

10 June 2020

Report of	Assistant Director of Place and Client Services	Author	Alistair Day 282479
Title	Roman Circus Management Plan		
Wards affected	New Town and Christchurch		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Roman Circus Management Plan provides an 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. The Roman Circus Management Plan has been subject to public consultation ([Colchester Borough Council](#)) and a summary of the comments are set out in the report. Members are requested to endorse the recommendation that the Management Plan is adopted as a planning guidance document. The link includes the management plan and appendices.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 To adopt the Roman Circus Management Plan as a planning guidance document.

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 The adoption of the Roman Circus Management as a planning guidance document will set out the Council's position in terms of the management of the Roman Circus; once adopted, the management plan will form a material planning consideration when determining planning applications.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 Members can decide not to adopt to the Roman Circus Management Plan. If this option is chosen, it would weaken the weight afforded to the Management Plan when considering planning applications and thereby potentially reduce the ability of the Council to shape the protection of the monument and it's setting from the pressures of damage and commercial interest.
- 4.2 Alternatively, Members could decide that the Roman Circus Management Plan should be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The adoption of the Management Plan as an SPD would increase weight afforded to the plan; however, further work would be required before the management plan can be adopted as SPD. Given that the primary purpose of the Roman Circus Management Plan is to provide a strategy for its management rather than a planning document intended to shape development proposals it is considered that there would be little additional benefit in adopting the management plan as SPD.

5. Background Information

- 5.1 The Colchester Roman Circus is a unique archaeological monument in Britain. It is the only known example in the country and 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 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 building, i.e. the above-ground structure, does not survive; all that survives are the remains of the foundations and these were extensively robbed out in the medieval period. Floors and other horizontal layers and surfaces are rare.
- 5.4 The purpose of the Management Plan is to set out an overarching strategy for the management of the Roman Circus for the next five years and to define the roles and responsibilities of the Council and stakeholders. 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.
- 5.5 To increase the weight afforded to the Roman Circus Management Plan, the plan has been subject to a public consultation exercise. The formal consultation exercise ran from 8 February 2021 to 8 March 2021; although all representations that were received prior to writing this report have been considered. The public consultation was undertaken in two ways:
- via the Council's Planning Consultation webpage; and
 - the owners or occupiers of the properties within and adjacent to the limits of the proposed Conservation Area have been notified by letter.
- 5.6 The public consultation on the Roman Circus Management Plan was coordinated with the consultation on the draft Development Brief for the DSG (ABRO) site and on the proposal to extend the Garrison Conservation Area (to include the DSG site within the conservation area). In total 34 responses were received; 18 of the responses were specifically in relation to the Roman Circus Management Plan. A summary of the representations received together with the officer response is set out in Appendix 1.

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 objectives of the Strategic Plan to:
- Strengthen Colchester's tourism sector and welcome more visitors each year; and
 - Protect, enhance and celebrate Colchester's unique heritage.

8. Consultation

- 8.1 The Roman Circus Management Plan has been the subject of a public consultation exercise. No objections were received to the management plan and many of the suggestions made are already captured within the management plan. Some of the comments (for example the development of the Heritage Centre) fall outside the scope of the management plan and with need to be considered further as a separate project.

9. Publicity Considerations

- 9.1 The Management Plan has been subject to publicity as a part of the public consultation exercise; any further publicity associated with the adoption the management plan should be seen in a positive light.

10. Financial implications

- 10.1 Appeals against a planning 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 planning application, thereby reducing risk of an appeal.
- 10.2 The development of proposals for the presentation, interpretation and enhancement of the Roman Circus could have financial implications; however, the emergence of any such proposals will need to be the subject of further reports

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; all future proposals for the presentation, interpretation and enhancement of the Circus will need to take into account that the Council has declared a Climate Emergency and has committed to being carbon neutral by 2030.

Appendix 1: Summary of comments received and Officer response.

Comment	Response	Action / suggested way ahead
Plan Welcomed	Noted	None required
Signage is required from the town centre to the circus	An objective of the Management Plan (MP) is to wayfind/mark a route from the town centre.	Covered by the MP. Additional comment: work on a comprehensive wayfinding strategy in and around the town centre is about to commence; this work needs to coordinate with the improvement of signage to the Circus
The site needs integrating with other heritage sites ... a heritage / town trail is required; it needs to be included in tourist plans	The desire for the integration between the Roman Circus and other heritage sites is supported. The idea of a heritage trail has great potential, and this is noted as an objective in the MP.	Covered by the MP. Additional comment: the potential for developing a town trail should also be investigated as a separate project.
Access is problematic – Southway is a barrier, underpasses are unattractive, pavements on Mersea Rd and Butt Rd are narrow, there is no direct route; redevelopment of the ABRO site provides an opportunity to improve accessibility to monument / Roman Circus House	The physical barrier caused by Southway and the narrow pavements on Mersea Road and Butt Road are acknowledged as a constraint when seeking to integrate this site (and the land in general around Abbey Fields) with the town centre. The resolution of these accessibility issues is beyond the scope to the MP. The redevelopment of the DSG / ABRO site provides an opportunity to improve connectivity and this requirement is set out in the draft Development Brief for this site	The strictures of the existing highway network are difficult to resolve. Essex County Council is working on proposals to remodel St Botolph's roundabout and its environs which should assist in improving pedestrian and cycle access through this area. The draft Development Brief for the DSG site promotes the creation of a permeable pedestrian / cycle network and achieving this aim will assist in improving access to the Roman Circus
Need to invest in the interpretation of the monument e.g. signage boards, need a full size replica of starting gates & stands etc	To date, the interpretation and demarcation of the Circus has been achieved through works associated with the redevelopment of the former garrison land and/or the work of the Trust. Museum Services are currently proposing to install an interpretation panel in the vicinity of Flagstaff Road. It is however acknowledged that there is scope for further interpretation. A key aim of the MP is to provide appropriate and consistent	A key aim of the management plan is to develop a coherent and comprehensive strategy for the presentation, interpretation and enhancement of the Circus. 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

	<p>site interpretation around the monument, for example, by the installation of adequate interpretation panels and signage. A further objective of the MP is to investigate and deliver other forms of presentation, for example, use of public art and sculpture and/or lighting to mark the seating and/or line of racetrack as well as improved digital presentation of the Circus. Further the MP also proposes to investigate the reconstruction of part of the seating area.</p>	
<p>There is the opportunity for the Circus to become a major tourist attraction; the ABRO site provides an opportunity for expansion</p>	<p>It is acknowledged that Circus has the potential to become a major attraction. A key objective of the MP is to present and interpret the Circus for public benefit and as an important heritage attraction. This also aligns with the Strategic Plan which aims to strengthen Colchester's tourism sector. The draft Development Brief for the DSG site seeks to protect the Circus and its setting and provides for the potential expansion of facilities associated with the Circus</p>	<p>This is covered by the MP. The purpose of the Management Plan is to present and interpret the Circus. The implementation of these objectives will help to promote the Circus as an important heritage feature and thereby help it become a major tourist attraction.</p> <p>Scope for the potential expansion of the facilities associated with Roman Circus is provided for within the draft Development Brief for the DSG site.</p>
<p>The plan needs to be linked to the cultural strategy; a new Heritage and Cultural Strategy is required</p> <p>As a major heritage feature the Circus should feature in the Heritage / Cultural Strategy</p>	<p>The Council's Strategic Plan promotes a new Cultural Strategy that supports town's cultural assets. The MP relates specifically to the management and promotion of the Circus however this is not considered to prejudice the goals and aims of the proposed Cultural Strategy</p>	<p>The Council is currently working on the development of a new cultural strategy. The aims and objectives of this document should be compatible with the stated aims of the Roman Circus Management Plan</p>
<p>A major attraction needs associated facilities</p>	<p>The development of a strategy for the promotion and enhancement of the Circus will create a better understanding of the facilities need to support the Circus as a visitor attraction. The draft Development Brief for the DSG site provides for the potential expansion of Roman Circus House</p>	<p>The MP seeks to promote the Circus as a tourist and heritage attraction. The MP promotes and supports the ongoing development of the heritage offer by Colchester Archaeological Trust at Roman Circus Centre. The requirement for additional facilities will emerge as the site develops and MP will be kept under review.</p>
<p>Need to see action</p>	<p>To date, the interpretation and demarcation of the Circus has</p>	<p>The MP provides a coordinated framework for the</p>

	<p>been secured through works associated with the redevelopment of the former garrison land and/or the work for the Trust. Museum Services are also currently working on proposals for the installation of an interpretation panel. The purpose of the MP is to promote a coherent and comprehensive strategy for the interpretation and enhancement the Circus; from this will flow new proposals for the presentation of the monument</p>	<p>conservation, enhancement, interpretation, presentation and celebration of the Circus</p>
<p>Lack of parking / coach park required</p>	<p>There are three public car parks in the general vicinity of the Circus and as such the monument is well served by public car parks. In developing future facilities at the Circus, sustainable modes of transport should be promoted over the use of the private car.</p>	<p>The purpose of the management plan is to promote a coherent and comprehensive strategy for the interpretation and enhancement the Circus. As these proposals are developed, an assessment of the parking requirements can be considered.</p>
<p>The plan only considers the scheduled monument not the wider setting</p>	<p>The purpose of the MP is to provide an overarching strategy for the management and interpretation of the scheduled monument. The MP proposes a boundary review of the scheduled monument to ensure there is an appropriate buffer around all sides of the archaeological remains. The MP requires new development to be informed and supported by appropriate assessments to adequately assess the significance of the Roman Circus and also to accurately identify the impact of proposals on the setting. The plan also requires all new development will have regard to local context and precedence, scale and massing, layout and design</p>	<p>The management plan sets out various objective to safeguard the monument and its setting.</p>
<p>No discussion about the removal of roads to create an enlarged unhindered space</p>	<p>The purpose of the MP is to promote a coherent and comprehensive strategy for the interpretation and enhancement the Circus. This could in the future include exploring the feasibility of removing roads to create an enlarged unhindered space.</p>	<p>The stakeholder will need to developer further the aspirations for the future management and interpretation of the Circus. This could include exploring the feasibility of closing sections of adopted highway; any such proposals would</p>

		need to be subject of a detailed traffic assessment
Retained Garrison building could be used as exhibition space	The DSG site includes several historic garrison buildings; the Draft Development Brief notes that these could be used for a variety of uses.	The MP does not preclude the potential for re-using existing Garrison buildings for exhibition space.
Holy Trinity Church should be used as a heritage centre / exhibition space to Circus and other assets	The desire for a heritage centre is acknowledge however this is considered to fall outside the scope of the MP. It is understood that there is a proposal to convert Holy Trinity Church into a community hub.	If desired, the potential for developing a Heritage Centre could be explored by a separate working group
Events should be held on Abbey Field to promote the circus	Organised events will help to raise the profile of the circus. An objective of the MP is to investigate creative and imaginative ways of using the amenity space for events.	The promotion of the circus through associated events is provided for in the MP
The plan fails to say what enhancement is proposed	The purpose of the MP is to provide an overarching framework for proposals to be developed for the interpretation and enhancement of the circus. It is for the working to determine the most appropriate form of enhancement	It is the purpose of the MP to develop proposals for the interpretation and enhancement of the circus
No reference to funding / funding should be made available	The purpose of the MP is to provide a framework for the interpretation and enhancement of the circus. Once the nature of the interpretation proposals is known, a bid for funding can be made. The MP explains that the working group will promote (and also scrutinise) initiatives and seek partnerships and external funding opportunities for proposals that better reveal the significance of, and create better access to, the Circus.	The funding and investment necessary to deliver the promotion of the Roman Circus can only be developed once there is agreement on how the Circus should be management / promoted
What is the preferred management solution ... CBC, the Trust or a.n.other ... each will require a different approach	At present the Circus has a number of different landowners, each of which are responsible for the management and maintenance of land within their control. An objective of the MP is to create a working group, with representatives of the key stakeholder groups, to support the protection, enhancement and promotion of the Circus. The MP also seeks to review how the long-	The MP includes provision for exploring how the site may be effectively managed in the long term

	term management of the Circus can be most effectively delivered, for example, by the Council or sub-leased to another organisation.	
Not enough done to maintain and promote the town's heritage	The enhancement of the town's heritage is an important Corporate objective. Grant funding has been secured to enhance Balmerne Square and St Nicholas Square as new public spaces. The Council also takes the opportunity to enhance and promote the town's heritage by better revealing our assets by supporting projects and initiatives to increase public awareness and access to their heritage in daily life.	Noted; however general concerns about how the Borough promotes the town's heritage falls outside the scope of the MP
A working group should be established to develop proposals for the enhancement of the circus	The MP aims to create a working group, with representatives of the key stakeholder groups, to support the protection, enhancement, and promotion of the Circus as an important part of Colchester's public realm/heritage offer, and which will promote and support the ongoing development of the heritage offer by Colchester Archaeological Trust at Roman Circus Centre.	The MP proposes the establishment of a working group to support the protection, enhancement and promotion of the Circus as an important part of Colchester's public realm/heritage offer
Biodiversity of the area should be enhanced	The MP seek to ensure the significance of the biodiversity (both flora and fauna) of the Circus area is informed by appropriate up-to-date biodiversity assessments, to protect important species and to minimise and mitigate the disturbance to species that make a positive contribution to the site	This is covered by the MP
The Plan should be adopted as soon as possible	Noted	The plan is before Members to adopt