

Maldon District Council

Maldon District Local Plan support

Project Initiation Document

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Ove Arup & Partners Limited
8 Fitzroy Street
London
W1T 4BJ
United Kingdom
arup.com

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Executive summary

This Project Initiation Document provides a comprehensive framework for Maldon District Council to start the preparation and management of a Local Plan under the new plan-making system. It is accompanied by a separate risk register, programme and resource plan and budget. The key headlines to note are as follows.

Headlines

- 30-months to produce a new Local Plan for Maldon District under the new plan making system. There is a statutory deadline to commence this process by 31st December 2026.
- Recommended that the new Local Plan should be delivered in-house with targeted support from consultants e.g. for the evidence base.
- Considerable work was undertaken as part of the previous Local Plan review, which can be reused or updated for the new Local Plan.
- Current Planning Policy Team resources (3.4 FTE) are insufficient to produce a new Local Plan and deliver business-as-usual activities; as would current agreed Planning Policy team structure (6 FTE), even if vacant roles are filled.
- A revised Planning Policy team structure (7.4) is suggested to provide a manageable and resilient basis for delivering the new Local Plan within the required 30-month programme and business-as-usual activities.
- In addition to the currently advertised vacancies for a Senior Policy Planner and a Policy Planner, a further Senior Policy Planner and a Section 106 Officer should be recruited.
- Work on the new Local Plan would commence 21 September 2026, subject to a Full Council decision to proceed.
- By vesting day (April 2028), a full draft Local Plan would be prepared ready for Mid Essex Council take the plan forward for consultation, Examination and eventual adoption in May 2029.
- The programme has seven weeks contingency overall to meet the statutory timetable for plan making, reflecting the complexities of plan-making.
- The estimated costs for the new Local Plan is £1.5m including 10% contingency on a zero-based budget. The budget covers the Local Plan preparation only; additional staff identified within the resourcing plan will also need to be funded
- Delivery of the Local Plan to this programme and budget, is dependent on multiple assumptions and requires implementation of robust processes and governance arrangements to mitigate risks.

Legislation and policy context

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (2023) introduced a new plan making system, which will provide the legislative framework for Maldon District's new Local Plan. It will need to follow the new 30-month process, with a single Local Plan replacing the existing suite of development plan documents when adopted.

The publication of the Local Planning Regulations in March 2026 enabled LPAs to formally commence plan making under the new system with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) and emerging Create or Update a Local Plan (CULP) guidance shaping the approach to plan-making. However, the policy and guidance context remains dynamic with a new and fundamentally different NPPF, which will include National Development Management Policies (NDMP) due for publication in Autumn 2026 and regular updates being made to the PPG and CULP. This context will require close monitoring moving forward to ensure that Local Plan production is aligned with the latest policy and guidance.

Plan-making context

In developing the Project Initiation Document, consideration has also been given to the wider plan-making context for the new Maldon District Local Plan. It will need to be progressed within a period of significant institutional change, including Local Government Reorganisation and devolution, and the emerging Greater Essex Spatial Development Strategy (SDS). Despite this uncertainty, plan-making should continue at pace, with the new Local Plan providing an important opportunity to establish an up-to-date planning framework for Maldon District before transition to the new Mid Essex unitary authority. The position of neighbouring authorities was considered; however, it was concluded that opportunities for joint working are limited because surrounding authorities are at different stages of plan preparation, with most progressing plans under the legacy system¹ and the extent of Maldon District's existing evidence base.

Maldon's existing Development Plan, wider Council strategies and Essex-wide strategies provide important context for the new Local Plan. These will need to be reviewed to determine what should be incorporated, updated or reflected in future policies.

The practical conditions needed to support delivery were explored, including the Planning Policy team's current capacity, the role of wider Council teams, existing governance arrangements and the communications and engagement framework. These factors will directly influence the project management, resourcing and governance arrangements for the new Local Plan, particularly given the constrained 30-month timetable and the need for efficient decision-making and clear stakeholder engagement.

Review of existing policies, evidence base and documents

The review of the Maldon District Local Development Plan was originally initiated in 2021, however due to the introduction of the new 30-month plan making system it is necessary to start again. However, work to date will provide a strong foundation for the new Local Plan. Considerable evidence base work has been prepared or commissioned, including housing and economic evidence, and other technical studies. This means that, although the new plan-making process must formally start again under the new system, much of the evidence base work already completed can be updated and reused to inform the new Local Plan, helping to maximise value for money and increase momentum.

A review of the existing Maldon District Local Development Plan policies and related guidance has identified several areas that will need to be rationalised, updated or removed as part of the new Local Plan. Some existing policies are now out of date, overlap with other policies, or repeat national policy and guidance, while the new Local Plan will need to make a clearer distinction between strategic and non-strategic policies and address policy gaps that have emerged since adoption. Since Supplementary Planning Documents do not form part of the new plan making system, it will also be necessary to incorporate any required guidance within the new Local Plan. Importantly, it should be noted the introduction of National Development Management Policies will reduce the scope of the new Local Plan, as more policy areas will be covered nationally and local policies should not duplicate national requirements.

¹ Chelmsford Local Plan 2041 submitted for Examination on 5 June 2026

The documents and datasets produced through business-as-usual planning policy work will provide an important foundation for the new Local Plan. Many of these workstreams require regular statutory reporting or ongoing updates and therefore represent a continuing resource commitment for the Planning Policy team alongside Local Plan preparation. This has been reflected in the resourcing assumptions for the Local Plan programme to ensure that statutory monitoring and reporting requirements can continue to be met while plan-making progresses.

New Local Plan

Consideration was given to the scope, objectives and key requirements for the new Maldon District Local Plan. It will need to respond to the new legislative and policy framework, the Council's corporate priorities, wider local and Essex-wide strategies, and the emerging strategic planning context. Once the Greater Essex SDS is adopted for the area, future Local Plans will need to be prepared in general conformity with it, including its strategic objectives, spatial strategy and approach to growth. However, it should be noted that for Maldon District, the preparation of the new Local Plan will be ahead of the preparation of the SDS

The new Local Plan will provide an up-to-date spatial strategy and policy framework for Maldon District, including a positive long-term vision, strategic and site-specific policies, provision for housing and economic growth, and policies to support infrastructure delivery, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and the protection and enhancement of the District's distinctive built and natural environment. The plan should cover at least 15 years from adoption, with the proposed programme indicating a minimum plan period from 2029 to 2045.

As part of the preparation of the new Local Plan, it will be necessary to produce a number of key deliverables as required by the new plan making system. These include a formal Project Initiation Document (PID), which will be based on this longer and more detailed PID. A community engagement strategy will be required as part of the PID and will need to guide engagement across the Local Plan production and the formal consultation stages.

Consideration has been given to the additional evidence needed to support a sound Local Plan, balancing the reuse and updating of existing evidence with new studies where required. The PID identifies where work should be undertaken in-house or by consultants to reflect local knowledge, technical requirements, value for money and the capacity constraints of the Planning Policy team.

Project Management

A recommended project management approach for delivering the new Maldon District Local Plan within the constrained 30-month timetable has been suggested, covering resourcing, programme, budget, risks and governance. The overall emphasis is on ensuring the Council has the capacity, structure and decision-making processes needed to progress the Local Plan efficiently and robustly.

Resourcing

At 3.4 FTE within an agreed structure for 6 FTE, the Council's current Planning Policy team does not have sufficient capacity to deliver a Local Plan within the 30-month timetable while also maintaining business-as-usual responsibilities. The latter absorbs around 2FTE, leaving limited capacity for Local Plan preparation. Even if the current vacancies were filled, it is judged that additional resource will be required to deliver the Local Plan and business-as-usual activities.

The Local Plan process will require input from a wide range of Council teams, including Communications, GIS, Development Management, Legal, Finance and others. Engagement with key teams indicates that available support will be limited, with Communications, GIS and Development Management only able to provide constrained input alongside business-as-usual work, and Local Government Reorganisation likely to reduce capacity further. While these teams will provide important support at specific stages, they will not be able to address the wider resourcing gap within the Planning Policy team needed to produce the Local Plan.

A number of resourcing options were considered, including doing nothing, redeploying internal resources, working with neighbouring authorities, full consultancy support, partial consultancy support and recruitment.

- **Do nothing:** This report concludes that Maldon District Council should discount the 'do nothing' option, whether this means not preparing a new Local Plan or commencing one without sufficient Planning

Policy resources. Both scenarios present significant risks, including failure to meet statutory plan-making requirements and key deadlines under the new plan-making system; continued reliance on an out-of-date development plan, resulting in weaker control over growth and infrastructure delivery; pressure on staff capacity and wellbeing; increased risk of MHCLG intervention; and a missed opportunity to secure a legacy Local Plan for Maldon District before a future Mid Essex Local Plan is prepared. On this basis, the Council should progress a properly resourced new Local Plan.

- **Re-deploy internal resource:** Given the specialist planning expertise required, the only realistic source of support within the Council would be the Development Management teams; however, it does not have spare capacity alongside its statutory caseload. As there are no suitable internal resources available to divert to the Local Plan without compromising other statutory functions, this option has been discounted.
- **Full consultancy support:** This option considered appointing a single multi-disciplinary consultancy to deliver most of the Local Plan work, including evidence base studies and plan production through to a full draft Local Plan. However, this approach is not recommended because a substantial amount of evidence base work has already been completed or is underway, and it would be more efficient and cost-effective to use existing consultants to update relevant studies, alongside work undertaken in-house by the Planning Policy team. Appointing a new single consultancy would create additional familiarisation costs, duplicate existing workstreams and increase overall project costs, particularly where residual internal team capacity remains available to support plan preparation. This option has been discounted.
- **Partial consultancy support:** This option proposes targeted consultancy support for selected Local Plan workstreams, including specific evidence base studies, short-term capacity support during intensive stages of the 30-month programme, and potential critical friend input on technical issues or plan management. While recruiting permanent planners remains the most financially attractive approach where possible, consultancy support may be required to fill vacancies, manage peaks in workload and reduce programme risk, particularly around spatial options and consultation processing. On this basis, this option forms part of the recommended way forward for the new Local Plan, with identified consultancy costs reflected in the resource plan and budget, and any additional critical friend support expected to be met from the contingency allowance.
- **Recruitment:** This option would involve recruiting additional planners into the Planning Policy team to increase capacity and support delivery of the new Local Plan, either through general policy roles, specialist posts linked to technical workstreams or business-as-usual responsibilities, or junior roles to address current capacity gaps and release senior officers to focus on plan preparation. Recruitment would enable the Local Plan to remain largely in-house, maintaining continuity with work already undertaken and ensuring it is led by officers embedded within the Council and familiar with the Maldon District context. While recruitment would need to be progressed quickly, the time required is not expected to be significantly greater than other resourcing options and, overall, this forms part of the recommended option for delivery of the Local Plan.

The recommended approach is thus a hybrid model combining additional recruitment into the Planning Policy team with targeted consultancy support for specialist evidence base studies and critical friend input where required. Although consultants will undertake much of the technical evidence work, this will still require officer input to prepare briefs, procure and manage contracts, review outputs, and ensure the evidence is properly integrated into the Local Plan. The resource plan assumes that current Planning Policy vacancies will be filled and that the team will be expanded to provide sufficient capacity to deliver the 30-month Local Plan programme while continuing to meet statutory business-as-usual responsibilities. The revised structure would provide 7.4 FTE across the team, including two additional roles over and above the agreed current structure: a Senior Policy Planner and a dedicated Section 106 Officer to help release senior Planning Policy capacity for Local Plan delivery. Overall, the proposed structure is designed to provide a manageable and resilient basis for delivering the new Local Plan within the required 30-month programme.

Programme

A Local Plan programme has been developed using MS Project to map tasks (including consultation and impact assessment), dependencies, governance requirements, officer workloads and quality assurance processes. It allows for holidays, team management, business-as-usual work, procurement and contract management, and the need to manage peaks in workload, with Local Plan tasks prioritised where resource

constraints arise. The programme assumes a 7.4 FTE Planning Policy team, early preparation of evidence base briefs, defined governance stages, timely procurement and consultant input, prioritisation of Local Plan work over non-statutory business-as-usual activity, early engagement with the shadow authority, and acceptance of the plan for Examination at Gateway 3 at the first attempt. Subject to these assumptions, the programme provides a deliverable route to securing a Maldon District Local Plan before a wider Mid Essex Local Plan is prepared.

The proposed Local Plan programme has been structured to comply with the requirements of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 and to meet the statutory 30-month timetable. Existing workstreams from the Local Plan review are assumed to continue from 1 July 2026, with new evidence base workstreams commencing from 21 September 2026, subject to a Full Council decision to proceed. The programme schedules notification of the start of the Local Plan process for September 2026 and Gateway 1 for February 2027, ahead of the statutory deadlines of 31 December 2026 and 30 April 2027 respectively. The programme currently supports submission for Examination two months ahead of the statutory deadline.

By the Mid Essex vesting day, a full draft Local Plan will have been prepared, and Gateway 2 check will have been completed, as will the preparations for Regulation 27 consultation. The Regulation 27 consultation, submission, examination and adoption will then progress under the new Mid Essex authority. The programme includes seven weeks of contingency to manage uncertainty arising from Local Government Reorganisation and wider plan-making risks.

Milestone	Time period
To be delivered by Maldon District Council	
Getting ready to start	July 2026 – September 2026
Preparatory evidence gathering and scoping	September 2026 – January 2027
Notification of the start of the Local Plan process	September 2026
Regulation 20: Scoping consultation	November 2026 – December 2026
Gateway 1 (advisory)	February 2027
Plan vision and strategy development	December 2027 – June 2027
Spatial options identified	June 2027
Regulation 23 consultation	August 2027 – September 2027
Preferred option development and drafting the plan	September 2027 – March 2028
Preferred option identified	November 2027
Gateway 2 (advisory)	November 2027
To be delivered by Mid Essex Council	
Regulation 27 consultation	May 2028 – July 2028
Process consultation and prepare plan for submission	July 2028 – September 2028
Gateway 3 (stop/go)	September 2028 – October 2028
Submission	October 2028
Examination	November 2028 – April 2029
Adoption	May 2029

Budget

A full cost profile has been prepared for 2026/27 to 2029/30 on a zero-based budget for the new Local plan, excluding permanent staff costs and existing service obligations, with a 10% contingency to reflect uncertainty around plan-making. The majority of the costs associated with the production of a new Local Plan will be related to the use of consultants. Other costs to be taken into consideration relate primarily to counsel advice, consultation process and the formal examination process, including PINS. Where possible, costs have been benchmarked against published sources and relevant experience elsewhere. On the basis of

the outlined assumptions, and assumed resource profile, the total cost of a new Local Plan is estimated as £1.5m, including contingency. Further funding will also be required to cover the cost of the additional staff identified in the resource plan.

Risks

Local Plans are large, complex and long projects, which include a range of stakeholders. This creates a range of risks which may affect the quality, cost or programme of the Local Plan. This report is accompanied by a risk register for the Local Plan project and includes associated mitigation measures. The main risks relate to delivery of the statutory 30-month timetable, the need for timely governance and decision-making, Local Government Reorganisation, potential changes to national policy or guidance, competing demands on Planning Policy resources, recruitment and consultancy market pressures, uncertainty over the volume of consultation responses, and the future ownership of transport modelling currently held by Essex County Council. The risk register sets out measures to reduce the likelihood and impact of these risks and will need to be maintained during the lifetime of the project and used as reporting tool.

Governance

The new Local Plan system and constrained timetable mean that there is limited scope for flexibility in Local Plan programmes and that business-as-usual governance cannot remain the same if the 30-month timetable is to be met and for the draft plan to reach an advanced draft stage prior to LGR. It will be important to strike the right balance between providing sufficient Member and senior officer engagement and oversight, whilst also ensuring governance processes can enable the Local Plan to progress at pace to meet the timetable. It is recommended that formal decision-making is reserved to Full Council at the three key statutory stages. The Planning Policy Working Group should continue to play an important cross-party advisory and engagement role. It will be important that the right governance arrangements are put in place to support expedient decision-making, with these arrangements put in place as early as possible and before the new Local Plan process formally commences.

Next steps

It is recommended that the Council decides as soon as possible whether to proceed with the preparation of a new Local Plan and, if it does, immediately progresses the key early actions needed to meet the statutory programme. These include recruiting additional officers, procuring priority evidence base work, agreeing the Local Plan budget, finalising streamlined governance arrangements, completing the Planning Advisory Service Project Initiation Document template, publishing the Local Plan timetable and notice of intention to commence, and preparing material for the Regulation 20 scoping consultation.

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The Project Initiation Document (PID) sets out the proposed project management approach for the new Maldon District Local Plan. This document will form the basis of the formal PID, which will need to be prepared as part of the plan-making process, and to strengthen the internal project management practices for the Local Plan. Although the formal published PID may be shorter and less detailed than this document.

1.2 Structure

The document is structured as follows:

- Section 2 sets out the legislative and policy framework which will govern the production of the Local Plan.
- Section 3 explores the wider plan-making context including Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and devolution and the relationship with wider plans and strategies – both within Maldon District and in neighbouring authorities.
- Section 4 gives a high-level review of existing Local Plan policies, evidence base and documents, highlighting what needs updating, replacing or creating for the new Local Plan.
- Section 5 sets out Local Plan objectives, scope, plan period and project deliverables.
- Section 6 presents the proposed approach to project management for the new Local Plan, including programme, resources, budget and risk management, governance, communication and engagement to deliver a sound and robust Local Plan.
- Section 7 sets out a summary of immediate next steps in the new Local Plan process.

The document has three accompanying digital files covering the Local Plan full programme, budget and risk register.

2. Legislation and policy context

2.1 Legislation and policy framework

Plan-making in England is currently governed by two parallel sets of legislation, one for the ‘legacy’ plan-making system and one for the new 30-month plan-making system. The transitional arrangements for moving from the ‘legacy’ local plan system to the new plan making system are:

- LPAs have until 31st December 2026 to submit a plan for examination under the legacy system, after which LPAs must start again under the new system. The Council cannot submit a new Local Plan by this deadline. Therefore, the new Maldon District Local Plan will be governed by the new 30-month plan-making system.
- Local Plans submitted for examination on or before 12 March 2025 and where the housing requirement meets less than 80% of the authority’s local housing need figure were required to commence preparation of a plan under the new Local Plan system on or before 30 June 2026, complying with regulation 21 (Gateway 1) by 31 October 2026. This does not apply to Maldon District as it has not submitted a plan for examination.
- Local Authorities that have a Local Plan which is over four years and 8 months old after 31 December 2026 (which is the case for Maldon District) are required to publish their Regulation 21 self-assessment summary (Gateway 1) by 30 April 2027 – which would require the Notice to Commence plan making to be published by 31 December 2026 (see section 2.2.4.1). This deadline will apply to Maldon District.
- All other local authorities who have up-to-date adopted plans have more flexibility to commence plan-making in the new system, complying with Regulation 21 within 5 years of the date of their adopted plan. This does not apply to Maldon District.

The main legislation that prescribes the processes and duties for making Local Plans for the new 30-month plan-making system includes:

- Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 as amended by the LURA 2023
- Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (LURA) 2023
- The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026

However, most of the main plan-making requirements are contained in national policy. Distinct from legislation this can be updated by government without the need for Statutory Instruments.

In England, the main policy framework applicable to plan-making is the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This is complemented by Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). The PPG is as important as the NPPF for plan-making going forward, as the Court of Appeal² stated last year that the PPG has the same status as the NPPF. Government has centralised guidance and resources on plan-making for the new Local Plan system into a collection called ‘Create or Update a Local Plan’³ (CULP), which is where the government intends to publish information about the new plan-making system as it becomes available.

² Mead Realisations Limited v Secretary of State (Court of Appeal, 30 January 2025) https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66012fd165ca2fc1fa7da734/9_Mead_Realisations_Limited_v_Secretary_of_State_for_Levelling_Up_Housing_and_Communities_2024_EWHC_279_Admin_.pdf

³ GOV.UK. 2026. ‘Create or Update a Local Plan Using the New System’. March 26. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/create-or-update-a-local-plan-using-the-new-system>.

2.2 Legislation

2.2.1 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (PCPA) 2004

The sections of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (PCPA) which are relevant for plan-making have now been amended by Schedule 7 to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023. In particular, sections 15-39 of PCPA 2004 have been superseded.

2.2.2 Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (LURA) 2023

The LURA was enacted in October 2023 but secondary legislation bringing into force the relevant sections for plan making was not published until March 2026⁴. Section 97 and Schedule 7 contain provisions for joint Spatial Development Strategies, Local Plans, Minerals and Waste Plans and Supplementary Plans. This summary focuses on the provisions related to Local Plans only.

2.2.2.1 Scope of Local Plans

Each Local Planning Authority (LPA) should have a single Local Plan in force at any point in time⁵. When an LPA adopts a new Local Plan under the new system introduced by the LURA, it will overwrite the existing suite of legacy Development Plan Documents (DPDs). The LURA specifically amends Part 2 of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) to require LPAs to prepare a single document to be known as their "Local Plan". Section 15C, states: *"Each local planning authority must prepare one document, to be known as their local plan..."*.

The Local Plan must set out policies in relation to the amount, type and location of, and timetable for, development in the LPA area. The Local Plan must be designed to secure mitigation and adaption to climate change for the area and should take account of any Local Nature Recovery Strategy for the area. The Local Plan may also include:

- policies related to the use or development of land in the LPA's area designed to achieve objectives related to the special characteristics of the area
- details of any infrastructure and affordable housing requirements

In doing so, the Local Plan must take into account its evidence base assessment of the amount, and type of housing that is needed in the LPA's area, including the amount of affordable housing that is needed. The Local Plan must not be inconsistent with or repeat any National Development Management Policies (NDMP).⁶

The LPA need to ensure that their development plan includes design requirements for development, which will need to be met for planning permission to be granted. The design requirements do not need to cover every part of the LPA area, every type of development, nor be in relation to every aspect of design⁷.

2.2.2.2 Local Plan preparation and timetable

LPAs will be required to prepare and maintain a Local Plan timetable which must specify who with, where, when and how the LPA is proposing to prepare a Local Plan, including how they are proposing to meet the design code requirement⁸. Local Plan Timetables replace Local Development Schemes (LDS), which set out timetables for Local Plan production under 'legacy' plan making system.

⁴ The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 (Commencement No. 11 and Saving and Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2026

⁵ LURA 2023, Schedule 7 Section 15C

⁶ LURA 2023, Schedule 7 Section 15C(9)(b)

⁷ LURA 2023, Schedule 7 Section 15F

⁸ LURA 2023, Schedule 7 Section 15B

The Local Plan must be prepared in accordance with its timetable and be in general conformity with the Spatial Development Strategy (SDS), if one is operative for the area.⁹ It should be noted that for Maldon district, the preparation of the Local Plan will be ahead of the preparation of the SDS.

The LPA may seek observations and advice from PINS on the Local Plan at any time, for a fee.

2.2.2.3 *Examination*¹⁰

LPAs will be required to submit their Local Plans for independent examination by a person appointed by the Secretary of State to determine whether the plan can be considered sound. The LURA details the process and requirements for Examination, including how and when an examination can be paused to allow for further work to be done¹¹.

2.2.2.4 *Withdrawal and adoption of plans*

An LPA can withdraw a plan before it is submitted for examination¹². However, once the Local Plan has been submitted for examination, the LPA will not be able to withdraw the plan unless recommended to do so by the Inspector or by the Secretary of State. Once a Local Plan has been found sound by the examiner, the LPA may adopt the plan.

2.2.2.5 *Requirement to assist with plan-making*

Where an LPA notifies specific public sector organisations) to assist in relation to the preparation of the Local Plan, the organisation ‘must do everything that the plan-making authority reasonably requires of the body to assist’ in relation to the preparation or revision of the relevant plan¹³. This requirement replaces the Duty to Cooperate which was repealed on 25 March 2026¹⁴. The phrase ‘reasonably requires’ is not defined in the legislation, nor in the guidance¹⁵, and will be a matter tested through Examinations, which over time will likely set precedents for these requirements.

2.2.3 *Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025*

The Planning and Infrastructure Act¹⁶ was adopted in December 2025 and introduced a wide range of changes to the planning system from Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) to planning fees and planning committees. However, the most significant change for plan-making was the reintroduction of a tier of strategic planning in England, through Spatial Development Strategies (SDSs). Local Plans will need to be in general conformity with the SDS for their area. This is further explored in section 3.

The SDS will form part of a Local Authority’s Development Plan when adopted. There is currently no timescale for preparing an SDS in legislation. However, the government have previously suggested they expect them to be adopted in 2028 for front-runner authorities and 2029 for those that are less advanced in terms of their governance structures which is the case within Greater Essex. The introduction of SDS will have several effects for Local Plan production, including:

- The Local Plan will need to be in general conformity with the SDS and its strategic objectives and overall growth strategy.

⁹ LURA 2023, Schedule 7 Section 15CA

¹⁰ LURA 2023, Schedule 7 Section 15D

¹¹ LURA 2023, Schedule 7 Section 15DA

¹² LURA 2023, Schedule 7 Section 15E and 15EA

¹³ LURA 2023, Section 100

¹⁴ The provisions contained in Schedule 7 of the LURA 2023 will repeal the Duty to Cooperate by replacing sections 15 to 37 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, including section 33A which contains the Duty to Cooperate.

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/issue-a-requirement-to-assist-notice>

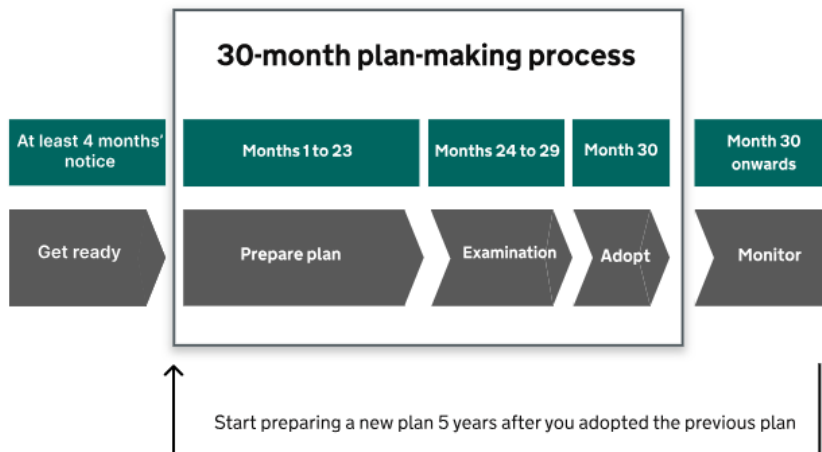
¹⁶ ‘Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025’. Statute Law Database. Accessed 17 April 2026. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2025/34/section/58>.

- Maldon District Council, including the Planning Policy team, will need to engage with the preparation, review and monitoring of the SDS, adding to existing workloads and potentially diverting resources from Local Plan production. The extent and timing of this involvement is unknown at the moment.

2.2.4 The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026¹⁷

The regulations came into force on 25 March 2026 and formally enabled LPAs to start preparing Local Plans under the new plan making system. The regulations specify the processes and timeline that an LPA should follow to prepare a Local Plan under the new system, which should take a total of 30-months from Gateway 1 to adoption (Figure 1).

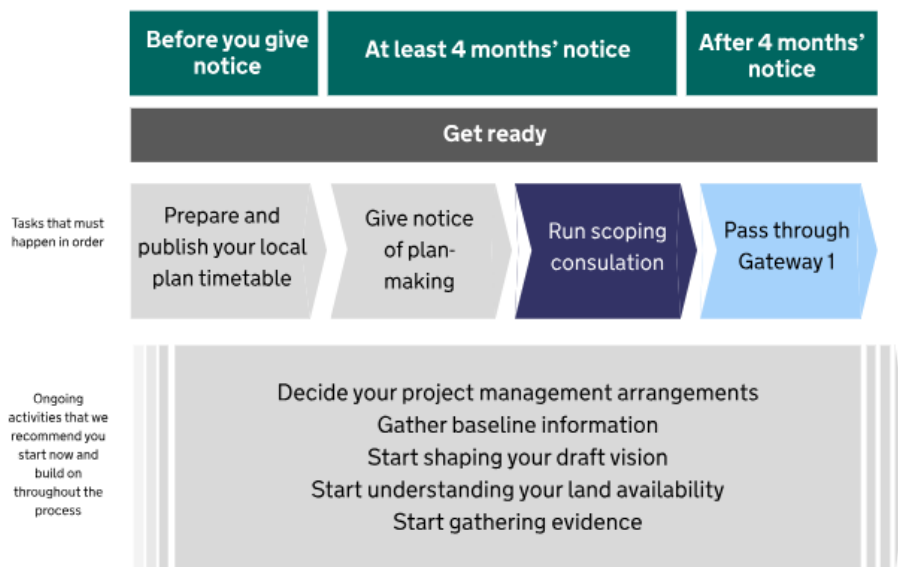
Figure 1 Illustration of the 30-month plan-making process¹⁸



2.2.4.1 Months -4 to 0: Getting ready for plan-making

This stage of plan-making should last at least four months (Figure 2). These four months are not counted as part of the 30-month plan-making period. The main requirements for this stage are summarised in Table 1.

Figure 2 Illustration of the activities to be undertaken before the 30-month process starts¹⁹



¹⁷ The regulations amend the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and replace the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 for any Local Plan submitted for Examination after 31 December 2026 (unless specified by the Secretary of State).

¹⁸ Source: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/30-month-local-plan-process-an-overview>

¹⁹ Source: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/30-month-local-plan-process-an-overview>

Table 1 Summary of requirements for getting ready for plan-making

Regulation	Purpose of the regulation
Regulation 4: Form and content of timetable.	Requires LPA to set out a timetable, including the main consultation stages, gateway stages, submission and adoption.
Regulation 19: Notice of intention to commence	Requires LPAs to prepare and make available a notice confirming that Local Plan preparation is starting.
Regulation 20: Scoping consultation	The consultation should invite views on what the plan should contain and how stakeholders should be engaged.

2.2.4.2 Months 1 to 23: Prepare the plan

Once the LPA has passed through Gateway 1, the official 30-month timeframe for Local Plan production begins. The main plan preparation and drafting should happen within the first 23 months of the process, as illustrated on Figure 3. The main requirements for this stage are set out in Table 2.

Figure 3 Illustration of the activities to be undertaken within months 1 to 23 of the new plan-making process**Table 2 Summary of requirements for preparing the plan**

Regulation	Purpose of the regulation
Regulation 21: Gateway 1	Gateway 1 marks the official start of the plan-making process. To pass gateway 1, LPAs need to publish a self-assessment summary of readiness for Local Plan preparation. This should not be done less than 4 months after the notice of intention to commence has expired.
Regulation 22: Summary of scoping consultation	Requires LPAs to publish a summary of the scoping consultation undertaken under Regulation 20.
Regulation 23: Consultation on proposed content and evidence	The LPA should consult on proposed content of the plan and its supporting evidence. Regulation 23 sets out the specific notification and requirements for the consultation.
Regulation 24: Summary of consultation	The LPA should publish a summary of consultation responses from Regulation 23.
Regulation 25: Map of proposed policies	The LPA should prepare a map showing the geographical application of proposed Local Plan policies.
Regulation 26: Gateway 2	Under Gateway 2, the LPA should seek observations and advice on progress towards a plan from an appointed person which is likely to be a Planning Inspector. The advice received from the appointed person must be published.
Regulation 27: Consultation on the proposed Local Plan	The LPA must publish and consult on the proposal Local Plan and associated documents, including a statement summarising the main issues raised in earlier consultations.
Regulation 28: Conformity with spatial development strategy (SDS)	Where there is a spatial development strategy (SDS) and as part of regulation 27, the LPA should invite representations from the authority who published the SDS on whether the plan it is in 'general conformity' with the SDS.

Regulation	Purpose of the regulation
Regulation 30: Publication of summary of consultation	The LPA should prepare a summary of the consultation under Regulation 27 and make the summary available.
Regulations 31-33: Gateway 3	The LPA must seek observations and advice on whether plan-making requirements are met and make available the advice received. If necessary, the LPA must repeat Gateway 3.

2.2.4.3 Months 24 – 30: Submission, examination and adoption

Following submission of the plan for Examination, the new system anticipates the examination process to last six months and the adoption process to last one month, if no additional work or main modifications are required. Should it be determined during the Examination that additional work is required, the Examination may be paused for a maximum of six months. If the Inspector recommends that main modifications required for the Local plan to be found, it may be necessary to consult interested parties. This will also likely extend the six-month timeframe for the examination.

The main requirements for this stage are set out in Table 3.

Table 3 Summary of requirements for months 24-30

Regulation	Purpose of the regulation
Regulation 34: Submission	The LPA must submit the Local Plan documents for examination, make these available and notify stakeholders of the submission.
Regulation 35: Independent examination	The LPA must publicise the examination and hearings.
Regulation 37: Publication of the recommendations	The LPA must publicise the examiner's recommendations, make these available and notify stakeholders.
Regulation 39: Adoption	The LPA must make the adopted plan and adoption statement available and notify stakeholders

2.3 Policy and guidance

2.3.1 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The NPPF (December 2024 with minor updates in February 2025) provides the overarching policy framework for planning in England. Chapter 3 of the NPPF sets out the government's expectations for the plan-making process. It emphasises the importance of having an up-to-date and positively prepared development plan that provides a clear vision for the future development of an area. The chapter outlines the principles for plan preparation, the need for strategic and non-strategic policies, and the importance of effective cooperation between local planning authorities and other bodies. It also sets out the tests of soundness that plans must meet to be considered robust and effective.

2.3.2 Consultation Draft NPPF

The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published a draft NPPF for consultation in December 2025. Consultation closed in March 2026 and a new version of the NPPF is expected in Autumn 2026. The consultation proposed a significant change in approach, with two distinct sections of the NPPF: one focused on plan-making and one focused on development management. This reflects the government's agenda to bring forward a set of National Development Management Policies (NDMP), which have effectively been incorporated into the NPPF.

The final 2026 NPPF may differ from the consultation version. However, below is a summary of the main changes between the current NPPF and the December 2025 consultation version, which may be carried forward into the final 2026 version:

- Creation of non-statutory NDMP which will significantly reduce the scope of Local Plans as they should not repeat national policy.
- The revision of the tilted balance to a permanent presumption in favour of sustainable development with more locational specificity.
- General support across the document for comprehensive development around railway stations.

- Introduction of new policies on residential densities promoting higher density development, setting minimum densities in town centres and for locations with a high level of connectivity.
- While not within the proposed text, the accompanying consultation proposes the introduction of a ‘medium development’ category, i.e. 10-49 homes on land up to 2.5ha (to complete the current minor and major development categories). The consultation NPPF explicitly supports SME developers to bring forward medium sized sites.
- Further support for vision-led transport planning.
- Strengthened natural environment considerations with better alignment to other environmental and natural environment documents such as Local Nature Recovery Strategies.
- Support for a more diverse mix of homes including in rural areas.

2.3.3 Planning Practice Guidance²⁰

The Plan-Making²¹ section of the PPG provides detailed guidance on the preparation and development of Local Plans. It outlines the statutory duties of LPAs, emphasising the importance of creating up-to-date and effective development plans that address strategic priorities such as the delivery of new homes, economic / employment floorspace, and infrastructure. Further to this, the PPG offers practical advice on the plan-making process, including evidence gathering, public consultation, and cooperation with neighbouring authorities and relevant bodies.

2.3.4 Create or update a Local Plan using the new system²²

Government has created a new collection of guidance and resources which regroups existing, updated and new guidance on how to Create or Update a Local Plan (CULP). The collection is aimed at LPAs looking to adopt a Local Plan under the new plan-making system. The collection is still in development but already contains significant guidance on the early stages of plan-making, including getting ready to start a Local Plan, giving notice of plan-making and preparing a Local Plan vision.

2.3.5 Procedural guide for Examinations and Gateways²³

The Planning Inspectorate has published a procedural guide for Examinations and Gateways under the new plan making system. This sets out the roles of Inspectors and the expected involvement of LPAs, including a step-by-step guide to what LPAs must do and when LPAs must action a task.

2.3.6 Plan-making and Local Government Reorganisation²⁴

In July 2026, Central Government published guidance on the interaction between plan making and LGR. The guidance states that Local Plan should be progressed, despite the uncertainties created by LGR and that this is the case, even where the Council will not be able to progress the Local Plan to adoption before the new unitary authority is operational. Transitional regulations will be published in due course to address the complexities arising from LGR.

²⁰ GOV.UK. ‘Planning Practice Guidance’. 22 July 2019. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance>.

²¹ GOV.UK. ‘Plan-Making’. 27 November 2025. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/plan-making>.

²² GOV.UK. 2026. ‘Create or Update a Local plan Using the New System’. March 26. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/create-or-update-a-local-plan-using-the-new-system>.

²³ GOV.UK June 2026 [Procedural guide for Examinations and Gateways under the Town and Country Planning \(Local Planning\) \(England\) Regulations 2026](#) - GOV.UK

²⁴ GOV.UK. n.d. ‘Plan-Making and Local Government Reorganisation’. Accessed 9 July 2026. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/plan-making-and-local-government-reorganisation>.

3. Plan making context

3.1 Wider context

The wider context of Local Plan production is important to consider. As well as responding to the legal and policy framework, it will be necessary to consider the implications of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and devolution; relationship with wider plans and strategies; plan making activities of neighbouring authorities; governance; and skills and capacity.

At the local level, the Local Plan sits alongside other plan, policies and strategies prepared by the Council. The operational model of the Council, such as the governance of decision-making, the Planning Policy team skills and capacity, as well as the capacity of the wider teams within the Council to support plan making will all impact the Local Plan making process.

LGR and Devolution represent significant changes for plan making. LGR will impact on the governance of the Local Plan in the later stages of its production. In this context, the plan making progress of neighbouring authorities is also relevant context for the Local Plan. While devolution will see a new tier of strategic planning introduced with the production of a Greater Essex Spatial Development Strategy.

3.2 Local Government Reorganisation and devolution

In December 2024, central government announced changes to the way local government is organised across the country. The changes can be categorised into two different programmes: Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and devolution.

- Under LGR, all areas of England will be covered by unitary authorities. England is currently divided between areas which are already unitary and areas which have two tiers of local government. In two-tier areas, local government functions are split between an upper-tier county council and a lower tier district or borough council. The reorganisation will end the two-tier system.
- Some regions of England already have a strategic tier of government. It is the government's ambition that all areas in England should have this tier of government, called Strategic Authorities. As detailed in the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026, Strategic Authorities can be:
 - Foundation Strategic Authorities (which includes single council devolution deals and all non-mayoral Combined Authorities and Combined County Authorities)
 - Mayoral Strategic Authorities including all Mayoral Combined Authorities and Mayoral Combined County Authorities
 - Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities including the Greater London Authority

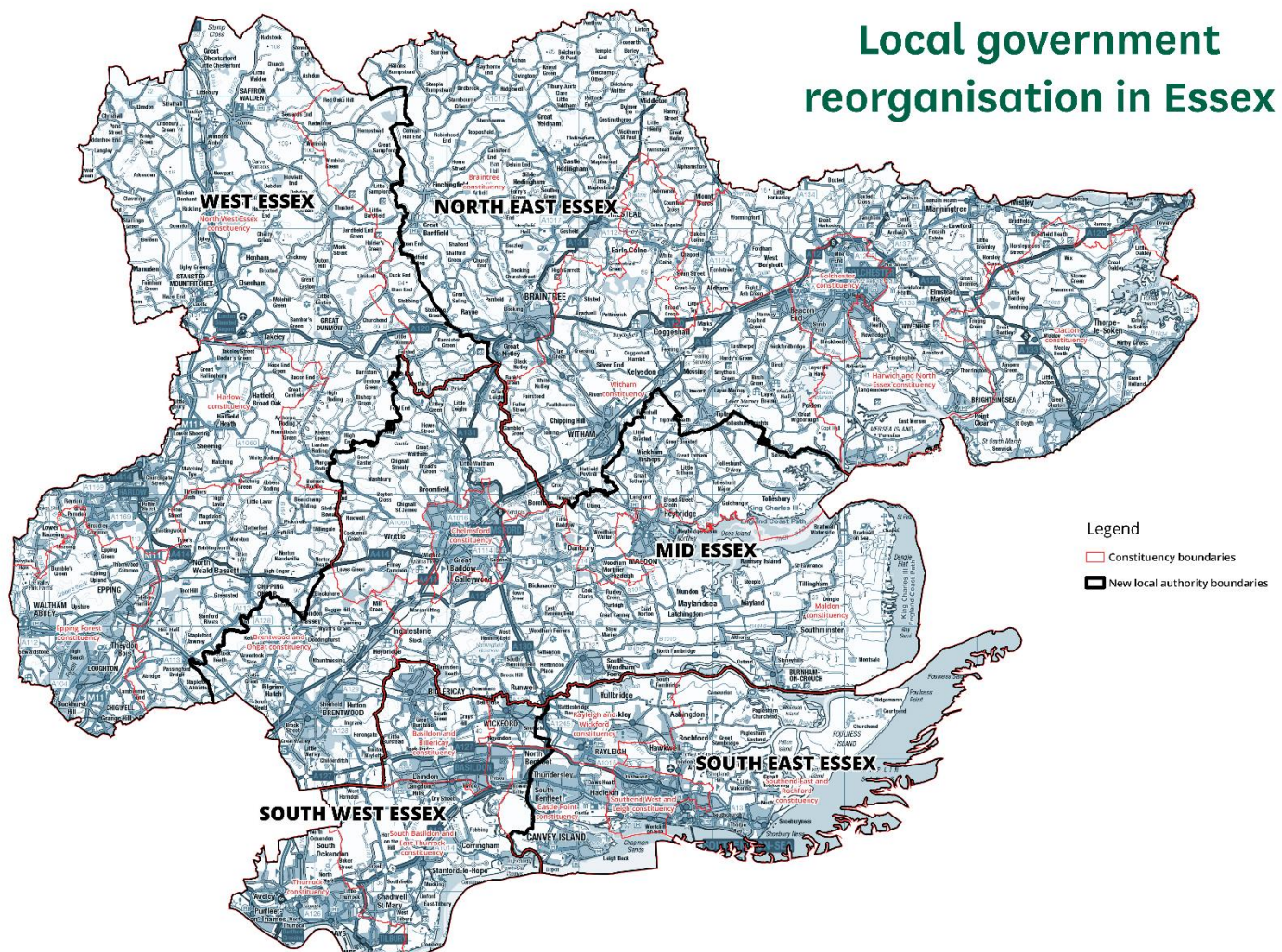
3.2.1 Local Government Reorganisation

The upper tier authorities of Essex County Council, along with Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock were invited to set out their milestones for reorganisation to central government by 26 September 2025. Following a statutory consultation on the proposed options for reorganisation, the Secretary of State announced their intention to implement the proposal for five unitary councils via a Written Ministerial Statement to Parliament on 25 March 2026.²⁵

Under the new structure, Maldon District Council will cease to exist, and its geographical extent will be part of the new Mid Essex Council, alongside Brentwood Borough Council and Chelmsford City Council and the relevant services currently delivered by Essex County Council. This is illustrated on Figure 4.

²⁵ <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2026-03-25/hcws1455>;
https://www.maldon.gov.uk/info/20061/your_council/10198/local_government_reorganisation_lgr_and_devolution

Figure 4 Map of the Local Government Reorganisation in Essex



Source: [Proposed unitary authorities 2026: Maps - House of Commons Library](#), accessed May 2026

Secondary legislation, subject to Parliamentary approval, is required to implement these changes and has not yet been made. The Secretary of State wrote to Chief Executives and Leaders of the concerned Councils on 25 March 2026, setting out the decision, as well as the additional information required from Councils, transitional arrangements and the timeline for implementation of the Structural Changes Order, required to implement LGR in Essex.

Maldon District Council, alongside the other Councils identified, will cease to exist on 1 April 2028. Transitional arrangements will be organised, with the creation of ‘shadow’ Councils with preparatory functions, budgets and plans to ensure a smooth transition to the new Councils’ structure.

On 3 June 2025, government reiterated through a ministerial statement²⁶ that they expect local plans to continue being produced while LGR is on-going:

‘Accordingly, as stated in my invitation letters, I continue to expect local planning authorities to work towards the adoption of an up-to-date local plan as soon as possible. Local Government Reorganisation should not hinder this essential work; and neither should the introduction of the new legal framework for local plan-making later this year, or our strategic planning reforms.’

It thus should remain a priority of the Council to work towards a new Local Plan and consideration has been given to joint working with neighbouring authorities to ensure value for money and future-proof the evidence base work and plan itself. This is considered further in Section 3.3.

3.2.2 Devolution

Following the publication of the English Devolution White Paper in December 2024, Local Authorities were asked to set out plans to create a Strategic Authority in their area. Essex County Council, Thurrock Council and Southend-on-Sea City Council expressed their interest in becoming a Mayoral Combined County Authority for Greater Essex. Following consultation, government confirmed in July 2025 that the proposal would be taken forward.

The Greater Essex Mayoral election is planned for May 2028. In the interim, work will take place to establish the Combined Authority, which will be responsible for the creation of an SDS as of 1 April 2028. Regulations setting out the requirements for producing SDSs are anticipated later in 2026. There will be a requirement to produce an SDS timetable. Given the production of the Greater Essex SDS will not be able to formally commence until later this year at the earliest and no programme for its production is currently in place, a new Maldon District Local Plan would likely to run ahead of the SDS.

3.3 Neighbouring authorities

Maldon District Council adjoins four other LPAs: Braintree District Council, Chelmsford City Council, Colchester City Council, and Rochford District Council (see Figure 5). It is good practice to consider the possibility of joint working with regards to plan making. Where authorities are within a similar timeline for the production of their Local Plan, joint working could be considered to ensure efficiency of scale and joined-up, collaborative working across boundaries. With LGR imminent, this imperative is even more important. Given the confirmed makeup of the Mid Essex Council, joint working with Brentwood Council was also considered.

The status of Local Plan preparation for these five Councils is presented in Table 4. Four out of the five LPAs are preparing a Local Plan under the legacy system and have, or will be, submitting a draft plan for Examination this year, therefore joint working is ruled out as they are not an appropriately equivalent point in the Local Plan review cycle.

Brentwood’s current Local Development Scheme is based on the legacy system; however, it misses the transitional arrangements deadline for submission by December 2026. Therefore, like Maldon district, it will be necessary for a plan to be progressed under the new system, however no formal decision or timetable has been set out for this. Therefore, joint working with Brentwood in the short-term is likely to be limited. In addition, there is limited scope for joint evidence at this stage given the large amount of evidence that has

²⁶ Local Government Reorganisation, Jim McMahon, Statement made on 3 June 2025, Statement UIN HCWS676, <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2025-06-03/hcws676>

been produced in Maldon and given Brentwood is not directly adjacent, making the geographies for joint evidence base production more limited.

Figure 5 Map of Maldon District and neighbouring authorities

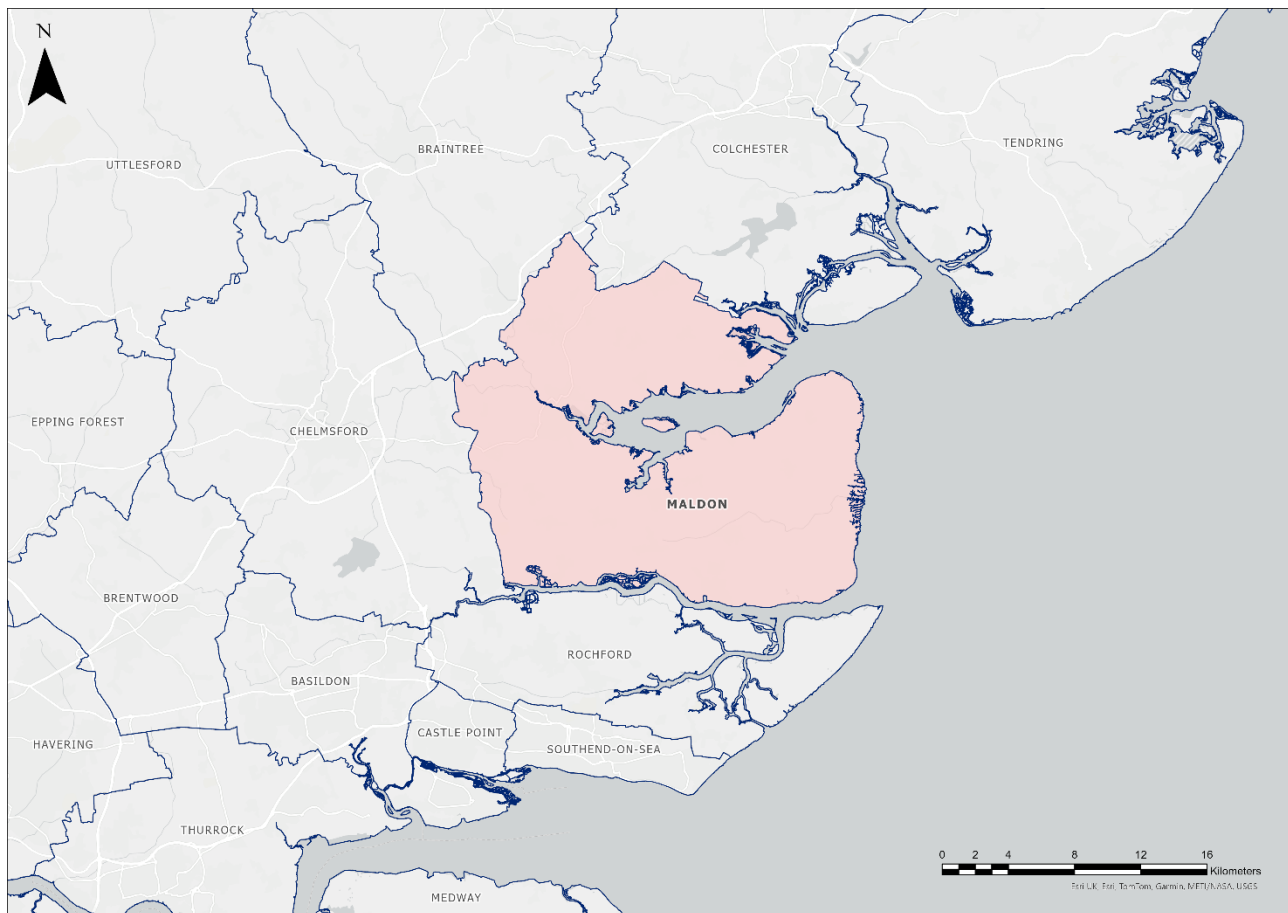


Table 4 Neighbouring authorities Local Plan status

Neighbouring authority	Local Plan status
Braintree District Council	Braintree District Council (BDC) started their Local Plan Review in Early 2024, aiming to adopt in June 2027. BDC completed a Preferred Options Consultation (Regulation 18) on 17 April 2026, will be publishing Regulation 19 in Summer of 2026 and aiming to submit the Local Plan in November 2026 under the legacy system.
Brentwood Borough Council	Brentwood Borough Council (BBC) started their Local Plan Review in quarter two of 2025. Their current Local Development Scheme identifies a Regulation 18 consultation in quarter two of 2026, Regulation 19 quarter two of 2027 and submission in early 2028. This would not meet the December 2026 deadline for the legacy system. Thus, a plan under the new Local Plan system will be required however no timescales have been set out for this at the time of drafting this report.
Chelmsford City Council	Chelmsford City Council began their Local Plan review in 2022. A final Regulation 19 consultation on additional sites finished in January 2026. The plan was submitted for on 5 June 2026 under the legacy system.
Colchester City Council	Colchester City Council completed a Regulation 18 consultation on the Preferred Options Local Plan, which closed on the 14 January 2026. A Regulation 19 consultation is planned for summer 2026, with a view to submitting the plan under the legacy system before December 2026.
Rochford District Council	Rochford District Council completed a Regulation 18 consultation on the Preferred Options Local Plan, which closed on 24 March 2026. In Autumn of 2026 Rochford District Council plan to publish a Regulation 19 Plan with a view to submitting a plan under the legacy system by the end of 2026.

3.4 Maldon plans and strategies

3.4.1 Maldon District Development Plan

The approved Development Plan for Maldon District comprises the following documents:

- Maldon District Local Development Plan 2014-2029 (approved July 2017)
- Policies Map
- Neighbourhood Plans
- Essex and Southend-on-Sea Waste Local Plan 2017
- Essex Minerals Local Plan 2014

The Maldon District Local Development Plan was adopted in July 2017 and covers the period 2014-2029. The Local Plan set a vision of sustainable development for the district, based on the protection of what makes the District unique, including its heritage, coastline and countryside. The spatial vision emphasises the need to maintain the quality of life of the community and ensure the delivery of local service and of new affordable homes for the District.

There are four made Neighbourhood Plans in Maldon district:

- Burnham-on-Crouch (2017)
- Wickham Bishops (2021)
- Great Totham (2022)
- Langford and Ulting (2022)
- Mayland (2025)

In addition, there are five more designated neighbourhood areas, three of which have plans in progress:

- Tollesbury Parish Council – designated 27 February 2014
- Latchingdon Parish Council – designated 25 April 2014
- Althorne Parish Council - designated 3 December 2014
- Heybridge Parish Council - designated 14 January 2016
- Woodham Walter Parish Council – designated 10 December 2024
- Maldon Town Council – designated 11 July 2025

All existing Development Plan Documents and saved policies will remain in force until the LPA brings into force a new-style Local Plan.

3.4.2 Supplementary Planning Documents

The Council have a number of adopted Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) in place (Table 5). These will remain in force until the LPA adopts a new style Local Plan.

SPDs can only be adopted under the legacy system until the end of June 2026; after this date SPDs will no longer be able to be produced under the new Local Plan system. Instead, provision is made for Supplementary Plans which will go through independent examination and have the same weight as Local Plans. Supplementary Plans are intended to be used in a more limited way than SPDs, to address specific issues not already covered in the Local Plan or NPPF. The draft NPPF, for example, identifies their use for specific design standards, or to create policy for a specific site or group of sites close to each other.

In scoping the new Maldon District Local Plan, it will be necessary to consider whether the advice and guidance contained in the existing SPDs is still relevant and if so, whether it should be revised and re-published as guidance or integrated into the new style local plan.

Table 5 Supplementary Planning Documents

Document	Date	Purpose
Maldon and Heybridge Central Area Master Plan (CAMP)	2017	The Masterplan and Action Plan set out the vision and ambition for economic growth, through regeneration, environmental enhancements and redevelopment of sites.
Maldon District Design Guide	2017	Guidance to deliver high quality design in all development.
Affordable Housing and Viability	2018	Provides guidance on the approach to affordable housing provision and details about the council's approach to viability assessments.
Maldon District Specialist Needs Housing	2018	Guidance about the approach to delivering specialist needs housing, such as for older people and those with disabilities.
Renewable and Low Carbon Technologies	2018	Provides guidance for considering proposals for renewable and low carbon technology development and for the use of sustainable building standards in residential and non-residential developments.
Vehicle Parking Standards 2018	2018	Guidance on the approach to vehicle parking provision within new development.
Green Infrastructure Strategy	2019	Provides further guidance on the approach to green infrastructure provision in the District.
North Quay Regeneration Development Brief	2020	The North Quay is the most significant employment allocation within the adopted Local Plan. The North Quay Development Brief SPD sets out a framework to enable employment-led regeneration of the area.

3.4.3 Other planning guidance

There are also masterplans and design codes that have been endorsed by the Council for use in the consideration of planning applications as set out below (Table 6).

Table 6 Other planning guidance

Document	Date	Purpose
North Heybridge Garden Suburb Strategic Masterplan Framework	2014	Strategic masterplan framework for the garden suburb.
North Heybridge Garden Suburb Strategic Design Code	2017	Strategic design code prepared to ensure design quality throughout the garden suburb.
South Maldon Garden Suburb Strategic Design Code	2016	Strategic design code prepared to ensure design quality throughout the garden suburb.
South Maldon Garden Suburb Masterplan	2018	Strategic masterplan framework for the garden suburb.
Technical Advice Note (TAN) on Housing Mix	2025	To provide technical advice to developers and decision-makers explain the guidelines that will be used to assess the ratio of housing mix for different development proposals.

3.4.4 Other plans and strategies

The Local Plan will need to respond to wider plans and strategies produced by the Council, including the Corporate Strategy, Climate Action Strategy and Housing Strategy, as well as those of key stakeholders, such as Essex County Council. The key documents are summarised in Table 7.

Table 7 Other plans and strategies

Stakeholder	Strategy/plan	Key messages
Maldon District Council	Corporate Plan 2025-2028	The Corporate Plan sets the Council's vision and priorities for the three years to 2028. The corporate plan supports a vision to <i>'be a sustainable council, promoting the district and all that it has to offer. To support our communities through excellent partnership working and to maintain and improve quality of life.'</i> ²⁷ The emphasis on the quality of life of residents echoes the spatial vision of the 2017

²⁷ Council, Maldon District. n.d. 'Corporate Plan 2025 - 2028'. Accessed 7 May 2026.
https://www.maldon.gov.uk/info/20066/policies_and_strategies/10197/corporate_plan_2025_-_2028.

Stakeholder	Strategy/plan	Key messages
		Maldon District Local Development Plan. The council has articulated five priorities to support this vision: 1. Supporting our communities 2. Investing in our district 3. Growing our economy 4. Protecting our environment 5. Delivering good quality services. Key principles will guide how the Council seeks to deliver this vision and priorities. Of particular relevance to the new local plan, the corporate plan seeks to <i>'Deliver commercial projects that benefit the district'</i> and <i>'As a smaller local authority in the county, we will lobby for infrastructure and investment'</i>.
Maldon District Council	Homelessness & Rough Sleepers & Housing Strategy 2018-2025	Provides a review of the need for housing and incorporates the Homelessness Strategy and Older People's Housing strategy. In seeking to meet the need for housing, it is recognised there is now a stronger emphasis on prevention this as part of the Homelessness Strategy, as well as the need to plan for the growing need for housing related support to help older people retain their independence. Of relevance to the new Local Plan is the recognition of improving supply, improving the use of existing housing stock, the delivery of new affordable homes as well as looking at how housing can be delivered which meets a range of needs including those of older people.
Maldon District Council	Our Home, Our Future - Climate Action Strategy and Action Plan 2025-2028	Seeks to identify ways to reduce carbon emissions and increase climate resilience across the Maldon District. Four key pathways have been identified: 1. Mitigation – to reduce green housing gas emission in line with the Council's target to reach net zero by 2050. 2. Adaptation – to increase resilience to the local impacts of climate change. 3. Community engagement – to encourage and support climate positive behaviour 4. Sustainable development - Develop a new Local Plan with policies and standards to address climate change, meeting future development needs in a planned and managed way, including policies covering sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), flood risk, renewable energy, biodiversity and geodiversity, transport and climate change. The strategy and action plan therefore provides the framework for some specific elements that local plan is tasked with addressed in relation to sustainable development combined with the role it can play in climate mitigation and adaptation.
Essex Highways & Maldon District Council	Maldon District Future Transport Strategy, October 2024	Identifies the transport challenges and opportunities faced and sets out a vision and objectives to help guide the future approach. It is identified that Maldon has a high reliance of car use that is contributing to increased levels of delay and congestion on the road network. Of relevance to the Local Plan will be how future development can provide transport infrastructure to be well-connected for people of all ages, with an accessible and sustainable transport network, and how sustainable travel options and be delivered to help support growth and make other options to driving viable.
Essex County Council	Sector development strategy	Highlights five future growth sectors - life sciences, construction and retrofit, clean energy, digi-tech and advanced manufacturing and engineering. It identifies Maldon is strong in construction and advanced manufacturing and identifies key assets including higher education centres and proposed NSIPs. This provides a wider regional context for future Local Plan economic development policies.
Essex County Council	Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy	A statutory requirement under the Environment Act – the Greater Essex LNRS provides a county wide solution for nature recovery, identifying locations to create or improve habitat most likely to provide the greatest benefit for nature and the wider environment. It identifies locations where actions can create, expand and connect spaces for nature. The LNRS and map-based opportunities will be

Stakeholder	Strategy/plan	Key messages
Essex County Council	Our Water Strategy for Essex, 2024	relevant for future natural environment and biodiversity policies in the Local plan. Identifies 30 actions to contribute to addressing the water issues Essex faces related to reduce demand, land use and developing alternative supply.
Essex County Council	Local Cycling and Walking Action Plan (LCWIP)	Develops network plans for both walking and cycling across Essex with LCWIPs for all major towns/cities including Maldon.
North Essex Economic Board	North Essex Economic Strategy and Action Plan	Long term strategy providing an overarching vision for the North Essex Economic, with four strategic priorities including innovative businesses and skilled residents'; a greener high growth economy; a dynamic and connected region; and prosperous and inclusive communities. It provides jobs growth forecasts for clean energy by area as well as identifying challenges and opportunities.
Multiple stakeholders including Maldon and Essex County Council	Essex Coast Recreational Disturbance Avoidance Mitigation Strategy (RAMS)	SPD focuses on the mitigation necessary to protect the wildlife of the Essex coast from the increased visitor pressure associated with new residential development, and how this mitigation will be funded. (This has been reviewed with an updated strategy which, when approved, will revoke the SPD). Key updates include an updated mitigation package, an updated tariff fee and amended development types eligible to pay the tariff.

3.4.5 Scoping the New Local Plan

As part of the scoping of the new Local Plan it will be important to consider the implications of existing Neighbourhood Plans and Areas, the range of different SPDs and the extent to which they should be incorporated into the new Local Plan (this is also addressed in section 4), as well as the context of wider strategies within Maldon district and Essex for specific policy areas.

3.5 Maldon District Council's resources and capacity

The corporately agreed structure for Maldon District Council's Planning Policy team is as follows:

- 1 x Planning Policy Manager
- 2 x Principal Policy Planners
- 1 x Senior Policy Planner
- 1 x Policy Planner and
- 1 x Project Support Officer

All the roles are full time roles within the establishment. If the Planning Policy team was fully resourced, it would provide 6.0 FTEs.

Currently four of these roles are filled. One Principal Policy Planner works 0.8 FTE, and the Project Support Officer works 0.6 FTE. The Senior Policy Planner and Policy Planner roles are currently vacant and being advertised. The current team therefore has a resourcing capacity of 3.4 FTEs. Within this time, the team currently undertakes the following tasks:

- Monitoring duties as summarised in Table 8.
- Support for planning applications, including Section 106 agreement support. A CIL schedule is also in the early stages of development.
- Engagement with wider environmental workstreams that are the responsibility of wider Council teams or external public sector bodies, for example recently the team has supported the production of an updated Recreational disturbance avoidance and mitigation strategy for the Essex Coast Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation and Ramsar sites.

- Supporting Neighbourhood Plan bodies with the production of Neighbourhood Plans, including designation of neighbourhood areas, responding to Neighbourhood Plan drafts and facilitation of Neighbourhood Plan referendum and Examination.
- Development of evidence base for the new Local Plan, with 12 evidence base studies currently finalised or underway. This has included a Call for Sites and HELAA undertaken in-house.
- Engagement with infrastructure providers, neighbouring authorities and Essex County Council on strategic planning matters.
- Engagement with Members, including the Planning Policy Working Group.

Table 8 Planning policy team monitoring duties

Title	Description	Updates required
Brownfield Land Register	A brownfield land register identifies previously developed sites considered to be appropriate for residential development. It is not a complete list of all brownfield land in the district; however it can support the Local Plan with wider evidence in relation to housing sites, capacity and the status of sites. The register was last updated in 2020.	On-going updates required
Self and custom build register	Details people/associations who are seeking plots of land for self-build/custom-build housing. It helps track demand for these types of homes. The last monitoring update was published in December 2025.	On-going updates required plus annual reporting to MHCLG required
Five-year housing land supply	Under the NPPF (2024), LPAs are required to demonstrate at least five years' worth of housing supply against their housing requirement. The absence of a 5-year supply triggers the presumption in favour of sustainable development. The latest housing supply paper published February 2026 demonstrates a housing land supply of 4.1 years.	On-going updates required
Authority Monitoring Report	The Authority Monitoring Report (AMR) monitors the delivery of the Local Plan, delivery of relevant national targets and progress against the Local Development Scheme. The last AMR produced was in 2022/23 and provides series of topic-based Fact Sheets.	Planning authorities are required to publish an Authority Monitoring Report (AMR) each year
Housing Delivery Test	Housing delivery data must be submitted to MHCLG each year. The housing delivery test is a percentage measurement of the number of net homes delivered against the number of homes required over a rolling three-year period. MHCLG last published HDT results in 2023. The delivery test measurement for Maldon for 2023 was 1,162 homes delivered against a requirement of 819, (or 142%).	Annual reporting to MHCLG required
Infrastructure Funding Statement	The Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) sets the yearly S106 funding that has been submitted, spent and is still to be collected in the district. The last statement produced was for 2024/25.	Annual update required
P2 Quarterly Housebuilding Return	New build dwelling data to be submitted for statutory data returns to central government.	Ongoing updates required and quarterly reporting to MHCLG
Traveller Count	Biannual counts (January and July) of caravans on both authorised and non-authorised sites	Biannual reporting to MHCLG

3.6 Governance

3.6.1 Existing governance arrangements

Under the Local Government Act 2000, Councils are required to prepare, keep up to date and publicise a constitution. Maldon District Council's latest Constitution document was adopted in March 2026. The constitution explains the governance arrangements of the Council, who makes decisions and how by allocating powers and responsibilities and regulating the behaviour of individuals and groups through codes of conduct, terms of reference and rule of procedure.

The Council is composed of elected members and paid officers. There are 31 elected members representing district residents within the Council. All Councillors are elected every four years. All councillors sit at Full Council, which has to be held at least annually. The Leader of the Council is the head of the largest political group represented amongst the 31 elected Councillors. The Leader of the Council does not have executive or delegated powers but has a position of influence and works closely with the Chief Executive and the rest of the Senior Leadership Team, Councillors also elect a deputy-Leader of the Council.

3.6.2 Full Council

The Council is headed by an elected Chairperson and vice-Chairperson. The remit of Full Council Meetings is to make appointments to committees (see section 3.6.3), to determine the budget, the amount of Council tax to be levied, to approve or adopt plans, policies, schemes and strategies, including the Local Plan and associated guidance. Decisions on the Local Plan have to be made by Full Council.

3.6.3 Committees

The Council's governance is organised as a committee system. Under this governance arrangement, councillors are divided into politically balanced thematic committees which make decisions within the remit afforded to them by the constitution. Maldon has 15 committees, including Strategy and Resources Committee and Planning Committees (District wide and three Area Committees). The latter deal purely planning applications. The upcoming reform of planning committees will require an update to the Planning Committee's structures and processes by 31st October 2026.²⁸

Each committee is headed by a Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson, who are elected for each committee by Full Council every year. Their role is to make sure committees are run in accordance with the constitution and to maintain good communication with other Chairpersons and officers, ensuring the co-ordination and efficient management of all committee activity. Full council and committees meet on a regular basis according to the schedule of meetings published on the Council's website. Extraordinary meetings can be scheduled if required.

The Strategy and Resources Committee exercises the Council's power in relation to its budget, to the regulation and control of the Council's finances, including investment and borrowing, and ensure the compliance of the Council's budget with its revenue and capital budgets. The Strategy and Resources Committee is also responsible for reviewing the Council's policy framework and can approve or adopt any plan, policies or strategies which do not have a significant corporate impact on the Council or on its resources. Where plans, policies or strategies do not fall under this category and are likely to have a significant corporate impact or impact on the Council's resources, the Committee reviews the proposal and makes recommendations on it to Full Council for approval or adoption. The Local Plan is identified as a key document for the Council which requires Full Council approval.

3.6.4 Planning Policy Working Group

In addition to the committees, the Council also has a series of working groups, including the Planning Policy Working Group (PPWG). The group does not have delegated powers and is therefore not a decision-making body. PPWG meets monthly providing an opportunity for Members and Officers to delve into a level of detail that would not be possible at a formal committee and can make recommendations to Strategy & Resources and / or full Council.

3.7 Communication

3.7.1 Maldon District Communications, Marketing and Engagement Plan

The Communications, Marketing and Engagement Plan, published in 2023, sets out how the Council will communicate, engage with communities, and promote its work and services. It aims to ensure clear public

²⁸ GOV.UK. n.d. 'Planning Committee Reform: Statutory Consultation on Draft Regulations and Guidance'. Accessed 22 June 2026. <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-committee-reform-draft-regulations-and-guidance/planning-committee-reform-statutory-consultation-on-draft-regulations-and-guidance>; GOV.UK 'Consultation outcome – Reform of planning committees: technical consultation – government response', <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/reform-of-planning-committees-technical-consultation/outcome/reform-of-planning-committees-technical-consultation-government-response>. Accessed 22 June 2026

messaging, effective use of resources, and strong stakeholder engagement while supporting the Council's six Corporate Plan priorities.

The approach focuses on collaboration with communities and partners, delivering targeted marketing campaigns, using technology and data to maximise impact, and maintaining high ethical and inclusive communication standards.

The plan does not specifically reference planning or the Local Plan but two of the plan principles are of particular relevance to the PID, namely '*All Council projects have a communications workstream identified to receive communications support and resources (and at inception)*' and '*Digital first approach is a priority, when social and electronic channels are the most effective method to use.*'. The community and engagement strategy that will need to be developed for the Local Plan will need to be based on the key principles set out in the Communication, Marketing and Engagement Plan.

3.7.2 Maldon District Statement of Community Involvement

The legacy system required LPAs to produce a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), detailing how the Council was going to engage with stakeholders and communities throughout the process. Under this legacy system, LPAs were required to update their SCI every five years²⁹.

The Maldon District Council Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) was adopted in September 2021³⁰. The SCI sets out what consultation will take place when the Council develops planning policy documents or determines planning applications. The purpose of the SCI is to translate the objectives and priorities of the Corporate Plan into a focus strategy which communities can use to understand how to get involved in the planning system. The SCI is built around seven consultations principles:

- Open and fair
- Appropriate, Meaningful and Relevant
- Honesty and Integrity
- Equality and Diversity
- Responsibility and Accountability
- New Technology and e-consultation
- Climate Change Emergency

The SCI explains at which stage of the Local Plan process the community can get involved and how.

Under the new plan-making system, the requirement for an SCI is replaced by the requirement to include a community engagement strategy within the formal Project Initiation Document, which will be submitted for Gateway 1. The principles contained in the current SCI will need to be reviewed but could form the basis of the new community engagement strategy.

3.7.3 Engagement platform

The Council currently uses an online engagement platform to ensure that consultation of planning policy documents reach a wide audience. The use of online tools for Local Plan engagement is encouraged by Government, and it is understood that a review of how best to utilise these tools is currently underway by the Planning Policy team, including consideration of whether to replace the current engagement platform for one with increased functionality.

²⁹ GOV.UK. 2025. 'Plan-Making'. November 27. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/plan-making>. Paragraph: 071 Reference ID: 61-071-20190315

³⁰ https://www.maldon.gov.uk/info/7050/planning_policy/9727/maldon_district_statement_of_community_involvement

4. Review of existing policies, evidence base and documents

4.1 Local Plan review

The Maldon District Local Development Plan 2014-2029 was approved by the Secretary of State on 21 July 2017. In 2021, the Council started a review of the Maldon District Local Development Plan 2014-2029. Several key milestones were reached in the review, alongside the introduction of major changes at a national level:

- In early 2022, the Council carried out an Issues and Options Consultation which set out seven high level options for growth in the district.
- In September 2023, the Council agreed to explore further three of these potential growth options.
- In October 2023 the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (LURA) received Royal Assent. This introduced the new approach to plan making which is based upon a shorter timeframe, more proportional evidence base, and clearer project management steps. However, it required secondary legislation to implement it, which was only published March 2026. In the interim period (2023-2026), Government was clear that LPAs should continue plan making at pace under the legacy system.
- In December 2024, the Government published a new standard methodology for calculating housing need. The housing requirement for Maldon district nearly doubled. This required a fundamental review of the sites which could be allocated in a new local plan for Maldon district.
- In February 2025, the Council published a new Local Development Scheme (LDS) reflecting the need to amend the programme to undertake an additional review of sites. The updated LDS includes a timetable which showed that the Local Development Plan would be submitted for examination in August 2027.
- In June 2025, the Council agreed as part of the Local Development Plan review that two potential growth options be approved to enable modelling and further testing.
- The Government has set a limited transition period for local plans being prepared under the legacy system, with a deadline for submitting the plan for examination by December 2026. Given the work necessary to take forward a sound local plan review with a near doubling of the housing requirement it became evident that the local plan review could not be accelerated to meet the December deadline. This was formally reported to Members at full Council in February 2026 as part of the report on the Council's Five-Year Housing Land Supply.

There is now insufficient time to for this Local Plan review to complete given the December 2026 submission deadline. Given the new Local Plan system is a parallel system created under separate legislation, there is no ability to pivot to an equivalent point in that system, rather the process must be commenced from the beginning.

Since 2021 significant work was undertaken through the Local Plan review, including the preparation of a number of evidence base studies. Thus, as part of the preparation of this PID, consideration was given to which elements could be used or updated to inform the new Local Plan to maximise value for money.

4.2 Existing policies and guidance

A review of existing policies in the Maldon District Local Development Plan was undertaken through engagement with Members and with the Development Management team. The following themes emerged from the review, which were used to inform the scope of the new Local Plan and of the evidence base.

- Updated national policy: due to the passage of time, some of the Local Plan policies have become outdated, either due to the age of the evidence underpinning them or due to changes in national policies.

- Strategic policies: the Maldon District Local Development Plan did not specifically split policies between strategic policies and non-strategic policies. The new Local Plan will need to make a clear distinction between strategic and non-strategic policies.
- Compliance with national policy: the Maldon District Local Development Plan contains policies which repeat requirements contained in national policy or guidance, such as flood risk or climate change. It is not appropriate nor necessary for a Local Plan to repeat national policy. Such policies should be removed from the new Local Plan. The introduction of non-statutory National Development Management Policies (NDMP) through the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) will further reduce the scope of the new Local Plan, with a larger number of policy areas being covered, at least in part, at the national level.
- Split of policy topics: a few policy topics are covered across different policies, which create unnecessary overlaps. The policies in the new Local Plan should seek to be more focused.
- Infrastructure: the policies in the existing Maldon District Local Development Plan are difficult to interpret in relation to the need for infrastructure provision. The new Local Plan should focus and clarify the need for infrastructure provision in relation to the different allocations.
- Gaps: national guidance and policy requirements have evolved since the Maldon District Local Development Plan was adopted and there are policy requirements that are currently not addressed in the plan. For instance, this is the case for requirements on housing delivery on small sites and self-build and custom housebuilding³¹.

The Council have already undertaken a review of policies against the 2021 NPPF. A further review of policies following publication of the new NPPF, likely in Autumn 2026, should be undertaken as part of the scoping of the new Local Plan policies as the new NPPF is likely to supersede a number of development management policies in the Maldon District Local Development Plan.

The scope of the new Local Plan will also need to take into account the existing Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs). Maldon District's SPDs will be revoked upon adoption of the new Local Plan. The content of these SPDs was discussed with the Development Management team to understand which aspects of the SPDs may need to be part of the new Local Plan for Maldon District.³² Any part of an SPD which would be taken forward into the new Local Plan would have to be drafted as policy and would need to be supported by evidence. This discussion suggested that the majority of the SPDs will not be required moving forward due to the passage of time (e.g. major development sites are largely built out, national policy has moved on etc.), however there was an identified need for further design guidance within the new Local Plan. This would need to be underpinned by appropriate design evidence.

4.3 Existing Evidence base

Various evidence base studies have been progressed since 2021 as part of the Local Development Plan review under the 'Legacy system'. Some of these have been completed and some are in the process of being produced. Table 9 sets out a list of existing evidence base studies, if they will require an update and the extent of the update required with a view to being able to repurpose and re-use existing evidence within the new plan making system. Further analysis of additional evidence to be produced is set out in section 5.4.

³¹ GOV.UK. 2025. 'National Planning Policy Framework'. February 7. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>, paragraph 73.a and 73.b

³² GOV.UK. n.d. 'Plan-Making Regulations Explainer'. Accessed 30 April 2026. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/plan-making-regulations-explainer/plan-making-regulations-explainer>. See section on Commencement, saving and transitional arrangements.

Table 9 Local Plan evidence base studies - work to date

Topic	Title	Status	Description	Author	Update required?
Housing and economy evidence	Maldon District Economy Study	Completed (January 2021)	Identifies economic growth opportunities in the district up to 2040. Growth prospects were identified as modest. The proposed Bradwell B nuclear power station was identified as potentially transformative, with the ability to generate substantial construction, supply-chain and operational employment, alongside significant local spending effects. Overall, the study emphasised that economic growth is achievable, but only if it is actively planned, infrastructure-led and carefully managed alongside housing and workforce growth.	Consultants	Partial update required The context within which the report was written means that the economic evaluation of the district may have shifted significantly since 2020, with an update required to take into account current economic circumstances post Covid-19 and more recent economic events.
	Employment Land & Premises Study	Completed (February 2024)	The study established the economic market area, evidence to inform employment growth, future requirements for sites and supply of land to support economic growth. It identifies Maldon District as a small but distinctive local economy Whilst there is enough employment land to meet forecast needs to 2040, the supply is poorly located, constrained or not suitable for full range of business needs. The study concluded that Maldon should prioritise additional and better-located employment land around Maldon-Heybridge, support rural diversification and site modernisation, and plan positively for SME-focused growth.	Consultants	Partial update required This is a relatively recent piece of evidence but would likely need to be reviewed and updated as part of the new Local Plan to take into account the updated national policy context, and employment land position within the context of the updated position on housing and to ensure that it is considered up-to-date at the point of submission.
	Economic Viability Assessment	In progress	This will assess the current viability of housing development sites across the District of Maldon in terms of the provision of affordable housing and viability of introducing a Community Infrastructure Levy.	Consultants	Partial update required. Suggested that this study is updated and wrapped into a wider whole plan viability study.
	Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment	Completed (October 2023)	An assessment of land availability from 2020 – 2040. For housing land the study sites were suitable and available for development with an indicative capacity of 13,480 dwellings. When combined with existing allocations, permissions, windfall assumptions and brownfield sites available, the total potential housing supply identified was 16,051 homes for the period 2022-2042. The study also confirms the supply of employment land - with 94.21 hectares of employment land already allocated in the current Local Plan, the HELAA identified a further 119.22 hectares as suitable.	MDC	Partial update required The update will be required to assess the changes in potential housing supply since 2023, in relation to the new plan period and to take into account any updated evidence (e.g. viability), as well as reflecting changes in national policy and guidance (e.g. updates to the standard method). For employment land see also Employment Land and Premises Study.
	Local Housing Needs Assessment	Completed (September 2025, amended February 2026)	Considers housing need up to 2044. The study identifies an annual housing need of 583 dwellings per year and a net affordable housing need of 284 homes per year, with around 71% of need unable to afford buying or private rent. The assessment concludes that future housing strategy must focus on delivering a	Consultants	Partial update may be required. The evidence is based on the latest standard method for housing needs which was published in December 2024. A partial update will be required to demonstrate it is up to date at the point of submission in

Topic	Title	Status	Description	Author	Update required?
Natural environment evidence			diverse mix of tenures if housing need, affordability pressures and demographic change are to be addressed.		terms of the latest dwelling stock figures and in case of any changes to the Standard Method prior to that.
	Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment Update	Completed (September 2024)	The Maldon District Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment identified a clear and significant shortfall in provision over the period 2022–2043, concluding that 55 additional pitches are required for Gypsy and Traveller households who meet the 2023 Planning Policy for Traveller Sites definition, with the majority of this need arising in the first five years. A further 31 pitches are need for those who do not meet the definition (as well as 9 undetermined) with an overall need of 95 pitches.	Consultants	Partial update required. The PPTS definition changed in 2024, therefore an update is required. This could take the form of an update to the report or a supplemental topic paper setting out the implications of the changes.
	Nature Conservation Study	Completed (February 2023)	Reviewing 102 local wildlife sites to inform the Local Plan, the study found a west–east divide in ecological value and connectivity. It concludes that reversing ongoing declines will require not only site-level protection but landscape-scale action to improve ecological connectivity, enhance habitat creation and embed biodiversity gains through development, land management and coastal realignment initiatives.	Consultants	Partial update required. Given the timing and nature of the study it is unlikely an update will be required if there has not been a significant change in circumstances on wildlife sites. Any mapping and/or boundary changes could be dealt with through a topic paper or addendum.
	Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment	Completed (February 2024)	Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) to inform planning policies and decisions. The most significant risks were identified as coming from fluvial flooding along the rivers and estuaries, and surface water flooding linked to flat topography, high groundwater levels and constrained urban drainage.	Consultants	Partial update to reflect EA mapping changes which occurred after the Level 1 SFRA publication. Will need to be supplemented by Level 2 SFRA
Built environment evidence	Landscape Character Assessment	Completed (September 2006)	A joint Landscape Character Assessment with Braintree, Brentwood, Chelmsford and Uttlesford, this report provides detailed assessments of different character areas in Maldon making recommendations on objectives to conserve and enhance them, as well as suggested landscape planning and land management guidelines.	Consultants	No update required. Will need to be supplemented by site level assessments of landscape sensitivity.
	Rural Facilities Survey and Settlement Pattern	Completed (May 2023)	The Maldon District Rural Facilities Survey and Settlement Pattern (May 2023) identified how rural settlements function in terms of services, facilities and connectivity, and how this varies across the District. Building on this evidence, the study established a five-tier settlement hierarchy—towns, large villages, medium villages, small villages and hamlets/open countryside—using a points-based scoring system that weighted the presence and accessibility of services, employment, education, healthcare and public transport.	In-house	Full update required This study should be replaced and broadened out to a full settlement hierarchy study.

Topic	Title	Status	Description	Author	Update required?
Whole plan assessments	Integrated Assessment (SEA/HRA/HIA/EQIA)	Ongoing	Iterative assessment of the social, environmental, economic, health, equalities and habitats impacts of the Local Plan as it is produced.	Consultants	Full update required. The impacts of the new Local Plan will need to be assessed as it is produced in line with relevant legislation and guidance.
Infrastructure	Highways Modelling	In progress	Modelling of highways impacts	Consultants	Full updated required. Highways modelling will need to take into account and assess the impacts of future site allocations and spatial strategy.
	Indoor and Outdoor Sports Strategy	In progress	Assessment of indoor and outdoor sports provision.	Consultants	Updates required to the document to reflect changes to the leisure contract and the changes to the facilities in the Blackwater Leisure Centre.

5. New Local plan

5.1 Project objectives

The new Maldon District Local Plan will need to respond to:

- The new legislative, policy and guidance framework for plan making (as discussed in sections 2).
- The Corporate Priorities of the Council around supporting communities, growing the economy, investing in the district, protecting the environment and delivering good quality services.
- Wider plans and strategies, including the emerging Strategic Development Strategy (as discussed in section 3).

5.2 Scope

Maldon District Council has a statutory duty to prepare and adopt a Local Plan³³. The new Local Plan will set out an up-to-date policy framework for the area, including a spatial strategy, strategic and site-specific policies that are clear about the amount, type and location of development, and timescales for this to come forward. The Local Plan must include policies which contribute to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change and take into account the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. It must also take account of an assessment of the amount, and type of new homes that is needed, including the amount and type of affordable homes.

The scope of the plan will need to set out a positive vision and spatial strategy, and specific proposals to accommodate development needs, including a spatial strategy and policies for the minimum amount of development to be provided. The vision should be supported by measurable outcomes to monitor progress. Policies will need to be reviewed against the NPPF to ensure they are not inconsistent with or (in substance) repeat national decision-making policies³⁴.

The new Local Plan will need to:

- Provide a positive long-term vision for the future of Maldon District, focused on place-making, and creating communities.
- Set out a spatial strategy that supports strategic and sustainable patterns of development. This will identify where future economic and housing growth will go and how this can be accommodated in a strategic and sustainable way that puts businesses and homes in the right locations.
- Review and update site allocations within the context of an updated spatial strategy to demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply and provide a housing trajectory for the plan period which meets local housing needs.
- Plan for economic growth to support the local economy, including tourism, providing high quality jobs.
- Set out how key infrastructure will be delivered, including social infrastructure, transport, and green infrastructure. It will set out contributions or provisions expected from development towards affordable housing and infrastructure necessary to support development and the delivery of the plan.
- Include policies which help to manage future growth in a way that responds to the unique identity and built and natural environment of Maldon District, creating places that people want to live and providing for key infrastructure to support communities.

³³ Under both the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and amendments made by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023

³⁴ As set out in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023

5.3 Plan period

National policy states that strategic policies ‘should’ look ahead over a minimum of 15 years ahead, from adoption (NPPF, 2024, paragraph 22). The new draft NPPF also states that a Local Plan ‘should’ set out the strategy and policies for a period of no less than 15 years from the point of adoption.

The 15-year period was also confirmed through a recent update to national guidance which states that, in relation to housing requirements “The plan must last a minimum of 15 years from the date of adoption, even if the start year is before the adoption year.”³⁵ However, government sought views during the 2025 NPPF consultation on whether a 10-year plan period would be more appropriate under the new plan-making system. Further details on whether this proposal will be taken forward should be provided upon publication of the revised NPPF.

Based on the proposed programme in Section 6, if there is an anticipated adoption of the Local Plan in May 2029, the Local Plan would need to cover the period 2029 until 2045, as a minimum. Given the clear steer in national policy and guidance, any deviation from the suggested minimum would need to be robustly justified.

To date, no policy or guidance has been published covering the start date for a Local Plan under the new plan making system. Under the legacy system, LPAs had discretion and took a variety of approaches, including the starting date of evidence base collation, the date of the latest update to Local Housing Need and the date of adoption. This will thus be a matter for the Council to determine, reflecting local factors such as housing requirements and delivery. The key point to note is that irrespective of the start date for the plan period, the end date for the period should be 15 years post adoption. Therefore, if a start date of 2026 was chosen, the plan period would be 2026 – 2045 based on the proposed programme for the new Maldon District Local Plan.

5.4 Project deliverables

Under the new regulations and guidance, there are a number of deliverables for the Local Plan project at each stage as set out in section 2. The ultimate deliverables for the project for submission to the Secretary of State and for examination will be³⁶:

- The proposed Local Plan (the draft NPPF also requires plans to be published in a searchable digital format).
- A map of proposed Local Plan policies.
- A document which sets out the details of the evidence which the local planning authority has gathered.
- A Gateway 3 completion statement, along with a statement of compliance and soundness.
- A statement setting out a summary of the consultation and engagement activities carried out and a summary of consultation on the proposed Local Plan.
- Relevant environmental reports and other evidence to support the soundness of the plan.

5.5 Engagement and consultation

Under the new plan making system, a community engagement strategy is required which should clearly be set out in the Project Initiation Document, including the purpose, target audience and objective of the strategy. This engagement strategy should be drafted during the ‘Scoping and early participation’ stage of the process, prior to Gateway 1. It should be informed by the scoping consultation.

The community engagement strategy should clearly outline its purpose, target audience and objectives. Government guidance recommends the use of mixed methods of engagement to gather a broad range of

³⁵ [Publishing your local plan housing requirement - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/publishing-your-local-plan-housing-requirement)

³⁶ As set out in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026, regulation 34.

insights. Further guidance has been published on engagement as part of the Create or Update a Local Plan (CULP)³⁷. The Council is working with a specialised consultancy to ensure youth engagement with the Local Plan. This will be combined with the use of an online engagement platform which will ensure Local Plan consultations reach a wider audience.

The community engagement strategy will underpin future engagement and consultation on the Local Plan. The three main consultation stages are:

- Scoping consultation (Regulation 20): inviting views on what the plan should contain and how stakeholders should be engaged. A summary of the consultation will need to be prepared and published (under Regulation 22).
- Consultation on proposed Local Plan content (Regulation 23), with a summary of the consultation responses prepared and published (under Regulation 24).
- Consultation on the proposed Local Plan (Regulation 27) with a summary of the consultation prepared and published (under Regulation 30).

5.6 New Evidence base

The production of evidence in a timely manner will be essential to support the creation of policies and meet the 30-month timetable. The Government has emphasised the importance of proportionate evidence in the new system, this is also reflected in the draft NPPF, however at this stage it is unclear what this means in practice. Alongside the production of formal evidence, the Create or Update a Local Plan guidance recommends carrying out baseline evidence before passing through Gateway 1³⁸. Additional guidance has also now been produced on the site identification and assessment process.

The list of existing evidence and updates required to that are set out in section 4.3. Table 10 sets out additional new evidence to be produced based on discussions with stakeholders as well as a review of evidence base requirements. Some elements of optional additional evidence have been identified for the Council to consider depending on the policy approaches they would like to take. The full list of evidence to be created or updated is considered to represent a proportionate and pragmatic approach to covering of main topics required for a sound Local Plan.

For each of the evidence base studies, a recommended resourcing option has been identified. This recommendation seeks to achieve a balance between:

- Value for money / efficiency in terms of work already carried out to date on evidence base studies.
- Ensuring the Planning Policy team members have a varied balance of Local Plan and business-as-usual work. This is considered important to encourage recruitment and retention of team members, since Local Plan production is usually considered to be the most interesting type of policy work.
- Capitalising on the Team's local knowledge in terms of geography, characteristics, data, issues and politics, as well as stakeholder relationships, much of which is generated through business-as-usual activities. Then, identifying those studies where local knowledge is likely to add greatest value or offer greatest efficiencies in production.
- Identifying when technical skills or access to specialist datasets will mean that external consultants are likely to be required to carry out work.
- Recognising the capacity limits of a relatively small team to carry out a significant volume of work in time limited period.

³⁷ [Engaging the public when preparing a local plan - GOV.UK](#)

³⁸ [Gathering baselining information to inform a local plan - GOV.UK](#)

Table 10 Evidence base – existing studies and additional requirements

Title	Description	Author	Requirement
Existing evidence			
Maldon District Economy Study	Identifies economic growth opportunities in the district up to 2040.	Consultants	Partial update required
Employment Land & Premises Study	Evidence to inform employment growth, future requirements for sites and supply of land to support economic growth.	Consultants	Partial update required
Economic Viability Assessment	Assesses the viability of housing development sites. (To be incorporated in the Whole Plan Viability Assessment).	Consultants	Partial update required.
Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment	Assessment of housing and employment land.	MDC	Partial update required
Local Housing Needs Assessment	Considers housing need up to 2044.	Consultants	Partial update required
Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment Update	Identifies Gypsy and Traveller needs over the Local Plan period.	Consultants	Partial update required
Nature Conservation Study	Review of local wildlife sites.	Consultants	Partial update required
Landscape Character Assessment	Provides a detailed assessments of different landscape character areas within Maldon.	Consultants	No update required.
Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment	Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA).	Consultants	Partial update required
Rural Facilities Survey and Settlement Pattern	Existing review of rural facilities and settlement pattern to be replaced by a full Settlement Hierarchy Study.	In-house	Update required
Integrated Assessment (SEA/HRA/HIA/EQIA)	Assessment of the social, environmental, economic, health, equalities and habitats impacts of the Local Plan as it produced.	Consultants	Full update required
Transport and Highways Modelling	Modelling of highways impacts.	Consultants	Full update required
Indoor and Outdoor Sports Strategy	Assessment of indoor and outdoor sports provision.	Consultants	Partial update required
New and additional evidence			
Heritage Impact Assessment	Evidence to support site allocations and other strategic heritage policies where appropriate.	In-house	Required
Gypsy and Traveller Pitch Delivery Assessment	Evidence to support the delivery of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation.	Consultants	Required
Water Cycle Study	To help identify water infrastructure capacity and water and flood management infrastructure required to support growth.	Consultants	Required
Infrastructure Delivery Plan	To identify the infrastructure baseline in the area, planned provision and infrastructure required to support future growth. This will include blue and green infrastructure.	Consultants	Required
Whole Plan Viability Assessment	To assess development viability within the area and implications of proposed policies. This will incorporate the updated economic viability assessment work.	Consultants	Required
Retail Study	To assess retail needs.	Consultants	Required
Renewable Energy Study	To assess areas for delivering local carbon and renewable energy.	Consultants	Required
Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment	Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment.	Consultants	Required
Character and Design	Focused on reviewing character of existing settlements and providing wider design evidence to inform policies, this could also include evidence on density.	Consultants	Required
Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment	Focused on wider review of landscape value to help inform policies for specific sites.	Consultants	Required
Climate Change Resilience and Adaptation	Evidence to support climate resilience and sustainable design principles.	Consultants	Optional

6. Local Plan Project Management

6.1 Approach to project management

This section explains the proposed and recommended project management approach for the Local Plan. It explains the potential resourcing options which were considered for the project, the preferred option as well as a programme, resourcing schedule and budget for the recommended option. The underlying assumptions for these are detailed in each relevant sub-section. The final sub-section details the governance arrangements which are necessary to ensure that the Local Plan can be produced within the new 30-month timetable.

6.2 Resourcing

6.2.1 Existing Planning Policy team resources

As detailed in section 3.5, the Planning Policy team currently has an agreed structure providing 6.0 FTE. However, presently the team has a combined capacity of 3.4 FTE. The two vacant posts are currently being advertised.

Based on conversation with officers and on a full assessment of all the tasks undertaken by the Planning Policy Team, it is estimated that 2 FTE are currently dedicated to business-as-usual tasks, leaving the equivalent of 1.4 FTE for the preparation of the Local Plan.

Based on best practice and experience elsewhere, it is judged that the current team capacity (3.4 FTE) is not sufficient to undertake a 30-month Local Plan project as well as business-as-usual tasks for the Planning Policy team. Furthermore, even if the team's capacity was expanded to provide 6 FTE, this would not be sufficient to cover the full resource needs.

6.2.2 Wider Council resourcing

The production of the Local Plan will draw in other teams across the Council that will need to provide support at specific stages of the Local Plan making process. The production of the Local Plan will generate work for / require inputs from a wide range of teams / officers, including Communication, GIS, Development Manage, Customer Service, Committee Services, Legal, Economic Development, Tourism, Heritage, Urban Design and Finance.

Engagement was undertaken with selected council teams, who will or could be directly involved in plan making to understand the resources available to support the Planning Policy team:

- Maldon District Council Communications team: the Council has a small Communications and Engagement team with limited capacity to offer support beyond Business as Usual. The team will be able to approve and publish the communications content created by the Planning Policy team but will not be able to offer wider resources to generate communications content, or support engagement and consultations, i.e. the production of consultation material, including digital content, facilitation / attendance at engagement or consultation events or analysis / responses to stakeholder and public responses.
- Maldon District Council GIS officer: the GIS officer has indicated that they would be able to offer limited resources for the Local Plan process, within the remit of geospatial analysis and data.
- Maldon District Council Development Management team: the Development Management team would have limited capacity to support Local Plan workstreams.

All these teams highlighted that LGR is likely to further reduce any resource which they could dedicate to the Local Plan. However, the full extent of the work required from each team to conduct LGR is still unknown.

Although all these teams will provide critical support, they will not fill the resource gap in the Planning Policy team to produce the Local Plan.

6.2.3 Resourcing options

As set out in section 6.2.1, the Planning Policy team does not currently have the capacity to undertake a Local Plan within 30 months. The following sub-sections present the resourcing options which were considered to deliver the Local Plan. The assessment of the different options is based on engagement with the Planning Policy team, wider teams within the Council and neighbouring authorities, as well as best practice and financial implications of the resourcing options.

6.2.3.1 Resourcing option 1: do nothing

The first option considered was ‘do nothing’. This was considered from two perspectives:

- Maldon District Council does not prepare a new Local Plan.
- Maldon District Council begins preparation of a new Local Plan but does not secure additional resources for the Planning Policy team.

The Council has a statutory duty to produce a Local Plan as set out in Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (PCPA) 2004, as amended by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (LURA) 2023. Central Government has made it clear through guidance that Local Plan should be progressed despite LGR. This is the case, even where the Council will not be able to progress the Local Plan all the way to adoption before the new unitary authority is operational. Transitional regulations will be published in due course to address the complexities arising from Local Government Reorganisation.

As set out in section 2, to comply with the Local Planning Regulations (2026) Maldon Council must publish their Regulation 21 self-assessment summary (Gateway 1) by 30 April 2027, which means the latest date the Council may publish its Notice to Commence plan making is 31 December 2026.

Experience from elsewhere around the Country where unitarization has already occurred has highlighted that there is often a significant gap between the establishment of the new authority and the ability to produce a new Local Plan for the new geography. This is often for multiple reasons but not least that it takes time for the new authority to establish new teams and processes and consolidate / unify different systems and data sets, for the full range of services previously provided across multiple authorities and two tiers of local government. As a result, the new unitary authority is likely to rely on the previous individual district level Local Plans for some time until a new Local Plan can be produced for the whole geography. Experience elsewhere also suggests that if a district level Local Plan has completed the majority of the plan making process, the new unitary authority will likely take this forward to adoption.

The production of a new Local Plan therefore offers the best opportunity to create a legacy plan to guide future development in Maldon District until a Mid Essex Local Plan is produced and adopted. If not, decisions for the Maldon District will continue to be based on the existing Maldon District Local Development Plan for a significant period of time. This will have multiple consequences, including, for example, continued engagement of the presumption in favour of sustainable development (otherwise known as the ‘tilted balance’) for decision making since the development plan policies will be considered out of date; and an inability to coordinate infrastructure investment to accompany growth since all applications will be considered on an individual basis and the cumulative impacts will not be fully considered.

If the Council decides to commence a new Local Plan but does not secure additional resources; this could have a number of potential consequences. This could include negative impact on staff well-being and retention; reduced ability of the team to deliver business-as-usual activities and slow plan making. The latter brings the risk that when Mid Essex Council assumes plan making responsibility, they will abandon the new Local Plan as it will not be sufficiently progressed to warrant taking it forward to adoption rather than focusing on producing a new Local Plan for the whole Mid Essex geography.

As set out in section 2, the new plan making system includes a number of Gateway checks. The first of which includes a demonstration that the appropriate project plan has been produced for the Local Plan, including sufficient resources. If this cannot be demonstrated, the Council risks being asked to repeat this plan making stage, putting the 30-month programme at risk.

Ultimately, if the Council decides to do nothing, or the production of the new Local Plan is too slow, the Council faces the risk of intervention by MHCLG. Under the PCPA (2004), as amended by the LURA (2023), the Secretary of State (SoS) may intervene in plan making by directing the LPA, or assuming plan-

making responsibilities themselves. The SoS may invoke these powers if it judges that the statutory test (i.e. that the authority is failing to do anything necessary related to plan-making, or its plan being considered unsatisfactory) or the policy test (plan progress vs. local development needs) are met.

This option was discounted for multiple reasons, including failing to meet Central Government directive to continue plan making at pace; prescribed dates for commencing plan making under the new plan making system; potential threat of Local Plan intervention; and missed opportunity to create a legacy plan for Maldon District to guide future development and secure appropriate infrastructure investment until a new Local Plan can be produced for Mid Essex.

6.2.3.2 Resourcing option 2: re-deployment of internal resources

This option to resource the Local Plan considered diverting resources from other teams across the Council for the duration of the project. The creation of a Local Plan requires planning expertise and knowledge which can only be found within the Planning Policy team or the Development Management team. However, most of the business-as-usual tasks currently undertaken by the Planning Policy team are statutory requirements and resources cannot be diverted from these workstreams. Similarly, the Development Management team does not have sufficient resources to be able to divert resources towards the new Local Plan while meeting their statutory caseload.

This option was discounted due to the lack of resources which could be diverted.

6.2.3.3 Resourcing option 3: working with a neighbouring authority

This option considered whether there was a possibility to resource some of the Local Plan work in tandem with a neighbouring authority, ranging from joint evidence base to a full joint Local Plan. Due to the context of LGR, it was judged that only joint working with either Brentwood Borough Council or Chelmsford City Council should be considered to future proof the Local Plan.

Following engagement with Brentwood Borough Council and Chelmsford City Council, it was judged that this option was not viable for the following reasons:

- Chelmsford City Council's new Local Plan is at an advanced stage under the legacy system and was submitted for Examination on 5 June 2026. The misalignment of the stage of plan making make the option of joint Local Plan working non-viable.
- Brentwood Borough Council has started a review of their Local Plan; however, their current Local Development Scheme is based on the legacy system but would not meet the December 2026 deadline. There is currently no final decision on what route the is going to be followed - either continuing a review under the legacy system or starting under the new Local Plan system.
- Maldon District has already undertaken a wide range of studies, some of which may need updating, but which mostly remain relevant for the new Local Plan. For evidence that needs updating there is likely to be limited scope for joint commissioning given the bespoke and focused nature of this. Whilst there could be scope for work to jointly commission new evidence this is unlikely to work in practical terms given where Brentwood and Chelmsford currently are and in terms of the programme.
- Essex County Council are currently in the early stages of thinking about evidence to support the new Greater Essex Spatial Development Strategy however at this stage there is no confirmed programme for the evidence to support it and the new Maldon District Local Plan would be ahead of a future SDS meaning opportunities for joint evidence base production as limited at this stage.

This option was discounted due to the misalignment of local plan programmes and existing evidence base for Maldon District.

6.2.3.4 Resourcing option 4: full consultancy support

This option considered whether it would be viable for the Council to tender most of the Local Plan work to a multi-disciplinary single consultancy which could deliver the project from start to end, including evidence base studies and the full Local Plan programme until a full draft Local Plan is produced. This option was not considered appropriate due to the range of existing evidence base studies which have already been completed or are in progress. It was considered that using the same consultants to create updates to existing evidence

base studies and producing some updates in house would be a more financially attractive option compared to handing the work to a single consultancy which would have to familiarise itself with the different methodologies and context for each study. Using the same consultants to update the existing studies is also likely to be more efficient in meeting the 30-month programme. This option also creates the additional costs for paying for full consultancy support for plan production in addition to the existing Planning Policy team.

This option was discounted due to the higher financial cost, existing residual capacity within the team and extent of work already undertaken.

6.2.3.5 Resourcing option 5: partial consultancy support

This option would include consultancy support for some of the Local plan workstreams, to produce some of the evidence base or fill vacancies within the team. Table 5.6 sets out a recommendation for each evidence base study, as to whether they should be produced in house or by consultants. These have been reflected in the accompanying resource plan and costed as part of the budget.

In terms of filling vacancies, it is typically more financially attractive to recruit new planners within the team rather than to rely on external consultancy support for the duration of the local plan programme. However, the 30-month timeframe may require short but intensive periods of work, particularly around the definition of spatial options or the processing of consultation responses, which may create the need for additional support to boost the team's capacity in the short term or to fill vacancies should permanent recruiting not be successful. This option was therefore retained as part of the mitigation measures presented in the risk register, as a means to reduce the risk associated with the tight 30-month timeframe.

The Council may also wish to consider critical friend support at key points, or to help deal with particular technical issues, be it with evidence being produced in house or local plan management or production. If required, it is assumed that these costs would be met through the contingency element of the new Local Plan budget.

This option forms part of the recommended way forward for the new Local Plan

6.2.3.6 Resourcing option 6: recruitment

This option would involve the recruitment of new planners within the Planning Policy team to increase capacity and enable the delivery of the new Local Plan.

Additional recruitment, could be focussed on hiring general policy planners to support plan making in the round, or specialist policy planners to oversee production of particular technical specialities or to take on business-as-usual activities, currently the preserve of the existing team to free up their time for Local Plan work, for example a S106 Officer who would take ownership of the S106 and CIL workstreams. Recruitment at junior grades would help address the current gap in junior resources in the team, and free up some of the principal planners' time to focus on delivery of the Local Plan.

Recruiting to bolster the existing team would allow for the delivery of the Local Plan to remain mostly in-house, ensure continuity with the work already undertaken, and ensure that the Local Plan is work is undertaken by a team embedded within the Council and who fully understand the context of Maldon District.

Recruitment would need to be conducted quickly to ensure that resources are able to start as soon as possible. However, it is not considered that the time required for new resources to be recruited would be significantly longer than any of the other options considered for boosting resources.

Overall, this option is considered a potential option for the delivery of the Local Plan.

6.2.3.7 Recommendation

Following exploration of the above a hybrid option is recommended primarily focussing on additional recruitment to the existing Planning Policy team and partial consultancy support for specialist evidence base studies, to provide targeted additional support for plan making and to help fill any resource gaps, where recruitment is not possible or warranted.

Overall, the recommended option is a combination of additional recruitment and partial consultancy support.

6.3 Proposed resource plan

A resourcing schedule and programme have been prepared on the basis that the Planning Policy team will undertake all Local Plan work but will rely on consultancy support to undertake most of the evidence base studies. This will enable the tight programme to be met and allow for specialist technical input into the Local Plan. However, the preparation of the evidence base studies by consultants will still require involvement from officers who will need to prepare briefs, appoint consultants, manage contracts, feed into and review consultant work. The team may draw on further targeted consultancy support to provide critical friend input, however, the need for this will only become apparent during the production of the Local Plan, with its costs met through the contingency allowance for the Local Plan.

The proposed resource plan is based on the assumption that the current vacancies in the Planning Policy team will be filled, and the team structure will be further expanded to cover the full workload that will be created by the Local Plan project. In addition, a further dedicated officer will be hired to deal with Section 106 agreements and the development / administration of a Community Infrastructure Levy. This latter role is considered essential to ensure senior members of the Planning Policy team have sufficient capacity to manage and deliver a new Local Plan.

The proposed revised Planning Policy team structure, taking into account the contracted hours of existing staff, would provide an overall capacity of 7.4 FTE, as follows:

- 1 x Planning Policy Manager (1 FTE)
- 2 x Principal Policy Planners, (1.8 FTE)
- 2 x Senior Policy Planners, (2 FTE)
- 1 x Policy Planner, (1 FTE)
- 1 x Section 106 Officer, (1 FTE)
- 1 x Project Support Officer, (0.6 FTE).

This structure includes two new roles compared to the existing agreed team structure – a Senior Policy Planner and a Section 106 Officer.

The resource plan was derived to enable the team to meet the new Local Plan 30-month programme. The use of MS Project allowed for the different Local Plan tasks to be mapped in terms of duration, work required, interdependency with other tasks and workload of each team member. Interactions between different Local Plan workstreams and the parallel impact studies (i.e. viability assessments, HRA and IIA) and consultation events have been built in to the programme.

In addition to the above team structure, the resource plan built in the following considerations:

- Requirement to deliver business-as-usual tasks, which were mapped and officer time allocated to each of them. This includes all the items identified in sections 3.5 and **Error! Reference source not found..**
- Allowances were made for holidays, governance processes and team management.
- Time for Local Plan project and programme management.
- Each officer has been allocated evidence base workstreams based on skills and seniority. This includes direct delivery and oversight of consultant led evidence base studies. Officers will be responsible for managing consultants and ensure the integration of the evidence base with the rest of the Local Plan work. Time has been built in for procurement and contract management associated with the delivery of evidence base studies.
- All officers will be working jointly on the development of spatial options, writing of the Local Plan policies and consultations.
- All officers will be working on several workstreams at once and will have to balance competing demand on their time. The Local Plan workload will be uneven across the programme and where resource

constraints were identified, business-as-usual tasks were de-prioritised and scheduled to ensure that the Local Plan work was given priority.

- The programme and task allocation within the resourcing plan were derived to ensure a manageable workload on a week-by-week basis for the team.
- Officers are generally resourced at 100%, or less, throughout the programme to build in the contingency required due to the length of the Local Plan programme and to take into account the risks presented section 6.6. For instance, transport and highways modelling is likely to create additional work for the team due to the uncertainty around the ownership of the transport modelling following LGR. For any officer, only a few weeks within the overall programme contain a workload over 100%, representing the need to meet a specific statutory deadline at some key points in the programme. This has been capped at a modest level of 110% during a few ‘sprint weeks’, equivalent to an extra half hour per day and is balanced out by periods where officers are at less than 100%.
- Time was factored for quality assurance processes within the team, ensuring that sufficient time and resource was allocated to review documents and address comments.

6.4 Programme

The main milestones of the proposed Local Plan programme are presented in Table 11. These are aligned with the programme requirements as set out in The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 (see Section 2.2.4), which prescribe the time periods between key milestones, for example, the duration between commencement notification and Gateway 1, and the duration of the Examination period.

Table 11 Local Plan programme milestones

Milestone	Time period
To be delivered by Maldon District Council	
Getting ready to start	July – September 2026
Preparatory evidence gathering and scoping	September 2026 – January 2027
Notification of the start of the Local Plan process	September 2026
Regulation 20: Scoping consultation	November – December 2026
Gateway 1 (advisory)	February 2027
Plan vision and strategy development	December 2026 – June 2027
Spatial options identified	June 2027
Regulation 23 consultation	August – September 2027
Preferred option development and drafting the plan	September 2027 – March 2028
Preferred option identified	November 2027
Gateway 2 (advisory)	November 2027
To be delivered by Mid Essex Council	
Regulation 27 consultation	May – July 2028
Process consultation and prepare plan for submission	July – September 2028
Gateway 3 (stop/go)	September - October 2028
Submission	October 2028
Examination	November 2028 – April 2029
Adoption	May 2029

To ensure best use of resources and to help meet the 30-month programme, the workstreams which were started as part of the Local Plan review have been mapped as continuing from the start of the programme on 1st July 2026 (Figure 6). Any new workstreams are assumed to start at the earliest on 21st September 2026, based on the assumption that any decision to proceed with the new Local Plan will be made at the September 2026 Full Council.

The programme takes into account the wider context into which the Local Plan will be developed. The new Local Plan system transitional arrangements prescribe that authorities with a Local Plan which is more than 5 years old, such as Maldon, will need to publish their notification of the start of the Local Plan process before 31 December 2026 and through Gateway 1 by 30 April 2027. The programme schedules these milestones for Maldon District respectively for September 2026 and February 2027, creating some contingency and ensuring the Local Plan complies with statutory deadlines.

Gateway 1 marks the official start of the 30-month period for the Local Plan preparation, however, it is a self-assessment and no Local Plan workstreams are contingent on Gateway 1 finishing to be able to start. As such, Gateway 1 has not been scheduled as early as possible to ensure that the statutory deadline for submission of the Local Plan for Examination can be comfortably met. Work will be progressing alongside the Gateway 1 process, and the programme intends for the Local Plan to be submitted 2 months before the statutory deadline.

Based on this programme, Maldon District Council will have produced a full draft Local Plan, passed through Gateway 2 and prepared for the Regulation 27 council by the time Mid Essex vesting day arrives. The latter task will need to be undertaken in close consultation with the shadow authority to ensure smooth transition and that the 30-month programme stays on track. The programme currently contains seven weeks of contingency, which provides a degree of flex to account for the uncertainty surrounding the LGR process and its potential impact on the Local Plan programme. This is in line with latest government guidance which requires Local Plans to be progressed, even where the Local Plan will not be progressed to adoption before the new authority is operational.³⁹

Regulation 27 consultation will not begin until the end of May 2028 to account for the impact of LGR and the pre-election period prior to the Greater Essex mayoral elections. The final steps of running the Regulation 27 consultation on the final draft plan, the submission, examination and adoption of the plan will be under the responsibility of the new Mid Essex authority. Based on experiences from authorities that have already transitioned into unitary authorities in recent years, it is assumed likely that the new unitary will continue the preparation of the Local Plan and will adopt it as the Local Plan document for the Maldon District geography, until such time that new Local Plan for the whole Mid Essex Geography can be prepared and adopted.

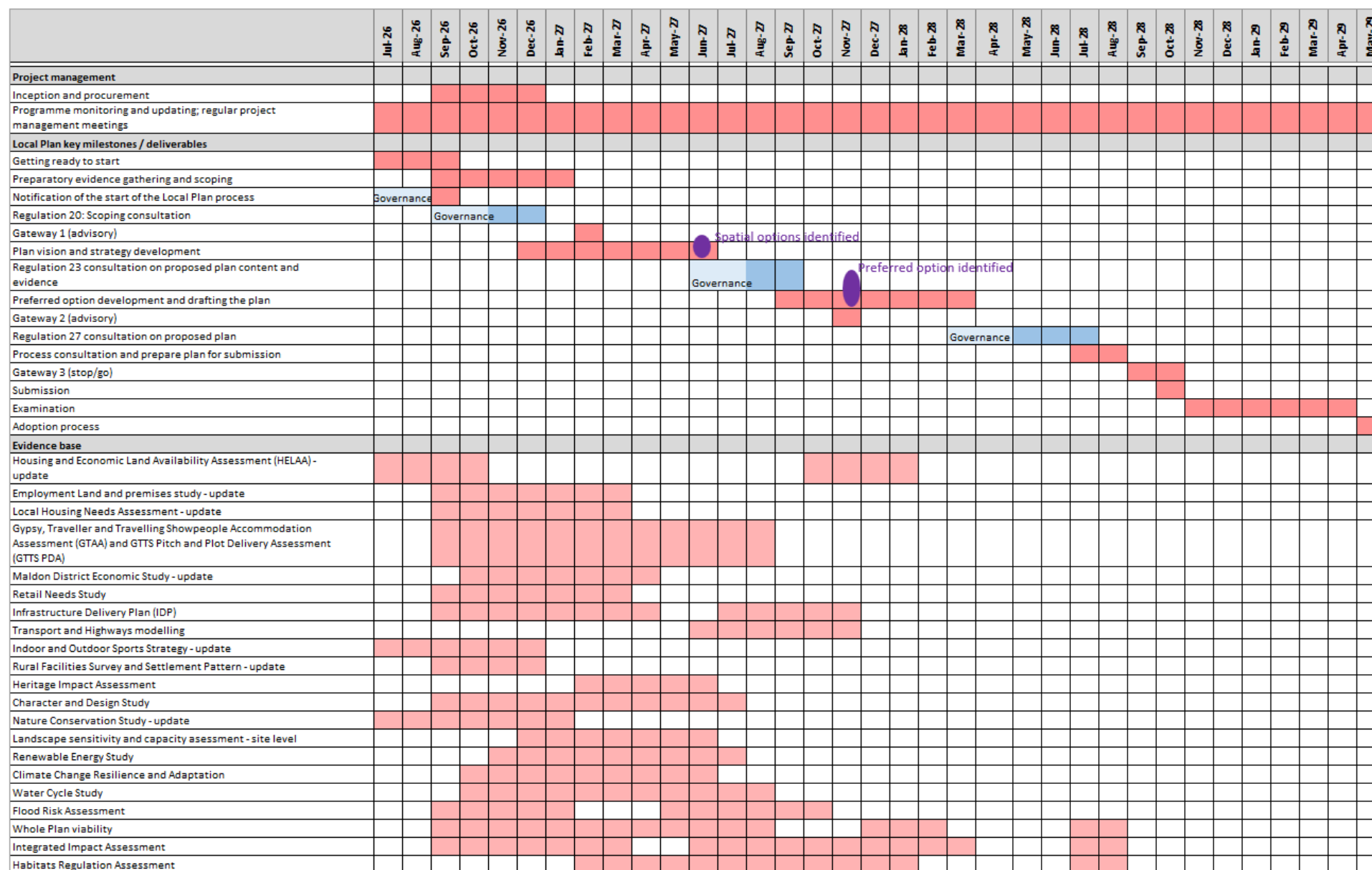
The programme is based on the following assumptions:

- The team will be composed of 7.4 FTE equivalent, with the structure presented in section 6.3.
- Preparatory work on new evidence base briefs starts on 1st July 2026.
- A decision to proceed with the preparation of the Local Plan and decision to issue a notification of the start of the Local Plan process will be taken jointly at full Council in September 2026.
- Each evidence base study report is issued as draft by consultants, reviewed once by officers and a final report issued following implementation of the comments. The same approach has been assumed for internal reports and evidence base, with one round of review from the Planning Policy Manager.
- There are three main decision-making points that will go through full governance: Regulation 20 scoping consultation, Regulation 23 consultation, and Regulation 27 consultation (which will be conducted by the new unitary authority).

³⁹ Plan-making and local government reorganisation guidance, July 2026, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/plan-making-and-local-government-reorganisation>

- Full governance for the Local Plan includes Senior Leadership Team meeting, an all-Member briefing, and Full Council. This full governance process is assumed to take 10 weeks.
- Two engagement periods with Councillors: the first one on the Local Plan vision and outcomes and the second one on the preferred option following the Regulation 23 consultation on proposed plan content and evidence base.

Figure 6 New local plan programme overview



- Updates to the monthly Planning Policy Working Group will report on the work in progress on the Local Plan at the time and are not linked to specific activities within the programme as the PPWG is not a decision-making body (see section 6.7 on governance).
- Local Plan tasks are prioritised over business-as-usual tasks that do not have a statutory deadline.
- Extraordinary Full Council sessions will be scheduled to suit the Local Plan programme.
- A consistent timeframe of five weeks for tendering the procurement of evidence base studies, not including brief writing and appointment processes.
- The Local Plan is accepted for Examination at Gateway 3 at the first attempt.
- There will be early discussions around governance arrangements with the shadow authority for the new Mid Essex Council, with legal advice sought to put in place appropriate flexibility for Submission within the Regulation 27 Full Council report. It is also assumed nearly action will be taken to secure any additional decisions needed to submit the plan for Examination following Regulation 27 within the new Mid Essex Council.
- The approval of the local plan for consultation will be one of the last decisions of Maldon District Council prior to the formation of the Mid Essex unitary authority.
- Transitional arrangements will be made in advance to ensure that officers can launch the Regulation 27 consultation once the new unitary is formed.
- The Examination has been scheduled to last six months as prescribed by the 30-month timetable. The examination timetable will be driven by the Planning Inspectorate, and it is not possible at this time to predict the timings of hearing sessions. A Main Modifications consultation or six-month stop period during the Examination to allow for further work to be undertaken have not been factored into the programme as it is unknown at this stage whether they will be necessary.

6.5 Budget and costs

The existing Planning Policy team budget covers staff time and any associated costs for business-as-usual tasks. The majority of the additional costs associated with the production of a new Local Plan will be related to the use of consultants for the evidence base/specialist advice. Other costs to be taken into consideration relate primarily to consultation processes (e.g. specialist software, printing, hiring of premises for consultation events, Comms support) and for the formal examination process (e.g. employing a programme officer, planning inspector fees, legal support, venue hire, specialist advice).

A full profile of the anticipated costs for Local Plan production for the period 2026/27 to 2029/30 has been developed. In developing the indicative costs, the following assumptions have been made:

- Zero based budget, as per the direction of the S151 Officer, i.e. it does not cover staff costs or business-as-usual activities covered by the existing planning policy budget.
- No allowance made for business-as-usual activities and associated costs, e.g. permanent staff salaries, existing service level agreements, costs accrued through meeting regulatory duties such as neighbourhood planning etc. This will be met through the existing planning policy budget.
- The budget covers the Local Plan preparation only. The additional staff identified within the resourcing plan will also need to be funded.
- A contingency of 10% built into the budget, reflecting of the risks associated with the projects, which are particularly high given the large number of uncertainties regarding the on the new plan making framework and National Development Management Policies. This will also cover anticipated additional costs including the need to update evidence base studies following the release of new data, or the need to undertake further work that only becomes apparent as Local Plan production progresses.

It should be noted that the costs are necessarily broad brush given the unknowns around, for example:

- Full extent of plan making reform. Depending on when, or if changes, are brought forward, this may result in additional work either revisiting tasks or undertaking new ones, and equally the introduction of NDMP may lead to some reduction in workload.
- Exact scope of evidence base studies.
- Number of sites that will need to be assessed.
- Scale of engagement required with stakeholders around key issues (e.g. highways) or cross border strategic issues.
- Future transport modelling capabilities.
- Number of responses that will be received and require processing for each consultation event.
- Need for legal advice during plan production depending on what issues arise.
- Length of the Examination, and therefore the associated costs of the Inspector(s), Programme Officer, venue etc.

Where possible data has been benchmarked using published sources (e.g. Government's contract finder, PINS published day rates) and / or experience elsewhere, commissioning and delivering evidence base studies and local plans.

On the basis of the outlined assumptions, and assumed resource profile, the total cost of a new Local Plan is estimated as £1.5m, including 10% contingency and excluding permanent staff costs (Table 12).

Table 12 Estimated Local Plan Costs

Item	Costs per financial year, £000s			
	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30
Local Plan	£545	£607	£142	£62
Contingency	£54	£61	£14	£6
Total	£600	£668	£156	£68

Note: may not sum due to rounding

6.6 Risks and mitigations

Local Plans are long projects which involve a wide range of stakeholders. This creates a range of risks which may affect the quality, cost or programme of the Local Plan. This report is accompanied by a risk register for the Local Plan project. The risk register currently contains 23 unmitigated risks, their unmitigated risk score and the recommended associated mitigation measures and mitigated score if the mitigations are put in place. The main risks identified are:

- The 30-month timetable is not met due to lengthy governance processes or decisions not being made in a timely fashion. The statutory 30-month timetable only allocates 23 months for LPAs to produce their local plan, including the need to engage stakeholders and communities through two statutory consultations within those 23 months. This creates significant time pressure to deliver the Local Plan and a need for efficient governance processes. An additional risk will be ensuring sufficient governance and decision-making once the new Mid Essex Unitary Authority is in place to ensure the Local Plan can continue to be progressed through to submission.
- Revisions to policy and guidance during preparation of the Local Plan bring significant changes and create additional work on the Local Plan. For example, a requirement to refresh evidence base studies or redraft policies. Competing demands for the planning policy resources, including Local Government Reorganisation, Spatial Development Strategy or other workstreams, which could divert resources away from the Local Plan and create potential programme slippage.
- The need for all LPAs in England to update their Local Plan could lead to difficulties in recruiting new policy planners and to secure the right type of consultancy input due to competing demand from other LPAs.

- It is not possible to forecast the number of consultation responses which are likely to be received as part of the three statutory consultations. Should the number of consultation responses be high, this would require a longer period to process responses, creating potential for programme slippage.
- Transport modelling is currently owned by Essex County Council, an entity which will cease to exist in May 2028, while plan making will still be in progress. The lack of clarity over the ownership of the transport model creates uncertainty for the plan, programme and budget.

The risk register presents mitigation measures to reduce the probability and impact of those risks. The risk register is intended to be a live document which will require updating throughout the lifecycle of the project.

6.7 Governance

Governance of plan making should be clear from the start of the project to ensure there is clarity about who will take key decisions, when and how. The existing governance arrangements are set out in section 3.5.

The new Local Plan system and constrained timetable mean that there is limited scope for flexibility in Local Plan programmes and that business-as-usual governance cannot remain the same if the 30-month timetable is to be met and for the draft plan to reach an advanced draft stage prior to Local Government Reorganisation.

It will be important to strike the right balance between providing sufficient Member and senior officer engagement and oversight, whilst also ensuring governance processes can enable the Local Plan to progress at pace to meet the timetable.

Under the constitution there is currently no delegation of plan making decisions to committees nor delegation of plan making decisions to the Director of Place, Planning & Growth. The current approach to governance involves the following steps:



Currently Local Plan matters that will require a decision as well as updates on the Local Plan and associated evidence go to the Planning Policy Working Group (a Member advisory group), before going to Strategy and Resources Committee (who do not make formal decisions on the Local Plan) then going to Full Council. The internal process before going to Full Council also involves briefings with the Senior Leadership Team and All Member briefings as appropriate which need to be factored in.

The timescales and officer resources required to meet the current arrangements will need to be streamlined to meet a 30-month timetable under the new system due to the lead in times and sequencing. In order to help achieve the 30-month programme as set out above, it is recommended that:

- Formal decision making will be the sole preserve of the Full Council and will be focused on three main points in the process – approving the early scoping consultation (Regulation 20), the consultation on an early draft (Regulation 23) and consultation on a final draft plan (Regulation 27), with the decision on the final draft plan to also include the decision to submit the Local Plan (assuming there are major no changes) or providing flexibility for delegation to do this under the new Unitary Authority should this be required.
- Formal decision making will go straight to Full Council and will no longer go via the Strategy and Resources Committee. Prior to Full Council, Member briefings can be undertaken via the PPWG and ad-hoc All Member briefings, as well as meetings with the Senior Leadership Team as required.

- Regular briefings on progress, (including programme, budget and consultations) will be provided to PPWG via the normal cycle of meetings. Workshops with Members have been assumed in the development of the Local Plan vision and plan content given the importance of these stages.
- Given the tight timescales for evidence base production with over 20 pieces of evidence being updated or produced in the first 12 months of the programme there will need to be a streamlined approach for briefing Members on this via the PPWG. There will not be time for significant delays in producing evidence once the 30-month timetable has commenced. Members can be updated on and note evidence as it is produced – but there will not be time for individual pieces of evidence to be approved.
- The PPWG provides a valuable role in briefing and engaging Members of different political parties and advising the production of the Local Plan. It will continue to play an important role in shaping the Local Plan and helping with wider member engagement to reduce governance risks at key decision points. The PPWG currently takes a significant amount of officer time each month. Given the 30-month timeframe and pace required, it is recommended that current arrangements for the PPWG are reviewed, splitting out where information is being provided for the PPWG to note, and where more collaborative discussions are needed on key strategic issues in advance of key governance milestones. This can be supported by clear, timed agendas and a forward plan of items which identify what is being brought to the PPWG and for what purpose. This can be supplemented by a regular reporting framework with a one-page summary provided each month of progress on the Local Plan which can be reviewed at each meeting.

It will be important that the right governance arrangements are put in place to support expedient decision-making on the Local Plan process as early as possible.

7. Next steps

This Project Initiation Document presents a recommended approach for the production of a new Local Plan for Maldon District Council. The following steps are required to be made as soon as possible to ensure that Local Plan preparation is underway and the programme can be met.

A **decision** should be reached on whether to proceed with a new Local Plan based on the considerations presented in this report. Should the Council decide to proceed with the production of a Local Plan, the following **actions** should be taken as priorities:

- Recruitment of 2 x senior planners, 1 x policy planners and a S106 officer;
- Start procuring key evidence base as identified in the programme;
- Agree the Local Plan budget;
- Update and finalise governance arrangements to support the new Local Plan process
- Complete the Planning Advisory Service Project Initiation Document template⁴⁰.
- Publish a Local Plan timetable (see section 7.2);
- Publish a notice of intention to commence Local Plan preparation (see section 7.3); and
- Prepare material for Regulation 20 scoping consultation.

7.1 Key Early Tasks

Further detail to support the key early tasks of producing a Local Plan timetable, publishing a notice to commence and producing a PID are set out below.

7.1.1 Publishing a Local Plan timetable

The new Local Plan timetable should include:

- the matters the plan will deal with
- the geographical area that the plan will cover
- any supplementary plans that will be prepared (including the subject matter, geographical area and sites they relate to)
- dates for the following milestones:
 - Notice of intention to commence
 - Regulation 20 scoping consultation
 - Gateway 1
 - Regulation 23 consultation on proposed plan content and evidence
 - Gateway 2
 - Regulation 2 consultation on the proposed plan
 - Gateway 3
 - Submission
 - Adoption

The plan timetable should also be completed using the template for the approved data standard⁴¹. The timetable should be published no later than the day on which the ‘notice to commence’ is published. A

⁴⁰ [Local Plan Project Initiation Document \(PID\) Template and Guidance | Local Government Association](#)

⁴¹ [Plan and plan timetable template - GOV.UK](#)

further statement is required to bring the timetable into effect. This should appear alongside the timetable on the LPA's website. Once the timetable is published, the LPA must comply with it and update it as prescribed by legislation.

7.1.2 Publish a 'notice to commence'

Summary of the recommendation contained in the programme on the official commencement of the Local Plan production.

The Council will need to publish a notice of intention to commence local preparation⁴². The notice will need to include:

- the name of the local planning authority who have prepared the notice,
- the geographical area to which the Local Plan is to relate,
- the title, if any, by which the local planning authority will refer to the Local Plan,
- details of where the local planning authority's Local Plan timetable is published, and
- the date on which the notice is made available.

The notice needs to be 'made available' in accordance with section 88 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026.

7.1.3 Producing and updating a PID

A Project Initiation Document should be prepared by the Council using the Planning Advisory Service Template⁴³, drawing on the detail in this document as required. The Project Initiation Document is a live document which should be kept up to date. It is recommended that each update should be accompanied by a version log to ensure clarity over the publication date and context of each update.

⁴² Regulation 19 of the 'The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2026/186/regulation/19/made>.

⁴³ [Local Plan Project Initiation Document \(PID\) Template and Guidance | Local Government Association](#)