

East of England Plan > 2031: Scenarios for Housing & Economic Growth, Consultation Document, East of England Regional Assembly, September 2009

ESSEX LOCAL AUTHORITIES' JOINT RESPONSE

Preamble

1. Local authorities in Greater Essex welcome the opportunity to comment upon the EERA consultation document.
2. The response set out below represents the combined views of Essex County Council, Southend-on-Sea Borough Council, Thurrock Council, and the twelve District Councils in Essex.
3. The twelve Districts are Basildon District Council, Braintree District Council, Brentwood Borough Council, Castle Point Borough Council, Chelmsford Borough Council, Colchester Borough Council, Epping Forest District Council, Harlow Council, Maldon District Council, Rochford District Council, Tendring District Council, and Uttlesford District Council.
4. Although the individual local authorities above will be submitting their own consultation responses to EERA setting out their views by the closing date of the 24 November 2009, they have also collectively agreed that a combined response should also be submitted. This covers several matters upon which there is a unanimous view between all local authorities in Greater Essex.
5. This combined response is set out below.

Combined Response to the RSS Review

6. There is continuing concern about the economic and social impact of the current housing shortage on communities in Greater Essex including access to a decent home, at a house price or rent that local people can afford, and for first time buyers, key workers, and people in housing need. Government and their agencies, and regional partners, must fully support local authorities in addressing this issue.
7. In particular, there is major disappointment about the continued failure of national and regional government to provide the necessary infrastructure and funding to support new housing and employment growth in Greater Essex proposed by the current approved East of England Plan up to 2021 (let alone the RSS review). The delivery of the housing and job targets in the existing Plan is proving extremely challenging.
8. The impact of the severe UK economic recession suggests that it is going to be delivery factors based around the capacity of the housing market and the construction industry, future job creation, and infrastructure provision which will have a major influence on the future housing trajectory for new homes in the region up to 2021 and beyond.

9. For the whole of Greater Essex as a geographic area, the constituent local authorities express a clear preference that scenario 1 is the maximum scale of growth that should be considered in the RSS review. Whilst there may be a preference for scenario 1, even this level of growth is unlikely to be achieved given the capacity of infrastructure, the state of the local economy and the impact on the environment.
10. The higher scales of new housing growth proposed for Greater Essex overall in scenarios 2, 3 and 4 of the EERA Consultation Document are considered to be unrealistic, unsustainable, and not capable of delivery. This is evident in the lack of a robust and credible evidence base to support these scenarios. They cannot be supported.
11. Within this overall position for Greater Essex (paragraphs 9 and 10 refer), individual local authorities will express their own preference for the long-term scale of growth which they consider appropriate for their respective administrative areas.
12. Finally, there is some significant concern that the EERA Consultation Document and its related public consultation process have not been 'fit for purpose'. This relates to the way in which the growth scenarios are presented, the lack of technical information provided, and the inadequacy of the evidence base in justifying major growth proposals at particular locations.