



Local Plan Committee

Item
8

30 June 2014

Report of	Head of Commercial Services	Author	Laura Chase ☎ 282473 Vincent Pearce ☎ 282452
Title	Consultation on Draft Northern Gateway Framework		
Wards affected	Mile End and adjoining Highwoods and Fordham and Stour		

This report concerns proposed consultation on the evolving Framework for development in the Northern Gateway area

1. Decision(s) Required

- 1.1 To approve the content of the Northern Gateway Draft Framework Document as the basis for;
- consultation with the community;
 - development of the document for adoption as a material planning consideration in the determination of any future development proposals and to inform the development of a new Local Plan for the Borough.

2. Reasons for Decision(s)

- 2.1 To ensure that development of Council-owned land is informed by sound planning principles and a transparent and effective consultation process.

3. Alternative Options

- 3.1 The Council could pursue development of the area in an ad hoc manner and seek approval for individual proposals through the planning application process, but this would not lead to a co-ordinated approach.

4. Supporting Information

- 4.1 In July 2011 Cabinet requested that masterplan guidance be developed for the Council owned land adjacent to the Community Stadium within land allocated as a Strategic Employment Zone. It was recognised that if the Council is to optimise the financial, social, cultural and economic returns from the land a clear blueprint would be necessary to deliver sustainable, high quality development. Allies and Morrisons were accordingly commissioned to carry out initial work on overall design options.
- 4.2 In September 2012 Cabinet approved the resulting vision developed by Allies and Morrison for the Northern Gateway. At the heart of the agreed Vision were the following key aspirations:-
- A new gateway for Colchester

- A cutting edge destination for sport and leisure
- A distinctive place defined by memorable buildings and spaces
- An exemplary approach to sustainability.

- 4.3 The initially approved vision has been developed further by the Council as landowner working with Allies and Morrison. Additional development is now proposed adjacent to the Strategic Employment Zone which is considered appropriate to ensure the overall sustainability and deliverability of the vision for the Northern Gateway, and consequently, its appropriateness for the overall spatial development of the Borough.
- 4.4 Development in these areas, however, does not fully align with the existing allocations in the adopted Local Plan. The Council as landowner is accordingly proceeding cautiously with development of proposals to ensure that if development proceeds, overall benefits clearly justify variation from adopted policy. The Council needs to demonstrate it is as rigorous in assessing its own proposals as it is in assessing proposals from any other landowner. Early and transparent consultation on the proposals is essential to ensure that the community is involved in making decisions about the future of the area. There is potential for the Myland Neighbourhood Plan currently being progressed by Myland Community Council to encompass Northern Gateway proposals. Additionally, the Framework will inform decisions on options for the wider Borough as the Council moves ahead with preparation of a new Local Plan.
- 4.5 Initial work on the Northern Gateway site focused on the land located within the North Colchester Strategic Employment Zone. The western half of the site (land between the stadium and the link road to A12 Junction 28) is included within the Community Stadium permission (O/COL/01/1622) approved in 2006 for the stadium, a hotel, health and fitness centre, A3 food and drink facilities and B1 business use. The eastern half of the site (including the Easter site) is included within a 2006 permission for employment use in Use Classes B1, B2 and B8.
- 4.6 As the process of developing ideas for the area evolved, two further areas were included into the Framework area:
- Land north of the A12 – This land lies outside the settlement boundary of Colchester and is shown as ‘white land’ on the Proposals Map. This means that it is subject to policies governing land in the open countryside, where development is strictly limited. Within that context development of a service station has occurred and there are permissions for a restaurant and the park and ride facility,
 - The Rugby Club - Colchester Rugby Club are under pressure to expand and early discussions have been held with them about relocating from their existing site (Council owned) in Mill Road to a site north of the A12. Their existing site is allocated as open space on the Proposals Map, and accordingly any proposals to redevelop any part of the site for housing or other uses would need to address Council requirements to demonstrate compliance with policies on maintaining open space or a departure from the Local Plan (similar to that undertaken at Tiptree as part of the Wilkin and Sons factory expansion).

- 4.7 The Allies and Morrison draft Framework document outlines general land use criteria and urban design principles to guide development in the 84 ha of land in the Northern Gateway area. The draft Framework document reflects the following aspirations, policies, and constraints:

Access - A new gateway for Colchester

The site's location next to a recently built junction with the A12 and the forthcoming Park and Ride means that it is highly accessible to a wide area. In particular, the site is well-connected to the Town Centre by the Northern Approaches road and will be served by the Park and Ride service. While good vehicular access to the A12 would be provided, the scheme also provides for safe and convenient crossing points across the Northern Access Road for pedestrians and cyclists. To the south, pedestrian and cycle networks would link into new networks being developed within the former Severalls Hospital development and existing links progressing through Highwoods Country Park, Leisure World, Castle Park and the Town Centre. To the north, a new pedestrian/cycle bridge is proposed over the A12 to provide sustainable access to the countryside.

Activity - Sport and leisure destination

A flexible approach would be taken to allow a range of uses. The existing Community Stadium, with its associated permissions for health and fitness facilities, provided the initial spur to enhance the sports and leisure offer of the area and to support Council objectives to improve health and activity levels of Borough residents. Work with Sport England and interested developers confirmed developer interest in the idea and has meant that the sport and leisure aspects of the proposal have increased as proposals for the area have been developed. The Council has commissioned a Sports Facilities Strategy to measure existing and potential supply and demand for a wide range of sport and recreation facilities.

Design and layout

The Allies and Morrison work takes the existing landscape as the starting point of future development. They propose creation of a generous tree lined central boulevard running east-west, with strong connections to integrate north-south connections to adjacent neighbourhoods. The movement network would be integrated within a swathe of green parkland running through the site. Three principle green areas would be delivered including Tower Lane, a new neighbourhood park, and recreational facilities north of the A12.

Sustainability

The Council as landowner would ensure delivery of the highest standards of sustainable technology and building techniques, including sustainable drainage; renewable energy; sustainable construction; digital connectivity; and extensive green infrastructure.

4.8 Detailed proposals for sites within Northern Gateway

Land adjacent to the Community Stadium

Leisure uses compatible with the stadium use will be developed in the adjacent sites.

A boulevard spine will be created across the site in a west-east direction with the Weston Homes Community Stadium at one end to provide a clear visual structure for the area.

The frontage land on either side of the new boulevard and the cluster of new buildings around the central piazza will form the heart of the new Northern Gateway. The range of proposed activities is intended to create activity throughout the day and evening and to cater for a wide range of sports and leisure activities that will complement the Town Centre offer.

Employment Land

The employment land adjacent to the NAR is proposed to be developed for a flexible range of employment uses. There remains the intention to deliver the employment jobs as originally envisaged in the employment allocation but to add to this with additional jobs in a range of leisure and recreation activities.

Rugby Club land

Redevelopment of part of the Rugby Club site for housing or other uses would enable development of new club pitches at a location north of the A12. The Masterplan recognises that the existing Rugby Club land provides a break in the dominant housing landscape and retains part of the site to form a new urban park. Additionally, the Mill Road frontage would need to retain elements of openness to preserve green links and open space in the area.

Land north of the A12 adjacent to Park and Ride site.

Sports pitches and a limited amount of associated club facilities are proposed for the area outside the Colchester settlement boundary to the north of the A12 adjoining the Park and Ride site. Critical requirements for the countryside site are:

- Minimising built development,
- Preserving the openness of the site and key landscape features,
- Providing green links to adjacent countryside
- Integration with the other sports and leisure facilities in the Northern Gateway

5. Proposals

- 5.1 It is proposed to maximise public scrutiny of proposals to develop the Northern Gateway through early publication and consultation on potential options. The Council has developed a programme of exhibitions, as detailed in the consultation section below, which are designed to provide opportunities for residents, businesses, community groups and other stakeholders to view and comment on the plans. Their feedback will then be used to inform further evolution of the framework.
- 5.2 In overall outlook, the Framework proposals are intended to reflect both sustainable planning objectives and the Council's Strategic Plan. It is important to note, however, that although Colchester Borough Council's planning services' were involved in the process, this document, as produced by the Council's appointed consultant's Allies and Morrison, will not, at this stage, be a statutory planning document. While it will be used to guide the consideration of planning applications, it cannot override the adopted planning policies of the Council, national guidance and any other material matters.
- 5.3 If proposals for the Northern Gateway proceed as planned, a planning application could be submitted before adoption of a new Local Plan, which is currently programmed for 2017. If this was to prove the case, it will be important to show that any variations from current adopted policies have been thoroughly aired and

considered, given that the proposals would be expected to represent a departure from the Development Plan. Equally, development of the new Local Plan will need to address the issues arising from development of the site and evidence of thorough consultation will be required to form part of the evidence base used for submitting Northern Gateway proposals into this process.

6. Strategic Plan References

- 6.1 The Strategic Plan has an overall intention to improve Colchester as a place to live, learn, work and visit and this proposal is seen as perhaps one of the most significant developments that will help to achieve that objective. The Action Plan includes a commitment to regenerating the borough through buildings, employment, leisure and infrastructure. Sustainable development in the North Colchester area can help achieve these objectives.

7. Consultation

- 7.1 Development of the Framework to date has involved discussion with a number of officers within Colchester Borough Council. Local Ward Members as well as Myland Community Council have been briefed regularly on progress of the framework development process.
- 7.2 The Council intends to consult on the Framework document by holding a series of workshops in July as follows (precise dates to be determined):
St. Michael's Hall, Myland – 1 evening and 1 Saturday session
Town centre (library) – 1 afternoon and 1 Saturday session
Great Horkesley Village Hall – 1 evening session
- 7.3 The events will be widely publicised using the following methods-
- Mailings to those on the Council Local Plan stakeholder list
 - Notices on the Council website
 - Press releases
 - Liaison with Myland Community Council and notification in their newsletter.

8. Publicity Considerations

- 8.1 There is likely to be continued interest in developments in the Northern Gateway area resulting in publicity for the Council.
- 8.2 The full contents of the Draft Framework as well as the processes for considering it will be available to the public via the planning consultation pages of the Council's website.

9. Financial implications

- 9.1 Consultation on the Framework will be funded by the Council in its capacity as landowner of the site with the intent that costs will be recouped through eventual development of the site.
- 9.2 Cabinet will be fully advised of the individual financial implications of each proposal as these emerge from the marketing process and subsequent promotional activities before further decisions are made.

10. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

- 10.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been prepared for the Local Plan and is available to view on the Colchester Borough Council website by following this pathway from the homepage: Council and Democracy > Policies, Strategies and Performance > Diversity and Equality > Equality Impact Assessments > Strategic Policy and Regeneration > Development Plan.
- 10.2 This project does not have any direct implications for the Council regarding the Human Rights Act

11. Community Safety Implications

- 11.1 There are no direct implications for Community Safety arising from this decision. However, it is part of the Vision for the Northern Gateway that the facilities that it will offer together with the encouragement of all residents to re-engage with participatory sport, will have a measurable improvement in crime and disorder in the future.

12. Health and Safety Implications

- 12.1 None identified at this stage.

13. Risk Management Implications

- 13.1 The risks associated with delays in progressing planning for the Northern Gateway and Council owned land is that this will lead to delays and confusion within the market as to the seriousness of the Council's intentions to bring forward the site. The inability to act quickly to deliver early wins in respect of a number of sites will result in lost opportunities to maximise key social, capital and revenue returns.
- 13.4 The latest version of the enhanced Masterplan includes elements that are currently outside of current adopted policies and allocations. This includes land north of the A12 and parts of what is currently Mill Road Sports Ground. Over time it may also include the proposed composition of uses. Consultation on these proposals and the overall framework for the area is considered to mitigate this issue as it will allow the Council to incorporate consultation feedback into its Local Plan Review process and would also inform the consideration of any planning applications submitted in advance of the adoption of a new Local Plan.

Northern GATEWAY



artist's impression






A new urban structure

Development within the Gateway will change the character of the land south of the A12

- creation of a generous tree lined boulevard
- areas where buildings dominate
- new buildings, uses, spaces and activity
- new public realm and street
- urban street furniture
- activity into the evening

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 Key Views
 Key Building Facades
 Key Buildings



A Sense of Place

Giving the Northern Gateway a strong identity of its own

- the Council's vision for the area means the Central space (pink) along the line of the boulevard will play a key place-making role. This will be an activity hub with larger scale buildings and formal spaces
- uses will cater for a range of users and activities at different times of the day and into the evening
- it is important that destination attractions are linked by attractive, well used, pedestrian friendly routes. These will draw visitors through the development generating activity and energy
- important to establish coherent townscape character and quality in this location
- focus for public uses and public transport



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Character of streets and spaces

Character of key links should respond to the role and function of streets and spaces

pedestrian / cycle only route based around a less formal boulevard better suited to parkland setting

pedestrian friendly urban plaza with formal planting providing a transition between the parkland boulevard (to the east) and the urban boulevard (to the west)

pedestrian friendly tree-lined boulevard with wide pavement and active frontages

NAR + public transport corridor and Axial Way

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Green network

Movement network complemented by a generous swathe of green parkland running through site

- strong emphasis on creating a sense of space and openness
- a major new urban park for communities to enjoy
- chances for informal leisure and impromptu recreational events
- bringing the countryside into the heart of the area
- new lakeside walk
- massive new planting program and chances for innovative landscaping schemes
- nature areas





Working with the landscape

Existing landscape infrastructure as the starting point of future development

- sensitively incorporating historic hedgerows into developments
- inviting greater use of Tower Lane
- extending green links across north Colchester and into the countryside to the north
- accommodating forms of development that fit well in the landscape north of the A12
- taking the opportunity to create new landscape
- understanding key views
- increasing biodiversity

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Key connections

Identify the principal desire lines as a basis for the movement framework

- provide a new pedestrian-cycle bridge over the A12 to connect communities in north Colchester safely with the countryside and planned leisure facilities north of the A12
- connect neighbourhoods
- connect attractions
- provide safe and easy access between homes, new leisure opportunities, new jobs and shops
- connect North Colchester to the Town Centre via an attractive natural pedestrian cycle network that links to Highwoods Country Park and Castle Park
- connect to the soon to be redeveloped Severalls Hospital site and Northern Growth Area Urban Extension

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Landscape proposals

Additional planting and other works to reinforce landscape structure

- three principal green areas -
 - Tower Lane
 - new neighbourhood park
 - recreational facilities to north of A12
- land contouring to create a lake
- integration of historic hedgerows into new planting schemes
- extensive new tree planting
- meadowland
- new habitat creation

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Masterplan framework

- series of viable development plots
- flexible approach, capable of accommodating different uses
- well structured arrangement of space with long key frontages marked along the boulevard
- connected and usable open spaces with a leisure thread running through entire site
- development of connected leisure dominated areas, employment / commercial areas and residential areas
- strong linear built form running west-east around the boulevard with active ground floor frontages
- a clear development hub within the centre of the site clustered around the meeting point of the boulevard and NAR

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Pedestrian & cycle connections

Making the area easy to enjoy and move around without a car

- strategic north-south routes from Severalls and town centre via Tower Lane
- wide, safe and clearly demarcated boulevard pedestrian crossing point over NAR
- new pedestrian-cycle bridge across A12
- generous footpaths set within attractive spaces
- parkland walk
- 5km off-street cycle loop for leisure and training

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Planning Policies

Current planning policies affecting
Northern Gateway Proposals

National Policies

- National Planning Policy Framework
- presumption in favour of sustainable development.

Local Policies:

Colchester adopted local policies provide more
detail on what that means for the Borough

- Policy SD1: Sustainable Development Locations -
Growth to be located at the most accessible and
sustainable locations.
- Policy SD2: Delivering Facilities and Infrastructure -
Facilities and infrastructure should be provided to
sustainable communities. New facilities and
infrastructure must be designed so that they are
accessible and compatible with the character and
needs of the local community.

- Policy CE1: Centres and Employment Classification
and Hierarchy - The Council will promote employment
generating development through the regeneration
and intensification of previously developed land and
through the allocation of land necessary to support
employment growth at sustainable locations. The
Council will promote and maintain a Centres and
Employment Hierarchy to coordinate the use and
scale of developments with the accessibility and role
of the various mixed use Centres and Employment
Zones in Colchester.
- Policy H1: Housing Delivery - The Council will plan,
monitor and manage delivery of at least 19,000 new
homes in Colchester Borough between 2001 and 2023.
These will be focussed on the urban areas of Colchester.
- Policy UR2: Built Design and Character - The Council
will promote and secure high quality and inclusive
design in all developments to make places better for
both residents and visitors.
- Policy PR1: Open Space - The Council aims to provide a
network of open spaces, sports facilities and recreational
opportunities that meet local community needs and
facilitate active lifestyles by providing leisure spaces
within walking distance of people's home, school and
work. The Council will protect and enhance the existing
network of green links, open spaces and sports facilities,
and secure additional areas where deficiencies are
identified.



Local Development Framework

Core Strategy

Adopted December 2008



Colchester Borough Council

www.colchester.gov.uk