

3 April 2023

Report of	Simon Cairns / Sandra Scott, Place and Client Services	☎ 01206 508650 / 282975
Title	Colchester City Centre Masterplan - Supplementary Planning Document	
Wards affected	Castle, New Town & Christchurch	

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Colchester City Council, together with Essex County Council, jointly commissioned consultants to prepare a City Centre Masterplan accompanied by a City Centre Transport Plan. We Made That were appointed and have prepared a draft City Centre Masterplan, attached to this Report as Appendix A. Transport consultants, Steer, have prepared the accompanying City Centre Transport Plan, attached as Appendix B.
- 1.2 The City Centre Masterplan has been informed by consultation and engagement but has now reached the stage where it is proposed to undertake wider public consultation with a view to it being adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to support delivery and add further guidance to key policies within the Colchester Local Plan.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Committee approve publishing the draft City Centre Masterplan SPD for public consultation in accordance with the Planning Regulations and Statement of Community Involvement.

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 The Council can prepare SPDs to provide further guidance to Local Plan policies. In this instance the adoption of the Masterplan as an SPD will provide a clear and comprehensive approach to development opportunities within the City Centre. It will provide guidance to supplement relevant policies in the Local Plan and assist applicants and the Council in making decisions in accordance with local transport priorities as well as Local Plan requirements.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 The alternative option is to not produce a City Centre Masterplan SPD and rely on Local Plan policies. There is also the option to adopt the masterplan as guidance, however, an SPD provides the greatest weight in decision making.

5. Background Information

- 5.1 Supplementary planning documents (SPDs) build upon and provide more detailed advice or guidance on policies in an adopted local plan. As they do not form part of the

development plan, they cannot introduce new planning policies. They are a material consideration in decision-making and should not add unnecessarily to the financial burdens on development.

- 5.2 The Council have worked in collaboration with Essex County Council to progress the masterplanning work for Colchester City Centre. The pivotal role and influence of the highway network within the City Centre and the need and opportunities for enhancement are fundamental to the joint approach ventured for the preparation of the Draft City Centre Masterplan SPD.
- 5.3 In early 2022 a consortium of consultants, under the lead of 'We Made That' were appointed jointly by the Council's to prepare a City Centre Masterplan (CCMP). The consortium included a comprehensive range of key skills including urban design, heritage, socio-economic and transport. Steer were appointed to provide input and expertise on the transport matters to provide a fully integrated City Centre Transport Plan (CCTP) to inform the wider master planning. This holistic approach is critical to success given the challenges and nature of the City Centre.
- 5.4 The focus /scope of the masterplan is on the core city centre area - the primary and secondary shopping areas as defined in the Local Plan, as well as the main city centre development allocations and gateways to the surrounding neighbourhoods. However, the continued economic and cultural vibrancy of the city centre lies in reconnecting it to the surrounding neighbourhoods and improving the walking and cycling experience of routes to the mainline rail station, the Roman Circus and the Hythe and University campus in particular. The masterplan therefore includes recommendations for wider area improvements with regard to connectivity into and through the city centre and public realm.
- 5.5 Design frameworks have been prepared for the main city centre development allocations and gateways, which have been referred to as key sites. A summary of the masterplan is set out below.
- 5.6 The Executive Summary sets out that interventions are proposed at three different levels:
- the wider city centre in context
 - an urban design strategy for the core
 - urban design frameworks for 6 key sites.

Interventions are proposed to deliver the five key guiding strategic objectives. These are:

- i) An active response to the Climate Emergency;
- ii) Providing a safe, healthy and accessible city centre;
- iii) Diversifying uses to promote footfall;
- iv) Support the city centre economy for the benefit of all;
- v) Making the most of Colchester's rich cultural heritage.

- 5.7 The context is provided by Chapter 1: Setting the Scene identifies the opportunities and challenges for the city centre, sets out the scope of the masterplan and confirms the fully integrated approach with the associated CCTP. The CCTP identifies a range of transport and public realm interventions along key corridors and gateways with strategic matters to facilitate delivery. The CCTP recommendations are fully integrated with the CCMP. The Delivery Note provides a strategy for CCC/ECC and identifies the governance structures, actions and processes required to successfully implement the plan recommendations.

- 5.8 The strategic context of the CCMP/TP is set out relating the plan to adopted policies and regeneration initiatives. The masterplanning process is explained together with a baseline appraisal undertaken to establish the wider context and summary headlines for key themes (transport, heritage and socio-economic). The wider engagement undertaken is set out with a summary of the highlights of responses received.
- 5.9 The strategic vision for the city centre is explained in Chapter 2: Strategic Vision with a graphic summary of the interventions responding to the five strategic objectives. The masterplan is structured by these key strategic objectives (set out at para. 5.6 above) which the urban design strategies then provide a series of related interventions to deliver. Each of these strategic objectives is addressed through a dedicated 'layer' in the CCMP which sets out how each objective can be delivered through active interventions that are illustrated graphically in a summary plan diagram. The approach adopted in the CCMP provides a clear and concise series of related individual remedies directly linked to the strategic objectives that underpin the plan and provides a logical explanation / justification for each. The annotated mapping provides a visual summary and overview of the proposals and overview of how they may work together.
- 5.10 The urban design strategies are then focused on six key areas of the City Centre where their principles are applied to site specific urban design frameworks (briefs). These principally relate to redevelopment sites together with the High Street (whose importance justifies a dedicated strategy) and each includes proposals for public realm improvements/redevelopment briefs. The six frameworks are:
- 1) High Street:** comprising a *"low-traffic, people focused street, where space for walking, cycling and outdoor seating is maximised while ensuring necessary public transport, deliveries and blue badge access is maintained."* The key point is that complete pedestrianisation is not being proposed.
- 2) Southway and St John's Street/Osborne Street.** The proposed strategy seeks to reconnect *"communities to the south with the city centre through frequent, at-grade crossings for pedestrians and cyclists. Creating a more attractive public realm that can catalyse the development of sites on either side and turn Southway from a 'back' to a 'front' while keeping the traffic flowing."*
- 3) Former Bus Station Site:** The strategy proposes *"public space and mixed-use development including space for creative and digital industries alongside housing. New public realm for events and casual use, including next to the Roman Wall."*
- 4) Britannia Yard:** The strategy seeks to deliver *"A significant new public space that can be used for events, markets and casual use, designed to highlight the extraordinary heritage of St Botolph's Priory. New urban housing of various types, fully integrated with the existing neighborhood south of Priory Street."*
- 5) Vineyard Gate:** the framework seeks to deliver *"a public open space next to the Roman Wall, an attractive walking and cycling route through to Queen Street and fine grain, tight-knit new homes and business spaces as infill in and around existing buildings."*
- 6) St Botolph's Junction:** The framework seeks to deliver *reclaimed "space for people, interchange between different transport modes, and to mend the street frontage to the south of the junction through new mixed-use development."* ECC has developed detailed proposals for the redesign of the junction based on the principles of the framework and

CCTP. Consultation on these detailed proposals will be undertaken concurrently with the proposed public engagement on the CCMP/TP as this will enable each to be considered in context by stakeholders.

- 5.11 Each framework provides a detailed contextual analysis and design framework to inform and shape future development proposals. These include helpful exemplars of successful precedents drawn from a wide area to demonstrate the look and feel of the design solutions proposed.
- 5.12 Next Steps: The CCMP concludes with a summary of delivery recommendations (Chapter 04) which include a summary masterplan delivery outline for CCC/ECC to take forward the plan's proposals. (Para.5.14 below also refers).
- 5.13 Steer has prepared this City Centre Transport Plan (CCTP) on behalf of the Councils. This key document has been used to frame and inform the holistic masterplan for the city centre. It is attached in full as Appendix B to this report. The overall aim of the CCTP is to recommend a range of transport interventions that can be packaged together to take forward as part of Colchester's City Centre Masterplan. The CCTP recommendations have been integrated into the Masterplan. The key conclusions set out in full in the CCTP (Appendix B) which have informed the masterplan work are summarised below;
- The CCTP shortlists a range of transport and urban realm interventions (across various modes and disciplines) that could be integrated into the Colchester masterplan.
 - The CCTP identifies six corridors and three City Gateways which are considered important to inform Colchester's masterplan from a transport perspective. It identifies the following as the most beneficial to bring forward as the first phase of masterplanning and the modelling exercise;
 - **St Botolph's Circus** - It is recommended in the CCTP to consider St Botolph's as the key City Gateway for further testing for the following reasons:
 - Many stakeholders raised existing accessibility and safety issues.
 - It plays a key role in supporting the success of interventions at the adjacent Colchester Town station, Britannia development site, and St Botolph's Priory site.
 - The extensive work that is already ongoing in this area as well as the funding CBC has bid for.
 - The site's role as a gateway to the shopping core due to its location at the end of Osborne Street and St Botolph's Street, as well as its connection towards the south of the City centre and onwards to the University & Knowledge Gateway.
 - **Red Lion Yard / Stanwell Street**- It is recommended in the CCTP considering the Red Lion Yard / Stanwell Street Corridor as a North-South corridor in priority for the following reasons:
 - Red Lion Walk already forms a robust pedestrian core for this corridor.
 - The existing Vineyard Gate elevator supports accessibility across the City Centre's topography.
 - More importantly, this corridor would link the shopping core to several destinations:

- East Stockwell Street and the Dutch Quarter residential area to the north, the Vineyard Street Development site, an improved bus interchange at Osborne Street, and across Southway (A134) to the Roman Circus SAM, as well as existing residential areas and the Garrison Regeneration Area to the south.
- **Balkerne Gate – Culver Street-** It is recommended in the CCTP to consider the Balkerne Gate / Culver Street Corridor as the east-west corridor for further testing for the following reasons:
 - Culver Street West and Culver Street East already form a robust pedestrian core for this corridor.
 - Improving the pedestrian experience along Church Street and the eastern end of Culver East would not dramatically impact traffic.
 - More importantly, this corridor would link several destinations which are currently poorly connected to the shopping core and each other:
 - the FirstSite community centre, the Natural History Museum, the Jumbo Water Tower and Mercury Theatre, as well as Balkerne Gate and the proposed City Wall walk, the St Mary's Car Park and the residential area further west.
- The CCTP also highlights next steps including indicating where further studies and consideration of issues are necessary including the impacts on the wider network of behaviour change, a Bus Improvement Plan, detailed design of St Botolph's city gateway, Southway corridor strategic study, and adoption of detailed design guidance MfS, MFs 2 and LTN 1/20 (in relation to cycle facilities).

5.14 A separate delivery outline has been prepared by consultants (prd) for Colchester City Council and Essex County Council. This has been developed to highlight opportunities for partnerships, financing and delivery structures, as well as the actions / process required to implement the initiatives contained in the masterplan. The full Colchester Masterplan Delivery Outline is attached as Appendix C.

Engagement

5.15 As part of the process of drafting the masterplan there has been significant public and stakeholder engagement. This is explained in more detail in the draft masterplan on pages 24-27. The early engagement includes a range of activities involving, Council Members from both the City and County Councils, Strategic stakeholders, local businesses and the BID, youth groups and general public events. The key points raised as part of this engagement are:

- Heritage should be a source of pride for Colchester and enhance the experience of visiting the city centre;
- Colchester does not yet have the infrastructure to support a complete transition to public transport and active travel (parking options are still required);
- Business would like to see increased spend / revenue in the city centre;
- Loss of large stores from the city centre (such as M&S and Debenhams) presents opportunities for more local independent businesses and community facilities;
- Retention of young people – offer them a good experience when they are here as students to encourage them to stay;
- Accessibility and inclusivity should be an overarching and holistic goal of the masterplan;

- Need for an improved pedestrianised experience and separation from cyclists / e-scooter.
- 5.16 The next steps will include wider consultation as required by the Town and Country Planning regulations and in accordance with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement. This will include statutory and non- statutory consultees and those individuals included on the Local Plan database. In addition, those who have engaged in the early formulation of the masterplan will also be notified of the consultation. All information will be available on the Council's website with information regarding how and when to respond. Notifications will be sent out and the documents will also be available in paper copy in the Colchester main Library to maximise engagement opportunities.
- 5.17 It is intended that the consultation will commence in May to coincide with the consultation by Essex County Council on the St Botolph's junction design proposals (see para.5.10 point 6) above). Comments are invited on the Draft City Centre Masterplan as drafted and appended to this report as Appendix A. All representations received will be considered and where appropriate revisions may be made to the masterplan prior to reporting back to Local Plan Committee for Adoption. This is likely to be in the Autumn.
- 5.18 In accordance with the regulations a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) screening has been carried out, which has concluded that SEA is not required.

6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

- 6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been prepared for the Local Plan, and is available to view by clicking on this link:

<https://cbccrmdata.blob.core.windows.net/noteattachment/Equality%20Impact%20Assessment%20June%202017.pdf>

7. Strategic Plan References

- 7.1 The Colchester City Masterplan SPD helps to deliver on all of the Strategic Plan Objectives contributing specifically to;
- Tackling the climate challenge and leading sustainability;
 - Creating safe, healthy and active communities;
 - Delivering homes for people who need them;
 - Growing a fair economy so everyone benefits and
 - Celebrating our heritage and culture.

8. Consultation

- 8.1 It is a requirement of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 to consult on draft SPDs for a minimum of 4 weeks and to prepare a statement setting out who was consulted, a summary of the main issues raised and how those issues have been addressed in the SPD.
- 8.2 The SPD consultation will be publicised through written / email consultations with statutory consultees, general consultees on our database, other relevant stakeholders, individuals and organisations who have expressed a wish to be consulted or have previously made comments as set out in the Statement of Community Involvement.

9. Publicity Considerations

- 9.1 Publication of the Masterplan and Transport Plan is likely to generate mixed publicity for the Council. The City Centre is of interest to many people with different views on the multitude of issues and opportunities presented.

10. Financial implications

- 10.1 There is budget allocated to this work and the costs are shared with Essex County Council.

11. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications

- 11.1 The three climate emergency SPDs will bring multiple benefits including benefits to health and wellbeing. A healthy environment plays a role in improving health and wellbeing.

12. Health and Safety Implications

- 12.1 No direct implications.

13. Risk Management Implications

13.1 No direct implications.

14. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

- 14.1 The Council has declared a Climate Emergency and has committed to being carbon neutral by 2030. The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development as defined in the National Planning Policy Framework. Achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways. These are economic, social and environmental objectives.
- 14.2 This SPD seeks to help deliver Colchester City Council's ambitions in respect of a holistic approach to future opportunities within Colchester's City Centre. It aims to contribute to achieving sustainable development through a range of measures and interventions.

Appendices

Appendix A - Draft Colchester City Centre Masterplan – Supplementary Planning Document (We Made That)

Appendix B – Draft Colchester City Transport Plan – Background to the Masterplan- (Steer)

Appendix C – Colchester Masterplan Delivery Outline – (prd)