

November 2020

Report of	Assistant Director of Place and Client	Author	Alistair Day
Title	The Roman Circus Management Plan		☎ 28479
Wards affected	New Town and Christchurch Wards		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Roman Circus Management Plan provides the vision and overarching strategy for the management of Colchester's Roman Circus – a nationally significant heritage asset which has the potential to become an important cultural attraction. The plan defines the roles and responsibilities of the Council and key stakeholders involved in this work and sets out a framework for the conservation, enhancement, interpretation, presentation and celebration of the Colchester Roman Circus for the next five years. It is proposed to adopt the plan as supplementary planning guidance and as a part of this process it is important to seek the views of the public on the plan and aspirations for the Circus.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 To agree to undertake public consultation on the Roman Circus Management Plan with the intention to adopt the brief as planning guidance, but with the option to change the status of the brief to a supplementary planning document following the public consultation exercise.

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 It is intended to adopt the Roman Circus Management as a supplementary planning guidance. The process of preparing a management plan involves seeking the views of a number of agencies and individuals. The weight afforded to planning guidance as a material consideration in determining any future planning application will increase if it has been prepared in consultation with the public and has been the subject of a Council resolution.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 The alternative option is not to consult the public on the Roman Circus Management. Should this option be pursued, this would weaken the weight afforded to the Management Plan as a planning guidance and thereby potentially reduce the ability of the Council to shape the protection of the monument and its setting from the pressures of damage and commercial interest.

5. Background Information

- 5.1 The Colchester Roman Circus is a unique archaeological monument in Britain. Chariot racing was the oldest and most popular sport in the Roman world and the Colchester Circus is the only example in the country and it is one of only six locations in the northwest provinces of the Roman Empire where circuses have been securely identified.
- 5.2 The buried archaeological remains of a Roman Circus or chariot racing track were identified during archaeological investigations in advance of the redevelopment of the former Colchester Garrison in 2004/5, although the remains were first encountered in 2000.
- 5.3 The Circus is located c.450m to the south of Colchester town centre (defined by the town wall). The Circus is orientated E to W and lies between the garden of the former Officers Quarters, north of Le Cateau Road and the grounds of Flagstaff House on Napier Road (now Nero Court, Arena Place). The overall size of the Circus c.450m in length (E to W), which is within the average size range (normally 350-500m long) for Circuses across the Roman Empire. The Circus is however unusually narrow at c.71-74m in width (N to S). The Circus had an estimated seating capacity of c.8,000; this compares to a possible population of c.5,000-10,000 for the town as a whole at its peak in the mid 2nd to mid 3rd centuries AD. The building, i.e. the above-ground structure, is poorly preserved and there are no upstanding original walls or earthworks (which is the reason why the Circus was previously unknown). All that survives of its walls are foundations and these were extensively robbed out in the medieval period; in many places, robber trenches mark the position of the wall foundations. Floors and other horizontal layers and surfaces are rare.
- 5.3 The purpose of the Management Plan is to set out an overarching strategy for the management of the Roman Circus and to define the roles and responsibilities of the Council and stakeholders. The Plan sets out a framework for the conservation, enhancement, interpretation, presentation and celebration of the Colchester Roman Circus for the next five years. The Plan is intended to be a dynamic document and the actions may be adapted in response to changes in management context over the life of the plan. It is proposed that each year an action plan is developed that outlines the actions that are to be delivered over the forthcoming year by the relevant partners.
- 5.4 The proposal to consult with public on the Roman Circus Management Plan will allow residents to engage in how the management of this important asset is undertaken and will strengthen the weight afforded to it as a supplementary planning document.

6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

- 6.1 None directly arising from this report

7. Strategic Plan References

- 7.1 The Roman Circus Management accords with the theme “celebrating our heritage and culture” as defined in the Strategic Plan

8. Consultation

- 8.1 This report seeks authorisation to consult the public and other interested groups on the draft Roman Circus Management Plan.

9. Publicity Considerations

- 9.1 The purpose of this report is to seek agreement to consult the public and other interested parties on the draft Roman Circus Management Plan which should be seen as a positive strategy.

10. Financial implications

- 10.1 There will be potential costs associated with undertaking a public consultation exercise.
- 10.2 Appeals against refusal can expose the Council to significant expense and costs where the planning authority is seen to have acted unreasonably. The provision of the Roman Circus Management Plan will increase developer certainty and will become a material consideration in the determination of development proposals, thereby reducing risk of an appeal.

11. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications

- 11.1 None identified.

12. Health and Safety Implications

- 12.1 None directly arising from this report.

13. Risk Management Implications

- 13.1 The provision of a Roman Circus Management Plan will serve to inform planning decisions and based on policies within the Local Plan will help reduce the risk of inappropriate development being permitted.

14. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

- 14.1 None directly arising from this report.

Appendices

Draft Roman Circus Management Plan