

Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment of the Chelmsford Pre-Submission Local Plan

It is very important that the new Chelmsford Local Plan contributes to the sustainable development of Chelmsford's communities, economy and environment. To meet these requirements, and to ensure sustainability is integrated into the Local Plan, independent consultants Amec Foster Wheeler (now Wood) have carried out a Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment of the Chelmsford Local Plan: Pre-Submission Draft (the Pre-Submission Local Plan).

What are Sustainable Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment?

Sustainability Appraisal is a process that identifies, describes and appraises the likely significant social, economic and environmental effects of the Chelmsford Local Plan. Where negative effects are identified, measures are proposed to avoid, minimise or mitigate such effects. Where any positive effects are identified, measures are considered that could enhance such effects.

Habitats Regulations Assessment is a process to determine whether there will be any 'likely significant effects' on any European designated nature conservation sites (European sites) as a result of the Local Plan. European sites include Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Ramsar Sites.

Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment are not one-off exercises. They are ongoing and have helped the Council make important decisions about how Chelmsford should change in the future.



What is the Pre-Submission Local Plan?

The Chelmsford Local Plan will provide a new planning policy framework to meet local development needs up to 2036. Following consultation on Issues and Options for the plan between November 2015 and January 2016, and Preferred Options for the plan between March and May 2017, Chelmsford City Council has prepared the Pre-Submission Local Plan. This is being published for consultation before it is considered by an independent planning inspector.

The Pre-Submission Local Plan sets out:

- **The number of new homes to be delivered:** the Pre-Submission Local Plan makes provision for 21,893 dwellings as well as nine permanent pitches for Gypsies and Travellers and 24 permanent plots for Travelling Showpeople.

- ▶ **The amount of employment land and jobs to be supported:** the Pre-Submission Local Plan makes provision for 55,000 square metres (sqm) of employment floorspace and 13,400 sqm of retail floorspace.
- ▶ **The sites needed to deliver growth:** the Pre-Submission Local Plan directs growth to sustainable locations within the following three Growth Areas - Central and Urban Chelmsford, North Chelmsford and South and East Chelmsford.
- ▶ **The Local Plan policies:** the Pre-Submission Local Plan contains 97 proposed planning policies to help guide future development in Chelmsford.

The Sustainability Appraisal has considered the effects of the Pre-Submission Local Plan on:

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| ▶ Biodiversity and geodiversity | ▶ Water; |
| ▶ Housing | ▶ Flood risk and coastal erosion; |
| ▶ The economy, skills and employment | ▶ Air quality; |
| ▶ Sustainable living and revitalisation | ▶ Climate change; |
| ▶ Health and wellbeing | ▶ Waste and the use of natural resources; |
| ▶ Transport | ▶ The historic environment; and |
| ▶ Land use and soils | ▶ Landscape and townscape. |

A Habitats Regulations Assessment of the Pre-Submission Local Plan has also been completed to identify the likely impacts of the Local Plan upon European sites.

What are the findings?

Sustainability Appraisal

The Sustainability Appraisal has found that the policies and proposals of the Pre-Submission Local Plan will have positive social, environmental and economic effects. These effects are expected to be particularly significant in relation to: housing; the economy; sustainable living; health and wellbeing; and transport. This is because of the likely social and economic benefits associated with the delivery of new housing, employment and community facilities, services and infrastructure in Chelmsford and the focus of this growth in and adjacent to Chelmsford Urban Area, to the north of South Woodham Ferrers and at Key Service Settlements outside of the Green Belt. The findings also reflect the strong framework provided by the plan policies that will help to conserve Chelmsford's natural and built environment and resources.

Negative effects have been identified in relation to: biodiversity; transport; water; flood risk; air quality; climate change; waste and resources; cultural heritage; and landscape. This is mainly due to impacts associated with the construction and operation of new development including land take, resource use, emissions to air and loss of landscape character. However, the Pre-Submission Local Plan includes policies which seek to manage these effects and enhance Chelmsford's natural and built environment and therefore positive effects on these topics have also been identified.

The policies and proposals of the Pre-Submission Local Plan seek to maximise the use of previously developed (brownfield) land. However, development requirements and the limited number of suitable brownfield sites that have not already been earmarked for future development mean that greenfield land adjacent to the urban areas of Chelmsford will be required. **Significant positive and significant negative effects have therefore been identified in respect of land use.**

Summary of the Sustainability Effects of the Pre-Submission Local Plan

Topic	Cumulative effect of the Pre-Submission Local Plan
Biodiversity and Geodiversity	+/-/?
Housing	++
Economy, Skills and Employment	++
Sustainable Living and Revitalisation	++
Health and Wellbeing	++
Transport	++/-
Land Use and Soils	++/--
Water	+/-
Flood Risk and Coastal Erosion	+/-
Air	+/-
Climate Change	+/-
Waste and Natural Resources	+/-/?
Cultural Heritage	+/-/?
Landscape and Townscape	+/-/?

Key

Score	Symbol
Significant Positive Effect	++
Minor Positive Effect	+
Minor Negative Effect	-
Significant Negative Effect	--
Uncertain	?

Habitats Regulations Assessment

A Habitats Regulations Assessment screening exercise has been undertaken to identify the likely effects of the emerging Local Plan upon European sites. Where the possibility of significant effects could not be

excluded, a more detailed Appropriate Assessment has been carried out to determine whether these effects would adversely affect the integrity of these European sites.

The Habitats Regulations Assessment has highlighted that those European sites that are associated with the Mid-Essex coast estuaries¹ plus the Thames Estuary and Marshes SPA / Ramsar and Benfleet and Southend Marshes SPA / Ramsar are potentially vulnerable to regional 'in combination' effects arising from additional recreational visitors, to which the Local Plan will contribute. Such effects could include noise and disturbance which could affect important breeding bird populations. The Habitats Regulations Assessment also highlights that the development of the site 'North of South Woodham Ferrers' may affect the Crouch Estuary site by increasing recreational pressure. However, the Pre-Submission Local Plan includes policies and proposals that seek to manage such effects including a commitment to the adoption of a Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy, which is currently being developed by Essex County Council in collaboration with relevant local planning authorities and Natural England.

The Habitats Regulations Assessment also identifies that growth supported by the Pre-Submission Local Plan has the potential to contribute to 'in combination' air quality and water quality effects on European sites. However, further detailed assessment has demonstrated that these 'in combination' effects are unlikely to be significant.

Overall, the Habitats Regulations Assessment concludes that ***"most aspects of the plan will have no significant effects on any European sites, alone or in combination. Where residual effect pathways remain, appropriate policy-based mitigation measures have been incorporated into the plan policies to ensure that proposals coming forward under the Local Plan either avoid affecting European sites entirely (no significant effect) or will have no adverse effect on site integrity."***

What are the next steps?

The Sustainability Appraisal Report and Habitats Regulations Assessment are being issued for consultation alongside the Pre-Submission Local Plan. **The consultation will run from 31st January to 14th March 2018.**

You can view and comment on the consultation documents at www.chelmsford.gov.uk/planningpolicyconsult. Comments can also be sent to:

By email: planning.policy@chelmsford.gov.uk

By post: Planning and Housing Policy, Chelmsford City Council, Civic Centre, Duke Street, Chelmsford, CM1 1XP

By hand: During normal opening hours to Chelmsford City Council Customer Service Centre (Duke Street, Chelmsford)

A specially designed response form is available online at www.chelmsford.gov.uk/pre-submission or on request by telephoning **(01245) 606330**.

The Sustainability Appraisal Report and Habitats Regulations Assessment, together with the consultation responses received, will be submitted to the Secretary of State alongside the Pre-Submission Local Plan for examination which is expected to take place in Summer 2018.

Want to Find out More?

For further information about the preparation of the Local Plan and the Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment please visit Chelmsford City Council's website: www.chelmsford.gov.uk/pre-submission. Alternatively, please telephone: **(01245) 606330** or email: planning.policy@chelmsford.gov.uk.

¹ The European designated nature conservation sites in the Mid-Essex coast estuaries are: the Crouch and Roach Estuaries SPA / Ramsar; Blackwater Estuary SPA / Ramsar; Foulness SPA / Ramsar; Dengie SPA / Ramsar; and the associated areas of the Essex Estuaries SAC.