

Garden Communities Topic Paper

**Braintree District Council Local Plan
Colchester Borough Council Local Plan
Tendring District Council Local Plan**

October 2017



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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Colchester Borough Council (CBC), Braintree District Council (BDC) and Tendring District Council (TDC) have been working together, alongside Essex County Council in order to identify an agreed strategic approach to the allocation and distribution of large scale housing led mixed use development.
- 1.2 The approach is set out in a shared strategic Section 1 of each Council's Local Plans, which sets out strategic policies across North Essex including approach to housing, employment and infrastructure.
- 1.3 A key part of the strategy as set out in the Local Plans is the inclusion of a small number of large scale 'Garden Communities'. These will be comprehensively planned new settlements containing a wide range of services and facilities and will set the basis for growth across the North Essex area both for the current plan period but also for future plan periods.
- 1.4 Given the importance of the Garden Communities, this topic paper has been prepared to provide further information relating to the nature of such settlements and decision making process that has been followed.
- 1.5 This paper sets out:
 - The origins, policy context and rationale behind the Garden Communities concept;
 - The local plan making process with specific reference to the consideration of Garden Communities across North Essex;
 - A summary of alternative Garden Communities that were considered as part of the process; and
 - A summary of the rationale behind the selection of Garden Communities in North Essex

2 What are Garden Communities

‘Garden Cities’ and the origins of large scale planning

- 2.1 The concept of ‘Garden Cities’ upon which various derivatives such as Garden Towns, Villages & Communities originate, has its historical basis from Ebenezer Howard's book "Tomorrow: a Peaceful Path to Real Reform" published in 1898. This put forward a vision of towns that would take the best elements of the city: good employment prospects, relative wealth for its inhabitants and good communications, and merge these with the best elements of the countryside: a healthy and affordable setting. Parkland was central to the design, as was a covered space where people could shop. The Garden City was intended to be surrounded by an agricultural belt to help make it self-sufficient in food and to prevent unchecked sprawl.
- 2.2 The concept promoted by Howard was the ‘marriage of town and country’ in the ‘Garden City’. It was a new form of development in which people would live close to places of work in an environment that brought the open spaces of the country into the city. ‘Human in scale’, garden cities would separate residential uses from non-residential uses to give cleaner living environments, but still provide access to employment areas, town centre services & facilities, and the surrounding countryside
- 2.3 At the heart of the Garden City ideas is the development of holistically planned new settlements which enhance the natural environment and provide high-quality affordable housing and locally accessible jobs in beautiful, healthy and sociable communities. The Garden Cities were among the first manifestations of attempts at sustainable development.
- 2.4 Letchworth Garden City was founded in 1903 as the first Garden City. It was brought forward by a dedicated Garden City Companies - First Garden City Ltd which was formed in 1903 and purchased around 1600 hectares (almost 4000 acres) of agricultural land in the three adjacent villages of Letchworth, Willian and Norton. Welwyn Garden City was the second Garden City to be built, established in 1922.
- 2.5 The Garden City movement was the precursor to state involvement in creation of a wave of new towns during the latter half of the 20th Century, following the 1946 New Towns Act. This gave the government power to designate areas of land for new town development. A series of “development corporations” set up under the Act were responsible for one of the projected towns. In nearly all cases an existing minor settlement provided a basis for wider development

- 2.6 Large scale development in various forms has formed part of the planning and development process for many years, mostly originating from or heavily influenced by the initial Garden City Movement. Key principles around quality placemaking, sustainable development and creating successful communities, has have fed into the new towns programme, and more recently into initiatives such as sustainable communities, sustainable urban extensions, new settlements, Ecotowns and now into the recent Garden Villages & Towns programme supported by the Department for Communities & Local Government (DCLG).

Garden City Principles

- 2.7 Clearly society has changed in many ways since the original Garden Cities and the concept requires a modern interpretation.
- 2.8 The Town & Country Planning Association (TCPA), founded in 1899 by Ebenezer Howard has had an important role in considering the application of key Garden City principles and have had a strong influence on planning and placemaking right up to today. Whilst there is no formal statutory definition to what a Garden City entails, the TCPA have published guidance and a series of key principles that they consider should be embodied in any approach, which set the concept apart from traditional or standard types of development. These key principles are:
- strong vision, leadership and community engagement;
 - land value capture for the benefit of the community;
 - community ownership of land and long-term stewardship of assets;
 - mixed-tenure homes that are affordable for ordinary people;
 - a strong local jobs offer in the Garden City itself, with a variety of employment opportunities within easy commuting distance of homes;
 - high-quality imaginative design (including homes with gardens), combining the very best of town and country living to create healthy homes in vibrant communities;
 - generous green space linked to the wider natural environment, including a mix of public and private networks of well managed, high-quality gardens, tree-lined streets and open spaces;
 - opportunities for residents to grow their own food, including generous allotments;
 - access to strong local cultural, recreational and shopping facilities in walkable neighbourhoods; and
 - integrated and accessible transport systems – with a series of settlements linked by rapid transport providing a full range of employment opportunities (as set out in Howard’s vision of the ‘Social City’).
- 2.9 The TCPA have been active throughout the period to promote and lobby for the concept to be positively considered as a potential additional approach to housing supply. The concept and principles have been directly referred to in

recent Government documents on the subject, albeit these have been carefully presented to enable local places to evolve their own interpretations based upon local circumstances and ambitions.

Recent policy & guidance relating to Garden City style development

- 2.10 In recent years, there has been a renewed level of interest in Garden City style development in part stimulated by the need to utilise all possible mechanisms to address the Country's chronic housing shortage and meet housing needs at a national and local level.
- 2.11 The most notable relevant policy paper "[Laying the foundations: housing strategy for England](#)" (DCLG, 2011) referenced the opportunity that locally led large scale development could play stating that:

"Sometimes the supply of new homes may best be achieved through comprehensively planned development – whether through new settlements or extensions to existing villages and towns. Well-planned, large-scale projects can be highly successful and the best examples of these have been a great British contribution to international thinking on planning."

(Laying the Foundations: a housing strategy for England para 41)

- 2.12 Alongside this policy paper, the then Housing Minister invited the Town & Country Planning Association (TCPA) to "reinvent the garden city concept for the 21st Century". This culminated in the "[Reimagining Garden Cities](#)" report published by the TCPA in July 2012, with DCLG officials providing the keynote speech at the launch event.
- 2.13 The important role given to large scale Housing projects was recognised at the heart of Government. In the then Prime Minister's speech on infrastructure in March 2012 the ambition was reinforced stating that we "*urgently need to find places where we're prepared to allow significant new growth to happen. That is why we'll begin consultation later this year on how to apply the principles of garden cities to areas with high potential growth in places people want to live*".
- 2.14 Around the same time, the National Planning Policy Framework was published (March 2012) and made explicit reference to the potential role of larger scale development, evolved in accordance with garden city principles:

"The supply of new homes can sometimes be best achieved through planning for larger scale development, such as new settlements or extensions to existing villages and towns that follow the principles of Garden Cities. Working with the support of their communities, local planning authorities should consider whether such opportunities provide the best way of achieving sustainable development. In doing so, they should consider whether it is appropriate to establish Green Belt around or adjoining any such new development."

(National Planning Policy Framework, para 52)

- 2.15 The Royal Town Planning Institute published a paper – “[Delivering Large Scale Housing](#)” (RTPI Sept 2013) to provide further thinking around opportunities and challenges of building at scale. This made reference to the potential role that long term large scale development could play, stating:

“There is no single solution, but large schemes can provide an important part of the solution. The experience of the last 20 years suggests that the level of demand for new homes over the next decade will not be met by piecemeal incremental developments. There are many ways in which the housing crisis can be tackled. These include looking at the role of the existing stock, and considering how small scale development (for example infill) can play a part. Responses should also encompass issues of housing mix, affordability, sustainability, demographic change and preparedness for an ageing population..... While there is no single solution, large scale housing-led developments could provide an important part of the response, as a large number of houses can be built whilst giving an opportunity for planners to design communities that people want to live in – with appropriate infrastructure, community services and green spaces.”

(Delivering Large Scale Housing, RTPI Sept 2013 paras xx)

- 2.16 In the Budget 2014 the Government announced that it would support a new Garden City at Ebbsfleet in Kent, for up to 15,000 new homes based on existing brownfield land, to be driven forward by a development corporation with compulsory purchase powers.
- 2.17 Following Government announcements on support for garden cities, the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) published, the “[Art of Building a Garden City – Garden City Standards for the 21st Century](#)” in June 2014, which, set out practical information on the standards required to deliver Garden Cities.
- 2.18 Subsequent to and as referenced in the DCLG Housing Strategy quoted above, a prospectus was published by DCLG in 2014 inviting expressions of interest from Local Authorities who were interested in working with Government to consider locally led opportunities. The prospectus did not set a formal definition of what a garden city was, but did set out additional context to the potential role and opportunities they may offer, stating:

“We need to build more homes. However, we know that people can be concerned that developers will throw up sprawling extensions to their communities which place additional pressures on local infrastructure. Garden Cities provide a unique opportunity for local areas to prevent this, by taking control of development, integrating planning to decide where best to locate developments and ensuring that public services, green spaces and amenities are hardwired into designs from the beginning. Development at a large scale creates the opportunity to secure real and important benefits: attributes that people most value – such as quality design, gardens, accessible green space near homes, access to employment, and local amenities – can be

designed in from the outset. In short, Garden Cities are about far more than houses alone: they are about creating sustainable, economically viable places where people choose to live. These are the principles on which the Garden Cities movement was based, and they remain as relevant today as they were over a century ago”

(Locally Led Garden Cities Prospectus, DCLG 2014)

- 2.19 In March 2016 a further prospectus was issued by Government “[Locally-led garden villages, towns and cities](#)” and invited expressions of interest from local authorities who wanted to create new communities based on garden city principles across a broader range of scales than the 2014 prospectus. This stated that:

“Large new settlements have a key role to play, not only in meeting this country’s housing needs in the short-term, but also in providing a stable pipeline of housing well into the future....We want to encourage more local areas to come forward with ambitious locally-led proposals for new communities that work as self-sustaining places, not dormitory suburbs. They should have high quality and good design hard-wired in from the outset – a new generation of garden villages, towns and cities.”

(Locally Led Garden Villages & Towns Prospectus paras 3-4)

Scale

- 2.20 The original Howard concept considered new Garden Cities that could accommodate 30,000 residents, equivalent today of around 13,000 homes. albeit this was considered in a very different context to today in relation to population, society and how places function.
- 2.21 The post war new town programme included a range of places and scales, with far higher overall capacities, such as Milton Keynes which has witnessed population growth of over 200,000 people since designation and is still growing today.
- 2.22 The original Garden Cities Prospectus referred to 15,000 homes as a minimum size threshold, and the more recent prospectus broaden the scale and typology range to include Garden Villages of over 1,500 homes and Towns of over 10,000 homes.
- 2.23 In relation to selecting an appropriate scale to relation to potential Garden Communities in North Essex, the primary consideration has been to ensuring critical mass of on site population to provide essential services and facilities and ensure that a community can be truly fostered within a new place.
- 2.24 Of particular significance has been an appropriate threshold to ensure provision of both primary and secondary education on site. The core rationale is that a community should provide for its children through to adulthood, and that the quality of community life is impoverished if older children do not participate because they are sent elsewhere each day. Growing up in a

sustainable community also provides a sound foundation for citizenship, social mixing and interaction.

- 2.25 Secondary school catchments can therefore form a sensible basic building block when designing the size of a new community. This infers that the number of homes should as a minimum be in the range 4,000-5,000 homes, therefore capable of generating the need for a (minimum) 8 form entry secondary school.
- 2.26 This has formed the basis of thinking around potential sites available in the North Essex context, and has set a minimum potential size threshold.

Key opportunities offered by Garden Communities

- 2.27 In the 21st century we need a very different approach. Our small market towns are often cited as the most popular settlements in Britain but few of these have sufficient capacity to accommodate major population growth. Moreover, because of their popularity, housing costs in these towns are often very high.
- 2.28 Inevitably, meeting housing need will involve a range of types and patterns of development, and the relative merits of in-town, edge-of-town and new communities varies depending on the circumstances of particular locations. A portfolio of solutions is needed to fit local circumstances and secure the most sustainable option for the location concerned. Clearly, development of brownfields sites, infill and urban regeneration will always play a role in meeting housing and planning objectives, and appropriate opportunities should be incorporated into respective Local Plans.
- 2.29 Opportunities provided by developing at scale are varied and numerous. This is not to say that many could be realised by alternative forms of development, but both the opportunity and prospect of realisation are enhanced through scale. Such opportunities include but are not limited to the following:
- Planning for large scale, long term development provides the opportunity to ensure that well planned development, incorporating all necessary services, facilities and a blend of end uses incorporated from the outset as opposed to piecemeal, sprawling development.
 - By virtue of their scale, and if carefully designed and developed to produce integrated, 'holistic' settlements, they can encourage and accommodate highly-sustainable patterns of living.
 - Major development, but perhaps particularly one on a greenfield site, provides opportunities to fully integrate considerable green infrastructure and environmental assets.
 - Major planned developments provide an opportunity to design-in the greenest of technologies, in ways that are not possible in smaller infill or incremental schemes. This could include aspects such as Sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS), approaches to public transport systems and local energy generation and supply systems

- Infrastructure costs are often a key challenge in delivering new development. Large scale development will generally involve areas of greenfield/agricultural land with relatively low values, providing the opportunity to fund infrastructure from the uplift in value.
- A sense of community cohesion can be established by creating a sufficient critical mass of population and social mix, generating sufficient demand to support a full range of services and facilities locally within the community (including community facilities, education, retail, social meeting places and commercial uses)
- Scale enables sufficient critical mass of local population to also make the onsite provision of services and facilities viable and deliverable – for example sustaining local amenities and making new strategic public transport interventions viable with sufficient patronage.
- Developing a new place at scale provides the opportunity to create successful ‘hubs’ of activity that can foster community development and positive human interaction, creating a sense of belonging and a safe and inclusive environment.
- A sustainable and healthy environment can be designed in from the outset, for example to encourage a walkable environment, and provision of well designed and accessible recreation facilities and attractive parklands.
- Trip generation is likely to be less in relatively large settlements, provided they are reasonably self-contained, and provided that services and places of employment are located in close proximity to places of residence.
- Scale provides greater scope to create assets that can be passed over to new local communities, promoting a greater sense of belonging with active long-term stewardship and community empowerment.
- Ownership or control of a large area of land by a small number of stakeholders, with a ‘master-developer’ or ‘town-builder’ component, provides the basis for a long term view of the scheme and ensures that the essential infrastructure, facilities and components that turn a development into a place are planned and phased to support the implementation of development. A master-developer can better recognise and benefit from taking a long term view, with high-quality place making and direct provision of infrastructure adding value to the land by making the scheme location more attractive and valuable to occupiers over a long time period. Smaller scale development risks owners/developers being less interested in the long term performance of the place as they would not retain any long term interest.

3 Local Decision Making processes

Local Plan Process: Consideration of Garden Communities

- 3.1 Officers and Members from Braintree, Colchester, Tendring and Essex have been working closely together during the preparation of the draft Local Plans, particularly in relation to the proposals for new garden communities.
- 3.2 To aid coordination and the legal requirements of the Duty to Cooperate, the Councils initiated a joint approach to strategic plan-making. This included the evolution of a common evidence on strategic matters (such as housing, the economy transport and the natural environment) and included consideration of the concept of Garden Communities to potentially deliver part of the growth required within the strategic area. The selection of the best sites to deliver Garden Communities were informed by Sustainability Appraisal work and consideration of alternatives. Braintree, Colchester and Tendring jointly commissioned Sustainability Appraisal work for strategic cross-boundary proposals, which resulted in submission plans containing separate Sustainability Appraisal reports for the shared Section 1 of the plan containing strategic proposals and the locally specific Section 2 of each Local Plan.
- 3.3 In accordance with this strategic approach, both BDC and CBC Local Plan Issues and Options consultations included the potential for new settlements.

Braintree Local Plan

- 3.4 BDC began preparation of its Local Plan in June 2014. An initial call for sites exercise was held between August and October 2014.
- 3.5 BDC produced a Local Plan Issues and Scoping Document in January 2015 which highlighted some of the main issues that needed to be addressed in the next Plan and suggested a number of approaches to managing growth. The document asked whether these were the right issues and strategies and if people wanted to suggest other for consideration. Further sites were accepted during this Issues & Scoping consultation. The Local Plan Sustainability Appraisal (SA) Scoping Report was also subject to consultation at the same time.
- 3.6 The BDC consultation ran roughly at the same time as a similar Issues & Options consultation in CBC, with both documents containing the possibility of a new settlement on the border of the two authorities. The BDC consultation document made direct reference to potential new villages; areas where new housing could fund major infrastructure, and the consideration of key cross boundary issues.
- 3.7 Within BDC two broad locations were identified as the most appropriate potential areas for Garden Communities - one to the west of Braintree and Rayne (including some land within Uttlesford District) and one to the east of

Coggeshall and Feering at Marks Tey, much of which is situated within Colchester Borough.

- 3.8 The BDC Local Plan Sub Committee on 17th Feb 2016 provided an update to the issue of potential Garden Communities. This referred to the appointment of Garden City Developments CIC (GCD) and confirmed that the Councils were actively seeking to evolve the policy process to consider if Garden Communities should become broad locations for growth in their Local Plan Preferred Options consultations.
- 3.9 The Sub Committee was advised at this point that any Garden Community would be anticipated to contribute to a proportion of the assessed housing needs of the district, and that a range of other sites would also be required to make the Council's 'preferred options' consultation robust. It referenced that any Garden Community would need to be of sufficient scale to be viable and therefore development was likely to extend throughout and beyond the emerging Local Plan period.
- 3.10 The BDC Local Plan Sub Committee on 14th March 2016 considered a Broad Spatial Strategy which included new planned Garden Communities. These were set out as a way of creating standalone new towns or villages which could contain all the everyday services and facilities that a new population would need, including health, retail, education, culture and recreation space. The officers report set out that any new community would need to ensure that appropriate infrastructure was provided from day one to ensure sustainable development that meets the principles of garden cities as set out by the Town and Country Planning Association and advocated by national government. As such the Officers considered them a sustainable way of providing new development in principle. The report noted that further studies were underway to see if there were any suitable locations for a Garden Community in the District.
- 3.11 The BDC Local Plan Sub Committee on 25th May 2016 approved that areas of search within the draft Braintree District Local Plan for two new Garden Communities – one to the West of Braintree (which could be cross border with Uttlesford) and one to the West of Colchester (shared with Colchester Borough) as the most sustainable way of meeting that unprecedented levels of local housing need. The report noted that the proposed areas of search remained provisional and needed to be tested further.
- 3.12 The Officers report noted that the overall housing target to which the Councils was working to was a substantial increase on that which was set out in previous Local Plans. It presented a challenging target and the Councils early on recognised that new ways of addressing it would need to be fully explored as part of the plan making process.
- 3.13 The main urban areas across North Essex provided sustainable areas for new growth as they contained the most facilities, services and employment opportunities for residents, as well as public transport, road and some walking

and cycling infrastructure. However existing towns and villages have constraints and infrastructure and services can be stretched. Officers noted that the Local Plan had considered the capacity and context of existing settlements and included proposals for further growth including a number of urban extensions on the edge, where these could be sustainably accommodated to make best use of their facilities and connections.

- 3.14 Villages in the area, particularly larger villages that had a good range of day to day facilities were proposed for varying levels of growth, depending on the facilities, accessibility and sustainability. Many of the smaller, more isolated villages were not being proposed for growth of any substantial nature, given their lack of facilities, services and public transport. However opportunities were taken where appropriate to allocate new sites for development, particularly on sites that have been previously developed or in villages that may have some facilities.
- 3.15 A number of sites were submitted through the call for sites exercises in 2014 and early 2015 which set out initial considerations around potential growth options and the potential for stand-alone new settlements. Such exercises provided the starting point for site consideration and were appraised through the Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Land Availability Assessment processes.
- 3.16 The BDC Local Plan Sub Committee 12 July 2016 approved the North Essex Garden Communities Concept Feasibility Study and North Essex Garden Communities Charter as part of the evidence base for the Local Plan.
- 3.17 The Feasibility Study provided an overview of issues, constraints and opportunities, helped to inform site selection and the consideration of alternatives. The study investigated a range of scenarios in relation to the scope and scale of development that may be feasible, together with an evaluation in relation to meeting objectives, deliverability and anticipated infrastructure requirements. The aim of the study was to set out the key alternatives for the Councils to consider and provide an evaluation of how each of them performed. The work included liaison with a range of key statutory stakeholders, particularly infrastructure providers such as UK Power Networks and Anglian Water, as well as liaison with a range of officers from the four Councils.
- 3.18 The Charter set out further detail and the tailoring of Garden City principles to North Essex against which alternative options could be considered. This was a standalone statement of intent to demonstrate and articulate the level of ambition.
- 3.19 The BDC Local Plan Sub Committee on 16 May 2017 approved a set of further evidence base documents relating to the Local Plan and Garden Communities, and agreed a Publication Draft Local Plan supported by Sustainability Appraisal work which included broad locations for the 2

proposed Garden Communities at West of Braintree and Colchester Braintree Borders. This decision was endorsed by Full Council on 5th June 2017.

Colchester Borough Council (CBC) Local Plan

- 3.20 CBC began preparation of a new Local Plan in 2014. An initial call for sites exercise was carried out from July to September 2014
- 3.21 An Issues and Options Report was published by CBC in January 2015. This included several growth strategy options including new settlements to the east and west of Colchester and a possible urban extension to the north of Colchester. The Scoping Report for this stage of the process established a range of sustainability objectives and all options for potential policies and site allocations were assessed against those objectives.
- 3.22 The CBC Issues & Options process recognised that Colchester had a strong history of making use of, or redevelopment of, previously developed, or brownfield, sites. As a result of this, the Borough had a very limited and diminishing supply of brownfield sites that could contribute to the accommodation of additional growth requirements. Objectively assessed need was at a level which meant that brownfield development was only likely to be able to reasonably accommodate a very small proportion of total growth requirements.
- 3.23 All of the CBC growth options set out in the Issues & Options consultation included an element of urban development together with separate sustainable settlements, detached from the existing urban area. The reason being that the urban edge of Colchester town was subject to specific constraints, natural and otherwise, including Sites of Special Scientific Interest, archaeological features, topography and flood zones. It was not considered feasible for urban expansion directly adjacent to the urban boundary to accommodate the majority of growth. As a result of this, potential new sustainable settlements needed to be fully considered for accommodating growth, in particular post 2021.
- 3.24 CBC set out in the Issues & Options consultation that they would aspire for new development of any new settlement to be as sustainable and as high quality as possible and referenced the Town and Country Planning Association's Garden City principles as providing a useful framework for achieving this. A specific question was included in the consultation asking "Should any new sustainable settlement aspire to the Garden City principles?"
- 3.25 At the same time as the Issues and Options consultation, CBC invited landowners and developers to put forward potential sites for development that could be capable of delivering a sustainable new settlement. This process, known as a 'Call for Sites', repeated a similar exercise undertaken in the summer of 2014. The Council considered the suitability of the sites proposed through the two Call for Sites exercises.

- 3.26 Submissions received to the call for sites exercises formed part of the evidence base to consider the potential supply of land available to accommodate the growth requirements of the Borough. This work has been carried out in co-operation between BDC, CBC and TDC to ensure that the Duty to Cooperate was met and to facilitate exploration of cross-boundary planning options, including Garden Communities. All options were explored through the joint Sustainability Appraisal work carried out for these cross-boundary proposals.
- 3.27 Officers brought regular updates to the Local Plan Committee, notably in June and August 2015 which set out the results of the Issues and Options consultation and provided progress reports on the development of the plan and its supporting evidence base.
- 3.28 Responses to the Issues & Options consultation were considered by the CBC Local Plan Committee on 8th June 2015. Those commenting on the overall vision tended to accept the need for a well-considered long term approach.
- 3.29 As part of the ongoing process of developing the evidence to support the production of the Local Plan, CBC prepared a Strategic Land Availability Assessment and a Sustainability Appraisal for its plan as a whole including consideration of potential Garden Communities. In order to ensure a fair and comprehensive approach and to be clear in the process of developing the Plan, CBC carried out a consultation on draft frameworks for these two processes, to be used in the assessment of sites being considered for allocation. A six week consultation period for both consultations ran from 27 July to 7 September 2015.
- 3.30 The CBC Local Plan Sub Committee 5th October 2015 agreed reported on the Sustainability Appraisal consultation, noting general support for the criteria was expressed in some cases with points relating to matters of detail. Subsequent amendments to the criteria were agreed at the 14th December 2015 committee meeting
- 3.31 A report of progress with the Garden Communities was also considered by CBC Local Plan Committee received on 14th Dec 2015. This noted that the Council (in conjunction with BDC and TDC) had jointly appointed Garden City Developments CIC (GCD), a not for profit community interest company, to support consideration of the feasibility of the proposed Garden Cities. Funding was also secured from DCLG to support further evidence gathering, including preparation of a North Essex Garden Communities Concept Feasibility Study to test emerging options, alongside a North Essex Garden Communities Charter to further articulate local ambition and objectives.
- 3.32 The CBC Local Plan Sub Committee 5th July 2016 agreed a Preferred Options Local Plan document which was published for public consultation for an eight week period from 9 July to 2 September 2016, along with the Sustainability Appraisals for Sections 1 and 2 of the Local Plan.

- 3.33 As part of moving to a CBC Preferred Option, the 6 options for growth outlined in the CBC Issues and Options were refined into one involving a continuing focus on urban Colchester; small scale development in identified 'Sustainable Settlements'; and the development of two new Garden Communities to the east and west of Colchester.
- 3.34 The Preferred Option reflected the outcome of draft Sustainability Appraisal, the overall evidence base, deliverability considerations, the availability of sites, and an overall evaluation of the combination of allocations and policies that would produce the most sustainable pattern of growth. The preferred Spatial Strategy evolved from firstly, consideration of the individual characteristics and capacity of different parts of the Borough and secondly, consideration of the overall linkages and functionality of settlements within the area and the best ways of enhancing their sustainability.
- 3.35 It was concluded that new settlement options were only acceptable if promoted as Garden Communities given that communities built on Garden Community principles would be able to address requirements for infrastructure and community stewardship as part of meeting the requirement for housing and employment land. The selection of three sites spread across the three authorities reflected consensus between the authorities on an equitable and sustainable division of growth to meet identified need.
- 3.36 The CBC Local Plan Committee on 12 June 2017 approved a set of further evidence base documents relating to the Local Plan and Garden Communities, and agreed a Publication Draft Local Plan which included broad locations for the 2 proposed Garden Communities at Tendring Colchester Borders (East of Colchester – cross boundary with TDC) and Colchester Braintree Borders (west of Colchester, cross boundary with BDC).

Tendring District Council Local Plan

- 3.37 TDC had been preparing a Core Strategy which had involved looking at Issues & possible options in 2009, consultation on a Core Strategy in 2010 consultation on housing issues in 2011 and drafting of a draft Local Plan for consultation in September 2012. Following the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in 2012 TDC decided to prepare a new, single Local Plan, building upon the work already undertaken.
- 3.38 TDC undertook consultation between November 2012 – January 2013, on a Proposed Submission Draft of the Local Plan.
- 3.39 Following consideration of up to date evidence and all the issues received during the previous public consultation period, TDC Council agreed on 26 November 2013 to a series of changes to the Local Plan. These changes were placed on public consultation from January 2014 to February 2014.

- 3.40 The changes included extending the plan to a 15 year timeframe. The revised plan set out that for the first 10 years growth would be spread around existing settlements in a way that was sustainable, fair and broadly proportionate to their existing sizes. It also recognised that existing settlements were likely to have reached sensible limits for accommodating additional development, and that more focused, larger scale developments would be required as 'broad locations' to accommodate longer term growth. The changes included the addition of the West Tendring/Colchester Fringe as an urban settlement.
- 3.41 TDC Local Plan Committee agreed to consult on an Issues & Options at its meeting on 14th July 2015. This set out a number of alternative options for strategic development including potential for additional new Garden Villages. The report published set out several growth strategy options, all of which included a new settlement to the west of Tendring at the border with Colchester. The Issues and Options consultation took place between 1st September 2015 and 13th October 2015.
- 3.42 The TDC Local Plan committee on 12th Nov considered initial results of the public consultation exercise.
- 3.43 On 21st Jan 2016, TDC Local Plan Committee received an update paper on Garden Communities. This was similar to other papers considered by BDC and CBC around this time, and set out that Garden City Developments CIC had been appointed and that funding had been secured from DCLG to assist in facilitating a number of work streams to develop emerging proposals,
- 3.44 On 9th June 2016 TDC Local Plan Committee approved a Preferred Option consultation, which included the shared Part 1 and inclusion of 3 Garden Communities across the combined North Essex area. Consultation on the Sustainability Appraisal for Section 1 of the plan was held between 8 August and 19 September 2016 and consultation on the Section 2 Sustainability Appraisal was held between 28 August and 10 October 2016. Response to the consultations were considered by the Committee on 3rd Nov 2016.
- 3.45 TDC Local Plan Committee on 12th June 2017 approved the Publication Draft Local Plan, which was endorsed by Full Council on 15th June 2017.

4 Alternative Options Considered

Introduction

- 4.1 The Local Plan has to be justified to meet the soundness test as explained in paragraph 182 of the NPPF. This means that it needs to be the most appropriate strategy when considered against the reasonable alternatives. By working in co-operation the Councils agreed that the most appropriate long term strategy for North Essex is to meet housing need in three new garden communities. Alternative options to the spatial strategy proposed in the Publication Draft Local Plans were reviewed in the in light of consultation responses Sustainability Appraisals, and other evidence base work.
- 4.2 As part of the evolution of the Local Plans, a number of alternative Garden Community locations were proposed. These were:
- Colchester Metrotown;
 - North Colchester (Langham Garden Suburb; and
 - Monkswood Garden Settlement (Pattiswick).

Colchester Metrotown

- 4.3 Colchester Metrotown is an alternative spatial distribution model for delivering growth in Tendring submitted by the 'Campaign Against Urban Sprawl in Essex' (CAUSE) a campaign group which opposes the proposal of a Garden Community at Colchester Braintree Borders/West Tey.
- 4.4 Essentially the concept proposes to use the railway line between Clacton and Colchester and put a series of new or expanded communities within walking distance of railway stations and adjacent to existing settlements such as Weeley and Great Bentley. The sites would be entirely within the Tendring District but would be expected to provide for the housing need across North Essex.
- 4.5 The proposal was set out on a map together with some background papers, but was not lead by a promoter or group of promoters hence making it difficult to fully understand and assess what was being suggested.
- 4.6 The vast majority of land that was subject to the proposal has not been submitted to the Councils for consideration for development or therefore been subject to thorough public consultation or scrutiny via previous formal plan making stages.
- 4.7 The deliverability of the proposals is in question given the unknown quantity of landowners and the willingness of them to participate in such a scheme. The land is in fragmented ownership and with limited exceptions is not currently being promoted for development. Officers raised concern that the land

required is not available to the extent that would be required to be a deliverable alternative housing strategy

- 4.8 The Councils asked independent consultants to undertake a review of this option to a comparable level of assessment of other sites and options as set out in the North Essex Garden Communities Concept Feasibility Study. The full document is available as part of the published evidence base.
- 4.9 Notwithstanding the issue of a lack of clarity or certainty over land that would or could come forward for development, overall the site was considered to perform poorly against a number of the principles set out in the North Essex Garden Community Charter including delivery and the provision of green space, employment and community facilities as part of new development.
- 4.10 Development at scale may enable higher provision of local services and facilities but would be inappropriate to the existing scale, form and function of the existing villages and settlements. Development at any scale would also require significant improvements in access and utilities networks, given the sites locations away from main centres and road corridors (notwithstanding location on a rail corridor which itself would require improvements to accommodate increased patronage).
- 4.11 Overall it was not considered that the Colchester Metrotown offered an appropriate alternative solution for development, given that it fails to meet many of the sustainability criteria set out in the Sustainability Appraisal, would introduce unacceptable impacts to the existing towns and villages concerned, and has significant doubts over availability of land and deliverability.

North Colchester / Langham Garden Suburb

- 4.12 A proposed Garden Suburb for Langham was submitted through the concurrent Call for Sites process alongside the CBC Issues and Options document, and hence had not been included as a potential option at the time of issuing that report. The Issues and Options report did, however, include an option for expansion to the north in the Langham area.
- 4.13 The project was subsequently drawn into the consideration and evidence gathering process from then, including being considered as part of the North Essex Garden Communities Concept Feasibility Study.
- 4.14 The discounting of the North Colchester site for a Garden Community was primarily based on the negative environmental impacts of a large Garden Community on an area of significant landscape and environmental value.
- 4.15 Whilst located in reasonable proximity to the urban boundary of Colchester, it was also located across a major transport barrier (A12), with limited scope for integration.

- 4.16 Spatially the area to the north of Colchester was already experiencing significant growth which had been planned as part of the previous Local Plan, and infrastructure had not been planned to accommodate additional substantial growth this side of the urban area. The deliverability and sustainability of Garden Communities was considered to be best served by their location in two distinct areas of the Borough as opposed to the northern edge of Colchester.

Pattiswick

- 4.17 As part of the BDC Preferred Options consultation, a new standalone garden community was proposed. This was considerably later than call for sites exercise from 2014 and early 2015, and therefore had not been subject to consultation or assessment.
- 4.18 The site was referred to as Monks Wood and is located 5km to the east of Braintree, bordered by the A120 on its southern and part eastern boundary as it travels to the north around Coggeshall.
- 4.19 Since being identified, the project was drawn into the consideration and evidence gathering process from then as a potential reasonable alternative, including being considered as part of the North Essex Garden Communities Concept Feasibility Study.
- 4.20 The site is rural in nature and the wooded farmland area is considered to have a relatively high sensitivity to change.
- 4.21 Coggeshall is also one of the District's most historic towns, having been settled since the Mesolithic period and being located on the Roman road Stane Street. The core of the village is particularly historic with a substantial Conservation Area and large numbers of listed buildings, some dating from the medieval period. The Monkswood scheme is in close proximity to the northern boundary of the existing settlement.
- 4.22 The Monks Farm site at Pattiswick is located within 3km of the Colchester/Braintree borders community, with the historic village of Coggeshall located between the two. Given the scale and proximity of these two proposals it was not considered appropriate or sustainable to allocate both sites given the impact on infrastructure, landscape and existing resident population that these two large developments would have.
- 4.23 Monks Wood is accessible to a much smaller, albeit very successful, cluster around Earls Colne Airfield and Coggeshall. It is also closer in proximity to Braintree. The employment market in Braintree is less strong than Colchester and major new employment areas are proposed on the west side of Braintree which is in close proximity to the West of Braintree garden community.
- 4.24 A garden community at Monks Wood is currently located on the highly trafficked and single carriageway section of the A120. This may be upgraded

either in the current alignment or may be realigned some distance away from the site. The only other roads in the vicinity are rural lanes and there is very limited opportunity to access a site of this size by other routes. There is no rail access either directly to the site or to neighbouring Coggeshall.

- 4.25 The impact on the historic character of the dispersed settlement of Pattiswick, is considered to be greater than on the character of Marks Tey which is a much more modern settlement.
- 4.26 The promoters have indicated they are in a good position to deliver the proposal. However there was some uncertainty through material submitted over the anticipated scale of development which may have impacts on the proposals ability to provide larger pieces of infrastructure. A masterplan for the scheme was only supplied in May 2017.

5 Summary & Conclusions

- 5.1 The Councils have considered a variety of options for meeting objectively assessed development and infrastructure requirements and have set out from the outset that a range of solutions would be needed to address housing and growth needs in a way that was appropriate and sustainable.
- 5.2 The Local Plan process has considered options relating to growing the main urban areas across North Essex as they contained the most facilities, services and employment opportunities for residents, as well as public transport, road and some walking and cycling infrastructure. Local Councils have also had a strong track record in making use of existing (brownfield) assets wherever possible. The Local Plans have considered the capacity and context of existing settlements and proposals have been included for further growth including a number of urban extensions on the edge, where these could be sustainably accommodated to make best use of their facilities and connections.
- 5.3 The Local Plan has also considered a more dispersed growth pattern to spread growth around existing villages in the area, particularly larger villages that had a good range of day to day facilities. Some growth has been allocated where considered appropriate to allocate new sites for development, particularly on sites that have been previously developed or in villages that may have some facilities.
- 5.4 However existing towns and villages must eventually reach their limits, be it due to infrastructure capacity or a need to protect local character, and a bold new step has to be taken to meet the need for housing and urban development in such a way that the distinction between town and country is not confused by continual and/or piecemeal sprawl.
- 5.5 It was agreed that the most appropriate strategy for doing so was by promoting three garden communities distributed across the North Essex area – one to the west of Braintree, one between Braintree and Colchester and one to the east of Colchester. Spatially across North Essex the site enables a clear distribution of Garden Communities, enabling them to create their own identities and address local housing needs and pressures across North Essex as a whole.

Colchester Braintree Borders Garden Community

- 5.6 The Colchester Braintree Borders Garden Community has been identified as providing a strategic long term opportunity to not only contribute towards growth in this plan period, but to provide an opportunity for future plan periods. The site is in close proximity to the mainline railway station at Marks Tey, which with upgraded facilities would give regular train links to London,

Colchester and beyond within walking, cycling or bus rapid transport system to the station. It is well located at the intersection of the A12 and A120 thus providing opportunities for good accessibility and attractiveness to prospective residents and employers alike. There are also more opportunities for sustainable travel links into Colchester, a major regional centre of facilities and employment.

- 5.7 The Colchester Braintree borders site is in closer proximity to Colchester. As one of the major centres in the region, Colchester offers a full range of facilities including a hospital and is a major shopping and cultural destination. This would provide high order services not on the garden community within a reasonable proximity with the opportunities for public transport, walking and cycling links.
- 5.8 Colchester is also a major employer in the region and provides a good level and mix of employment opportunities. There is the opportunity to access these opportunities via public transport, walking and cycling.
- 5.9 Considering all the factors on balance officers recommend that the Colchester/Braintree garden community as a suitable and justified development in this Local Plan

Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community

- 5.10 The Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community also provides a strategic long term opportunity. The site is well located to the urban area of Colchester thus enabling it to benefit from the services and facilities provided in that higher order settlement.
- 5.11 The site is also well located to the University of Essex and Knowledge Gateway providing opportunities for business generation, economic growth and retention of younger aspirational populations. It is also well located to the A120 and other business park locations.
- 5.12 The site benefits from Salary Brook and other environmental assets which would be protected and provide the opportunity to create a quality natural setting.
- 5.13 The site also provides opportunities to connect rapid transit services into the eastern side of Colchester potentially creating a new public transport link from the edge of town into Colchester Town station.

West of Braintree Garden Community

- 5.14 The West of Braintree Garden Community has also been identified as providing a strategic long term opportunity to not only contribute towards growth in this plan period, but to provide an opportunity for future plan periods.

- 5.15 The site addresses needs in the western section of North Essex, and provides direct access to the A120. It is well located to Stansted Airport both as a centre of local employment but also providing opportunities for new business growth. It also provides access to the M11 and London Stansted Cambridge Corridor.
- 5.16 The site is well located to the urban area of Braintree thus enabling it to benefit from the services and facilities provided in that higher order settlement.