

Local Plan Review 2041

Issues & Options

Summary leaflet





Introduction

We are starting the refresh of our Local Plan to make sure we can tackle the challenges that face our economy, society and environment — to deliver a plan that meets community's needs for housing, employment and infrastructure.

The Government requires us to review our targets for new homes and jobs every five years. As we adopted the Local Plan in 2021, we have to start a review now, so there is enough time to consult and make sure residents and businesses are fully involved in the process before five years is up. The plan period will be extended to 2041 to ensure we are planning for our communities' needs into the future and to address major challenges we face.

The Braintree district is the second largest district, by area, in Essex, with a population that has grown 7% in the past decade. Our business sectors are thriving, and interest in building new homes is increasing.

At a national level, the Government is giving high priority to increasing housing delivery and like every area, we are expected to take our share of new development. We have a new mandatory housing target of providing 1115 homes up to 2041. An up-to-date Plan that has been shaped by the community is important to ensure that we remain in control and identify the right type of development in the right places with the necessary infrastructure.

Everyone deserves a decent home they can call their own, but many residents are locked out of that opportunity being affected by higher house prices. To meet this need, we need to plan for more good quality affordable homes and create accessible places that promote walking, cycling and public transport, as well as providing jobs for local residents. It's also important to ensure that the new development is fully supported by infrastructure improvements, for example to roads, wastewater and flood measures.

It's crucial we take this time to make meaningful changes to tackle the climate crisis and reduce our impact on the planet. The council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and is working to be carbon neutral as far as possible by 2030. The Local Plan will focus on integrating measures to enable this to happen, such as sustainable design policies, embedding on-site renewable energy measures into new developments, high quality green infrastructure and protecting and expanding natural habitats and biodiversity.

We want to seize this opportunity to ensure the design, function and feel of neighbourhoods creates places people are proud to live in. Key to delivering this is embedding the principles of high-quality design that is best for our towns and villages, having safe and well-designed streets with good quality open spaces and good access to facilities and services. We will work to support and improve residents' health and wellbeing by creating a network of great places and spaces which enable residents to live healthy and active lifestyles.

Ultimately it is vital that development is directed to places where it will provide for the needs of our local communities, whilst protecting and enhancing the overall character and environment of the district.

This document is the start of the conversation towards reviewing the Local Plan. A new Local Plan cannot be written without your ideas – so please do get involved and help us plan the district's future together.



Councillor Gabrielle Spray
Cabinet Member for Planning

What does the consultation cover?

We're reviewing the Braintree District Local Plan, a document that guides future development and growth that is sustainable. It identifies land for future housing, employment and infrastructure needs, whilst best protecting and enhancing the natural and built environment.

This is the 'Issues & Options' stage. This is where we outline the key challenges for future development and ask for your views on how we can best address these through planning policies.

You can comment on whether the vision, objectives and policies continue to be appropriate and if not, suggest changes you feel will help ensure we meet the district's needs. In addition, we are asking if the Local Plan period should be extended to 2041 to cover a 15- year period or whether an alternative longer period would be better.

The following pages provide a summary of key topics the discussion document covers.

The current plan

Currently the Braintree District Local Plan is in two sections.

Section 1

This section is a joint document shared with Colchester City Council and Tendring District Council. It deals with overall strategic development such as housing and employment numbers over the wider North Essex area.

Within this consultation you are invited to comment on whether the vision, objectives and policies in both sections continue to be appropriate and if not, suggest changes you feel will help ensure we meet the district's needs.

Section 2

This section relates to Braintree District Council only. It contains the vision, objectives, policies, maps and sites for matters including housing, employment and economic growth, regeneration, infrastructure and the protection of the environment.

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Economy and Retail

National Planning Policy requires planning to place significant weight on the need to support economic growth and productivity. Planning must address potential barriers to investment and identify strategic sites for development which meets local need and inward investment.

The current adopted Local Plan seeks to preserve existing urban and rural employment sites for office, manufacturing, storage and distribution, or supporting uses. Large concentrations of industrial land has been retained in Braintree, Witham and Halstead.

The plan identifies employment need as a range between 20.9ha and 43.3ha and allocates greenfield land targeted to meeting the higher growth scenario.

The relevant evidence base makes the following recommendations for the plan period up to 2041:

- An additional 2.4ha of office space
- 22.5ha of land needed for storage and distribution
- A criteria-based policy could be brought in to attract inward investment opportunities
- Translocating older stock on existing employment land to new sites with excellent strategic highway access
- Protect and direct new provision of offices to town centre locations which provide access to public transport and amenities
- New, limited SME space (Small, start-up and micro enterprises) could be promoted in new mixed-use developments, in town centres and edges of centres
- New inward investment, including focus industries, could be promoted on large sites where businesses moving out from London and Chelmsford can be captured.

National Planning Policy continues to require support for the growth and expansion of all types of business to enable rural diversification, including through rural tourism and leisure developments. For the rural economy, the Local Plan takes a development management approach rather than a policy of strategic intervention. There is likely to be further growth in demand for rural workspaces and policies should continue to support opportunities to convert redundant agricultural buildings where environmental and access considerations are acceptable.

Retail

National Planning Policy for retail development has not changed significantly since the Local Plan was adopted. National Planning Policy requires town centres to be recognised to be at the heart of the community. The Local Plan is required to define a network and hierarchy of centres, define town centres and primary shopping areas, as well as allocating sites and retaining markets. National Planning Policy continues to direct development of retail and other uses towards town centres in the first instance, and for development outside of town centres they must comply with both the "sequential test" and impact assessment.

The Council has updated its retail evidence base in 2024. In terms of floorspace, the updated retail report indicates that it is unlikely additional floor space will be required, however this should be kept under review along with any existing allocations.





Housing

The government has set the district a target of 1,115 new homes a year to meet national housing need. This is an ambitious target which will require new land to be allocated for housing development.

The Council has commissioned updated evidence to determine the level of affordable housing that can be delivered together with the mix of house types which are needed most.

Demographic forecasting shows that there will be increasing numbers of elderly people in the local population. Many older people prefer to live in their current home as long as possible rather than move into supported living, but there will be more people needing specialist housing on some kind.

Additionally, there is a demand, locally as well as nationally, for self-build and custom-build homes as part of the housing market supply.

The current Local Plan seeks to provide plots for gypsy and travellers through the larger strategic growth locations and the planning application process. This approach was taken as no sites had been submitted for G&T accommodation through the previous call for sites.

A spatial strategy determines where housing development should go in the district. The current spatial strategy states:



That the broad spatial strategy for the Braintree District should concentrate development on the town of Braintree, Witham and the A12/Great Eastern Mainline corridor and Halstead.



Transport and Infrastructure

The existing Local Plan requires new developments to contribute towards the improvement of the road network in the district, ensure safety or highway users and reduce congestion.

The core routes of Braintree's transport network continue to be heavily used. The Strategic Road Network comprises of the A12 and A120, while the A130, A131, and A1124 are important roads on the network. ONS data reveals that around half of employed residents in Braintree District commute to work outside the district (as a comparison, Colchester City retains 70% of its employed residents).

Local Plan policies as a whole also continue to manage patterns of development into sustainable locations, support mixed uses, safeguard future infrastructure routes, and retain a high bar for refusing development on road congestion grounds.

Updates to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) promote a 'vision-led' approach to transport planning. This approach to transport planning is based on setting outcomes for a development based on achieving well-designed, sustainable and popular places, and providing the transport solutions to deliver those outcomes.

To support the allocation policies in the Local Plan Review, key evidence will need to be commissioned including Highways Modelling and an Infrastructure Development Plan as well as incorporating cycling strategies into the updated plan.

Broadband

Chapter 10 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires planning to support the development and enhancement of electronic communications networks, including next-generation mobile technologies (5G) and full-fibre broadband. Local Plans

should set out the approach for delivering and upgrading high-quality digital infrastructure over time.

The availability of mobile (5G) and broadband infrastructure, particularly in rural areas remains a key factor for ensuring residents can access services, work from home and reduce the need to travel. Local Plan polices require the provision of full fibre to the premises for new employment and for developments of 30 or more dwellings. For smaller developments, either the same standard or additional ducting for future proofing is required.

The NPPF's focus on the development management of telecommunications mast installations (5g) will continue to be in use alongside the Local Plan policy.



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Good quality design

The Local Plan requires new developments in the district to achieve high quality design and:

- Make efficient use of the available land and buildings and reduce the demand for green field development
- Provide homes which are attractive and environmentally friendly
- Encourage well laid out urban areas with good quality buildings, safe well-designed streets and good quality public open spaces
- Allow people to get to work easily and to the services they need like local shops and health and leisure facilities
- Make good public transport viable and makes walking and cycling attractive options.

The Council needs to consider if the current policies contained in the Local Plan continue to be appropriate to meet the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), whilst at the same time enabling sufficient growth to meet other targets contained within the plan.





Creating better places

National Planning Policy seeks to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which enable and support healthy lifestyles, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs, through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage walking and cycling. In addition, the Local Plan is required to make sufficient provision for community facilities such as health, education and cultural facilities and protect existing community facilities.

The existing Local Plan includes policies which:

- Require Health and Wellbeing Impact Assessments
- Require provision of open space, sport and recreation
- Create high quality spaces which includes seeking a high standard of public realm and landscape features
- Specify standards for the provision of open space
- Identify sites for community woodland
- Protect community facilities from changes of use
- Identify sites for new community facilities

Education and Skills

In the Local Plan, delivery of new education facilities is sought at the main towns, key service villages and strategic growth locations to co-locate service provision across multiple types of infrastructure.

The current plan identifies the following:

- New primary school at Lodge Farm
- ½ form entry expansion of St. Peters CE
- Small expansion of Feering CE
- New primary school at Panfield Lane
- 2 FE expansion at New Rickstones Academy.

No new secondary schools were proposed through the existing Local Plan due to the lack of a single Strategic Growth Location with sufficient quantum of growth to warrant such provision. The Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) identified need for the provision of a new secondary school in the Braintree Town area to accommodate educational need for growth at Braintree and Great Leighs. The Local Plan review will likely need to address this forecasted shortfall.



The natural environment

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that Local Plans should set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and design quality of places (to ensure outcomes support beauty and placemaking), and make sufficient provision for green infrastructure.

Since the plan was examined, the requirement for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) has been introduced together with a mandatory requirement for the creation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies. The implications of these for plan policies will need to be considered.

Braintree District Council, as the local planning authority, also has a statutory duty to include in its plan, policies designed to ensure that the development of land contributes to the mitigation of, and adaptation to climate change.

The adopted plan includes a range of policies across its various subject areas which address climate change and the need to transition to a low carbon economy. Such policies include those that relate to locating homes near services and facilities, constructing homes to the lower building control standard of 110 litre water per person per day, provision of broadband facilities, charging points for new development and renewable energy generation.

One of the main issues informing Local Plan policy is how far policies can require higher energy performance standards than those set out in Building Regulations. The ability of Local Authorities to set a net zero standards remains unclear at present. Essex County Council has commissioned legal opinion on the ability of local planning authorities to set Local Plan policies that require development to achieve energy efficiency standards above building regulations, together with evidence support the development of 'net zero' planning policies in local plans in Essex. The Local Plan review will need to take into account these new requirements.



per person per day, provision of broadband facilities, charging points for new development and renewable energy generation.

Empowering local people

The Local Plan seeks to create a planning environment where local residents and businesses feel fully involved and empowered to engage in shaping the future of the district.

Our strategy for engaging with local communities is contained within our Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).

Our engagement on this document is the start of the discussion which will result in an updated Local Plan. Your input is an invaluable part of the preparation process, and will inform the development of a vision, objectives and policies to help create a sustainable framework for growth and development across

Braintree district for all.

How to participate

The council is providing opportunities to consult and feedback on the direction of the Local Plan from 20 January until 7 March 2025.

exhibitions providing further detail on the Local Plan will be held throughout the district and provide an opportunity to meet and engage with the council planning officers:

Monday 27 January:

Kelvedon Institute Small Hall 4pm-7:30pm

Tuesday 28 January:

Coggeshall Village Hall 4pm-7:30pm

Wednesday 29 January:

Halstead Queen Hall 4pm-7:30pm

Thursday 30 January:

Hatfield Peverel Village Hall 4pm-7:30pm

Tuesday 4 February:

Braintree Town Hall 4pm-7:30pm

Thursday 6 February:

Witham Public Hall 3.30pm-7pm

Saturday 8 February:

Braintree Town Hall 9am-12noon

You can also submit comments by:

- Completing a paper response form available on request or from Causeway House offices in Braintree or one of the following libraries during normal opening hours – Braintree, Coggeshall, Earls Colne, Halstead, Hatfield Peverel, Kelvedon, Sible Hedingham, Silver End and Witham
- Returning a response form to planningpolicy@braintree.gov.uk
- Returning/posting a response form to Planning Policy, Causeway House, Bocking End, Braintree CM7 9HB

**** 01376 552525

planningpolicy@braintree.gov.uk

www.braintree.gov.uk/localplanengagement



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