

15 August 2016

Report of	Head of Commercial Services	Author	Simon Cairns 01206 508650
Title	Colchester Northern Gateway Master Plan Review		
Wards affected	Mile End and Highwoods		

**The Local Plan Committee is asked to endorse the urban design principles set out in the review of the Master Plan for the Northern Gateway through adoption as guidance.**

## 1. Decision(s) Required

The Committee is asked to:

- 1.1 Endorse the urban design principles set out in the proposed Master Plan Review for the Northern Gateway through adoption of the Masterplan as guidance.
- 1.2 Agree that this review of the Master Plan should form the urban design framework and should then become a material consideration in the consideration of planning proposals in the Northern Gateway Area.
- 1.3 Note that further amendments to the Master Plan may be required at a later date following the conclusion of the current Local Plan preferred options process, and that following any significant amendment, the Master Plan will be brought back to members for approval.

## 2. Reasons for Decision

- 2.1 The Master Plan was first prepared four years ago and was endorsed by the Local Plan Committee for the purposes of public consultation in June 2014. Since then there has been significant change with road and facility development taking place, and further developments have been submitted as planning applications. The Local Plan has been reviewed and is currently out to consultation until mid-September 2016. As a consequence there is a need to update and review the master Plan in order to ensure it is fit for purpose, conforms to the policy framework and reflects responses received to the public consultation carried out between July and October 2014.
- 2.2 The intention behind the Master Plan is to help coordinate the development of the Colchester Northern Gateway area so that in design terms it creates a strong sense of place and an attractive destination. It was always intended that, wherever practical, new development should follow the urban design principles it sets out. The current review is intended to fulfil this purpose as the remaining land and buildings in the area are developed.

- 2.3 The master plan review is intended to bring the document up to date both in terms of the current development and future proposals and with regard to planning policy. The land use elements of the local plan options are reflected broadly in the master plan and the urban design principles relate to this.

### **3. Alternative Options**

- 3.1 The alternative option is not to review the Master Plan but to retain the existing version and to use it to help guide the consideration of future planning applications. However, this would entail using out of date information and would undermine the usefulness of the master plan as an aid to good planning and development management. The review has enabled a reconsideration of the basic principles in the light of evolving aspirations for the area and a strengthening of the value of the Master Plan as a tool. It has also provided evidence in applications for external funding which the Council regularly submits. The use of a master plan that is not up to date would clearly be limited. It was therefore decided to undertake the current review and to synchronise with the preparation of the Local Plan which itself references the master plan. Not to undertake review would have meant the potential use of out-of-date and less relevant material that could undermine the integrity of the proper planning process.

### **4. Supporting Information**

- 4.1 In June 2014 the Local Plan Committee authorised public consultation on proposals for the development of the land in the Northern Gateway. The draft Framework document was prepared by consultants Allies and Morrison Urban Practitioners who were commissioned to undertake the master planning exercise and design-led workshop sessions with officers, followed by public consultation in 2014. The resulting Framework outlined general land use and urban design principles intended to guide development on the 84 hectares of land in the area adjoining Junction 28 and the Community Football Stadium owned by the Borough Council.
- 4.2 There were nine consultation events between mid-July and mid-September 2014 attracting over 760 people, and responses from 70 questionnaires from people living in the CO4 postcode area. Their comments were presented to the Local Plan Committee at its meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2014. The key issues raised are summarised in Appendix 1 to this report; the review addresses the issues raised wherever practicable.
- 4.3 The first version of the Master Plan was entitled *Cuckoo Farm Northern Gateway Vision* (June 2012). The area of interest was later extended to include the land at Mill Road sports pitches and the land to the north of the A12 which was outside the formal settlement boundary of Colchester. Cabinet approved the following Vision in September 2012:

Cuckoo Farm - Northern Gateway will be an attractive and sustainable destination for sports, leisure and business complementing the wider plans for the growth of new communities at Severalls Hospital and other sites in North Colchester.

These activities will generate a wide range of jobs and be supported by a number of activities including retailing and employment.

Northern Gateway will be an accessible, green location forming a welcoming gateway to Colchester.

The area will have a distinctive character founded on good urban design principles, with an emphasis on creating excellent buildings, streets and spaces defined by high quality architecture.

The area will benefit from a network of walking and cycling routes which create clear and attractive links into surrounding areas.

4.4 This translated into four key ambitions:

- I. A new Gateway for Colchester
- II. A cutting edge Destination for Sport and Leisure
- III. A Distinctive Place defined by Memorable buildings and spaces
- IV. An exemplary approach to Sustainability

4.5 It set out several design 'opportunities' or challenges which remain the focus of the current master plan review:

Elevated junction: major opportunity to enhance the sense of arrival.

Lack of visibility/profile: development could enhance the site's visibility and profile to passing (A12).traffic

Car-dominant form: new infrastructure will play a key role in unlocking potential. Careful design will ensure that pedestrians and cyclists feel welcome.

Integrated land parcels: promote the type of streets and spaces to ease which are conducive to pedestrian and cycle movement

Buildings, spaces and streets: design proposals will establish appropriate relationships between buildings, spaces and streets.

Stadium parking: opportunity to make better use of the car park by encouraging shared parking with new occupiers who experience demand at different times from the stadium.

Integrate the park and ride site: given its location the proposed park and ride site will be integrated into the development

Landscape legacy: Northern Gateway benefits from a distinctive network of mature field hedges and trees which have the potential to shape the future character of the Cuckoo Farm - Northern Gateway.

An attractive place: Through careful management, development will create an attractive and distinctive sense of place which will meet the aspirations of the Council and elevate Cuckoo Farm - Northern Gateway above the traditional out of town model.

4.6 From this, the 2012 Master Plan set out key design principles:

- ❖ Respond to the existing landscape structure
- ❖ Establish a central boulevard which unifies Northern Gateway
- ❖ Use planting to reinforce spaces and connections
- ❖ Promote a sustainable movement strategy
- ❖ Establish flexible and accessible building plots
- ❖ Define a clear framework for key buildings, spaces and views

## 5. Proposals

- 5.1 The Council has been working with Gillespies, an international landscape, planning and urban design consultancy to prepare a public realm strategy for the whole of the northern gateway. The aim is to provide a parkland and informal recreation setting for the formal sports facilities on the northern side of the A12 and for the commercial leisure and employment uses on the southern side. The public realm strategy is in draft form and will take the Master Plan principles further to the creation of attractive public space. Clearly in order to complete this work it is important to have an up-to-date Master Plan, and Gillespies were subsequently appointed to undertake this task in May 2016.
- 5.2 The Brief for Gillespies' was to
1. Update the current Masterplan documents to reflect on site progress over the last three years and to provide a framework for future discussions with developers
  2. To update the Master Plan to reflect the Council's emerging development aspirations
  3. To ensure the emerging public realm strategy is an integral part of the Masterplan vision and suite of supporting documents, for example the central spine boulevard taking into account access routes, important corners, views, crossroad nodes, building forms etc; incorporating historic hedgerows, mature trees and the Tower Lane boundary; building plots and range of appropriate uses
  4. To build upon the existing Master Plan vision by developing some high level design principles for the area including heights, massing, sustainability etc.
  5. To re-examine the broad phasing plan and next steps.
- 5.3 Gillespies have been required to work alongside the Council's appointed transport consultants for the Northern Gateway, JMP, as well as the ecology and arboricultural consultants, leisure consultants and architects as appropriate. They have also engaged in discussion with key developers, including Turnstone, whose full and reserved matters planning applications for a range of leisure-related uses on the plot adjoining the east of the football stadium is currently under consideration. The proposals accord broadly with principles contained in the National Planning Policy Framework, the Local Plan Preferred Options and the ideas expressed in the draft Myland and Braiswick Neighbourhood Plan. The intention is to create a place of regional importance whilst acknowledging local community needs and aspirations.
- 5.4 The Review of the Master Plan therefore takes the original concepts and guiding principles and has tested them against current planning and design circumstances. It takes on board the proposals for the broad land use zones in the Local Plan Preferred Options and consultants have illustrated overall design guidance that would apply across the land use zone character areas. Sustainable energy use, water conservation and construction are key principles.
- 5.5 The draft Master Plan Review is attached at Appendix 2. It has five principal components: (i) The central spine comprising the Leisure Promenade and The Boulevard; (ii) The Circus: a central crossing point of the Boulevard over the Northern Approach Road; (iii) the A12 crossing point and principal access into the gateway; (iv) parkland for informal recreation around the principal sports areas on the northern side; and (v) Strong urban form with frontages creating focal points for views, landmarks and nodes for public art. Each is detailed below.

5.6 (i) The Boulevard:

- The concept has been retained as the creation of a pedestrian and cycle friendly link. It would have two different 'characters' on either side of the NAR roundabout. The Leisure Promenade would extend west along Stadium Way; the eastern route would be called 'The Boulevard' and would lead as a pedestrian and cycling priority area through the employment and mixed use zones to the residential areas along Mill Road.
- The Boulevard will have dominant frontages giving this linear space grandeur identified primarily as the employment sites on either side.
- The Boulevard will open out at key points to receive the north-south pedestrian routes, access from Axial Way or to provide a setting for key buildings.
- Soft landscaping will help define these opened out passive recreation areas and will be supplemented with public art. At some of these points The Boulevard will be 'crossed' by the existing and enhanced hedgerows which run SW/NE across the whole site as a relic of former agricultural use.
- It has been proposed to strengthen the edge of the Turnstone site on the Leisure Promenade using trees to try to achieve the continuity of presence of this important route and urban feature along Stadium Way.

5.7 (ii) The Circus will be created as The Boulevard crosses over the Northern Approach Road, expanding the public realm and creating two plazas on the southern side. It is a dominant node with scope for public art linking in the new, proposed and existing commercial leisure and employment mixed uses.

5.8 (iii) Connectivity over the A12. It is essential to improve pedestrian safety by working with the transport consultants, Essex County Council and Highways England to improve the pavement areas and to achieve safe crossing over the A12 slip roads. Longer term options include a wide underpass beneath the A12 itself, and eventually a new bridge crossing remains the aspiration if funds and circumstances permit.

5.9 (iv) Parkland primarily on the northern side sees the creation of informal routes and will permit connection to existing footpath and bridle ways. Landscaping will include protection and enhancement of the striking oak trees and hedgerows, the integration of public art and incorporation of informal sitting areas.

5.10 (v) Strong Urban Form: The Master Plan sets out the preferred heights, building massing, key landmarks, lighting and views to which building lines and frontages will be required to conform. Character will respect the rural hinterland and be more informal around the sports pitches north of the A12 and become more 'urban' to the south of the A12. Density and plot ratios will increase along the boulevard and around The Circus with a residential cluster fronting the community open space at Mill Road, incorporating local ancillary facilities such as a coffee shop or community meeting space. To the west uses will be more commercial and deliver a high number of jobs and training opportunities.

## 6. Strategic Plan References

- 6.1 The scheme will “Promote Colchester to attract further inward investment and additional businesses, providing greater and more diverse employment and tourist opportunities”
- 6.2 The scheme will “Regenerate our Borough through buildings, employment, leisure and infrastructure” by providing a new high quality destination, together with employment growth.
- 6.3 The proposal contributes to the Council’s aim to “Become commercially focused and even more business-like in order to be free of government grant by 2017” by delivering a substantial new income stream.
- 6.4 The proposed development will support the Council’s objective to “Create the right environment for people to develop and flourish in all aspects of life both business and pleasure” by creating a new sports and leisure hub, within which new businesses can be developed as well as residents using the facilities during their leisure time.
- 6.5 The preferred development is expected to “Promote Colchester’s heritage and wide ranging tourism attractions to enhance our reputation as a destination”
- 6.6 The proposed legal and financial structures will support the Council’s ambition to “Be clear about the major opportunities to work in partnership with public, private and voluntary sectors to achieve more for Colchester than we could on our own.
- 6.7 It is anticipated that the preferred scheme will make a significant contribution to the Council’s wish to “Cultivate Colchester’s green spaces and opportunities for health, wellbeing and the enjoyment of all”

## **7. Consultation**

- 7.1 As outlined in section 4.1 there was extensive consultation on the first draft of the Master Plan. Since that time the Council has shared the emerging draft principles with key sports and community stakeholders as part of the engagement process for the Northern gateway sports project as a whole. No further public consultation is proposed at this stage.

## **8.0 Publicity Considerations**

- 8.1 None directly though the Master Plan is referenced as a requirement in the Local Plan Preferred Options.

## **9. Financial Implications**

- 9.1 None arising directly from the Master Plan though implementing some of the design ideas such as the boulevard may involve the Council in infrastructure expenditure and for which funding applications have been submitted.

## **10. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications**

- 10.1 An Equality Impact Assessment was prepared for the Northern Gateway Sports Project when it was presented to the RIF committee on 16<sup>th</sup> March. This EQIA is also relevant to the master planning work. The link to this is:  
<http://www.colchester.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=20664&p=0>
- 10.2 There are no especial Human Rights implications.

## **11. Community Safety Implications**

- 11.1 The landscape proposals and design of the public realm which are being developed alongside the Master Plan will be subject to community safety scrutiny to ensure there are no intimidating spaces or areas unlit that become vulnerable; the buildings will include safety and surveillance provision.

## **12. Health and Safety Implications**

- 12.1 Development of the Northern Gateway will provide significant opportunity to help address the health and well-being of the existing and new communities. It will provide a range of opportunities for sport, recreational and health outdoor activity. It will also increase opportunities for participation in physical activity and in sport and other leisure pursuits, many free through the creation of parkland setting as set out in the master plan.

## **13. Risk Management Implications**

- 13.1 Using the Master Plan as a mechanism to provide comprehensive approach to the planning of the Northern Gateway will help to produce sustainable development and reduce the risk of inappropriate and unco-ordinated development. The Master Plan also serves to promote the high quality of standard of design and innovation the Council expects in this major growth area.

## **Appendix 1: Principal Issues raised during public consultation on draft Northern Gateway Master Plan July-September 2014**

### **Highways & Traffic**

The extent to which the proposals could add new traffic to local roads in Mile End and to the north in Boxted (Straight Road and Langham Road and connections)

*It is expected that the majority of vehicles accessing the site will do this via the A12 or the NAR3. Only local traffic is likely to use other roads to visit the site and many of these will already make journeys into Colchester to access similar facilities to those on the site. Traffic around Mill Road will decrease at times due to the relocation of the Rugby Club.*

The extent to which the proposals would impact on traffic in the wider area, particularly the Northern Approach Road and North Station Bridge

*The Northern Approach Road has been specifically designed to take the additional growth in the north of Colchester. The North Station Bridge is acknowledged as a potential barrier to the free flow of traffic though this area is controlled by traffic signals. Bus priority lanes in the vicinity of this area may encourage greater use of public transport to access the site.*

How can local people be confident that up to date full and detailed traffic modelling is undertaken to accurately assess likely traffic impact (and whether this can be adequately mitigated)

*Individual developments within the site are likely to require highway impact studies as part of the planning process; these will model the traffic at the time of the planning application. The new highway infrastructure already in place has been designed to take the additional growth in the area.*

Will the Council re-examine solutions for the Weston Homes Community Stadium entrance from Boxted Road which is currently closed to through traffic but provides bus drop off from Boxted Road. There were comments for and against opening to general traffic from people north and south of the A12

*The Council is not intending to re-evaluate this at the current time.*

Delivery of comprehensive and co-ordinated links from the development to public transport, including NAR3 to Park & Ride and the NAR2/Mill Road junction and NAR2 busway.

*The Master Plan has been designed with clear links to public transport; the sports hub is close to the Park & Ride providing opportunities to use the Park & Ride when available. In addition as the number of facilities and residents in the area increase, it is expected that bus services will begin to serve the area. The Master Plan includes sites for proposed bus stops.*

The extent and potential impact of new car parking being proposed for facilities north of the A12.

*It is proposed that the new facilities will have adequate parking for the day to day use of the facilities, based on current and projected numbers using the Mill Road ground. There may also be the opportunity for onsite overflow parking. Continuing discussions are being held with*



*Essex County Council to use the Park & Ride facility when special events result in additional vehicles.*

### **Open Space and Countryside**

The level and type of development north of the A12, which currently serves as a boundary between the urban area of Colchester and the open countryside.

*The Master Plan respects the difference between the north and south of the A12, the site to the north of the A12 will have limited build development and will be predominantly set out for sports pitches with significant landscaping, to contain the site.*

The extent to which floodlighting and sports activity could create a nuisance to residents in Boxted.

*A noise and amenity report will be undertaken as part of the planning application. However the site is located 1.8 miles from Boxford and the area is already affected by the noise from the A12. Lighting will need to be carefully controlled given its countryside location and to prevent any distractions to drivers on the A12.*

The extent to which the loss of open space at the Mill Road Sports Ground represents a loss of amenity for residents in the vicinity.

*While it is accepted that the scheme will involve the loss of open space, Mill Road Sports Ground is predominantly set out as sports fields and has little wider amenity value except for dog walking. The new "village green" area at Mill Road, while smaller, will provide a more useable area of public open space including footpaths through the site. The existing sports ground also causes some loss of amenity due to noise and on street parking which would be resolved by its relocation.*

The extent to which existing landscape and flora will be destroyed.

*It is the intention to protect as far as possible the existing hedgerows and trees within the wider site, although some may be lost to allow for access into sites and for optimum use of the site. The site has been previously used for intensive agriculture and has limited ecological value.*

Ensuring safe and convenient linkages are made to existing and/or enhanced footpaths, cycle routes and bridleways beyond the site in the countryside beyond.

*As the Council does not own the land to the north of the site, the extent to which further off road routes can be created to provide access to the wider countryside is limited. However the Council is willing to work with adjacent landowners if they have an interest in creating such links.*

Ensuring a range of free sports and leisure activities including use of the lake.

*The latest proposals provide a small balancing pond to the north of the A12 but this is unlikely to be suitable as a recreational facility. However the site will provide extensive walking, cycling and equestrian routes and children's play opportunities as part of the landscaping scheme. These elements will be free for the public to use.*

How and when the Council will be able to deliver the associated expensive infrastructure as shown, given viability constraints.

*Much of the highway infrastructure for the development is already in place. The Council proposes to fund the sporting infrastructure through the redevelopment of part of the Mill Road*

*Sports Ground as well as grant funding from Sports England and various sports governing bodies. The Council is also in the process of applying for external funding to forward fund some elements of the required infrastructure. While a new bridge over the A12 is an aspiration, the Master Plan acknowledges that this may not be possible in the medium term due to the costs involved.*

How the Council will resolve the potential conflict in expectations and desires from different sectors of the community.

*This is a sports led scheme with the priority for providing good quality sports facilities and ensuring that existing users of Mill Road Sports Ground are relocated. Other requirements and desires of the community will need to be secondary to this. However the Master Plan shows how other community needs will be provided for as part of the scheme.*

How various communities will be involved in and have influence over the evolution of the plans.

*The site is predominantly located in Mile End; Myland Community Council has been heavily involved in the proposals as well as undertaking their own neighbourhood plan. The local community will also have the opportunity to comment on the proposals as part of the new local plan consultation process.*

Clear and transparent resolution of any potential conflict of interest between the Council as landowner and the Council as local planning authority.

*The Council has to follow the same planning process as all other developers and in order for planning permission to be granted any development will need to be in accordance with local and national planning policy. All planning applications where the Council is either landowner or developer are required to be determined by Planning Committee, ensuring that there is additional scrutiny of the proposals.*

## **Uses and activity**

Ensuring that the uses selected will not cause harm to the town centre and/or harm to the amenity of residents already living in the vicinity of the CNG.

*The commercial leisure elements of the proposal will include some restaurant uses which require large units and therefore are not generally found within the town centre. Any retail elements will be ancillary to other uses. The uses proposed through the Master Plan are unlikely to be detrimental to the amenity of the local community.*

Ensuring that the NAR3 does not become a barrier to movement of people across the Gateway

*A major road through the site is acknowledged as a barrier to movement through the site and prevents a continuous boulevard feature. However pedestrian crossings will be provided, including the recently installed Pegasus crossing suitable for horses.*

The role and function of the hub needs to be clear. Consultees questioned whether the hub would achieve expected levels of activity and would benefit the local community.

The sports hub is designed to provide alternative sports facilities for the users of Mill Road Sports Ground plus additional facilities principally for cycling and a multi-use sports hall which will be used by badminton, table tennis and indoor cricket. The Council has been liaising with local sports clubs and governing bodies and there is a clear need for additional and improved facilities. In particular the sports hub will allow the Rugby Club to fulfil their ambition to develop.

In design terms, the introduction of tall buildings was questioned.

*The design of the building to the north of the A12 will be low key to acknowledge their countryside location. In the south of the A12 taller buildings will be more appropriate, there are 4 storey apartments already facing onto the NAR3. It is expected that the new residential development will have an urban rather than suburban character which will include the use of taller buildings.*

Ensuring appropriate levels and management of evening entertainment uses.

*The leisure uses will be located away from existing properties and entertainment uses are likely to be limited to the stadium. Any evening entertainment use of the sports hub is likely to be infrequent or within the Rugby Club building.*

The extent and justification for new housing within the site, particularly if it is at the expense of existing local open space.

*Residential development is required on the Mill Road Sports Ground to help pay for the sports development to the north of the A12. The new sports facilities will be a significant improvement to those at Mill Road and provide for a wider range of sports. Although the open space will be reduced, that which remains will be good quality public open space far more suitable for amenity use. Without the residential development Mill Road Sports Ground is likely to remain as it is, providing limited sports facilities and no public amenity space.*

## **Appendix 2: Draft Master Plan**