Colchester City Council Local Plan Review – Regulation 19 Consultation 'Soundness' Representations concerning Draft Policy PP37: Land north of Park Lane, Langham

Summary Statement for Langham Parish Council (Report ES1)

1. Further to the above Local Plan Regulation 19 consultation, we write to provide Langham Parish Council's (LPC's) representations for your consideration concerning objections to draft Policy PP37 which proposes 850 new homes on greenfield land adjacent to Langham.

2. Notwithstanding the extent and relevance of local objections to the Regulation 18 Plan, LPC is disappointed to note that the proposed housing allocation for our village hasn't materially changed and at 850 homes would involve trebling the size of the settlement for which there are scant facilities and very limited sustainable transport options and opportunities.

3. It doesn't matter which version of the NPPF is applied (either December 2024 or August 2026), the draft housing allocation is at odds with the principles of planning for sustainable development and combating climate change. It not only contradicts the settlement hierarchy of the draft Local Plan itself, but also fails to meet the necessary soundness tests of the NPPF which an independent examiner will consider against the plan and housing allocation as explained below.

4. It is clear that this level of housing is disproportionate to the size of the village and its position in the settlement hierarchy as a 'medium settlement'. In this regard, the draft Plan states, 'The settlement hierarchy identifies medium and small settlements where growth is allocated appropriate to the size of the settlement and its constraints.' Langham is defined as a Medium Settlement (fourth in the settlement hierarchy) and yet has been allocated a significantly higher number of dwellings compared with each of the 'Large Settlements' of Tiptree, West Mersea and Wivenhoe. There seems to be no planning rationale which could justify this level of housing in this location.

5. Officers seem to be in denial over the situation and at paragraph 5.28 of the Local Plan Committee report dated 26.08.26 they sought to justify their position by saying Langham is situated in a strategically accessible location close to the A12 transport corridor.

6. However, being located close to the A12 with no prospect of any meaningful modal shift away from car travel does not meet any form of sustainable development test. The housing development would load additional locally based trips onto the A12 Trunk Road, which due its strategic role should not be used as a local distributor route for traffic to access Colchester City and other local settlements. The local road network also has its limitations, which is already used as a 'rat run' to and from the A12 along Park Lane and Langham Lane. The development of 850 homes at Langham could result in around 1,000 to 1,500+ AM and PM peak car borne trips, with no effective mitigation identified, offered or achievable to bring about a suitable modal shift in favour of sustainable transport modes including virtually no suitable opportunities to provide for pedestrian routes and cycle lanes to link with Colchester.

7. Also, there is a significant identified infrastructure shortfall and for officers to say that the lack of infrastructure including wastewater is a matter for the developer to address, does not represent a credible or deliverable planning option and fails the soundness tests in several ways. Broad details of any private treatment plant and necessary suitable cordon sanitaire appear conspicuous by their absence.

8. The NPPF places a great emphasis on planning for sustainable development and meeting the challenges of climate change. The Langham allocation conflicts significantly with a number of key policies such as:

    - The need to locate development where it can support sustainable patterns of movement and make effective use of existing or proposed transport infrastructure, and

    - Development proposals generating significant movement, in the context of the area within which it would be situated, should be in locations that are sustainable or which can be made so, taking into account planned improvements.

9. The same goes for infrastructure provision as despite all the long technical reports used as part of the Plan's evidence base, there is no credible basis to assess how and when the shortfall would or could be funded and provided.

10. Also, the need for an airfield obstacle safeguarding zone at the western part of the site, north of the existing airfield runway has not been included. The flight path of the airfield (which has a lawful use to operate) and low flying aircraft are material considerations which do not seem to have been assessed. Reflector disks were added to the overhead cables at the end of the runway on Park Lane as a hazard warning to pilots. Consequently, an obstacle clearance zone on the western side of the site, kept clear of housing and other built structures needs to be factored in to allow for low flying take off and landing movements evidenced by aircraft approaching the airfield over existing housing located on School Road.

11. In summary, the proposed 850 home strategic allocation in draft Policy PP37 amounts to an unsustainable form and pattern of development contrary to the planning policy principles for achieving sustainable development set out in paragraph 11 of the NPPF and the emerging Local Plan strategy itself. The draft allocation also raises identified deliverability issues and conflicts with the soundness tests set out in paragraph 36 of the NPPF as summarised below:

12. **Not positively prepared** – the isolated strategic housing allocation at Langham would not contribute to meeting the area's objectively assessed needs consistent with achieving sustainable development.

13. **Unjustified** – attempting to locate 850 homes adjacent to Langham village is not an appropriate strategy, especially when an alternative urban extension to northern Colchester could be considered. Such an alternative strategy which does not appear to have been fully considered, could allow for a comparable level of housing to be integrated with the existing physical, economic and social fabric of the City along with associated integrated transport infrastructure links. This would represent a suitable alternative strategy compared with allocating a housing development physically separated from a suitable settlement with little prospect of achieving any meaningful modal shift towards sustainable forms of transport. Instead, PP37 would simply create a car reliant satellite housing estate, conflicting with current day policy requirements related to planning for sustainable development and combating climate change.

14. **Ineffective** – the identified constraints associated with the draft allocation and lack of any serious development intentions, infrastructure investment and deliverable masterplan or land budget, renders Policy PP37 an undeliverable option for the plan period. There is little evidence of any serious or suitable development and infrastructure planning or phasing from utility providers or funding commitment. The land promoter does not appear to have invested in the level of technical survey work normally required to support a development of this magnitude and reliance seems to have been left to 'hang on the coat tails' of the Local Planning Authority (LPA). The LPA seems to be content with identifying a development area on a plan and providing a long 'shopping' list of

infrastructure requirements within the site specific policy with little evidence of how this would actually be provided. This is not considered to represent a sound approach to local planning.

15. **Inconsistent with national policy** – this is a key consideration as it is difficult to see how and which national policies the 850-home allocation at Langham would actually comply with. As mentioned above, it does not matter which version of the NPPF is applied, the proposed housing estate would not deliver sustainable development or contribute to combating climate change. The proposal is a throwback to the 1960's and 1970's when large scale land releases for housing estates adjacent to villages were common place, which generated much of the current day local car-based trips on the strategic and local road networks. However, in this part of the C21st we all would like to think that we have moved on when planning for future generations and yet the Langham 850 home allocation sadly indicates otherwise.

16. Finally, at both the City and County Council Local Elections in May, LPC was encouraged to hear and read that the current majority group were elected on a platform which sought to protect our villages from excessive housing development and related car-based trips including that proposed for Langham.

17. However, to date this pledge has not been followed through in the form of providing suitable direction to officers to explore a more suitable alternative strategy. This could include a comparable urban extension to north Colchester itself, both north and south of the A12, where good accessibility, connectivity and infrastructure should be explored and provided. This could take some of the pressure off the villages and be considered further prior to the submission of the Regulation 19 Plan.

18. Therefore, it is requested that Policy PP37 is deleted from the draft Plan and replaced with an appropriate alternative housing strategy focused on directing this high level of growth to sustainable locations including the northern fringes of Colchester. Allowance for a far more modest level of housing growth in line with the size of Langham and the identified level of local need could potentially be accommodated within the village. However, this must be conditional firstly on resolving the longstanding wastewater treatment deficit and secondly on clearing the substantial backlog of stalled developments which remain unbuilt from the existing Local Plan due to unmet planning conditions related to that deficit. These stalled developments relate to CCC planning applications L191830 (approved 17/12/2020 but 23 dwellings remain unbuilt); L220595 (approved 04/07/2023 but 30 dwellings remain unbuilt); and L221510 (approved 11/12/2025 but no construction of the 12 approved dwellings has commenced).

19. **We hope you will find our representations to be helpful as part of the Local Plan preparation process and that they will be taken into account by the Council's Planning Policy Team and Local Plan Committee in due course.**

20. Should the Local Plan nonetheless be submitted for examination with the retention of the strategic PP37 housing allocation, then we invite the appointed Planning Inspector to consider the following full submission package from Langham Parish Council comprising:

    a. This Executive Summary (Report ES1)

    b. A PP37 Legal Compliance Review (LR1)

    c. A detailed PP37 Sustainability Review (Reports SR1 - Sewage, SR2 - Education, SR3 - Healthcare, SR4 – Sustainable Transport, SR5 - Highways, SR6 – DVNL Impact, SR7 – Landscape & Heritage and SR8 - Placemaking)

d. A PP37 Site Viability Review (VR1)

21. The PP37 Legal Compliance Review (LR1) challenges the legality of the allocation based on serious deficiencies in the Local Plan's Habitats Regulations Assessment. The Appropriate Assessment fails to prove absence of harm to the Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA to the required level of scientific certainty.

22. The eight PP37 Sustainability Review Reports (SR1-8) identity a number of problems with the Plan's sustainability improvement and mitigation proposals. Firstly, there are some important gaps in scope and coverage (primarily SR5, SR6, SR7 & SR8). Secondly, for some key issues that are recognised and discussed, there is no identification of credible and deliverable solutions with associated cost estimates (primarily SR1, SR2, SR3, SR5). Thirdly, for those recognised issues that do have indicative delivery costs in the IADP, these costs are very substantial whilst securing minimal likely effectiveness according to the Plan's own modelling analysis (SR4).

23. The PP37 Viability Review (VR1) identifies a number of site-specific infrastructure costs which were excluded from the scope of Newmark's generic Strategic Site Viability Assessment. Proper consideration of these additional costs will remove any realistic prospect of the site achieving viability.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Armstrong

Langham Parish Council Chairman