



Local Plan Committee

Item
7

15 January 2024

Report of	Simon Cairns – Joint Head of Planning	☎ 01206 508650
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 supported by a City Centre Transport Plan. 'We Made That' were appointed and prepared a draft City Centre Masterplan informed by community engagement.
- 1.2 This report summaries the comments received following consultation on the draft City Centre Masterplan and includes the amended Masterplan. The Committee is asked to adopt the Masterplan as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Local Plan Committee adopt the City Centre Masterplan as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).
- 2.2 The Committee is also asked to revoke the St Botolphs Quarter Masterplan (2005) and the Better Town Centre SPD (2012) as both will be superseded by the City Centre Masterplan. They also pre-date national and local planning policy.

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 adopt the City Centre Masterplan and rely on Local Plan policies.

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 partnership 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 City Centre Masterplan SPD. The redesign of the St Botolphs Circus roundabout (largely externally funded project) as a key southern gateway to the city centre formed part of the joint consultation and the design solution has evolved in response.
- 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. 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 transport matters to provide a fully integrated City Centre Transport Plan to inform the wider master planning. This holistic approach is critical to success given the challenges and nature of the City Centre. This forms part of the evidence base but is not proposed for adoption.
- 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 choice in transport modes including 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 associated 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 redevelopment sites.

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

- i) Actively respond to the Climate Emergency;
- ii) Providing a safe, healthy, green, active and accessible city centre;
- iii) Diversify city centre users to encourage footfall;
- iv) Support the city centre economy to everyone's benefit;
- v) Making the most of Colchester's rich cultural heritage.

- 5.7 The context is provided by Chapter 1: Setting the Scene, which 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 City Centre Transport Plan. The City Centre Transport Plan identifies a range of transport and public realm interventions along key corridors and gateways with strategic matters to facilitate delivery. The City Centre Transport Plan recommendations are fully integrated with the Masterplan. The Delivery Note provides a strategy for Colchester City Council and Essex County Council and identifies the governance structures, actions and processes required to successfully implement the plan recommendations.
- 5.8 The strategic context of the Masterplan 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 to prepare the Masterplan is set out in detail.
- 5.9 The strategic vision for the city centre is explained in Chapter 2: Vision and Masterplan, 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 paragraph. 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 Masterplan 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 Masterplan 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 how they may work together.
- 5.10 Chapter 3: Design Frameworks, sets out the urban design strategies for six key areas of the City Centre where the 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:** *“A low traffic, people focused street where spaces for walking, cycling and outdoor seating is maximised while ensuring necessary public transport, deliveries and blue badge holder access is maintained”.* The key point is that complete pedestrianisation is not being proposed. (interventions would be subject to further modelling and wider consultation.)
- 2) Southway and St John’s Street/Osborne Street.** The proposed strategy seeks to *“Reconnect communities to the south into 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 “*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 Circus: 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 circus through new mixed-use development.*”

ECC has developed detailed proposals for the redesign of the junction based on the principles of the framework and City Centre Transport Plan.

- 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 The Masterplan concludes with a summary of Delivery Recommendation (Chapter 4) providing immediate, short, medium and long term actions for each of the six key sites.
- 5.13 The final chapter is a Glossary (Chapter 5) which provides a definition of key words and phrases used within the Masterplan.

Engagement and Consultation

- 5.14 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 pages 24-27. The early engagement included 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.
- 5.15 Following approval by Local Plan Committee in April 2023, the Masterplan alongside the St Botolph’s Junction proposals were subject to formal public consultation for a six week period from 19 June to 31 July 2023. This was a ‘digital first’ consultation with a single point of entry, introductory videos and online surveys. Respondents could answer a short survey or leave more detailed comments. Two in person events were held in the City Centre to promote the consultation and provide the opportunity to engage with officers face to face. These were in Culver Square and St Botolph’s Church with approximately 30-40 and 150 attendees respectively. Focus groups were also held with Councillors, Colchester Civic Society, Colchester BID, the Council’s Residents Panel and with students at the Colchester Sixth Form College. The consultation was advertised via the Council’s Social Media, Website and Press Release. Hard copies of the Masterplan and response form were available in the Town Hall and Colchester Library. The consultation was undertaken in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 and the Council’s Statement of Community Involvement.
- 5.16 A total of 106 detailed representations were received from 44 respondents, regarding the Masterplan. These were complex and sometimes contradictory feedback was received. Some common themes were:

- Biodiversity and City Centre: Inadequate coverage and need for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) to be a key driver. Key theme of Provide a safe, healthy, green, active and accessible city centre is expanded to give greater emphasis to biodiversity (see page 40 of draft CCCMP)
 - Parameter Plans: Building Storey heights need to be agreed on case by case basis based on townscape analysis and Heritage Impact Assessments (HIA)
 - Highway interventions provide a suite of potential actions that will need to be explored further via modelling and consultation should detailed proposals be brought forward
 - Misunderstanding / enhanced expectation of nature of document – An SPD is intended to inform the planning process – it is not a costed action plan with milestones for delivery. Change will occur incrementally and facilitated by a mosaic of planning applications for development and public funding streams (including Town Deal and Levelling Up Fund).
- 5.16 The representations have been published on the [Council's Consultation Portal](#). A summary of the representations and officer response to each is provided in Appendix B.
- 5.17 Team Colchester and the Masterplan Steering Group have been kept informed as the Masterplan has been updated to take account of the feedback gained from the consultation. Officers have also regularly met with the Colchester Civic Society and Colchester BID.
- 5.17 Members requested that additional engagement be undertaken to gain further insight and views from specific groups/organisations including hard to reach groups who had not responded to the consultation. Officers have reconsulted the Emergency Services and Colchester 360, unfortunately no response has been received. However, officers have had further feedback from Autism Anglia and an in person session was held with the Alzheimer's Society. A summary of this engagement is provided in Appendix B.
- 5.18 'We Made That' were reappointed to review and update the Masterplan to take into account the feedback received during the consultation and the additional targeted engagement which has been undertaken.
- 5.19 The key changes made to the Masterplan include:
- Updated strategic objectives to consider biodiversity, ecology and nature. This now reads as Provide a safe, healthy, green, active and accessible city centre. Additional changes to enhance biodiversity throughout the Masterplan added. These include developing a connected Roman Wall Park to deliver enhanced environmental and biodiversity benefits and enhancing the river Colne as a biodiversity corridor (page 40).
 - Removal of the proposal to 'animate the River Colne' (and repurposing for promotion of biodiversity as above)
 - Updates to St Botolph's Circus proposal to align with the revised design prepared by Essex County Council, following earlier consultation (page 87)
 - Clarity provided to the proposals for the New Roman Wall Park. (page 40)
 - Clarify the Council will continue to support the retention and promotion of retail uses within the City Centre (page 48)
 - Set out that detailed development proposals must be supported by a Heritage Impact Assessment to consider wider townscape and heritage impacts (page 50)

- Inclusion of a Glossary to provide definitions of key words and terms used within the Masterplan to help wider understanding.
- 5.20 A full schedule of changes which have been made to the Masterplan are set out in Appendix C.
- 5.21 The updated Masterplan is contained within Appendix A.
- 5.22 A screening opinion, carried out under the Environmental Regulations 2004, was undertaken in February 2023, and concluded that the SPD is not likely to have significant environmental effects and consequently confirmed that a Strategic Environmental Assessment (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%20202017.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. A statement is appended to this report.
- 8.2 The consultation was publicised through written/email consultations with statutory consultees, general consultees on our database and 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.
- 8.3 Several press releases were issued, and the consultation was advertised on the Council's social media and website.

9. Publicity Considerations

- 9.1 The Masterplan and City Centre in general have and will continue to generate publicity. Officers consider that adoption of the SPD will help provide certainty as to how the City Centre will develop over the coming years and reduce the risk of negative publicity.

10. Financial implications

- 10.1 There is budget allocated to this project and the costs of developing the City Centre Masterplan are shared with Essex County Council. A number of projects in the Masterplan have already attracted Government funding via the Town Deal and Levelling Up Fund.

11. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications

- 11.1 The Masterplan 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 - Colchester City Centre Masterplan – December 2023 - Supplementary Planning Document (We Made That)

Appendix B – Statement of Representations to Colchester City Centre Masterplan and Further Engagement Activity Note

Appendix C – Schedule of Changes to Colchester City Centre Masterplan