

Definition of a Master Plan:

A master plan is an overarching planning document and spatial layout which is used to structure land use and development. 'Master plan' is an all-encompassing term.

Our brief tour

We started by the Mercury Theatre. This is where the National Cycle Route 1, enters through Balkerne Gate the city centre. The recently widened bridge to allow cyclists over Balkerne dual carriageway, has improved hat access. The National Cycle Route 1 links, on a shared footway, and 20 mph roads, to all the schools which are to the South of Lexden Road. Unfortunately, currently the route to the High Street and to the East of the Mercury Theatre is wrongly signposted. The Master Plan needs to indicate where these important National Cycle Routes serve the High Street of the city and Eastward from Head Street.

The planning application for a new hotel on Head Street proposes to open a route through the site for pedestrian access to the hotel entrance near the Mercury. This route should be shared with cycles. A Master Plan should show this potential route along with an old cart entrance on Head Street directly East of Jumbo as a potential cycle route to Head Street and Eastward to Harwich.

Currently the NCR heads out from the Mercury area to the High Street via two narrow streets. The existing cycle routes could be improved at this point. The misdirection of the signs confuses visitors to the city. Many cyclists arrive by boat from the continent so clear accurate signage is important.

(One sign is very dangerous as it directs cyclist to ride in the wrong direction on the Balkerne Hill dual carriage way) Those from the Netherlands will not be amused.

We would like the Master Plan to ask for all cycle route signs to be appraised to ensure they direct correctly, are not duplicated unnecessarily and are made vandal proof.

The Mercury Theatre is visually isolated from the city centre, we demonstrated that views of the Town Hall Spire must be maintained to help with a visual link of centre to theatre and the Balkerne gate entrance to the city. This may be relevant to the proposed hotel, which incidentally we welcome in principle.

We looked at the public realm around Jumbo and suggested that recommendations should have been made in a Master Plan to remove the transformer chamber which degrades Jumbo and stops the view from Head Street through a cart entrance onwards to the Mercury Theatre and Jumbo itself. Links and views are important to maintain, improve or create in a small city. The Master Plan should have appraised and considered the importance of views, and suggested new potential ones throughout the city

We looked at the access to cellars which can be found in the Jumbo car park. The plans of the cellars have now been recorded. The cellars travel under Culver Street West, under Head street into the car park near Jumbo. They should have been

highlighted in a Master Plan as a potential asset. They are defiantly historic assets to be protected, as members told the consultants.

Whilst a cycle tunnel would not be appropriate, some thoughts along these lines might be considered in a Master Plan for these cellars. Could they be linked to the revitalised Jumbo?

We progressed to St George's Hall. Apparently, there is a legal agreement for access to the Hall from the High Street. There would need to be arrangements with the church to make this secure. The right of access was granted when the Hall was built. The benefits to both to the city and the church could be great. Vehicular servicing access is available from the north through the NCP car park. Note the attached document about the Hall as a foot note. I used to use the engineering company which worked in the rooms the many rooms beneath the Hall.

A Councillor was concern about the state of the Church yard. As it is a closed church yard, under a Pastoral Measure, the care and maintenance is with the local authority. No doubt that issue has been taken forward.

As we moved across the city, we looked at pavement surfaces. Poor specification and lack of thought in positioning of access covers for example result in a very untidy mess on the pavements, which lowers the visual quality of the city. The state of pavements and roads is very poor. A Master Plan should include the need for high specifications for both aesthetic and practical reasons for all elements in the public realm. Higher specification would help reduce maintenance costs long term and also reduce accidents. We welcomed the fact that some resurfacing has used one material for the full width of the street, removing kerbs and going back to a more medieval appearance.

It is also important as we demonstrated, to have in the Master Plan, advice to control directional signage. Currently there are at least three groups in the public realm producing differently designed signs to guide citizens and visitors. The city is too small to have such conflict. A master plan should put the appearance of signs in the city under the control of one body. Just like the "A" board controls.

The loss of major stores in the City Centre, which the draft calls wrongly "an opportunity" will have an impact on the use of the large underground service areas. So, we investigated these privately owned spaces together. With careful thought these could be made more beneficial to the city rather than used as casual parking areas now the major stores have vacated. The Master Plan should have appraised these areas which have access to the shopping areas for pedestrians. They are high enough for buses!

When walking towards St Botolph's Circus we went via Vineyard Street carpark. We mentioned the comments that some members of the Society have made in relation to the short length of cycle track recently provided. The comments relate to the great expense in providing such a short, designated cycle route; and the loss of many car parking spaces, leaving the cyclists to negotiate across the entrance to the carpark without any protection. We appreciate that there may be plans to extend this route but are not convinced that this short section will be easily integrated into a

complete cycle track. A waste of money is often the members comments. Perhaps better presentation of the reasonings of the work would help!

Master Panning requires one to demonstrate that the whole project can be completed.

At St Botolph's Circus we discussed the great potential of the area covered by the roundabout, subways, planting and buildings. We believe the Master Plan should have including reviewing the area set aside for an electrical transformer in part of St Botolph's Circus and suggest replanning to ensure best use of land. Repositioning the potential for a transformer could free up an important site. We also suggested that it might be wise to make the narrow northern section of Mersea Road one-way and use Military Road and Roberts Road for ways in and out of the city. Many towns and cities have such routing of traffic. A pavement or shared cycle pedestrian path may be possible then in Mersea Road, protecting the historic wall as well a providing a safe cycle access.

Colchester Town Station was visited as the Society is very keen on the idea of having a pedestrian link from here through to Lewis Gardens set to the East of Queen Street.

We did look at the "cast iron poem" in the forecourt of the Courts and Rail station. We demonstrated how that work of art is being damaged by lack of control of vehicles. The Civic Society has rescued the loose panels, but sadly it was too late for one which is lost. Specification for these works should have suited the use. Perhaps the use has changed. Again specification requirements for public realm should be in a Master Plan.

We have concerns about the changes in levels in the proposed walkway to Lewis Gardens. So were pleased to hear that negotiations are in hand with the owners of the railway station to allow a change in levels from the current platforms to the carpark level for pedestrians. We trust access will also be for cyclists and those with disabilities. We started walking the route, but of course were prevented at the point where one needs to climb over the City Wall. We noted that with the recent archaeological investigation it may be possible that some of the change in level can occur on the Northside of the wall. This would leave the wall visually free to be appreciated. Both changes in levels on the proposed path will require lifts. A Master Plan requirement should be that two independent lifts at each change of level along with high-quality maintenance contracts are supplied for all public lifts. The Vineyard Street lift is another of our regular complaints: "it never works" is the cry!

As we passed through the priory ruins, a little later in the tour, we indicated that the Master Plan should include recommendation for better presentation of the Priory. What was the inside of that church in our opinion should be paved. This would allow a better visual understanding of the space and improve the character of the area. Such detail is also needed in the Master Plan.

We then inspected the area of the city bounded by Queen's Street, Long and Short Wyre Streets and Culver Street East. We all looked at the amount of derelict land and property to be found in this area. It is appreciated that much of this is in multiple

private ownership. We were pleased to hear that property acquisitions are being made by the council, but none the less demonstrated that this area at the heart of the City is under used except for storing rubbish and random car parking. There are some very important historic buildings in this area, like the sweet factory, which need to be fitted into the Master plan.

A Master Plan is desperately needed for this area to make certain this part of the city is financially viable for the various owners and attractive to live and work in. We would wish to remove as much as possible of the mid twentieth century brutalist architecture.

It is essential to stop the conversion to dwellings of these poor-quality building with currently disgusting aspects, if we are to have a quality City in the future and quality of life for the citizens. Once these poorly designed buildings are converted into individual dwelling units replanning the area becomes an insurmountable issue. We have no objection to the area being used for residential but would like it to be of high quality functionally and aesthetically pleasing. We do want to maintain the current shopping street facades. Members have said that an open square could be found in the site for new dwellings to look out on rather than stick with the current Priory Walk.

Sainsbury's must be kept at all cost, is the cry from our members.

Culver Street East is a vital route through the City. It is under used by pedestrians because of the awful aspect. We would like to see the Master Plan include a desire to represent the street as a pleasant place to pass by and through rather than it being an eyesore. It would be fine to have shops or housing lining this street. The current ugly rear entrances and motor bike parks are totally inappropriate for such an important historic route and street.

Looking along Culver Street the East one can see glimpse of the Minories, that view needs opening slightly (partial demolition of a house) as Rafael Vinoly suggested to attract one to First Site. Master Plans should look at reinforcing existing views and creating vistas to attract people to move around the City.

We went to look at East Hill House Gardens which are now part of First Site. The potential for reinstating this as a garden for pleasure and viewing sculpture and giving access to the South side of the church was discussed. The church aspect is important especially as it is going to be without access if the new cycle paths are put in place on East Hill.

The Folly now in the Minories garden was originally in the larger East Hill House garden. Then it was at the western end of a vista which went eastwards to the famous Colchester Obelisk. A Masterplan might suggest re-instating the East Hill garden especially as it will be at the northern end of the new pedestrian route from Colchester Town station. Consideration has to be given to the security and privacy of the land now associated with East Hill House which also was obviously part of the garden.

The Minorities may also benefit from opening up the view to the Folly from Lewis Gardens.

Finally, we looked at the St Nicholas Square. It was clear that the designs approved by the council did not show St Nicholas's House dustbins or delivery access which we think will mar the scheme which is about to be built. We hope that issue is resolved and were pleased to hear the Leader of the Council saying that one needs to negotiate with adjoining owners to get the best solutions for our City. This is the whole point we were making regarding the provision of a Master Plan for the Long and Short Wyre Street area of the city. The city is not just those areas owned publicly, but all the built environment and the private and public realm that surrounds the buildings.

The Civic Society thanks you for allowing us to talk briefly about our City and what we had hoped to get from a Master Plan. A document that looked at every aspect of the city and not just Council owned properties.