Chelmsford Local Plan Examination

Council's Opening Statement – 10 November 2026

Cllr Richard Lee – Cabinet Member for Planning and Place Shaping

Good morning. First, on behalf of Chelmsford City Council, I would like to welcome our Inspectors and everyone taking part in these Local Plan examination hearings. I would also like to thank Annette Feeney, the Programme Officer, for managing the examination process so far.

My name is Cllr Richard Lee, and I am the Cabinet Member for Planning and Place Shaping. Before taking on this role, I have had over 10 years of planning committee experience, firstly with Parish, then served as a member of our Planning Committee at City level, and later as its chair. During that time, I considered many planning applications, from small extensions to large estates. From alpaca farms to solar farms. When making these decisions, I fully recognise first-hand the importance of a robust, up-to-date Local Plan: one that meets the need for new development, provides certainty for our businesses and residents - of which I am one, and creates the conditions for positive growth and sound decision-making. Regardless of political colour, successive administrations in Chelmsford have understood the importance of genuinely plan-led development. As you will see during this examination, that approach has paid dividends for Chelmsford. It is a great place to call home.

Chelmsford is growing rapidly, and we believe that a strong, clear vision is crucial to building on our success. Our vision is for Chelmsford's growth to be greener, fairer and better connected. The Local Plan will be a key mechanism through which the Council delivers its strategic priorities for **Climate**, **Growth** and **Place**.

For **Climate** this means:

- Addressing the Climate and Ecological Emergency
- Promoting smart, active travel and sustainable development
- Protecting and enhancing the natural and historic environment, while supporting increased biodiversity and stronger ecological networks

For **Growth** this means:

- Ensuring sustainable patterns of development and protecting the Green Belt
- Meeting the need for new homes
- Fostering growth and investment, and providing new jobs

And for **Place** this means:

- Creating well designed and attractive places, and promoting the health and social wellbeing of communities
- Delivering new and improved strategic and local infrastructure
- Encouraging resilience in retail, leisure, commercial and cultural development

Chelmsford is a great place to live and work. Our area includes a vibrant city, a riverside town and many villages set within attractive countryside. The diversity of our places and communities is a key strength, alongside a strong economy, good transport connections and a high quality of life.

However, we do face challenges which this review of our Local Plan recognises:

- A housing crisis that requires more housing, especially genuinely affordable homes;
- Addressing climate change and the impact on nature;
- Changing nature of retail and city and town centre uses;
- Development pressures on our countryside and important river valleys;
- Retaining high-skilled employment in Chelmsford.

The greatest of these challenges are the continuing effects of climate change and the affordability of new housing, particularly for younger people. This review of the Local Plan addresses both issues head-on. We have ambitious policies to improve the energy efficiency of new buildings in Chelmsford. These are designed not only to cut carbon emissions, but also to reduce energy bills for future residents. In Chelmsford we have over 600 families in temporary accommodation, including over 700 children. Our affordable housing policies increase the proportion of rented affordable housing, particularly larger homes. This is the size and tenure of housing that can make a real difference to those in greatest need.

This Plan builds on a tried-and-tested Spatial Strategy, founded on the policies and allocations in Chelmsford's adopted Local Plan, all of which were found sound at examination. In many cases, this review continues the successful approach we have taken to building new communities. That approach has attracted significant government investment in strategic infrastructure. This includes the first new railway station to open on the Great Eastern Main Line in more than 100 years, and the first section of the Chelmsford North East Bypass.

We are also delivering sustainable, high-quality development. And you do not have to take my word for it. We are very proud of the national recognition our placemaking has received. This includes winning a national Housing Design Award in two consecutive years, as well as

the prestigious Academy of Urbanism 'Great Neighbourhood of the Year' award for the first phases of development at Chelmsford Garden Community.

Consultation and engagement are at the heart of our plan-making. We began reviewing the existing Local Plan within just 18 months of its adoption in May 2020. In late 2022, we held our first Issues and Options consultation, followed by a Preferred Options stage in spring 2024. We then held two further Regulation 19 stages, in February and November 2025.

Over that time, 8,000 respondents have provided comments. We have listened carefully to those views, helping us to shape new development for all our residents, businesses and organisations.

During the review, we have had to navigate a wide range of changes to national planning policy, including significant increases in housing numbers. This Local Plan is being examined under the transitional arrangements in the NPPF. Those arrangements have allowed councils such as ours to continue under the legacy Local Plan system, avoiding further delay to plan-making. We could have delayed or prevaricated, but that would have been a dereliction of our duty, and would have led to unplanned and uncoordinated development. Instead, we have accepted our responsibilities - and carried on.

This council is fortunate to have what I believe to be genuinely excellent officers. This plan has been a hard one to produce, but they have produced it, and more importantly – we can back it up. In conclusion - collectively - we believe this review of the Local Plan provides a sound and positive strategy. It will help us meet our development needs, achieve sustainable development and protect Chelmsford’s most important assets. We welcome the examination of our Plan and look forward to engaging constructively throughout the hearings. Thank you.