

CAUSE

The **Campaign Against Urban Sprawl** in **Essex**

VISIONS FOR GROWTH

COLCHESTER METRO TOWN “Pearls on a necklace”

FEBRUARY 2016

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Our vision: COLCHESTER METRO TOWN “Pearls on a necklace”

Overview

THE CHALLENGE

There is a need for 35,000 new dwellings in the Haven Corridor of which 14,000 in Greater Colchester over next 15 years. However, our infrastructure is overloaded:

- Colchester is one of the most car-dependent towns in England (Campaign for Better Transport Car Dependency Scorecard 2014). Its roads have no spare capacity;
- A120 dualling will not come until post-2025 and decisions on route will not be made until 2017. Once built, capacity will be needed for regional rather than local traffic.
- The Anglia main line is running close to capacity.

Yet NPPF requires urban growth to achieve sustainable transport outcomes.

THE NEED

- A vision and strategic plan for North Essex which prioritises infrastructure and opportunities for economic growth, not just the provision of housing
- To promote sustainable patterns of development with housing well related to jobs and services and served by public transport.
- To make use of spare infrastructure capacity and encourage sustainable transport solutions while reducing car-dependency.

THE CAUSE STRATEGY: METRO TOWN

Our vision is called ‘Metro Town’. It is proposed to take advantage of employment and infrastructure opportunities to the east of Colchester.

The CAUSE strategy could provide an integrated network of sustainable communities rather than one large settlement, and could boost the local economy, benefiting both Colchester and Tendring.

1. The underused resource of the Colchester-Clacton electrified railway provides the opportunity to create a sustainable and integrated chain of settlements linking jobs, housing and infrastructure, and could deliver 6-8,000 dwellings within a 10-minute walking catchment of high quality public transport within the 15-year plan period.

Each 'pearl' on the necklace would support low order services such as primary schools, doctor's surgeries and shops. High order services would be access in the urban centres.

2. Essex University and its Knowledge Gateway could provide the focus for an eastward urban extension to Colchester providing up to 10,000 dwellings. This would support a high quality 10-minute express bus service linking to the town centre and a new railway station serving the university.
3. There could be some proportional growth of other settlements in Colchester Borough/Tendring District. For example, a modest development within a 10-minute walking catchment of Marks Tey Station, that would be sufficiently small-scale not to overload the trunk roads and main line train services.

ADVANTAGES

There are a number of advantages of the Metro Town concept:

- Existing underused infrastructure is in place in the form of the Colchester-Clacton railway, with the capacity to provide a 15-minute local service and through services to the Anglia main line every 30 minutes.
- Land is available for development within a 10-minute walking catchment of stations. This solution would contribute to both the Colchester and Tendring economies by linking three proposed Enterprise Zones and their jobs.
- The East Colchester urban extension would capitalise on the growth point of the university and Knowledge Gateway. We know that the University is keen to expand the Knowledge Gateway.
- Early implementation is possible without waiting for major new infrastructure. Existing villages would get better local services, whilst jobs and higher order services, such as secondary education, major retail and entertainment would be based in Colchester and Clacton, where they would have a bigger catchment.
- There would be potential for further long-term growth.

This concept is more in line with the original garden city idea than a freestanding large settlement would be.

DISADVANTAGES OF WEST TEY

A large development to the west of Colchester would depend on the upgrading of the A12 and A120 and the provision of extra mainline train capacity. It would do nothing to boost Colchester's economy and would promote car and rail commuting out of the area. There would be a very limited boost to the local economy and this approach promotes London rail commuting and car commuting using trunk roads.

The only current justification of a new town at West Tey appears to be the contribution towards the funding of trunk road improvement, which is a national responsibility and whose purpose should be to provide regional rather than local road capacity.

Lack of upfront infrastructure capacity makes deliverability of a large settlement questionable before 2032. It is very difficult to establish higher-order facilities needed for a

larger settlement, ie jobs, secondary education, retail, cultural and entertainment. 'You cannot build a garden city from scratch – the problems are insuperable' (N Falk 2014).

CAUSE believes that no significant development at Marks Tey can be considered until the next plan period, by which infrastructure upgrades will be complete.

DELIVERY

A combination of Colchester's Local Plan Option 1b (eastward urban extension) and Tendring's Option 2 extended to include station-centred growth on Colchester-Clacton railway.

We have not been able to examine Braintree to the same extent due to lack of resources, but capacity of the Witham-Braintree rail line referred to by Tim Pharoah and the A130/131 corridor would permit the same approach of relating housing to jobs and infrastructure. The Flitch Way alignment also offers future potential as a public transport route. (Development within A12 corridor would overload road and rail and would not be needed if these other options chosen).

A joint development corporation as envisaged by Garden City Developments would be the best delivery mechanism. This relies on collecting land value uplift to fund infrastructure, a process that would be more difficult with the West Tey proposal, as development options already granted over a period of time limit the potential uplift, especially if it is intended to use some of it to fund trunk road upgrades.

Every proposed development should have its own development plan document or masterplan.

The principles can, of course, be applied more widely, and we would, for example, expect proportional expansion of some larger villages to cater for locally generated population growth.