



Chelmsford Local Plan

Review of the adopted Local Plan

Preferred Options

Topic Paper:

Natural Environment

May 2024

1. Purpose

- 1.1. This Topic Paper is one of a number produced by Chelmsford City Council to set out how the review of the Local Plan has been developed. Topic papers will be refreshed and updated at each stage of the review process to ensure the latest information/position is available. This will avoid confusion and duplication and the latest topic paper will supersede any previous versions.
- 1.2. The intention of the topic papers is to provide background information; they do not contain any policies, proposals or site allocations. Topic papers form part of the Local Plan evidence base which will be submitted alongside the Local Plan for independent examination.
- 1.3. This paper covers the natural environment including national and local environmental designations and implementation of the Environment Act 2021 through Biodiversity Net Gain and Nature Recovery Networks.
- 1.4. The Topic Paper provides background information and provides context of how the Local Plan has been formulated. This Topic Paper should be read alongside the other Preferred Options Topic Papers produced including Spatial Strategy and Strategic Sites, Health and Wellbeing, Climate Change and Infrastructure.
- 1.5. The main issues covered by this Topic Paper relate to:
 - Strategic Priority 1 – Addressing the Climate and Ecological Emergency
 - Strategic Priority 3 – Protecting and enhancing the Natural and Historic Environment, and support an increase in biodiversity and ecological networks
 - S2 – Addressing Climate Change and Flood Risk
 - Strategic Policy S4 – Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment
 - S11 – The Role of the Countryside
 - Relevant Development Management Policies related to the natural environment.

2. Background

- 2.1. In relation to the Local Plan, the natural environment concerns green, blue and wild infrastructure, ecosystems, biodiversity, water quality, pollution, farming landscapes, and climate change adaptation.
- 2.2. Chelmsford enjoys a very high-quality environment with 700 hectares of recreational space, including 17 Green Flag accredited parks, complemented by an extensive network of the Green Wedge, gardens and nature reserves. The Green Wedge covers 3% of the land in the whole of the Chelmsford area. Many major cities in the UK have an area of open land around their built-up area which is designated as Green Belt. This is designed to prevent the unrestricted sprawl of these cities. The Green Belt in Chelmsford is part of London's Green Belt often referred to as the Metropolitan Green Belt. There are four main rivers (Rivers Chelmer, Can, Wid and Crouch)

that flow through Chelmsford and a range of habitats and high levels of biodiversity including sites of local, national and European importance. The Green Belt covers almost 34% of the land in the south and west of Chelmsford.

- 2.3. Chelmsford has a range of sites designated for their habitat and conservation value of international, national and local importance. This includes three European sites namely Crouch and Roach Estuaries Special Protection Area (SPA), Crouch and Roach Estuaries Ramsar, and the Essex Estuaries Special Area of Conservation (SAC). There are also eight sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), five Local Nature Reserves, 171 Local Wildlife Sites as well as ancient woodlands. See also Figure 1 below taken from the Review of the Chelmsford Adopted Local Plan: Preferred Options Integrated Impact Assessment.

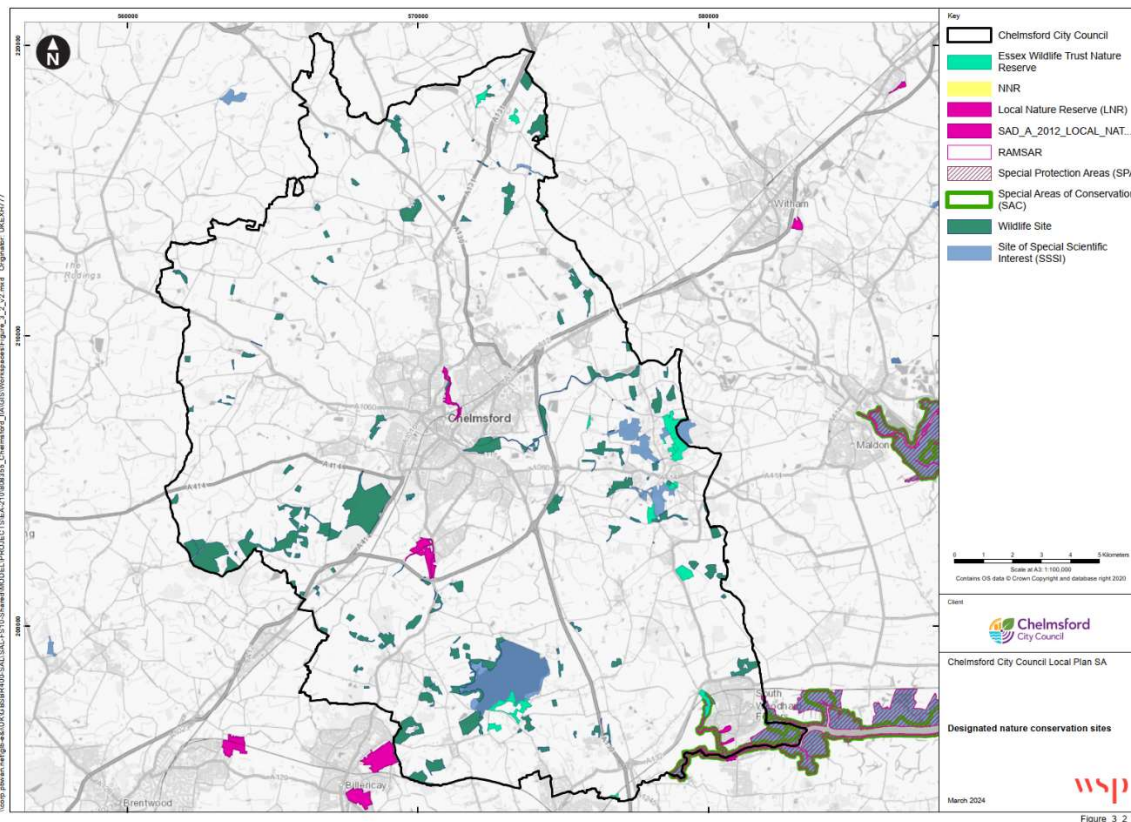


Figure 1: Designated Nature Conservation Sites

Source: Preferred Options Integrated Impact Assessment of the Review of the Adopted Local Plan

- 2.4. All of the above contribute towards the local distinctiveness of the area and need to be protected and enhanced at the same time as achieving the growth required. In addition, they are a key component of sustainability and the policies and allocations in the Local Plan need to ensure that new development takes place in a sustainable way, whilst minimising adverse effects on the natural environment and achieving betterment where possible.

3. Preferred Options

Policy Context

National Policy

- 3.1. All policies in the Local Plan must be positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the overarching planning policy framework, supported by the National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG).
- 3.2. The adopted Local Plan was examined under the 2012 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). There have subsequently been updates to the NPPF and the Preferred Options Local Plan has been considered against the requirements of the more recent national planning policy and guidance including the 2023 NPPF. Where possible, changes to the NPPF affecting plan-making have been reflected in the Preferred Options Local Plan.
- 3.3. Further detail on these changes for consideration are set out in the table below, included under the section 'Local Plan Approach'.

National Policy Guidance

- 3.4. Chapter 15 Conserving and enhancing the natural environment of the NPPF covers conserving and enhancing the natural environment and includes habitats and biodiversity, and ground conditions and pollution.
- 3.5. The most relevant paragraph of the NPPF which covers the natural environment in respect of the Plan-making process, is paragraph 180:

Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);*
- b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;*
- c) maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;*
- d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;*
- e) preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans; and*
- f) remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate*

3.6. Application of the NPPF and relevant legislation is further explored in the [Natural environment PPG](#). Paragraphs 001 (Reference ID: 8-001-20190721) to 043 (Reference ID: 8-043-20190721) sets out the key considerations in respect of the natural environment as summarised in the table below:

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Agricultural land, soil and brownfield land of environmental value</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning should take into account the quality of agricultural land using the Agricultural Land Classification. There are five grades, with the best and most versatile land being Grades 1, 2 and 3a. • Some previously developed land may be of high environmental value which should be taken into account. |
| <p>Green infrastructure</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green infrastructure can provide multiple benefits for the economy, good design, healthy communities, climate change mitigation, conservation and enhancement • Evidence-based strategies and those delivered with partners can inform the approach • Green infrastructure should be considered at an early stage as an integral part of development. |
| <p>Biodiversity, geodiversity and ecosystems</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The statutory background for seeking to conserve and enhance biodiversity (Section 40 of Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, as amended by the Environment Act 2021) • The need for identifying and mapping local ecological networks, including Local Wildlife Sites (with criteria), and their links to the Nature Recovery Network, a Government commitment to creating a connected network of wildlife-rich habitat across England • Consideration of potential impacts of development on protected and priority species and ecosystems. • Plans and strategic policies can be used to set out a suitable approach to the biodiversity net gain requirement introduced by the Environment Act 2021, to deliver at least 10% net gain • Local Nature Recovery Strategies can set out at a strategic level where there are opportunities to deliver offsite net gains in biodiversity and wider environmental net gain, how it can be achieved and calculated, and be of lasting value • Considerations for policies relating to trees |
| <p>Landscape</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and landscape conservation and enhancement • The need to identify special characteristics of the landscape through assessment, including potential cumulative impacts, of sensitivity and capacity. |

Other relevant legislation

Biodiversity Net Gain & Nature Recovery Networks

- 3.7. Biodiversity net gain (BNG) is an approach to development, and/or land management, that aims to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was beforehand.
- 3.8. Under the Environment Act 2021, all developments that have obtained planning permission will have to achieve at least 10% biodiversity net gain (BNG). The mandatory requirement came into place on 12 February 2024 and 2nd April 2024 for all Town and Country Planning Act development (some exemptions apply). It will be calculated using DEFRA biodiversity metric¹.
- 3.9. BNG delivers measurable improvements for biodiversity by creating or enhancing habitats in association with development. It will be delivered onsite, offsite within Essex or if offsite is not possible there will be statutory credits available which will be for national, strategic schemes.
- 3.10. The Environment Act 2021 also introduced the requirement for Nature Recovery Networks. The intention is for these to be implemented at a local level across the country. A Local Nature Partnership (LNP) covering Essex, Southend and Thurrock (Greater Essex) has been established and is preparing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy covering Greater Essex.

National Design Guide

- 3.11. The [National Design Guide](#) focuses on the natural environment in the following section:

| | |
|--------|--|
| Nature | <p>Well-designed places:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • integrate existing, and incorporate new natural features into a multifunctional network that supports quality of place, biodiversity and water management, and addresses climate change mitigation and resilience • prioritise nature so that diverse ecosystems can flourish to ensure a healthy natural environment that supports and enhances biodiversity • provide attractive open spaces in locations that are easy to access, with activities for all to enjoy, such as play, food production, recreation and sport, so as to encourage physical activity and promote health, well-being and social inclusion. |
|--------|--|

Voluntary national accreditation schemes

BREEAM

- 3.12. BREEAM is an international certification system for the built environment that covers a range of issues including management, health and wellbeing, energy, transport, water, materials, waste, land use and ecology and pollution. The Council requires non-residential developments above a

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65c60e0514b83c000ca715f3/The_Statutory_Biodiversity_Metric_-_User_Guide_.pdf

threshold to achieve a Very Good BREEAM rating (see the Local Policy section below.) Credits are awarded for a range of issues which for land use and ecology includes site selection, minimising impacts on ecology, ecological change and enhancement and long-term ecological management. Assessment are done at design and post construction stage to ensure compliance.

Building with Nature

- 3.13. [Building with Nature](#) (BwN) is the UK's first green infrastructure benchmark and was launched in November 2020. It is a voluntary accreditation scheme at three levels. There are 12 BwN Standards for placemaking and place-keeping, divided into four themes; Core Standards, Wellbeing, Water and Wildlife. A summary of the scheme is available in the [Essex Design Guide](#).
- 3.14. Relevant changes to the NPPF, PPG and other relevant legislation and guidance have been considered at this Regulation 18 Preferred Options Stage.

Local Policy

- 3.15. A key component of the adopted Spatial Strategy is to balance the need to accommodate future growth requirements with the need to minimise the effect on the environment, through sustainable development. It seeks to plan positively for the creation, protection and enhancement of networks to ensure a net gain for biodiversity and green infrastructure. Key natural environment priorities and policies within the adopted Local Plan are:
- **Strategic Priorities 1, 7, and 8** – These seek to ensure sustainable patterns of development, protect and enhance the natural environment, and create well-designed and attractive places including new green infrastructure.
 - **The Local Plan Vision** – Includes making the most of the area's assets and opportunities such as its river valleys, and improving the built and natural environment.
 - **Strategic Policy S1 (Spatial Principles)** – Includes locating development to avoid flood risk, respecting the character and appearance of landscapes, and preserving or enhancing biodiversity.
 - **Strategic Policy S2 (Addressing climate change and flood risk)** – Encourages development to provide opportunities for green infrastructure and new habitat creation. Requires all development to have appropriate flood mitigation measures in place.
 - **Strategic Policy S4 (Conserving and enhancing the natural environment)** – Seeks out a commitment to conservation of the natural environment through protection of designated sites while planning positively for biodiversity networks and minimising pollution; with management, mitigation and compensation measures.
 - **Strategic Policy S9 (Infrastructure requirements)** – Lists supporting infrastructure expected from new development including flood risk management, and green infrastructure such as open space and biodiversity enhancement.

- **Strategic Policy S11 (The role of the countryside)** – Ensuring development does not have an adverse impact on the roles and character and beauty of the countryside, and the function of the Green Wedge in providing wildlife capacity.
- **Site allocation policies** – All site allocation policies set out the specific requirements necessary to protect and enhance the natural environment for each allocation site.
- **Development Management Policies** – Set out the requirements for decision-making on planning applications in respect of the natural environment.

Policies **DM6, DM7, DM8, DM9, DM10, and DM11** cover the Green Belt, Green Wedge and the rural area. They seek to protect the countryside from inappropriate development, and retain openness, green networks for wildlife, and the role and function of rural landscapes. Rural area policies also focus on preventing or minimising the impact on the character and beauty of the countryside.

Policy **DM16** seeks to protect the natural environment including internationally designated sites, nationally designated sites (SSSIs), and locally designated sites. It also sets out a requirement for all development proposals to conserve and enhance habitats, avoid negative impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity, and where possible deliver a net gain. It also sets out the requirement for developments to contribute to the Essex recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS).

Policy **DM17** seeks to protect trees and woodland including preserved trees and ancient woodland, and natural landscape features that are important to the character and appearance of an area.

Policy **DM18** sets out criteria for demonstrating measures to ensure safety of development from flooding, manage water run-off, and incorporate water management measures including multi-functional Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS).

Policy **DM19** requires that proposals for renewable and low carbon energy should have no adverse effect on the natural environment, or an unacceptable visual impact which harms the character of an area.

Policy **DM24** requires all major new developments to respect the historic and natural environment of biodiversity and amenity interest through the provision of a range of green spaces. All new major developments shall also provide public open space and contribute to green infrastructure, retain existing trees and other landscape features where appropriate and explore opportunities for new tree planting.

Policy **DM25** expects all dwellings and non-residential buildings to incorporate sustainable design features to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and nitrogen dioxide emissions and the use of natural resources. All new non-residential buildings with a floor area of over 500sqm shall achieve a minimum BREEAM rating (or its successor) of Very Good.

Policy **DM29** addresses living and working environments and measures to ensure the development proposals avoid causing pollution including noise, light, smell, fumes, or

vibrations; and Policy **DM30** seeks to ensure there will be no impact on ground or surface water from development around hazardous substances sites or contaminated land, or on air quality management areas.

- 3.16. In addition to changes in national planning policy and legislation, the review of the adopted Local Plan will consider the achievability and effectiveness of natural environment policies in decision making in the adopted Local Plan, new corporate priorities and reports of the Council and other relevant plans and guidance.
- 3.17. These are described in the following paragraphs.
- 3.18. The Preferred Options Local Plan considers policy performance issues through the latest published [Authority Monitoring Report](#). Relevant policies for the natural environment include S2, S4, S7 and S11. The latest AMR does not identify any policy implementation issues.
- 3.19. The Council's [Our Chelmsford Our Plan](#) was updated in 2023. Strategy priorities include to protect, expand and improve the quality and accessibility of green spaces, improving habitat value and increasing biodiversity and everyday living, and to improve the environmental quality, attractiveness, safety, leisure and recreational potential of public spaces, green areas, rivers and waterways.
- 3.20. The adopted [Making Places Supplementary Planning Document](#) (SPD) (January 2021) seeks to promote and secure high-quality sustainable new development. It provides advice on good practice examples on achieving biodiversity net gain, Green Infrastructure, Flooding/SuDS, Trees and tree planting and much more.
- 3.21. The [Council's Planning Obligations SPD](#) (January 2021) sets out the Council's approach to seeking planning obligations needed to make sure development is acceptable in planning terms. Of relevance to this topic is the need for possible Section 106 Planning contributions towards flood protection and water management, as well as Environmental Mitigation measures, which include tree and new woodland planting to assist in the challenge to tackle climate change.
- 3.22. A '[Plan for Improving the Rivers and Waterways in and around Chelmsford](#)' was endorsed and approved by the Council in July 2022 (item 7 of Chelmsford Policy Board). The Plan sets out options and opportunities to improve the appearance, attractiveness and recreational use of the rivers and waterways in and around Chelmsford and to promote schemes and activities that enhance their habitat, ecological and biodiversity.
- 3.23. [The Essex Design Guide](#) is produced by Essex County Council. It is an on-line tool regularly reviewed and aimed to be used as a reference guide to help create high quality places with an identity specific to Essex. There are a number of sections in this design guide relevant to the natural environment including Landscape and Green Spaces, SuDS and Climate Change and Building with Nature.
- 3.24. [The Essex Biodiversity Net Gain \(BNG\) Guidance Pack](#) has been produced by the Essex Local Nature Partnership. The purpose of the guidance pack is to provide an overview of the facts and guidance so far on BNG. The BNG guidance pack covers everything from 'How does BNG

work?’ to the ‘National Register and Statutory Credits Scheme’, providing you with a holistic outline of BNG. The guidance pack is aimed at a wide audience and is suitable for Local Planning Authorities, Developers and Landowners.

- 3.25. Essex County Council has produced an [Essex Green Infrastructure Strategy](#). This strategy raises the importance of developing quality green infrastructure and green spaces across Essex to accompany planned growth in the county over the next twenty years. The purpose of the strategy is to take a positive approach to enhance, protect and create an inclusive and integrated network of high-quality green infrastructure in Greater Essex, to create a county-wide understanding of green infrastructure – its functions and values, and to identify opportunities for implementing green infrastructure.
- 3.26. [Essex Forest Initiative](#) sets out Essex County Council’s aim to plant 375,000 trees by 2025. Essex County Council is working in partnership with The Woodland Trust, The Forestry Commission, The Evergreen Fund as well as parishes and local authorities to find areas suitable for tree planting. The aim is to create habitats, woodlands, connections as well as planting individual trees.
- 3.27. Essex County Council are co-ordinating a county-wide Local Nature Partnership, and is developing targets for nature recovery and an ongoing strategy. The strategy will provide a shared vision for Essex, and will coordinate action for delivery and will be subject to public consultation in 2024 (dates tbc). The strategy will support the work of LAs to achieve biodiversity net gain, and provide evidence to support seeking more than the minimum 10%. Their newsletter is a good source of information. More information is available on their website <https://essexnaturepartnership.co.uk/#:~:text=The%20Essex%20LNP%20is%20an,the%20climate%20and%20nature%20crisis>.
- 3.28. Essex County Council has also produced [Essex Green Infrastructure Standards](#). The standards were published in 2022 and outlines nine principles and standards for the protection, enhancement, creation, and management of GI in Essex. The application of these principles and standards through development management and planning policy will ensure the delivery of multifunctional, accessible high-quality GI. They are based on several key policy documents including HM Government’s 25 Year Environment Plan, the Environment Act (2021) and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- 3.29. The [Essex Coast RAMS \(Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy\)](#), and SPD was adopted in May 2020. It is a county-wide initiative that seeks to lessen the impact of local housing development on protected birds along the Essex coast. Developers pay a contribution towards the RAMS for each new dwelling within a ‘zone of influence’ around the designated sites on the Essex coast including the Crouch and Roach Estuaries SPA and Ramsar site around South Woodham Ferrers. A similar strategy is being produced for the Hatfield Forest SSSI and National Nature Reserve referred to as the Hatfield Forest Strategic Access Management Measures Strategy (SAMMS). The zone of influence for the SAMMS includes the north western part of Chelmsford.
- 3.30. In July 2019, [Chelmsford City Council declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency](#). An [Action Plan](#) was agreed the following year with an initial focus of fifteen key areas of activity including reducing carbon emissions, greening Chelmsford and increasing biodiversity. A key

action is to undertake a greening programme to significantly increase the amount of woodland and the proportion of tree cover in Chelmsford through a sustained medium-term 'mass tree planting' campaign. Targets include:

- Increase tree cover to at least 20% in the Chelmsford area, i.e., to be the best in Essex
- Plant 175,000 additional trees creating an additional 53 hectares of woodland and tree cover using native species
- Plant at least three new trees for every new home in the Local Plan growth sites estimated to add a further 30,000 additional trees.

3.31. The Council has developed a [Green Infrastructure Strategic Plan](#) which sets out the aspirations and opportunities to establish a green infrastructure network across the City and to promote city greening. This includes both green and blue spaces (such as, hedgerows, woodlands, parks, rivers and water courses). Objectives, standards and guidelines for its implementation aim for a City which is more ecologically diverse and robust, better connected and can meet the needs and expectations of its residents, workers and visitors.

3.32. The [Council's Parks, Green Spaces and Waterways Strategy](#) was agreed in April 2022. The main focus of the strategy, supported by an improvement plan and site-specific managements plans is to ensure that:

- a) A network of attractive, high quality green spaces is provided that are clean, safe and easily accessible to all
- b) People can connect with the natural environment through the active use of parks, green spaces and waterways, enjoying positive experiences whilst using them
- c) Wildlife, habitats, and landscapes in and around Chelmsford are protected and enhanced
- d) Parks, green spaces and waterways are planned and managed in a sustainable way, reducing unnecessary waste and helping to preserve natural resources

3.33. The [South East Inshore Marine Management Plan](#) also forms part of the Statutory Development Plan. It has been adopted since the adoption of the Chelmsford Local Plan. This includes policies to help enhance and protect the marine environment and achieve sustainable economic growth while respecting local communities both within and adjacent to the marine plan area, which includes the coast within Chelmsford's administrative area.

Duty to Co-operate

3.34. The Council is committed to co-operating with other bodies on strategic planning matters. The Duty to Co-operate Strategy was reviewed and adopted in January 2022.

3.35. The Council will make every effort to seek co-operation on cross-boundary and strategic planning matters in a focused, positive and structured way. We will continue to discuss the Review of the Adopted Local Plan with neighbouring planning authorities and the prescribed bodies at stages which align with and inform the stages of the Review of the Adopted Local Plan. These discussions will help to determine the quantum and distribution of Chelmsford's future growth, which will be supported by updated evidence.

- 3.36. At the same time, we continue to work constructively with nearby planning authorities on their own local plan preparation. Early engagement and demonstrating co-operation both with neighbours and the prescribed bodies through Statements of Common Ground are key to meeting the legal duty to co-operate.
- 3.37. In some cases, discussion on strategic matters continue through existing joint working arrangements. We will also arrange further joint Officer and Member meetings, technical stakeholder meetings, focused workshops, and prepare Statements of Common Ground.
- 3.38. The strategic matters for the Review of the Adopted Local Plan are identified as follows:
- Delivering homes for all including Gypsy and Traveller accommodation
 - Jobs and economy including green employment and regeneration
 - Retail, leisure, and cultural development
 - Sustainable transport, highways and active travel
 - Climate change action and mitigation including flood risk and zero carbon
 - Natural and historic environment including increased biodiversity and green/blue/wild spaces and connectivity of ecological networks
 - Community infrastructure including education, health and community facilities
 - Utility infrastructure including communications, waste, water and energy
 - London Stansted Airport future airspace redesign.
- 3.39. As part of on-going Duty to Co-operate relevant to this topic, the Council has attended relevant meetings and provided updates on our plan review such as through the Local Nature Recovery Partnership (LNRP) and Essex Planning Officers Association (EPOA). We've also approached other LPAs and the Environment Agency for relevant information to support our Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) update. Details of ongoing activity are contained in the Duty to Co-operate Statement, published as an interim report to accompany the Preferred Options consultation here: www.chelmsford.gov.uk/lp-review. To date, no strategic cross-boundary natural environment issues/concerns have been identified by the Council or Duty to Co-operate bodies.
- 3.40. As part of the Preferred Options consultation we will be having meetings with neighbouring Local Planning Authorities as well as other relevant Duty to Co-operate bodies. Any strategic cross boundary issues relating to the Natural Environment raised through these meetings and the consultation will be further considered and any further engagement undertaken if required.

Integrated Impact Assessment

- 3.41. The Council is carrying out an ongoing Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) as the Review of the Local Plan develops.
- 3.42. The IIA is assessing the following aspects of sustainable development:
- Sustainability Appraisal (SA)
 - Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)
 - Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)
 - Health Impact Assessment (HIA)
 - Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)

3.43. The SA, SEA and HRA are a requirement of national policy. The HIA and EqIA are voluntary, but the Council believes they will help to provide a complete picture of the sustainability of the Review of the Adopted Local Plan.

3.44. The IIA identifies the key sustainability issues for the Review of the Local Plan, which feed into a framework against which proposals are assessed. It covers the potential environmental, social, economic and health performance of the Local Plan and any reasonable alternatives. It will be used at each stage of the Review, and be subject to separate consultation, as follows:

- Scoping Report
- Issues and Options
- Preferred Options – Current Stage
- Submission
- Adoption

3.45. The key sustainability issues and Appraisal Framework Objectives relating to this Topic Paper are:

| Key sustainability issue | Appraisal Framework Objective |
|--|---|
| Biodiversity and green infrastructure | 1. Biodiversity and Geodiversity: To conserve and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity and promote improvements to the multifunctional green infrastructure network. |
| Population and community | 2. Housing: To meet the housing needs of the Chelmsford City Area and deliver decent homes. 3. Economy, Skills and Employment: To achieve a strong and stable economy which offers rewarding and well located employment opportunities to everyone. 4. Sustainable Living and Revitalisation: To promote urban renaissance and support the vitality of rural centres, tackle deprivation and promote sustainable living. |
| Health and wellbeing | 5. Health and Wellbeing: To improve the health and wellbeing of those living and working in the Chelmsford City area. |
| Land use and soils | 7. Land Use and Soils: To encourage the efficient use of land and conserve and enhance soils. |
| Water | 8. Water: To conserve and enhance water quality and resources. 9. Flood Risk: To reduce the risk of flooding to people and property, taking into account the effects of climate change. |

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|--------------------------------|---|
| Air quality | 10. Air: To improve air quality. |
| Climate change | 11. Climate Change: To minimise greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the effects of climate change. |
| Material assets | 12. Waste and Natural Resources: To promote the waste hierarchy (reduce, reuse, recycle, recover) and ensure the sustainable use of natural resources. |
| Cultural heritage | 13. Cultural Heritage: To conserve and enhance the historic environment, cultural heritage, character and setting. |
| Landscape and townscape | 14. Landscape and Townscape: To conserve and enhance landscape character and townscapes. |

3.46. In particular reference to Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure, the Preferred Options IIA notes that there are a number of ongoing initiatives and projects that together will help to conserve and enhance biodiversity and which would be expected to continue without the Local Plan. These include the delivery of the Chelmsford Biodiversity Action Plan and the emerging Nature Recovery Networks.

3.47. The Preferred Options IIA also summaries the key sustainability issues for this topic area and includes:

- The need to conserve and enhance biodiversity including sites designated for their nature conservation value
- The need to provide net gains in biodiversity where possible
- The need to maintain, restore and expand Biodiversity Action Plan habitats
- The need to safeguard existing green infrastructure assets
- The need to enhance the multifunctional green infrastructure network, addressing deficiencies and gaps, improving accessibility for all users and encouraging multiple uses where appropriate.

3.48. In terms of protecting the natural environment, para 5.7.33 of the Preferred Options IIA notes that this “*subsection makes a positive contribution to a number of the IIA objectives. Policy DM16 seeks to ensure that biodiversity assets are promoted and conserved by protecting them from harm and encouraging biodiversity enhancement. The policy requires that new development (unless exempt) provides for a minimum 10% biodiversity net gain above the existing ecological baseline value of the site. Policy DM17 seeks the conservation of protected trees and woodland. This has been assessed as having a significant positive effect on biodiversity (IIA Objective 1) as well as on cultural heritage (IIA Objective 13) and landscape and townscape (IIA Objective 14). The implementation of Policy DM18 will help to ensure that development does not take place in areas of flood risk whilst Policy DM19 will support the development of appropriate low carbon and renewable technologies. Cumulatively, the policies have therefore been assessed as having a significant positive effect on flood risk (IIA Objective 9) and climate change (IIA Objective 11)*”.

- 3.49. The Preferred Options IIA also notes that the policies have been assessed as having minor positive effects on health and wellbeing (IIA Objective 5), water (IIA Objective 8), air quality (IIA Objective 10) and waste and resources (IIA Objective 12). No significant negative effects have been identified in respect of the policies contained in this subsection. The policies have been assessed as having minor negative effects in relation to housing (IIA Objective 2), as the policies may constrain housing delivery, whilst cumulatively mixed positive and negative effects have been identified in relation to the economy (IIA Objective 3).
- 3.50. Section 5 of the Preferred Options IIA includes recommendations which will be considered as part of further refinement of the Plan before Submission. These include recommendations related to the Natural Environment policies.

Evidence base

- 3.51. In accordance with the requirements of the NPPF, policies and their requirements should be based on up-to-date evidence.
- 3.52. In addition to the IIA, the following documents are of particular relevance to natural environment needs and are supporting the Review of the Adopted Local Plan. Evidence base documents are available via: www.chelmsford.gov.uk/lp-review.

| Document | Summary | Status |
|--|---|-----------|
| CC001: Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA), February 2024 | This report analyses the latest available data for current and future flood risk across the Council's area and information on how this may be mitigated. It informs the selection of development sites and policies on managing flood risk. | Published |
| Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA), April 2024 | The Level 2 assessment builds on identified risks from the Level 1 assessment for proposed development sites, to provide a greater understanding of fluvial, surface water, groundwater, and reservoir related flooding risks to the site. From this, CCC and developers can make more informed decisions and pursue development in an effective and efficient manner. The Level 2 assessment also identifies sites for further risk analysis at the site-specific Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) stage. | Published |
| Site Allocations Sequential and Exception Tests | Using the Level 1 and 2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment the document tests sites allocated for development in areas at risk of flooding (flood zones 2 and 3) and considers whether they are suitable for the proposed development. | Published |
| CC003: Stage 2 – Detailed Water Cycle Study, February 2024 | This study assesses the preferred spatial strategy. It considers whether the proposed growth can be accommodated by the water | Published |

| Document | Summary | Status |
|---|--|-----------|
| | and wastewater infrastructure, and wider water environment. The study has been used to develop the Preferred Spatial Strategy. | |
| The Braintree, Brentwood, Chelmsford, Maldon and Uttlesford Landscape Character Assessment (2006) EB099 | This report sets out the characters of the landscapes in the Chelmsford administrative area. This is still relevant to the review of the Local Plan. | Published |
| PL004-A Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment (Adopted Local Plan Sites) 2017 | This report presents an analysis of the sensitivity and capacity for development of land across the Chelmsford City Council area. It summarises the principal findings of the assessment of landscape sensitivity and capacity of a number of survey locations. | Published |
| PL004-B Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment Technical Note (Adopted Local Plan Sites) 2017 | The Technical Note is an Addendum to the Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment for Chelmsford City Council (March 2017). It considers land in three locations: Great Leighs, Chelmsford West and North-East Chelmsford (Boreham Airfield), all of which are extensions of the land assessed in March 2017. | Published |
| PL004-C Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment Technical Note Land at SWF (Adopted Local Plan Sites) 2018 | The Technical Note sets out the appraisal of the landscape sensitivity and capacity of land to the north of Burnham Road (opposite Hullbridge Road), South Woodham Ferrers. | Published |
| PL004-D Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment Annex Corrections to Summary Tables (Adopted Local Plan Sites) 2018 | The Technical Note sets out corrections to the Landscape Sensitivity & Capacity Report (March 2017) and Addendum (September 2017) arising from representations made on the Pre-submission Local Plan. | Published |
| PL004-E Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study (Preferred Options New Sites) 2024 | This additional study assesses parcels of land in three emerging spatial strategies following the Issues and Options consultation document that were not previously assessed in 2017 and 2018 studies. It identifies the landscape sensitivity and resulting capacity for the development proposed in the three spatial approaches. This includes consideration of the existing landscape character, the nature of the development and the scope that change could be mitigated. The study has been used to inform the Preferred Spatial Strategy. | Published |
| Green Wedges and Green Corridors Defining – Chelmsford’s River Valleys Review Report EB094A and Green Wedges and Green | The assessment includes a review of the existing Green Wedge designation to assess whether they are suitable for protecting the land for various reasons and whether the boundaries of the Green Wedges should be extended along the river valleys. | Published |

| Document | Summary | Status |
|--|---|---|
| Corridors Appendix A Parcel Profiles EB094B | | |
| Local Wildlife Sites Review | This will assess Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS) that lie within or near proposed new site allocations for residential and employment development in the Preferred Options Local Plan. The outcomes will be used to inform site allocation policies and LoWS designations in the Pre-Submission Local Plan. | Underway. To be published alongside Pre-Submission Local Plan |
| Air Quality Assessment | This is expected to consider the impact of the proposed development sites on local air quality now and in the future. | To be commissioned |
| V001: Local Plan Viability Update, 2023 | This document supports a 20% biodiversity net gain on the two Garden Communities. It also sets out the reasoning behind the approach retain a requirement for a minimum of 10% biodiversity net gain, while feasibility for a higher amount is being explored on all other policy requirements | Published |
| Chelmsford Open Space, Sports and Recreation Facilities Study and Sports Facilities Strategy | Provides an assessment of need for open space, playing pitches and indoor sports facilities. | Underway. To be published alongside Pre-Submission Local Plan |
| OSP003: Preferred Options Local Plan Form and Contents Checklist 2024 | Compares the PO Local Plan against key requirements of the NPPF | Published |

Issues and Options Consultation Feedback

3.53. The Review of the Local Plan Issues and Options document was published for consultation between August and October 2022. A total of 1,178 responses were received from 711 respondents. The 'You Said We Did' (YSWD) Feedback Report, available via [Local Plan Review \(chelmsford.gov.uk\)](#), sets out the main issues raised in the representations received, a summary of how the Preferred Options Local Plan has been informed by the comments and the plan evidence base. Main issues raised in the consultation responses include:

- Support for increasing biodiversity and ecological networks
- Support for implementing the requirement for 10% biodiversity net gain, and general support for the ambition for 20% net gain where supported by evidence
- Support for minimising the loss of agricultural land
- Representations encouraging further tree planting
- Representations calling for the review the green wedge policies and policies for environmental protection
- General support for the proposed changes for Strategic Priority 3 providing more focus on impacts of climate change, the implications of development on the natural environment and the objective to secure environmental gains within developments.

Local Plan Approach

3.54. The adopted natural environment policies are broadly consistent with the NPPF, and monitoring shows that they are working effectively. The Preferred Options document includes strengthened/updated and some new policies to better reflect the updated Plan Vision and Strategic Priorities, an updated plan evidence base, new local priorities and legislation, and Issues and Options consultation comments. The strengthened/updated and new policies include:

- Strategic Priority 1 is updated to include the Council's commitment to a 10 year tree planting campaign including at least three new trees for every new home built. Street trees are also encouraged in the new developments
- Strategic Priority 3 is updated to promote high quality green infrastructure, the protection, enhancement and creation of wildlife corridors and ecological connectivity
- Biodiversity Net Gain – Strategic Policy S4 (Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment) and Development Management Policy DM16 (Protection and Promotion of Ecology, Nature and Biodiversity) require qualifying developments to provide a minimum of 10% biodiversity net gain above the existing ecological baseline value of the site. They also encourage the delivery of a greater than 10% mandatory biodiversity net gain. The requirement to deliver 20% biodiversity net gain is also a requirement of the new Garden Communities (Strategic Growth Site Policy 6 North East Chelmsford – Chelmsford Garden Community and Strategic Growth Site 16a East Chelmsford Garden Community Hammonds Farm). The Local Plan Viability Update 2023 supports a 20% biodiversity net gain on the existing and proposed new Garden Communities
- Strategic Policy S4 and Policy DM16 also take into account local priorities set out in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, the Essex Infrastructure Strategy and Chelmsford Green Infrastructure Action Plan, and support creating biodiversity sites in appropriate locations, including sites associated with the emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy
- Strategic Policy S4 (Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment) and Development Management Policy DM16 (Protection and Promotion of Ecology, Nature and Biodiversity) require qualifying developments to contribute to the Essex Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS). The Essex Coast RAMS, which has the brand name Bird Aware Essex Coast, aims to deliver the mitigation necessary to avoid adverse effects on the integrity of habitat sites from the in-combination impacts of residential development in Essex. We have also reviewed text referring to the Hatfield Forest Strategic Access Management Measures Strategy (SAMMS) in Policy S4 and the reasoned justification to ensure it is in line with the latest work being carried out on this Strategy
- New Strategic Policy S17 – Future of Chelmsford City Centre includes a section on waterways to support improvements to the environmental quality, attractiveness and recreational potential of the waterways and their associated green spaces
- Tree planting is a priority for the Council, and additional policy requirements have been added to Policy DM17 (Trees, Woodland and Landscape Features) including requiring three new trees to be planted per net new dwelling for all new housing development. All new strategic employment and infrastructure development is also required to plant a significant number of new trees in addition to the normal landscaping requirements.

- New evidence base and comments from the Issues and Options stage have informed requirements in the new site allocation policies related to the natural environment. The site policy for East Chelmsford Garden Community (Hammonds Farm) (Site 16a) includes requirements for providing a network of green and blue infrastructure to mitigate the visual, biodiversity and heritage impacts of the development, appropriate habitat mitigation and creation, and landscape enhancement works to mitigate harm to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation Conservation Area. The site policy for Land adjacent to A12 Junction 18 (Site 16b) requires the creation of a network of multifunctional green infrastructure including provision of new trees, providing an extensive and robust landscape buffer along the boundaries of the site.

3.55. Although not mutually exclusive of one another, issues specifically surrounding climate change and zero carbon are covered more widely in the Preferred Options Climate Change Topic Paper.

NPPF 2023 Checklist

3.56. The Council has reviewed the Preferred Options Local Plan against the requirements of the latest 2023 NPPF. The table below shows that the plan meets all requirements in respect to Natural Environment. The full Preferred Options Local Plan Form and Contents Checklist (March 2024) is available at www.chelmsford.gov.uk/lp-review.

Commentary key:

| |
|---|
| Preferred Options Local Plan meets NPPF requirement |
| Preferred Options Local Plan partially meets NPPF requirement |
| Preferred Options Local Plan does not meet NPPF requirement |

| NPPF Requirement | NPPF Paragraph | Approach in the Preferred Options Local Plan |
|--|----------------|--|
| <p>Contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services.</p> <p>Additional text in footnote 53 requires local authorities to consider the availability of agricultural land used for food production when allocating sites for development.</p> | 180 | <p>Set out in the plan through various policies including Strategic Policies S4, S11 and Policy DM16.</p> <p>Availability of agricultural land used for food production is addressed in the Preferred Options Integrated Impact Assessment. The majority of the agricultural land in Chelmsford is either Grade 2 or 3. The Preferred Spatial Strategy promotes development on previously developed sites. However, as the identified development needs cannot be accommodated solely on previously developed land, the loss of some agricultural land to development is</p> |

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| | | inevitable. The plan will lead to a loss of approximately 853 hectares of Grade 3 agricultural land and approximately 246 hectares of Grade 2 land. This equates to around 2.4% of the total Grade 2 and around 4.2% of the total Grade 3 land in the plan area. |
| Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites, take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure, and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries. | 181 | Set out in the plan through site allocations and various policies including Strategic Policy S4 and Policy DM16. |
| Great weight should be given to National Parks, the Broads and the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The scale and extent of development within these designated areas should be limited. Development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas. | 182 | There are no National Parks or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty within Chelmsford. |
| Conserve the special character and importance of Heritage Coast areas. | 184 | There are no National Parks or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty within Chelmsford. |
| Identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species, and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity. | 185 | Set out in the plan through site allocations and various policies including Strategic Policy S4 and Policy DM16. Designated sites are shown on the Draft Policies Map including Local Wildlife Sites. Also supported by the Making Places SPD. |
| Ensure that a site is suitable for its proposed use taking account of ground conditions, any risks arising from land instability and contamination, and the likely | 189 | Set out in the plan through site allocations and various policies including Strategic Policy S4 and DM30. |

| | | |
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| effects of pollution on health, living conditions and the natural environment. | | |
| Sustain and contribute towards compliance with relevant limit values or national objectives for pollutants, taking into account the presence of Air Quality Management Areas and Clean Air Zones, and the cumulative impacts from individual sites in local areas. | 192 | Set out in the plan through site allocations and various policies including Strategic Policy S4 and DM30. There are no Air Quality Management Areas and Clean Air Zones in the plan area. |
| Ensure that new development can be integrated effectively with existing businesses and community facilities. | 193 | Set out in plan site allocations and policies including DM20 and DM29. |

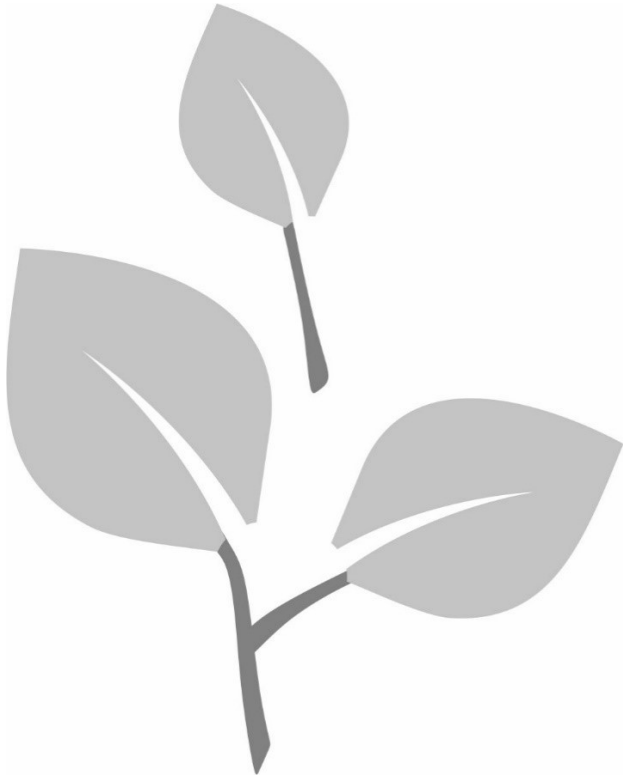
[Additional alternative approaches considered](#)

3.57. Throughout the Preferred Options Local Plan each policy includes any ‘Alternatives considered’. National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) makes it clear that a Local Plan reflects sustainability objectives and has considered reasonable alternatives. The alternatives considered have been tested by the Preferred Options Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA), alongside the proposed policies, to help ensure that the Preferred Options plan is justified and is an appropriate strategy, when considered against the alternatives and other available and proportionate evidence. Key alternatives considered in relation to the natural environment include:

- **Policy S4** - No Policy, rely on NPPF. The policy follows the requirements of the NPPF and also includes specific reference to the role of water management in reducing pollution locally
- **Policy DM16** - No policy, rely on NPPF. The NPPF does not go into the level of detail as to how applications should aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity. This policy and its reasoned justification provides greater clarity. This option is therefore not a reasonable alternative. Require at least 20% Biodiversity Net Gain for all major developments. There is no current evidence to demonstrate that exceeding the statutory minimum will be deliverable in all circumstances
- **Policy DM17** - No policy, rely on NPPF. This would not cover local landscape features which are of important to the character and appearance of the local area, and would not pick up on local policies for tree planting.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1. This Topic Paper will be updated and expanded on following feedback to the Preferred Options consultation and progress of further evidence-based documents. An updated version will then be published at the next stage of Local Plan Consultation (Pre-Submission) setting out the progress made and the reasoning behind the proposals in the Pre-Submission Consultation Document.



This publication is available in alternative formats including large print, audio and other languages

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