the Core Strategy and Development Management Plan), the New Local Plan will comprise a single document which sets

the overall planning strategy for Rochford District, alongside the detailed planning policies that applications must be determined against.

- 3.3 The New Local Plan is being developed over a period to 2040. It will need to set a positive and deliverable strategy for addressing development needs (including for housing, jobs and infrastructure) over that period, and make appropriate provisions for safeguarding, enhancing and managing the District's built, historic and natural environments.
- 3.4 Since 2015, the Council has taken a number of substantial steps in delivering a new Local Plan, including:
- Undertaking an informal public engagement exercise in 2016, focussed around parish-level engagement on key issues and opportunities affecting communities.
  - Issuing two 'Call for Sites' processes between 2015 and 2018, to allow landowners, developers and other parties to put forward land that they consider suitable for future development.
  - Undertaking the "Issues and Options" consultation in 2017-18, which set out the challenges and opportunities facing the future of the District, and detailed options for future planning policies.
  - Undertaking the "Spatial Options" consultation in 2021, which set out geographic (or spatial) options for how future development needs could be met, and revisited high-level options for the direction of future planning policies.
- 3.5 Development of the New Local Plan has been supported by a complete refresh of the previous Local Plan evidence base. A large number of technical studies and assessments have been prepared which, taken as a whole, will support decisions on planning strategy and policy matters. A summary of the evidence base completed to date, grouped by theme, is listed in Table 1 overleaf.

Table 1: Summary of ‘Completed’ Local Plan Evidence Base

<b>Title</b>	<b>Broad Purpose</b>
<b>Development Needs Assessments</b>	
<b>South Essex Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2016) and Addendum (2017)</b>	To assess the future need for different forms of housing
<b>South Essex Economic Development Needs Assessment (2017)</b>	To assess the future need for employment and commercial floorspace
<b>South Essex Retail Study (2017)</b>	To assess the future need for retail and leisure floorspace
<b>Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (2017) and South Essex Update (2019)</b>	To assess the future need for Gypsy and Traveller pitches
<b>Constraints and Opportunities Assessments</b>	
<b>3G Pitch Feasibility Study (2021)</b>	To assess opportunities to deliver 3G pitches in Rochford District
<b>Green Belt Study (2019)</b>	To assess the relative value of different parts of Rochford’s Green Belt
<b>Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (2017) and Update (2021)</b>	To assess the availability and suitability of land in Rochford District for future housing and employment development
<b>Initial Heritage Assessment (2021)</b>	To assess the relative impact development of sites promoted to the New Local Plan would have on local heritage assets
<b>Initial Transport Analysis (2016-2021)</b>	To consider the constraints of the local highway network and the relative impact of future growth on the network
<b>Landscape Character, Sensitivity and Capacity Study (2019)</b>	To assess the relative value of different landscapes in Rochford District
<b>Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2017)</b>	To assess relative flood risk across Rochford District from different sources
<b>Local Wildlife Sites Review (2018)</b>	To review the District’s network of local wildlife sites to ensure they remained worthy of formal designation, and to identify any undesignated sites worthy of a new designation
<b>Playing Pitch Strategy (2018) and Built Facility Strategy (2018)</b>	To assess the capacity of local playing pitches and leisure facilities to meet long-term demand and identify opportunities for improvements
<b>Settlement Role and Hierarchy Study (2021)</b>	To assess the relative role and access to facilities within each of the District’s settlements
<b>Site Appraisal Paper (2021)</b>	To undertake a detailed multi-criteria assessment of areas of land in Rochford District for future housing and employment development
<b>South Essex Green and Blue Infrastructure Study (2020)</b>	To identify opportunities to improve and enhance green and blue infrastructure (e.g. parks, coastal areas)
<b>South Essex Strategic Infrastructure Position Statement (2019)</b>	To assess baseline capacity and issues affecting infrastructure across South Essex
<b>Urban Capacity Study (2021)</b>	To assess the potential capacity of urban land for housing

3.6 The above list is not exhaustive and it is recognised that a wide range of other evidence is available to inform the New Local Plan. It also does not include topic papers prepared at the time of Local Plan consultations, which generally look to consolidate and compare the various sources of evidence available on relevant themes.

**Further Development of the Evidence Base**

- 3.7 In addition to the range of evidence base studies already complete, a number of new evidence base studies are substantially completed, awaiting presentation to the Committee, under preparation, or planned for the future.
- 3.8 A summary of the status of this future evidence base is summarised in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Summary of Planned Local Plan Evidence Base

<b>Title</b>	<b>Broad Purpose</b>	<b>Status</b>
<b>Development Needs Assessments</b>		
<b>Housing Needs Assessment Update</b>	To assess the future need for different forms of housing	Complete – to be presented to Committee
<b>Economic Development Needs Update</b>	To assess the future need for employment and commercial floorspace	Due to be completed in July 2023
<b>Retail and Leisure Needs Assessment</b>	To assess the future need for retail and leisure floorspace	Complete – to be present to Committee
<b>Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment Update</b>	To assess the future need for Gypsy and Traveller pitches	Due to be completed in August 2023
<b>Constraints and Opportunities Assessments</b>		
<b>Local Plan Transport Assessment</b>	To review the impact of potential growth on the District's transport network, and assess the adequacy of potential mitigation to manage those impacts	Underway, first stage due to be completed in November 2023
<b>Infrastructure Delivery Plan</b>	To understand the baseline infrastructure capacity within the District, review the impact of potential growth on local infrastructure, and assess the adequacy of potential mitigation on those impacts	Underway, first stage due to be completed in November 2023
<b>Whole Plan Viability Assessment</b>	To review the impact of proposed policies on the overall viability of developing in the District	Underway, first stage due to be completed in November 2023
<b>Employment Land Review</b>	To assess the quality and quantity of existing employment land across Rochford District	
<b>Site Selection Assessment</b>	To justify the selection of particular sites as proposed allocations for their planning reasons	Planned, due to be completed in November 2023
<b>Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP)</b>	To assess the baseline quality of the District's walking and cycling network and identify opportunities for improvement	Underway, due to be completed October 2023
<b>Detailed Heritage Assessment</b>	To assess the impact of the Plan's policies and strategy on protected heritage assets	Planned, due to be completed October 2023
<b>Local Wildlife Sites Review</b>	High-level refresh of the 2018 Local Wildlife Sites Review to ensure outcomes remain reliable	Planned for 2024
<b>Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment</b>	To assess the specific flood risk of proposed allocations within the Local Plan	Planned for 2024

**Key Considerations and Guiding Principles**

- 3.9 Progress of the New Local Plan to adoption is considered to have three substantive steps remaining:
- A consultation on a Preferred Options draft of the New Local Plan, setting out what the Council intends to include in its New Local Plan and why alternatives have been discounted

- A consultation on the final Local Plan that the Council intends to submit to the Government Inspector
  - Examination in Public on the submitted Local Plan whereby a Government Inspector will test the Local Plan for soundness and legal compliance
- 3.10 There are two key components to the New Local Plan that together make up the key elements of the remaining process. These are the ‘strategy’ element and the ‘policy’ element. In short, the New Local Plan will need to set a positive planning strategy for the District, underpinned by a vision, objectives and a spatial strategy (which defines areas of growth and/or protection). It will also need to set out a range of detailed planning policies that set rules that development must follow.

Latest Position on Strategy Matters

- 3.11 The Spatial Options consultation held in 2021 was the Council’s last formal consultation stage on its New Local Plan. It included the following overarching vision:
- “Rochford District will be a green and pleasant place with a focus on business and high quality homes supported by accessible and responsive services and facilities, creating healthy and sustainable communities”*
- 3.12 This vision was supported by five strategic priorities, which together covered 23 strategic objectives. The five strategic priorities were:
- Strategic Priority 1: Meeting the need for homes and jobs in the area
  - Strategic Priority 2: Making suitable and sufficient provision for retail, leisure and other commercial development
  - Strategic Priority 3: Making suitable and sufficient provision of infrastructure for transport, telecommunications, waste management, water supply, wastewater, flood risk and coastal change management, and the provision of minerals and energy (including heat)
  - Strategic Priority 4: Making suitable and sufficient provision of health, security, community and cultural infrastructure and other local facilities
  - Strategic Priority 5: Making suitable and sufficient provision for climate change mitigation and adaptation, conservation and enhancement of the natural and historic environment, including landscape
- 3.13 National planning policy requires Local Plans to meet the objective development needs of an area unless doing so would conflict with the need to protect areas of particular importance or any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.
- 3.14 The Government has a standard method for calculating the number of homes needed in an area. The method calculates an annual need of around 360 homes per year in Rochford District. This equates to a need for around 6,500 additional homes by 2040. Whilst use of this method is not mandatory, use of an alternative method requires exceptional justification.
- 3.15 The Council’s emerging evidence estimates that by 2040, there will also be a need for:
- 6-20 hectares of additional employment space (dependent on the level of assumed population growth)

- 6,000 – 9,000m<sup>2</sup> of additional retail and hospitality floorspace (dependent on the level of assumed population growth)
- 3.16 These need figures do not, however, account for existing planned supply. The District has an existing pipeline of housing of around 2,500 – 3,000 homes. This is made up of existing housing allocations (both those with and without planning permission), other sites with planning permission and a small number of identified opportunity sites.
- 3.17 Likewise the District has an existing pipeline of employment space, supported by developments such as Airport Business Park and Arterial Park. In headline terms, these developments are likely to be large enough to meet most of the District’s long-term employment needs.
- 3.18 In this context, the New Local Plan will need to set a strategy that balances opportunities to meet any unmet or additional long-term development needs, with enhancing the natural and built environments, and delivering infrastructure.
- 3.19 The Spatial Options consultation identified four broad strategy options for the New Local Plan, with some options having sub-options. These are listed below:
- Strategy Option 1: Urban Intensification
  - Strategy Option 2: Urban Extensions (sites smaller than 1,500 homes)
    - » Option 2a: Focused on main towns
    - » Option 2b: Dispersed to all settlements based on Settlement Hierarchy
  - Strategy Option 3: Concentrated growth (c.1,500+ homes in one location)
    - » Option 3a: Focused west of Rayleigh
    - » Option 3b: Focused north of Southend
    - » Option 3c: Focused east of Rochford
  - Strategy Option 4: Balanced Combination
- 3.20 A map summarising how these strategy options might relate to the various sites that have been put forward to the Local Plan is available at <https://arcg.is/yyDrz1>. It should be noted that this map includes all land promoted to the Local Plan, but only a small fraction would ever be needed to meet development needs.
- 3.21 The relative strengths and weaknesses of each of these strategy options is set out in the [Spatial Options document](#). The relative sustainability of different sites put forward to the Local Plan is set out in the [Site Appraisal Paper](#).
- 3.22 It is proposed that a future meeting of the Committee be used to revisit the previous strategy options identified, re-examine their strengths and weaknesses and begin to identify priorities and parameters that will guide the Council towards selecting a single preferred strategy. This will need to be informed by the technical evidence base discussed earlier in this note which, likewise, will continue to be reported into the Committee.
- [Latest Position on Policy Matters](#)
- 3.23 Alongside strategy matters, work has also been progressed on developing the detailed planning policies that future planning applications must be assessed against.

3.24 Whilst a majority of the Council’s existing policies remain broadly appropriate, it is clear that some policies have become out of sync with national policy or do not go far enough in achieving our objectives. Examples of areas where policies will need to be expanded include:

- More ambitious climate change policies, including improving building standards toward a carbon net zero standard<sup>1</sup>
- More ambitious environmental policies, including reflecting mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain
- Clearer expectations around high quality design, including greater use of design codes and masterplans

3.25 Proposed draft policies will be shared to the Planning Policy Committee over the Summer / Autumn with a view to receiving feedback on these well in advance of agreeing the final Preferred Options document for consultation.

### **National Policy Changes**

3.26 As has been set out in previous Member briefings, the Government has consulted on a range of potential changes to the planning system. It is looking to introduce significant changes through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill (LURB) and more limited shorter-term changes through changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The more significant changes may include:

- A more streamlined Local Plan process which seeks to make it possible to create a Local Plan in no more than 30 months
- A set of nationalised Development Management policies, which may limit the ability for local authorities to set local policies
- A new Infrastructure Levy to replace Section 106

3.27 There is currently a lack of clarity over whether these changes will ultimately be introduced and over what timetable. What is clear is that the planning system will remain plan-led, there will be a fundamental legal need for a local authority to have a Local Plan, and the process through which any changes will be introduced will offer no immunity to the negative consequences of not having an up to date New Local Plan. This uncertainty ultimately does not impinge on the Council’s ability to progress a Preferred Options consultation in the short-term, but will be fundamental to understand before the New Local Plan reaches the final submission version.

### **Next Steps**

3.27 A separate item will be reported to the Planning Policy Committee setting out a programme and timetable for the future work required.

## **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

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<sup>1</sup> An ECC commissioned report has demonstrated that requiring net zero building standards has only a marginal impact on development viability in most cases:  
<https://www.essexdesignguide.co.uk/climate-change/net-zero-evidence/>

4.1 There are no financial implications relating to this item.

**5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 There are no legal implications relating to this item.

**6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

6.1 There are no resource implications relating to this item.

**7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

7.1 There are no direct risks related to this item.

**8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

8.1 There is none.

**9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 There are no equality and diversity implications related to this item.

**10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 There are no environment and climate implications relating to this item.

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**APPENDICES**

None.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None.

**SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Planning Policy Committee</b>	<b>30/08/2023</b>