

MATTER 7 – PROSPEROUS PLACES

UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX

This representation has been prepared on behalf of Essex University in relation to the following Question.

7.4 Improving Education and Skills (PP12)

Is the policy justified and consistent with national policy? Are the requirements of the policy clear, and would they be effective? In particular, does the policy provide adequate recognition of the needs of Higher Education over the plan period?

The University Campus is located within the historic Wivenhoe Park, which is situated on the eastern edge of Colchester, close to the boundary with Tendering District. Whilst it covers a significant area, development of much of the site is constrained by a number of factors related to:

- heritage (there are several listed buildings on the Campus, whilst the eastern half is included in the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest);
- arboriculture (the Campus is located within a parkland);
- ecology (the Campus hosts several Local Wildlife Sites and many ‘veteran’ trees); and,
- landscape (the Campus lies within Colchester Borough Landscape Character Assessment Area D3, which identifies ‘potential pressure for expansion or new development at the University of Essex’ and sets landscape strategy objective(s) to ‘conserve and restore’ the landscape character of the area. It provides landscape planning guideline(s) to ‘ensure any new buildings and infrastructure, or any other redevelopment is of an appropriate scale, form, design, materials and uses colours that respond to landscape setting and landscape character’ and ‘conserves open views across the river and the character area and ensures that new development does not detract from views’. This constraints impacts upon the position and height of new buildings.

The University, supported by Colchester Borough and Tendring District Councils, has ambitious plans to grow the student cohort from some 16,500 (2019-2020) to 20,000, by the start of the 2024-2025 academic year. To that end, planning permission was secured for a further 1,262 student bedrooms in May 2020; with work due to commence on the first phase of that development later this year.

The University believes that there are sufficient opportunities (involving both the refurbishment of the existing estate and sites that can still be developed within the Campus) to deliver the additional teaching, administrative and support facilities that will also be required to deliver the planned growth up to 2024-2025. Beyond that date, however, further growth will require additional land outside of the University’s current boundaries and ownership. Options to expand are, however, limited.

The land to the west and south of the Campus is part of the Coastal Protection Belt, as designated in adopted Wivenhoe Neighbourhood Plan Area and the both the emerging Colchester Borough Local Plan. It also lies partly within the River Colne Special Character Area.

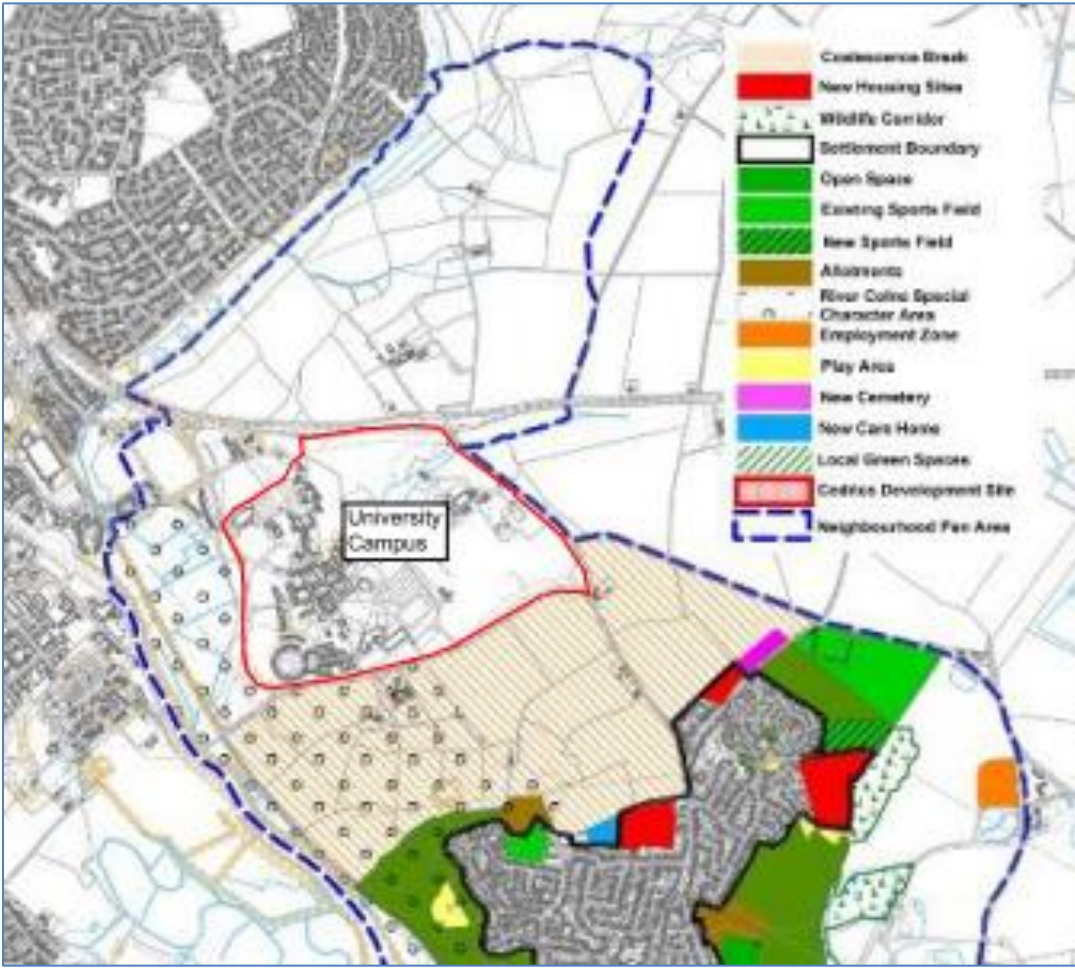


Figure 1: Extract from the Wivenhoe Neighbourhood Plan Proposals Map

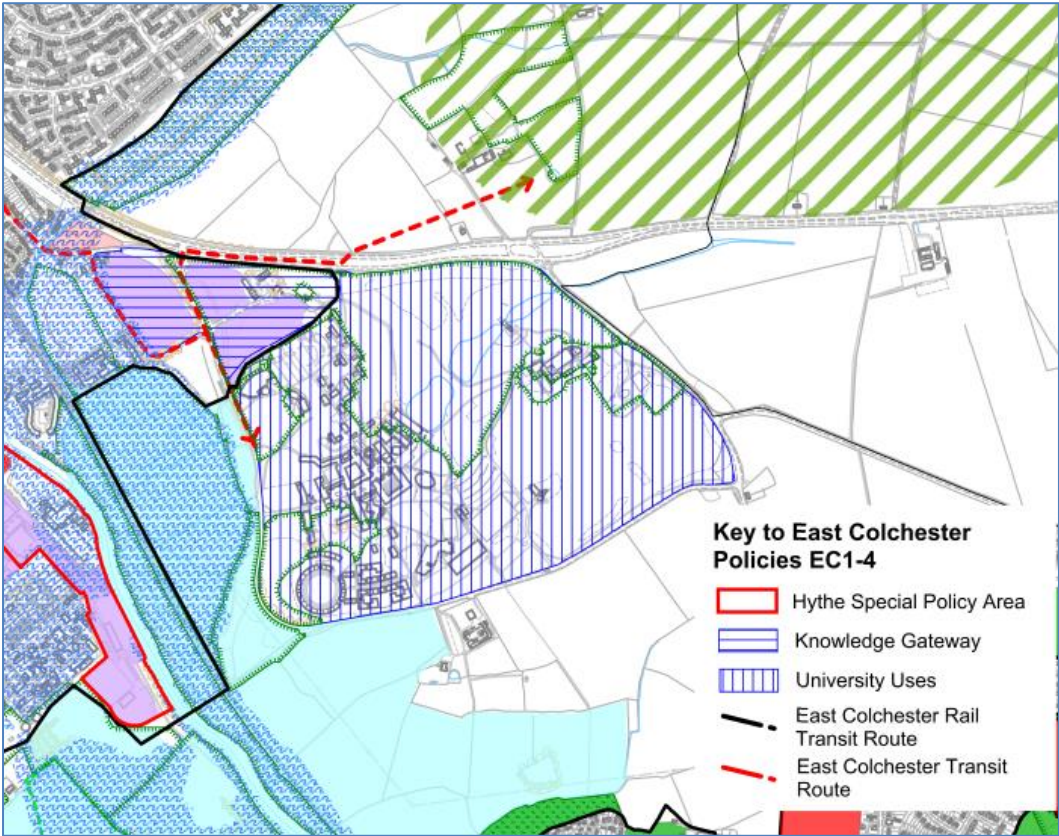


Figure 2: Extract from the Publication Draft Colchester Borough Local Plan 2017 – 2033 Proposals Map

The land to the south is also part of a 'Coalescence Break' between Colchester and Wivenhoe, whilst the land to the west (between the Campus and Colchester Town) is also functional flood plain and a local wildlife site.

All these designations carry policies that presume against new development.

The land to the north, between the Campus and the A133, is the Knowledge Gateway, with all undeveloped sites being designated for employment generating uses. The land beyond that, on the other side of the A133, is identified as part of the Salary Brook Country Park in the Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community Concept Framework.

The Garden Community lies to the northeast and east. It is the only direction where the University can expand. Whilst the Garden Community crosses Colchester / Tendring boundary, that part closest to the western boundary of the campus lies mainly within Tendring.

With the Tendring District Local Plan covering the period up to 2033, it must make provision for the potential continued expansion of the University beyond 2025.

Whilst Part 2 of the draft plan fully supports the continued expansion of the University, no specific provision is made for growth beyond the boundaries of the current Campus. Tendring District Council and the University of Essex has, therefore, agreed a Statement of Common Ground (Examination Document....) which will add the following wording at the end of Policy PP12: -

"this would include expansion of the University as part of the garden community development."

If this wording is incorporated into Policy PP12, the University is satisfied that it will make adequate provision for its needs over the plan period.