

PLANNING POLICY AND LOCAL PLAN COMMITTEE

27 FEBRUARY 2024

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR (PLANNING)

A.3 LOCAL PLAN REVIEW: VISION AND OBJECTIVES REVISITED

(Report prepared by Paul Woods and Gary Guiver)

PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To seek the Planning Policy and Local Plan Committee's comments on, and approval for an updated version of the Local Plan's overarching Vision and Objectives for the purpose of the Local Plan review and associated public consultation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Chapter 2 of the Council's adopted Local Plan (Section 2) sets out an overarching vision and associated set of objectives to guide the planning of the District up to 2033. The vision and objectives underpin many of the policies and proposals in the Local Plan that the Council, working with partners, are seeking to implement over the Plan's time-frame.

In reviewing the Local Plan and extending its timeframe to 2041, it will be appropriate to revisit the vision and objectives – albeit in line with the overarching principles agreed by the Committee at its last meeting on 20 December 2023 which included: *“The vision and objectives within Section 2 of the current Local Plan adopted in 2022 will be carried forward, broadly unchanged, into the adopted Local Plan to apply to the extended period to 2041. They will however be amended selectively and as necessary to reflect changes in national policy, updated evidence and the potential opportunities arising from Freeport status, particularly in relation to Harwich, Bathside Bay and the A120 corridor.”*

Because the vision and objectives in the current Local Plan were already designed to cover the period to 2033 (some nine years away from now) and were only adopted by the Council as recently as 2022, it would be reasonable not to expect the update to bring about any fundamental change in the overall approach and direction – assuming that a positive vision for the District in 2033 can sensibly form the basis of a positive vision for the extended period to 2041. However, the Local Plan review naturally provides an opportunity to check that the vision and objectives are accurate and reflect the most up-to-date position – including, as suggested above, the opportunities arising from Freeport East; but also on the priorities in Council's latest Corporate Plan (Our Vision) and progress on the Levelling-Up projects in the District and the Jaywick Sands Place Plan.

Another overarching principle agreed by the Committee in December 2023 was that: *“The general format, chapter headings and policy subject order in the updated Local Plan will broadly follow that of the current Section 2 Local Plan – accepting that some policies may be added and others deleted, as necessary. This will ensure a sensible level of continuity and understanding and to minimise confusion for residents, Parish and Town Councils and other interested bodies - particularly given how recently the current Local Plan was put in place.”* Officers therefore recommend that the way in which the vision and objectives are currently presented in the Local Plan be carried forward, broadly unchanged.

Local Plan Review Process

The process for reviewing the Local Plan will follow key stages that involve public consultation – the first of which will be the ‘Issues and Options’ stage where the Council will invite public comments on the broad direction of the Local Plan. Comments received at Issues and Options stage will then be taken into account when producing the first detailed draft of the updated Plan. Officers suggest that given the high-level and strategic nature of the Local Plan’s overarching vision and objectives, it would be useful to consult the public on an updated version of these at the initial ‘Issues and Options’ stage – accepting that these might need to be amended further when it comes to the later ‘Preferred Options’ and ‘Submission’ stages, once the Council has had the opportunity to consider the public’s comments, and as the detail of the Local Plan (including the longer-term need and associated strategy for growth) becomes clearer.

Vision

Appendix 1 of this report contains an updated version of the Local Plan’s overarching vision presented in the form of ‘tracked changes’ to highlight, for ease of reference, changes from the current Local Plan – as suggested by Officers. These suggested changes to the vision notably seek:

- To give stronger and clearer commentary around Harwich and the A120 corridor – particularly in terms of economic and housing growth likely to be generated in response to Freeport status and progress of development at Bathside Bay; as well as the Levelling-Up scheme for Dovercourt Town Centre. Implied within this is the likelihood that when it comes to generating options for the long-term housing and employment growth over the extended period to 2041, Officers will be looking closely at land in and around Harwich and the A120 corridor, alongside other reasonable options.
- To comment more positively on the potential for economic growth in the Clacton area reflecting the significant private investment in seaside attractions, the Levelling Up schemes for the library and civic area of the town centre and greater reference to the role of the business sector and the modernisation of business premises. The vision for the Clacton area might be the subject of ongoing refinement to reflect work on a long-term strategic plan for the area, as required by government as part of the Levelling-Up Partnership.

- To comment specifically on the Sunspot Workspace scheme and Jaywick Sands Place Plan, which have progressed significantly since the Local Plan was adopted in 2022.
- To update the section on the Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community to reflect elements of the vision within Section 1 of the Local Plan which would otherwise be lost once Section 1 and Section 2 are both superseded by a single Local Plan; to emphasise the economic opportunities around the Garden Community; and to reflect the progress on the planning of the Garden Community – particularly the advancement of the Development Plan Document, the link road and rapid transit system and positive collaborative work with partner Councils and the Lead Developer.
- To reflect, where necessary, priorities in the Council’s new Corporate Plan 2024-2028 (Our Vision) and to give greater reference to health and energy efficiency as themes where the vision statement could better reflect the priority given to these within the Local Plan itself.
- To better reflect the new requirements around biodiversity net gain and habitat creation.
- To make grammatic and other consequential wording improvements as necessary.

As it stands, Officers are recommending only subtle amendments to the section of the vision that talks about Tendring’s rural heartland in the interest of accuracy – acknowledging that a significant amount of new housing development has taken place, or is still under-construction or has planning permission in and around Manningtree, Lawford and Mistley; and certain rural villages including (but not limited to) Alresford, Elmstead Market, Great Bentley and Thorpe le Soken – with many of these developments having been granted planning permission on appeal and against local wishes. The Council might, or might not, need to review the wording of this section again following consultation on Issues and Options if, having determined how much new housing is required to meet any residual requirement for long-term growth, there needs to be a particular focus for any further growth, of a strategic nature, in the District’s rural areas. This can only be determined once the growth requirements have been clarified and reasonable options have been assessed.

Objectives

Appendix 2 to this report contains a related tracked-changes version of the Local Plan’s objectives that relate to the following topics:

- Objective 1: Housing Delivery;
- Objective 2: Employment/Commercial;
- Objective 3: Retail Development;
- Objective 4: Infrastructure Provision;
- Objective 5: Education and Health;
- Objective 6: Sustainability;
- Objective 7: The Historic Environment;

- Objective 8: Biodiversity;
- Objective 9: Water and Climate Change; and
- Objective 10: Tourism Promotion.

At this point in time, Officers consider that these ten objectives, as currently written in the adopted Local Plan, remain appropriate and could reasonably be carried forward into an updated Local Plan with an extended time-frame to 2041, with only limited necessary changes. An additional objective specifically around Climate Change is also proposed. Through public consultation at Issues and Options stage and subsequent stages, the Council can invite suggestions for any changes that can be considered as the Plan emerges in more detail; but as it stands, Officers are not suggesting any significant revisions.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Planning Policy and Local Plan Committee:

- a) notes the content of this report;**
- b) considers and comments on the Local Plan Vision and Objectives and Officers' suggested updates shown, with tracked changes, in Appendices 1 and 2 to this report;**
- c) agrees for the updated Vision and Objectives, with any additional amendments discussed and agreed by the Committee, to be included for public consultation in due course as part of the 'Issues and Options' stage of the Local Plan review process; and**
- d) invites the Cabinet to comment on and amend, as necessary, the Vision and Objectives as agreed under c) above before they are published as part of the aforementioned Issues and Options consultation – to ensure and confirm alignment with the Council's corporate vision.**

PART 2 – IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

DELIVERING PRIORITIES

Ensuring the District has an up-to-date Local Plan is a high priority for the Council and the review of the Local Plan is identified as a priority within the Corporate Plan 2024-2028. On 20 December 2023, the Planning Policy and Local Plan Committee agreed a set of overarching principles that will guide the review of the Local Plan. The policies and proposals in the Council's current Local Plan is underpinned by an overarching vision statement and a related set of strategic objectives that were examined and found to be sound by the government-appointed Planning Inspector before the Local Plan was adopted. The vision and objectives will be revisited as part of the Local Plan review.

RESOURCES AND RISK

The overall review and update of the Local Plan will be managed by the Council's Planning Policy Team utilising funds from the agreed Local Plan budget – as set out in the report to the Planning Policy and Local Plan Committee on 20 December 2023. The update to the Vision and Objectives has been undertaken in-house as a discrete exercise by Officers without the need to engage any external support, drawing upon the content of the existing adopted Local Plan and other relevant information and knowledge available.

In putting a revised version of the Vision and Objectives out to public consultation as part of the Issues and Options and subsequent consultation stages of the review process, the Council will be inviting feedback which could include suggested changes. These would be given due consideration by the Council as part of the Local Plan review – but in line with the overarching principles agreed by the Committee in December 2023, a fundamental change in approach

The preparation of a Local Plan is guided by legislation and regulations, which inform various stages of work and consultation that must be undertaken before the plan can be lawfully adopted. Third parties can apply for a Judicial Review if they feel the Council have acted unlawfully or have not followed the correct legal process. In order to mitigate the risk of Judicial Review, officers in the Planning team will work closely with colleagues in Legal Services to ensure all relevant processes are adhered to throughout the programme of works, as well as following up-to-date advice from the Local Government Association's Planning Advisory Service.

LEGAL

Planning legislation and the National Planning Policy Framework (last updated in December 2023) place Local Plans at the heart of the planning system, so it is essential that they are in place and kept up to date. The NPPF expects Local Plans to set out a positive vision for the future of each area; a framework for meeting housing needs and addressing other economic, social and environmental priorities; and a platform for local people to shape their surroundings.

The terms of reference of the Planning Policy and Local Plan Committee includes the exercise of the Council's functions, powers and duties in relation to the preparation of the District Council's Local Plan, including ensuring that it meets the "tests of soundness" set out in the NPPF. This report does not require any recommendations to Full Council – but it is recommended that the outcome be reported to the Cabinet for comment, to ensure the proposed vision and objectives for the Local Plan align with the corporate priorities.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Area or Ward affected: All wards.

Consultation/Public Engagement: The Local Plan Review will involve the same statutory stages of Consultation and Public Engagement as the original preparation of the Local Plan. It is recommended that the updated Vision and Objectives be published for public consultation as part of the Issues and Options stage and are revised as necessary for the subsequent Preferred Options consultation (regulation 18) and Publication Draft consultation (regulation 19). Once submitted, if the

Local Plan Inspector considers that main modifications are required to make the Plan sound, a further consultation on these modifications would be required.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Suggested Changes to the Local Plan’s Vision
Appendix 2 – Suggest Changes to the Local Plan’s Objectives

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

APPENDIX 1: SUGGESTED CHANGES TO THE LOCAL PLAN'S VISION

Additions shown as underlined and deletions shown as ~~struck through~~.

VISION

In ~~2033~~ 2041, ~~the Tendring District will be a vibrant, healthy and attractive place to live, work and visit. It will have a thriving, resilient and prosperous economy that promotes sustainable economic growth, making sustainable use of its natural and historic environments, maritime connections and popularity as a visitor destination.~~

~~Tendring~~ The District's residents will ~~have the opportunity~~ be able to enjoy a safe and healthy quality of life in communities that offer a range of high-quality new housing ~~which that~~ meets local needs, with job opportunities across a variety of employment sectors and other important services and facilities, including ~~improved~~ modern health, education and retail/leisure provision. ~~They~~ Residents and visitors will be able to enjoy a variety of landscapes including a tidy coast, the open countryside with its elements of natural beauty, ~~a wealth of wildlife areas where biodiversity has been conserved and enhanced and~~ a diverse range of attractive historic settlements, landscapes and assets, and an integrated and expanding network of protected wildlife-rich areas which are conserved and enhanced. The District will be home to people of all ages and abilities, providing a range of activities, attractions and facilities that will appeal to the active retired, the young and residents of working age. ~~The District;~~ and will also provide for the specialist needs of all people ensuring, in particular, that children and young people have the knowledge and skills ~~to secure the opportunity~~ for a good start in life.

Tendring District's coastal area places economic, social and environmental considerations at the forefront of climate change and therefore there will be a need ~~to place~~ for adaptation and mitigation against climate change at the centre of sustainable development.

Seaside Towns

Clacton-on-Sea will have established itself as the place everyone wants to live and the economy will have seen a significant resurgence with new job opportunities; particularly in the business, retail, leisure, hospitality and health sectors. ~~With~~ This growth will have been driven, in part, by the rejuvenation of the town's attractive and safe beaches and multi-million-pound private investment in its seafront attractions (including the coastal protection scheme between Holland Haven and Clacton); alongside public investment of Levelling Up funding in redeveloping the town centre's library and civic area. The town will have seen the emergence of high-quality a variety of attractive shops, restaurants and cafes and leisure facilities in the town centre, as well as the creation of new country parks, the modernisation of premises across its business and industrial parks and the construction of hundreds of new high-quality, energy efficient, accessible and spacious and much sought-after houses, bungalows and retirement complexes. ~~, the economy will have seen a significant resurgence with new job opportunities in the retail, leisure, hospitality and health sectors. The people of Clacton and the wider area will have access to a modern health facilities including the Diagnostic Centre at Clacton Hospital.~~

Clacton will have preserved and enhanced its heritage features and ~~still~~ maintained its tourism roots, building a thriving local tourism industry. ~~But~~ as well as attracting holiday makers, the town will provide a range of activities and attractions that our older residents can enjoy with their children

and grandchildren at the weekends and during the school holidays, and a strong evening economy where people from the town and surrounding areas will come for a fun and relaxing evening with their friends and colleagues in some of the town's new and trendy restaurants, nightclubs and entertainment venues.

In Jaywick Sands, regeneration projects will continue to raise the standard of living in this part of Clacton – building on the success of the Sunspot Workspace Scheme, renewed sea defences, improved housing conditions and the delivery of other projects the Jaywick Sands Place Plan. The people of Jaywick Sands will have seen, through the provision of a deliverable development framework, be able to enjoy a sustainable community with associated economic, community and employment opportunities.

~~The town will also have new training facilities with a centre of excellence for health and assisted living.~~

Frinton-on-Sea and Walton-on-the-Naze will enjoy year-round prosperity whilst retaining their very distinctive individual characteristics. Walton will have seen the biggest change with following an injection of new housing, holiday accommodation, shops and leisure attractions bringing vitality to the town centre and core visitor areas, with ~~new~~ improved medical facilities serving the resident population. Frinton will have also seen some new homes and improvements to public spaces whilst continuing to offer a unique and non-commercialised shopping and leisure experience to its residents and its visitors. Both settlements will have succeeded in preserving and enhancing their special historic character.

Harwich, Freeport East and the A120 Corridor

The Harwich area will have experienced an economic resurgence ~~with more jobs and a number of major employers operating in the area with developments including Stanton Europark, Harwich Valley and Carless making the most of the A120 following the designation of Harwich Port and other sites along the A120 corridor as part of 'Freeport East' (alongside Felixstowe Port and Gateway 14 in Suffolk). The tax, customs and other business incentives offered by Freeport status will have resulted in considerable private investment and new jobs for local people in industrial activities, logistics and emerging green energy sectors with new developments at Bathside Bay, Horsley Cross and other sites with good access to the A120 and the local population. Bathside Bay will be playing a critical role in the medium term, servicing the expansion, construction and maintenance of off-shore wind farms with more jobs to come in the long-term through the construction and completion of a new container port and associated small boat harbour.~~

~~As a result~~ The increase in work opportunities will have generated a significant demand for training facilities and new homes in the Harwich and Dovercourt area particularly for working people and families both in the local area and moving in from elsewhere. This boost in demand in the housing market will have picked up and resulted in a number of high-quality housing developments ~~will have taken place~~. The Old Town of Harwich will offer new leisure activities and ~~a number of~~ visitor attractions associated with its maritime history, ~~including the Mayflower~~. Dovercourt Town Centre and seafront will have also improved its offer of a year-round shopping and leisure experience following significant public investment through the Levelling-Up Fund in its public spaces and improved connections. These benefits will have taken place whilst continuing to preserve and enhance the town's maritime heritage through careful consideration of its associated buildings, structures and coastal landscapes.

Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community

The Neighbouring City of Colchester will have been the focus for significant growth in jobs and housing and will have continued to develop a thriving economy that will benefit Tendring District's residents, many of whom commute into the town each day for work. A new Garden eCommunity will be developed to the east of Colchester, developed in accordance with a detailed Development Plan Document (DPD) on garden community principles, and positive collaborative working with Colchester City Council, Essex County Council and the lead developers, which takes advantage of its strategic position in relation to Colchester and its proximity to the university to maximise the economic benefits to current and future residents of Tendring. The Garden Community will provide with necessary infrastructure and facilities provided and a high-quality of built and urban design. With major investment in rapid transit services to the town centre, pedestrian and cycle connections and a new link road between the A120 and A133, the management of traffic congestion will have improved, and along with provision of upgraded broadband infrastructure and services.

The University of Essex will be one of the leading research and development facilities in the country and, as a result, businesses will have moved to the area to benefit from its expertise and improved transport links. The new garden suburb Garden Community crossing the Colchester Borough City and Tendring District boundary will be a much sought-after place to live. It will provide the right balance of jobs, housing and infrastructure in the right locations and will attract residents and businesses who value innovation, community cohesion and a high-quality environment, and who will be provided with opportunities to take an active role in managing the community to ensure its continuing success.

Residents will live in high-quality and innovatively designed homes, which accommodate a variety of needs and aspirations and are located in well-designed neighbourhoods where they can meet their day-to-day needs. There will be a network of tree-lined streets and green spaces, incorporating and enhancing existing landscape features and also accommodating safe and attractive routes and space for sustainable drainage solutions; and leisure and recreation opportunities for both residents and visitors of the garden community.

Suitable models for the long-term stewardship of community assets will be established and funded to provide long term management and governance of assets. All Garden City principles as specified in the North Essex Garden Communities Charter will be positively embraced including where appropriate, new approaches to delivery and partnership working for the benefit of the new community. Central to this will be the comprehensive planning and development of the garden community, and the aligned delivery of homes and supporting infrastructure.

Rural Heartland

In the District's substantial rural heartland, the smaller towns of Manningtree, Lawford, Mistley and Brightlingsea, along with some of the larger villages, will have seen some modest varying levels of new housing and employment development to support that have helped to support local shops and services, address local issues, provide for local needs and facilitate investment by local businesses in job opportunities. In some of the District's more remote villages, hamlets and other rural communities a flexible approach to small-scale housing development has helped keep those communities vibrant. Improvements to the telecommunications network and internet broadband services have given these areas a new lease of life with more people able to work, shop and learn from the comfort of their own home.

An increasing number of communities will be developing their own Neighbourhood Plans and promoting community-led development as a means of bringing about positive changes and meeting specific needs and aspirations of local people and businesses.

Throughout the District's countryside and farming communities, a diverse variety of employment and leisure opportunities will grown up in support of the rural economy along with significant investment in the long-term sustainability and stewardship of the environment including habitat creation to support the requirements for bio-diversity net gain.

Any new development will need to obtain the following outcomes:

1. Creating the right balance of jobs, housing and infrastructure;
2. Ensuring that development is sustainable in terms of location, use and form;
3. Balancing the development needs of the District with the protection and enhancement of the natural, historic and built environment;
4. Excellent services and facilities easily accessed by local communities and businesses;
5. More walkable places and an excellent choice of ways to travel;
6. Vibrant, well connected town and productive countryside;
7. Avoid, then mitigate and, as a last resort, compensate for adverse impacts of development on the built, historic and natural environment to achieve a net gain in biodiversity and while capitalising on these features;
8. Stronger, more self-reliant town and countryside with thriving centres;
9. Enhanced quality of life for all residents;
10. Working with partners and residents to develop a place where people really matter;
11. All new developments should ~~account for~~ reduce the causes of, adapt to and mitigate against climate change.

APPENDIX 2: SUGGESTED CHANGES TO THE LOCAL PLAN'S OBJECTIVES

Additions shown as underlined and deletions shown as ~~struck through~~.

Objective 1: Housing Delivery

- To provide new dwellings within Tendring District up to ~~2033~~ 2041 of sufficient variety in terms of location of sites, size, types, tenure and affordability to meet the needs of a growing and ageing population in full.
- To deliver high quality sustainable new communities.

Objective 2: Employment/Commercial

- To create the conditions for economic growth and employment opportunities across a range of economic sectors including established business sectors and those sectors projected to grow in the future such as renewable energy and care and assisted living.
- To provide for the development of employment land on a variety of sites to support a diversity of employment opportunities and to achieve a better balance between the location of jobs and housing, which will reduce the need to travel and promote sustainable growth ~~up to the period of 2033~~ in the period up to 2041.

Objective 3: Retail Town Centre Development

- To promote the vitality and viability of the town centres through the promotion of retail and other related uses, exploiting the benefit of enhanced growth of the towns whilst retaining the best and valued aspects of their existing character, as well as responding appropriately to changes in the way people enjoy shopping and other leisure activities, and competition for trade arising from other centres, both within and outside of the district.

Objective 4: Infrastructure Provision

- To make efficient use of existing transport infrastructure and ensure sustainable transport opportunities are promoted in all new development. Where additional capacity is required in the form of new or upgraded transport infrastructure, to ensure this is provided as necessary in connection with new development.

- To enable provision of upgraded broadband infrastructure and services.
- To ensure that new growth brings opportunities to enhance existing services, facilities and infrastructure for the benefit of existing and new communities.
- To ensure that flood defence infrastructure is considered so that future developments take into consideration the impacts of climate change.
- To ensure there is adequate capacity in the foul water sewerage infrastructure.

Objective 5: Education and Health

- To improve and provide good quality educational opportunities and prospects for Tendring's residents as part of sustainable community strategy. This includes practical vocational training and apprenticeships.
- To work with partners in the National Health Service, local health organisations, Essex County Council and local community groups to ensure adequate provision of healthcare and multi-use facilities to support growing communities.
- To work with Public Health to promote and encourage healthy lifestyles through developments and planning to ensure that the people of Tendring have opportunities to be as healthy as possible.

Objective 6: Sustainability

- To locate development within Tendring District where it will provide the opportunity for people to satisfy their needs for employment, shopping, education, and other services locally or in locations which minimise the need to travel and where there are modes of transport available in addition to the use of the car.

Objective 7: The Historic Environment

- To conserve and enhance Tendring District's historic environment, including: heritage; respecting historic buildings and their settings; heritage assets; landscapes; links; and views.

Objective 8: Biodiversity

- To provide a network of interconnected multi-functional natural green and blue spaces which secures a net gain in biodiversity and geodiversity; promotes healthy lifestyles; and enhances the quality of the natural and built environment.

Objective 9: Water and ~~Climate Change~~ Flood Risk

- To reduce the risk of all types of flooding (~~all types~~) by securing the appropriate location and design of new development (~~including~~ incorporating SuDs where appropriate), having regard to the likely impact of climate change.

Objective 10: Tourism Promotion

- To work with partners to provide an enhanced environment for tourism and the maritime sector and its associated services.

Objective 11: Climate Change

- To provide developments that reduce carbon emissions and are ready to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change.