

Colchester City Masterplan.

Comments and queries for consideration submitted by

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General aims and objectives.

Can't argue with them. Nor will most people but details matter. My comments and queries are about practicalities and unintended consequences. i.e. Harm. That isn't being negative.

There are a lot of assumptions made by We Made That.

In my opinion they haven't taken enough time to understand the needs of the majority of Colchester's residents.

such as- What drives them? What aspirations do they have? What pressures are they under? Why do they have two cars outside their property?

They've only listened to those who have taken the time to

engage, many of which only think of their own special interests.

Did they walk around the densely populated area to the south of Barrack Street? Drive around Chesterfield estate at Mile End? Take a close look at Greenstead? See how many cars are on the front? Talk to anyone on the doorstep there? If they didn't, their background info about the population make-up of Colchester has limited value.

People and businesses have choices. If the conditions aren't right they'll locate somewhere that suits them or take their trade elsewhere. They don't make decisions based on pleasing the local authority.

Unlike London, where public transport is good, most Colchester residents need a car and, as they become more settled with a family or become more prosperous, they get a larger one and often another. To try to dampen that personal ambition will drive people and money further away.

I haven't simply said "that's not right" or "I don't think that'll work". I've tried to explain the grounds and context I've considered to support my comments.

In places I've used some direct terms to bring us down to earth and encourage planners to see things from the user's point of view. Unlike quite a few councillors, I don't own any rose-tinted spectacles. Nor do I have an image to maintain or a party line to follow.

We all want Colchester to be a nice prosperous and safe place.

All I ask is that that this read and considered by senior officers and WMT and put on the record.

(Comments broadly follow the report)

Page 5.

City centre. Over-reliance on Retail and hospitality.

Agree.

Providing spaces spaces to park on periphery.

Nice idea but where? No suggestions made. Unrealistic. The reality is that any spare space that might have been used has been built on.

Diversifying away from retail. Extend cultural.

We have a good cultural offer. What are we missing? Ideas please.

Page 6. Vision.

Diversify. Sounds reasonable but...

More markets.

Really? That sector is dying in provincial towns. Replaced by discount retailers. Unless in prime position, traders aren't interested.

Community uses.

Explain. Give examples of activities that aren't already catered for.

A lot of community facilities are already established situated in residential areas conveniently

close to homes on periphery of centre and in rural areas.

Independent food and drink.

Colchester is noted for having more than average.

Infrastructure, servicing and footfall are key. (an issue which I'll come back to)

High quality jobs in creative and digital sector.

That will depend on whether the boss wants to invest in a business in a 'car-lite' centre where he and his/her workers walk/bike or bus to the premises. Or opts for a small unit on a business park (springing up all around Colchester) where he can park his BMW, employees park for free and clients pull up outside. I rather think the second option trumps the first. Additionally, bus or bike isn't an attractive option for the boss or any 'up and coming' young person on a career ladder who owns his own car. Vans and just in time servicing may be a factor. The boss will probably live in outer

Colchester in a nice house with two car park spaces.

WMT hasn't noted the important self-employed sector, rural workers, the blue collar 'white van man' and others who get their hands dirty and contribute massively to the local economy. They seemed to air-brushed out in favour of new employment sectors. These are the ones who tend not to bother with 'having their say'.

Improving public transport.

Yes. Easily said but don't expect much. The operators are a law unto themselves. ECC/CCC have no control over them.

Transport interchanges.

You need to explain what that means. How it will work and pin-point where. Will need investment by ECC and other parties. Are these realistic expectations?

Page 10. Profile.

Again- increase in high paid jobs in the centre

Try looking at it from the businesses point of view. Why should they? What is in it for them compared to other location options? The investor is in it to make money. What is the centre's USP?

Increase evening economy and vibrancy of venues

There are positives and negatives to that. We are not short of bars or places to eat and drink. Nightclubs are losing their appeal. Again, look at it from a potential housing tenant's point of view. They might be reconciled to the existing level of Friday and Saturday night disturbance but won't want any more and certainly not on other nights. Most respectable, working residents want a degree of peace and quiet. Only the desperate or troubled will put up with more *vibrancy (*code in Colchester for noise and street trouble). They will opt for a quieter life on somewhere like Abbey Fields or Cowdray centre. More vibrancy and the kabab that goes with it on their

doorstep isn't attractive. They have a choice too.

The LA and police won't say what everyone else thinks, the city after dark is not a nice place. In fairness, it isn't an easy place to police and monitor. Four sides, (compared to other towns with one long street) with a McDonalds on north, Queen St bars on east, cinema on west and a sad bus station on the south. All surrounded by takeaways and bars etc who attract the loud crowd.

Aim to decrease vehicle movements in the centre.

A worthy aim. How and dealing with consequences is more problematic.

Page 11.

Ingrained transport habits of residents in the wiser city area and a reluctance to adapt model shift.

Colchester has on a hill on three sides. Old industrial areas which were a source for employment have switched to

housing. New employment is on edge of town, mainly north and west. Residents on South, SE and East have to travel across the centre or use the 'old bypass'. There is no formal southern circular road which would have made a huge difference. St Botolphs and Southway is under severe strain. Public transport for anything other than getting to the centre is impractical. Don't blame the car user. ECC highways and Colchester council are to blame. Infrastructure hasn't been provided to keep up with the aggressive housebuilding policy. It could have been done 20/30 years ago but wasn't. Narrow roads leading into centre and hills make cycling unattractive. It will be impractical to lay down cycle lanes along those sections of roads. We have lousy public transport that doesn't respond to modern working patterns. New estates have been built out of town south and east without local employment. The city is cut in half by railway

lines and river. More people are self-employed with a van and need to be mobile. Both partners work, go in opposite directions and at varying times. Why is anyone surprised that there are so many cars? One invests in a car, one expects to use it unless the alternative is better. That isn't being lazy or inconsiderate, it is being practical and putting the needs of the family first. Colchester is not London, Cambridge or Amsterdam.

Page 12.

This confirms the need to read and understand the CCTP which informs to MP. The MP can't be read in isolation.

Page 16 Strategic.

No mention of the need to level up the South East. No wonder there is so much traffic crossing town to access services and employment. Hospitals, leisure/sport facilities, retail parks and garden centres are in the north or west. There should be a plan to bring some public services and commerce to the

SE to reduce the need to cross town. Middlewick development will exacerbate the problem. CC planners have failed to grasp this, as have WMT, yet they plan to frustrate car use and social mobility for those still levelled down on the SE.

No mention of the notoriously polluted Brook St. A key route. A CPO should be put in place to remove the lower eastern side to alleviate pollution and ease flow. Ditto bottom end of Mersea Rd.

More robust economic environment including more evening activities...

No suggestions as to how and what. Tell us what we are missing and what will attract that commerce into the centre. Why should a commercial operator extend their working day and incur extra costs to please a handful of customers and the city council. Late night shopping through the year has been done before. Flopped every time.

Evening activities. This shows how little WMT understand Colchester and human nature. Most working and family residents simply want to get home, have a meal, see to the kids and relax. They aren't interested in heading into town and engaging in activities seven days a week. The students and young workers have limited funds. Even they need some quiet nights.

We are blessed with organisations who set up events but there is a limit to what we can expect from volunteers. Seasonal and weather factors have an influence on outcomes. You'll be playing "eye spy" the punter.

*Reference to policy TC3.
Housing in town centre.*

Be careful what you wish for. Insisting on 'carless' developments will not attract tenants with prospects. I don't know a young person who, on starting work, doesn't aspire to own their own car. Developers can only pitch these sites to the

desperate or troubled. They will add to the crime and social problems that already exist in the urban centre and make it less attractive to visit.

The prospects of well-paid jobs returning to the centre where parking has been reduced and traffic movement frustrated is slim to say the least. As said earlier, those with aspiration will either live on edge of centre and expect to park their car at the housing site.

The tenants that will move into the properties located on current car parks won't have deep pockets and won't replace the spend that car park users do across the city.

Page 30.

...deliveries by day and night must be considered with improving interchanges between different modes of transport.

Traders taking in deliveries by night is unrealistic. Small businesses can't carry the staff costs for that purpose plus they

often have to pay a premium for non-daytime deliveries.

You need to define 'interchanges' and where realistically would they could be sited other than St Botolphs/Osborne St.

Page 34. Responding to climate emergency.

Reference to parking on periphery of city and using alternatives to move around.

Seems sensible but some of the roads from the existing CPs are grotty and unattractive. Examples of such are Butt Rd and Mersea rd that have CPs within walking distance. The prospect of managing the hills is a disincentive.

Improving public transport and integrating with RTS

A natural development but it must be remembered that the RTS does nothing for the south and west. It's a partial solution designed mainly to support the Garden Community and university on the east. Like the P & R it doesn't serve the whole

city. It's easy to talk about improving public transport but there has been no progress at the behest of ECC or CC in recent years so why should we have any confidence that the operators will step up in the future?

I assume the 'trackless tram' is a bus.

800 spare car park spaces. The data used should be put in the public domain. How up to date is it? Does it take account to a growing population?

It should also be recognised that a lot of drivers, especially women and those with larger cars, don't like using multi-story CPs. They'll go elsewhere rather than use them. That will reduce choice and undermine economic activity.

Page 36.

Working with bus operators

Who will lead on that? Good aim but wishful thinking. You have no control or levers. Trying to pin down these firms and get them to extend or alter their services will be hopeless.

They are looking a cutting, not extending and they'll not chip in a penny to any infrastructure.

Idea of extending bus interchange through to into Stanwell St to ease congestion is worth developing. Widening Osbourne St, if Vineyard area gets developed, would help- and cost less. I expect the bus interchange to be improved but a super-dumper bus station isn't necessary. Users catch and drop off at other convenient locations. I'm not one calling for state of the art replacement.

Demand response transport with last mile modes

Can we have that explained please in plain English?

Car club. Nice thought but unrealistic to expect more than a handful of takers. I can't think that would work anywhere other than neighbours who commute at same time. Seems like a recipe for neighbours to fall out.

Ensure adequate car parking provision accessible CPs at key locations Improve CPs

This looks obvious but seems at odds with what is planned. A lot will be expected of Priory St. Entrance and exits are poor. It will be jam packed. A nightmare trying to get in and out.

Reduce long stay parking to maximise use of P & R.

The P & R is only any use to those coming into the city from the A12 or A120. Its value to the city has proved to very limited. Not all LS users will move to the P & P. Some regulars won't bother to visit the city.

Create satellite urban logistics hub at car parks with spare capacity.

Explain. What goes on there and where are there car parks with spare capacity after you've closed two? Can we have that in plain English please?

Page 38.

Car-lite centre. Closure of St Johns St to general traffic.

I don't have a strong view but traders and businesses along that street will.

Page 40.

Reference to safety concerns at Balcerne Hill/Crouch St underpass.

Where is the evidence for this? Majority feedback suggests that the existing set-up is preferred.

Page 42.

New pedestrian crossings along Southway

Has there been an assessment of the extra congestion and pollution that these will cause by vehicles stopping and starting every 100 metres?

I suggest that maintaining good flow of traffic trumps extra north/south crossings. You will frustrate legitimate movement east/west.

It will be seen as the ultimate 'car bashing' scheme by ECC/CC.

Page 44.

Unlocking potential sites for development along and adjacent to Southway.

You need to come clean. Which ones do you have your eyes on and what purpose would they be used for? This coy suggestion has caused considerable unrest.

Pages 52 & 54.

The narrative on these pages looks rather like stock town planning objectives for just about anywhere. Perfectly fine and dandy but somewhat harder to make happen.

Cultural. What are we missing? Is there unused talent? Volunteers free to organise? Does WMT understand that most people are working hard to maintain their standard of living and simply don't have the spare time?

Markets. Colchester isn't one of those towns with a reputation for a good market. Markets have been undermined by car boot sales and discount retailers. People say they want them but don't support them

unless in a prime position. Anything in a secondary one (like Britannia) will flop as before.

High tech and digital. A growth area. The question is for the prospective company. Why should they invest in a 'car lite' city centre as opposed to an off-centre site where the boss, workers and clients can park? Colchester isn't London. The boss won't be living in the centre and biking to the office. Nor will the skilled workers. They'll each own a car and expect to drive it and park. They won't be living in a city centre flat adjacent to a 'vibrant' night time economy. The BID has made it clear that businesses have a problem attracting and retaining good staff. They have location options. Hassle moving around and restricted parking will put them off.

Same remarks apply to '*diverse economy*'.

Page 58.

Placemaking. Please define this term for those of us outside the planning profession.

Page 66/67

High Street

General objectives are sound but I question the wisdom of moving the taxis over to the north side. Will there be the capacity? Will the restaurants on that side welcome them outside their premises? What do the taxi drivers think? Given that most of them are of foreign heritage, are they even aware?

Consolidating bus stops all to between West Stockwell St and The George. This is wrong. You are inconveniencing bus users who come up north hill and need to call at (eg) Head St, Mercury, Halifax BS and Crouch St. If you are wanting to encourage use of public transport, this plan will harm, not help.

Page 64 & 70

Southway.

Please explain what is meant by it being 'back to front'? How, in your opinion, should it look and what should replace the buildings that you think should be redeveloped.

Installing four pedestrian crossing across SW will harm traffic movement and pollution levels, not improve it. (see previous note) That will create a major inconvenience to people going about their business and will generally make their lives more difficult.

Page 72.

Old Bus station site.

I have no issue with the general direction other than to say that sheltered housing for those with restricted mobility, elderly or with slight special needs should be included in the plans. They shouldn't always be housed on edge of town. They spend and use services. Embrace them into the centre but away from the club and bars.

Page 64 & 76

Britannia Yard. Reference to housing, events and markets.

I am of the firm view that this area should be retained as surface car parking. Not all car users are comfortable with multi story ones. The nearest ones are up a hill to the south along grotty Butt Rd and Mersea Rd. Too far out to be convenient to manage shopping and kids. Those who currently use Britannia will get what they want somewhere other than town. If CCC are happy with that outcome, so be it. The loss of parking income to CC and impact on trade coming from the growing south and south east (including hospitality which is now much relied on) is too great to ignore.

Shoppers and church users will be squeezed out by the demand for spaces at poorly accessible Priory St. Access and exit points on Queen St and East hill will be horrendous. Congestion and pollution will worsen.

The idea that markets, pop-up traders and events can be run

there is fanciful. It is off centre. Footfall will be pathetic for markets. Organisers won't choose Britannia site and who wants to live next to events and markets? There are areas next to Firstsite, the park, spaces at Lion Walk, Culver centre and Mercury for such use. How many more open spaces do you need?

The Priory already has a large grassed area next to it. Tidy it up, make the site less gloomy and leave it alone.

Please do not build housing on Britannia car park. In the great scheme of things, it doesn't make sense and takes away one of the very few facilities that the SE has. Will cause much resentment especially when it eyes up what the north and south have going for them. More negatives than positives.

Page 82

Vineyard Gate.

I'm sympathetic to the idea of converting this space to housing. The downside is that it is next to Queen Streets bars

and night-time and weekend trouble. That has to be calmed down otherwise developers won't build the 'high-quality' affordable housing CC desire. They'll hold out for cheap and not very cheerful pitched to short-term lets for people who won't mind trouble on their doorsteps. Decent tenants will swerve it unless the 'vibrancy' is curbed. Proximity to the Roman Wall won't swing it. A tricky and difficult site to develop to achieve desired outcomes.

Mixed use. Don't bother will trying with new shops/businesses alongside housing. (this looks like cut 'n paste by WMT) Small traders can't afford new build rents. Off centre, poor footfall and servicing, they'll flop. The existing ones inside the city wall don't need more competition. We have enough small units already in the centre.

Page 86.

St Botolphs junction.

Yes, the roundabout needs to go. The space can be used better. I use it virtually every day but I'm not qualified to comment on detail so I'll leave that to others. My first impressions are in favour of proposals so long as it improves flow.

Heritage.

What we have should be preserved and cared for. Attractions should be well signposted and affordable. WMT and CCC should understand though that not everyone shares the passion of the arts and heritage lobby. (We are not ranked up there with York). Culture and history are not the only things people spend money on. I doubt that it's a priority of many of the new residents. They are too busy with their own lives.

A visit to a nice village and park up free meal at a garden centre rates just as high.

A family coming to Colchester for the day will get in the Castle, shopping precincts, the

Indies, Primark, have a meal and check out Fennicks. They won't have the time to get to the off-centre Roman Circus- especially with kids.

The circus is a special trip for schools and history enthusiasts. It doesn't sit well with a general town visit. Sign it well but don't expect it to drive up footfall and visitor numbers to any degree.

Alternative travel options.

Don't take responses to surveys as gospel. No-one wants to be seen as uninterested in environmentally friendly travel. You can bet though that there will only be two out of ten who will change their travel routines even if conditions are safer. Safety is only one consideration. There are umpteen other reasons why people don't switch to cycle or walk. Too many to list here. Whatever is done, must not impede car flow across the city or the plan to reduce pollution will backfire. The northern bypass is overloaded and an

outer southern one doesn't exist.

End

(Can't help wondering how many councillors will take the trouble to submit something like this)