Colchester City Council Local Plan Review – Regulation 19 Consultation

Soundness Representation concerning Draft Policy PP37: Land north of Park Lane, Langham

Education Statement for Langham Parish Council (Report SR2)

Core Issue

PP37 proposes approximately 850 dwellings at Land North of Park Lane, Langham, with a further approximately 10 dwellings at PP38.

The issue is not simply whether land or financial contributions are identified for education. The fundamental question is whether the Plan establishes a clear, agreed and deliverable education strategy for the additional demand generated by PP37, including Primary, Early Years and Secondary Education and associated transport.

The representation raises concerns principally under the soundness tests of **Justified and Effective**, with additional concerns under **Positively Prepared** and **Consistent with National Policy**.

The evidence is considered insufficient to demonstrate that PP37 is sound in relation to education provision.

Relevant Soundness Tests and National Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024), paragraph 20(c), requires strategic policies to make sufficient provision for community facilities such as education infrastructure. Paragraph 35 requires plans to set out the contributions expected from development, including infrastructure, without undermining deliverability. Paragraph 36 requires plans to be positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

Colchester Council's own response to Regulation 18 representations on PP37 acknowledges concerns regarding the capacity of social infrastructure, including education, together with concerns regarding viability, deliverability and infrastructure funding uncertainties (Report of Place Strategy Manager to Local Plan Committee Meeting of 26th August 2026, paras. 5.27–5.29, pp.35–36 of Meeting Agenda Pack).

The education evidence therefore needs to demonstrate not merely that education has been considered, but that the proposed allocation can be supported by an effective and deliverable education strategy.

This representation does not suggest that every detailed aspect of a future school or education facility must be resolved at Local Plan stage. The concern is that the evidence has not yet demonstrated that a workable education strategy exists which is capable of supporting the proposed scale of growth.

Education Demand and IADP Evidence

The IADP identifies the majority of the relevant growth as arising from the 773 'qualifying-unit' (discounting one-bedroom units with a presumed nil yield) proposed at Park Lane, Langham (PP37).

IADP Stage 4 Report, paragraph 3.1.8, page 44, identifies significant constraints. It states that there is insufficient space to significantly expand Langham Primary School on its current site; that development of

this size is unlikely to make two schools viable; and that relocation of the existing school would result in a significant funding gap to be borne by the taxpayer.

It also states that a dual-campus solution would be sub-prime in education and management terms and that pre-application discussions with promoters had not identified an acceptable alternative solution.

These are not minor matters of detail. They demonstrate that the education consequences of PP37 have presented a recognised and unresolved delivery problem.

ECC's Position and Unresolved Education Solution

IADP Stage 4, paragraph 3.1.15, page 46, records ECC's concerns about the level of growth proposed at Langham, including the cost of primary and secondary school transport.

If CCC endorses PP37, ECC advises that approximately 2.18 hectares of land for a primary school and Early Years and Childcare should be included so that all options remain open for an innovative solution outlined in section 1 above which does not adversely affect existing provision or require taxpayer subsidy.

This is important because the safeguarding of land is expressed as a means of keeping options open. It does not establish that a new school is the agreed solution, nor does it identify the precise education model, responsible provider, funding arrangements or delivery timetable.

The key question therefore remains:

What education solution has actually been agreed by ECC for the pupils generated by PP37?

On the evidence presently available, that question has not been satisfactorily answered.

ECC 10-Year School Places Plan

ECC's *10 Year Plan for Essex School Places 2026–2035* identifies the North (Langham) primary planning group as including Boxted St Peter's CE Primary, Dedham CE Primary and Langham Primary, with current capacity of 531 places.

Its published forecast identifies spare Reception capacity during the forecast period and its project pipeline states that there are no expansion projects currently in the pipeline.

This does not establish that no future education solution can be delivered. Nor does it establish that there is currently a shortage of primary school places.

However, it reinforces the absence of a currently identified and committed expansion project for the Langham primary planning group.

The evidence therefore remains insufficient to demonstrate how the additional primary demand generated by PP37 will be accommodated without affecting existing provision or requiring an unresolved funding solution.

Safeguarded Education Land Does Not Resolve Delivery

Policy PP37(c) safeguards approximately 2.2 hectares of land for education.

IADP Stage 4, paragraph 3.1.9, page 45, indicates that approximately 2.18 hectares would be appropriate for a new two-form-entry primary school with Early Years provision, based on DfE Building Bulletin 103.

However, safeguarding land does not itself demonstrate that the proposed education provision will be delivered.

It does not establish:

- the final education solution;
- who will provide it;
- how it will be funded;
- when it will become available;
- how the existing Langham Primary provision will be managed during any transition; or
- how education provision will be phased alongside the development.

Land safeguarding is therefore necessary but not sufficient to demonstrate an effective education strategy.

The issue is not simply whether land has been safeguarded, but whether the IADP and Policy PP37 together demonstrate **what education infrastructure will be provided, when it will be provided and who will provide it**.

Funding and Developer Contributions

The Council's *Whole Plan Viability Regulation 19 Addendum* (August 2026), paragraph 11.16, pages 53-54, recognises that development is not the only potential source of infrastructure funding, but also that seeking the full education requirement from development could materially affect development viability.

This reinforces the need for the Plan to demonstrate how the education infrastructure required to support planned growth will be funded and delivered, rather than leaving an identified funding gap unresolved.

The issue is not that the Council must necessarily fund the education infrastructure itself. Rather, where the evidence identifies a significant funding gap or uncertainty, the Plan needs to demonstrate how that gap will be addressed if the proposed allocation is to be considered deliverable.

Early Years Capacity and Delivery

The IADP considers Early Years and Childcare provision separately (IADP Stage 4, paras. 3.2.1–3.2.4, pages 46-47).

Early Years provision can be delivered through a range of providers and does not necessarily require a conventional school-based solution. However, the existence of safeguarded land does not itself guarantee that sufficient Early Years places will be available when required by the development.

ECC's separate *Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Summary – Colchester – Summer 2025* records 388 childcare places and 12 vacancies in Rural North, a vacancy rate of 3.1%, compared with 13.6% across Colchester as a whole.

This does not, by itself, establish a deficiency attributable to PP37. However, it demonstrates that existing local capacity cannot simply be assumed to absorb the additional demand generated by the proposed development.

The IADP itself records that, in summer 2025, Rural North was among the Colchester areas operating at more than 90% occupancy and identifies increasing numbers of under-fives from 2027 (IADP Stage 4, paras. 3.2.4–3.2.5, page 47).

The Plan should therefore demonstrate how the Early Years provision arising from PP37 will be secured and delivered at the appropriate stage of development, having regard to existing local capacity and the projected increase in demand.

Source: Essex County Council, *Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Summary – Colchester – Summer 2025*, "Vacancy Analysis" table: Rural North – 388 places, 12 vacancies, 3.1% vacancy rate.

Secondary Education Capacity and Transport

Langham has no secondary school, so pupils generated by PP37 will need to attend secondary schools elsewhere.

ECC's *10 Year Plan for Essex School Places 2026–2035* identifies forecast spare secondary capacity within the Mid (Colchester) planning group during the forecast period and records that no secondary expansion projects are currently in the pipeline.

This does not, however, demonstrate where pupils generated by PP37 are expected to be accommodated, whether sufficient capacity will be available when required, or whether that capacity is appropriately located and accessible to Langham.

Forecast spare capacity somewhere within the wider planning group is not, in itself, equivalent to demonstrating a deliverable education strategy for PP37.

The Plan should therefore demonstrate:

- which schools are expected to accommodate pupils generated by PP37;
- that sufficient capacity will be available when required;
- how pupils will travel to those schools; and
- how the associated transport requirement will be provided and funded.

This is particularly relevant because the IADP expressly identifies the cost of secondary school transport as a concern arising from the level of growth proposed at Langham (IADP Stage 4, para. 3.1.15, p.46).

The evidence therefore does not yet demonstrate a clear, site-specific and deliverable strategy for addressing the secondary education and transport consequences of PP37.

Overall Assessment Against the Soundness Tests

Positively Prepared: Unsound

The Council has identified the education implications of PP37 and has safeguarded land for education.

However, the evidence does not yet demonstrate a realistic and sufficiently developed education strategy capable of supporting the proposed scale of growth.

The concern is therefore not that education has been overlooked, but that the Plan has advanced a substantial housing allocation without demonstrating how the education consequences of that allocation will be addressed in practice.

Justified: Unsound

The evidence identifies significant constraints at Langham Primary and unresolved questions concerning the appropriate education solution.

These matters have not been sufficiently reconciled with the proposed allocation of approximately 850 dwellings.

The issue is particularly significant because the Council's own evidence identifies difficulties with expanding the existing school, questions the viability of two schools, identifies a significant funding gap associated with relocation and records that no acceptable alternative solution has been identified.

The evidence therefore does not yet demonstrate that the proposed scale of growth at PP37 represents an appropriately justified strategy in education terms.

Effective: Unsound

This is the principal concern.

The IADP identifies insufficient space to significantly expand the existing school, questions the viability of two schools, identifies a significant funding gap associated with relocation and records that no acceptable alternative solution had been identified.

ECC's current school-place plan also does not identify an expansion project for the Langham primary planning group.

For secondary education, forecast spare capacity within the wider planning group does not, in itself, establish how PP37 pupils will be accommodated or transported.

The Plan therefore does not yet demonstrate that the education requirements generated by PP37 can be addressed through a clear, funded and deliverable strategy linked to the timing and phasing of development.

Consistent with National Policy: Unsound

The Plan must make sufficient provision for education infrastructure and demonstrate that the infrastructure necessary to support the proposed development is deliverable, consistent with the relevant requirements of the applicable 2024 NPPF, including para 8(a); 11(a); 20(c); 26, 27 and 100.

The evidence presently available does not sufficiently demonstrate that the education infrastructure required to support PP37 has been identified and secured in a manner that ensures effective delivery alongside the proposed growth.

Modification Sought

Modify Policy PP37 and the supporting infrastructure framework to identify an ECC-agreed and deliverable strategy for Primary, Early Years and Secondary Education, including the necessary land, funding arrangements, responsible provider(s), transport arrangements and delivery/phasing triggers, with education provision secured and available at the appropriate stage of development.

The modification should ensure that the education infrastructure required to support PP37 is demonstrably capable of being delivered alongside the development, rather than relying solely on safeguarded land or on an unresolved future solution.

Conclusion

The evidence identifies substantial education challenges but does not yet demonstrate a clear, ECC-agreed and deliverable solution for PP37.

For Primary and Early Years provision, the principal issue is the unresolved solution for provision at Langham. The Council's evidence identifies significant constraints affecting the existing school and unresolved questions concerning the scale, form and funding of future provision.

For Secondary Education, the issue is not necessarily a lack of city-wide capacity, but the absence of a sufficiently defined strategy for accommodating PP37 pupils and addressing the associated transport implications.

Safeguarding education land is necessary but does not, by itself, secure delivery.

The Plan therefore needs to demonstrate **what education provision will be delivered, who will provide it, how it will be funded, when it will be available and how it will be phased alongside the development**.

Until this is demonstrated, the education evidence does not provide a sufficiently clear basis for concluding that PP37 is **justified and effective** in soundness terms.