

Comments and suggestions on Masterplan 2023 With required revisions to Policies TC1-4 as Required.

By Dorian Kelly

I am available at reasonable notice to discuss any aspect. d [REDACTED]

PREAMBLE:

A wide-ranging holistic master plan with legal teeth together with revised policies TC1-4 is very important to Colchester and I am very keen to see one put into practice to provide the necessary protection against aggressive and unsuitable development and to help the transition of the City Centre from a retail-based shopping area to a city centre leisure and tourism experience, together with opportunities for sustainable living and small-scale shopping lanes.

This masterplan does not provide this, nor does it provide sufficient protection from aggressive and unsuitable development, and that is the whole and entire purpose of it. But I have seen many such consultations and rarely are any major changes made: the proponents tend on the whole to wish to defend their work and its sunk costs. I hope this will be different, and another draft produced as soon as practicable as a result of the consultation.

But we are where we are, and this document provides a number of alternatives, improvements and options. I am very much aware how important it is to see a version of this plan put on the books as soon as possible, to ensure that development inimical to the character and development of the City as a primary tourist destination cannot take place. I suspect that it is too late to prevent what I consider to be the destruction of Priory Walk with the very real possibility of the loss of the City Centre Sainsburys. But it is not too late to prevent other building which is not on the human scale throughout the centre, which might otherwise be unpreventable under the byzantine rules of the National Planning Policy Framework without a strong and enforceable masterplan spelling this out in words of two syllables, so to speak.

Curiously, there are areas of the city for some reason not included in this masterplan. These are generally the privately owned and controlled areas which make up quite a large proportion of the city centre such as the Priory Walk, Culver Square and Lion Walk. One problem that we face with such private areas is that more often than not when it comes to reconstruction and refurbishment, the owners put profitability, simplicity of design and cheapness of construction above any concept of placemaking or community. One example of this is, of course the disastrous Priory Walk development, which not only creates a whole area where people will have no reason to go, (especially with the inevitable loss of Sainsburys) although it is an important gateway from the busy central core to the emerging cultural and historic quarters on the eastern side.

I am sure it comes as no surprise to hear that I am against the scale and density of some of the buildings shown, especially on Lewis Gardens, where we have tried to fight such developments off before and on Britannia Gate/Yard/Way (pick one): And I object to the wholesale changes made to St Botolphs Roundabout, as unnecessary, costing more than the stated budget, disruptive for years and showing no real advantage to traffic flow: But it might come as one to hear that I am in favour of some modernity on the lower parts of Colchester, including taller buildings with skyline impacts, provided they are of exceptional design and materials, and never as square featureless blocks.

Below I set out a mixture of tweaks, controls and some major changes. Please note that this does not include transport comments except inasmuch as St. Botolphs Roundabout is concerned and suggestions for a much enhanced bus station on Osborne Street.

GENERAL

On the general principle that a high no-compromise standard of design and utility is of the greatest importance to Colchester's economic future as a thriving, well-visited tourism-based City, a new section should be added which makes the point that in all new development or substantial refurbishment within the Heritage Centre as covered by the Draft Masterplan 2023:

- No design of any housing block within the core area may be simple squared off blocks, but must incorporate innovative high design features such as curves, overhangs, tapers, setbacks and so forth with context sensitive designs, design-led, not standards-led, considering place before movement and incorporating well designed lighting of the building and the surrounding area.
- Must be finished with a limited range of approved natural materials according to a continuously updated list
- Signage brightness, colouring and form must be in keeping with the character of the surrounding buildings and environment: in any case except where otherwise agreed, signage lighting must be restricted to a luminance ~40 cd/m² to ~190 cd/m² for background luminances of 1 cd/m² and 1000 cd/m²,
- Provision should be made via S106 /CIL for the inclusion and maintenance of approved street art commensurate with the size of the development in any new or refurbished building within the heritage centre. This could range from sculpture, or a low relief feature, decorative paving to an interesting clock.
- Where mixed use (mix of flats and commercial and retail) development approvals are sought, ground floor streets should be animated by retail, leisure or cultural and not by residential private windows which will invariably be curtained or shuttered and look uncared for.
- Must be fully wheelchair and visually impaired accessible.
- May not diminish, belittle or damage any tourism asset, such as listed or locally listed features.
- Where residential balconies are provided they may not overlook a main throughfare where the air quality is measured to exceed a predicted annual mean concentration limit of 10 µg/m³.
- Where building hoardings or safely netting on scaffolds facing public rights of way are installed for longer than three months, the application for approval should include designs for suitable street artwork.

Some of the above may require modifications to Policies TC1-4

And a new section is required which addresses the environment with reference to:

- All applications for development or substantial must reference and take into account Colchester's Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity strategies, specifically how they will encourage net biodiversity gain, actively improve quality of life, help address climate change and improve access to habitats and green space;
- Trees and planting should be an integral part of all design, if not on the site, then nearby, and provided with a funded maintenance plan.
- Engineering grade solar panels, wind turbines, and Green roofs must be incorporated where unobtrusive and practical.
- Gigabit internet should be incorporated as standard where possible.

LEWIS GARDENS:

It is worrying that no lessons seem to have been learned from the debacle of the narrowly-averted Alumno plan. The desire was clearly made by a large number of residents that the use of this land for large scale buildings, whether student accommodation or not, was not acceptable, and that a wide range of alternative options have been devised and communicated by others: yet it was not communicated to We Made That Ltd., in the initial specification that it should be considered in this light.

However It seems inevitable that there should be some construction on the site to make it mixed use, But it must be on the human scale and fully accessible to all.

Bearing that in mind, my specific comments and suggestions are as follows:

- I would seriously propose that the suggested building heights of 15 metres is far far too high, is inimical to the expressed public desire for a cultural space, will impact on the view from Priory Street and will diminish the setting of the City wall, a major bone of contention with the previous designs (by others). Recommendation: where building is absolutely necessary, restrict to 3-storey including attic workspace - i.e. eight metres.
- Remove item No 3 (20 meter tall building) as it will be seriously overscaled to Firstsite building, diminishing and belittling it. The Gallery was designed as the landmark building and must be perceived as taller than any nearby building..
- Replace the above in position further south opposite Link Road with a 18-20 meter tall significant and unique artwork such as a statue of Boudica by Anthony Gormley which will attract a minimum of 3000 extra incoming visitors per week who will also visit other attractions and be worth £20m annually to the local economy. The £7.2m cost (including the amphitheatre and landscaping) paid for by grant applications to trusts and grant makers
- Metered power at least 60A, preferably 100A, plus water to be provided at two locations for festival etc. use..
- The smaller spaces for cultural and media and affordable startups to have upper floor accommodation so they become a live-in studio for rent or sale. The space can accommodate eight to ten such units in a single block of exceptional design. The ground floor will be artists studio galleries, or craft retail, the upper floors being decent living accommodation for couples.
- *Drawing C* below shows in sketch form such a development, the north end of which is an all-weather cast concrete open access amphitheatre (see *Drawing A*), usable for music and theatre. At the south end of the building there is a glass conservatory/café with artworks, planting, good lighting and is open till late. The drawing also shows seating planters. This will keep the area busy and animated.
- If this is not possible, the multifunctional outdoor space shown as No1 on your map to be provided with floor anchors at intervals on the square, to allow for fixing of marquees, gazebos, stalls and stages
- No building requiring foundations deeper than 500mm or technical installation, water control tank, mechanically propelled vehicle etc. other than a footpath may be within ten metres of the town wall.
- Flat roofs are to be avoided wherever possible.
- The view from Curzon Balcony must be preserved wherever possible.
- Suggested use for retail on Queen Street under the Curzon- a youth centre specializing in training, e.g. motorcycle maintenance, digital, media, sport and life skills. Paid for by grants and youth project funding.

- On the plaza behind the innovation hub, once tentatively named John Ball Square: A 150m x 4800 x 2400mm cast solid concrete white painted stage to be provided for public open access use. The partly-demolished wall behind to be left in its current state as a "romantic ruin, part of the Theatre Royal"" subject to safety consolidation, rendered and painted pearl white for projection screen use. A 32A single phase supply be provided behind the stage and paralleled to a 32a socket in a IP67 Floorpocket in a central location for a projector. These power supplies to be metered. (*SEE DRAWING E*)
- Interpretation board of old theatre to be provided.
- Create path along Roman wall from new innovation hub square, named by previous developers as "John Ball Square" into Berryfields, with new entrance from Priory Street car park by existing gate and new lift north of wall. (More details about ways and means below in the Priory Street section)
- Place three or four significant sculptural artworks as a tourist trail along wall, after public competition
- Consider Demolishing 15 Queen Street to open up view of Firstsite and install an artwork garden with walkways either side to inhibit vehicles. OR create new vehicle access to the premises in High Street from Culver Street East through the site, which would require traffic lights but would enable the whole of the Lewis Gardens to be car-free.
- Where possible, any significant archeological finds should be displayed in-situ, buildings to be adapted and redesigned as needed.

BRITANNIA

- Ensure that the view of St Botolphs Church as well as the Priory and Firstsite are preserved for the benefit of passengers arriving at Colchester Town station.
- When re-providing the Chinese Cultural Hub, provide performance space/stage and kitchen/restaurant space.
- Subject to exceptional design and with careful placing, the taller structure mentioned can be even higher to create a landmark iconic skyline building: It can be a considerable height and still not impact negatively on the skyline But it should be accessed from Colchester Town Station at its level as well as Britannia Yard ground level to provide a viewing platform .
- Establish the future of the Magistrates Court, which I understand is due for closure and factor it in to the overall strategy as an eventually clearable site for a stop/layover for tour buses with toilets (first thing incomers need) and mini tourist centre with ambassador and maps.

ST BOTOLPHS JUNCTION AREA

- Consider relocating Colchester Town Station 100 metres further up the line with the main access from George Williams Way with pedestrian access from St Botolphs Junction, Rosebury Avenue, George Williams Way and Brook Street via footpath. With the potential clearance of the Magistrates Court, this will free up additional space to add to Britannia Gate, and the embankment areas creating a significant development area. *SEE DRAWING B*
- Consider the building of a much-needed Concert Hall with 1200 seats and rehearsal room on the newly available site. Paid for by applications to Trusts and Grant making bodies.

Properly programmed and managed, this will create a major and very valuable footfall asset for Colchester.

- In my opinion, the redesign of St Botolph's Circus is superfluous. It works reasonably well as a traffic circulation device. The problems of pedestrian and disabled access and cycle routes can each be addressed in a variety of different ways. Disability access is enabled by providing a lift in the twin staircase area by Colchester Town station, widening and lowering the footways in the central core thus allowing the ramps to be more compliant. The trees remain and are supplemented by other planting.
- The area is animated by creating leisure and retail facilities within the roundabout core and covering with a dome. These will require 24 hr, security which coupled with improved access will serendipitously make it safe to use all night. SEE drawing C.
- Bear in mind that the roundabout area, like the Dell development, which had almost insurmountable foundation problems, is based on an underground spring. If it is infilled with anything but engineering grade materials and steel spreaders which will cost most of the budget, the hydraulic pressure of traffic will cause constant and disastrous subsidence and disruption for years to come.
- Also, the recent local experience of remodeling roundabouts has shown that it will invariably cost more and take longer than predicted. The consultant has said at the St Botolphs Church consultation that the budget is £12million and they will spend all of that. So where will the inevitable overspend come from?

THE PRIORY

- Re-establish a performance space with power facilities in the Priory and light the façade.
- Fit CCTV for monitoring antisocial behavior in the Priory.
- Reclaim and demolish the infill shops built on the original alley on Queen Street (currently occupied by Welhams) to provide a snatch view of and access to the Priory.
- Create a small secure building for storage and distribution of promotional and interpretation materials for the Priory, a base for wardens, act as occasional equipment storage and changing areas for the performance area.

PRIORY STREET

- Create new disabled access from Priory Street to the Lewis Gardens and John Ball Square by a) removing steps of the original Theatre Royal stage door, opening the existing aperture down to street level. b) excavating with all due care for archeology the whole area between the Theatre wall and the foundations of the buried Roman wall to street level creating a cavity approximately 4meters x 2.8metres open to the air at the upper level with suitable protection against fall, c) Make good inside and out, provide drainage, expose and protect heritage walls, make floor and internal walls d) Install disabled lift and staircase.

HIGH STREET

- Move the Visitor information Centre to the High Street (the old Next building for preference as it has an additional entrance from Culver Street West) and provide café, toilets, gallery space, museum Wunderkammer section, ambassador room as well as Visit

Colchester facilities. This is similar to the Visit Rochester offer. On the upper floors, co-working space in creative industries. New lift required.. That will enable far more visibility and will free up much needed museum space at Hollytrees.

- Create Tour bus stop outside Visitor Centre (not a layover) to allow visitor coaches to be right at the heart of the action.
- Remove all unnecessary street furniture.
- Add more street sculpture, make a trail.
- Provide solar LED floodlights on no parking poles and light significant buildings.

CROUCH STREET:

- Clean up the façade of the Regal/Odeon Building and build a 1200 seater Concert Hall behind, with truck access from Headgate and a three storey car park over the existing car park.

VINEYARD AREA, INCLUDING ST BOTOLPHS STREET AND VINEYARD STREET

- Create new N-S pedestrian route following the Roman processional route from temple to circus via Long Wyre Street, Arthur Street, by creating a link opposite a set of new steps from Arthur Street to Vineyard. The missing section of the route through the wall is provided by purchasing No 11 Eld Lane and its associated basement, using their set of existing but rebuilt steps and a new internal lift. The Eld Lane shopfront will be very suitable for an arcade style small shops area.
- Reconfigure the NCP car park to have entrances and exits from Southway. Close exits from e Street, removing the need for private vehicles to enter the Street at all.
- Create a Rapid transit and Lion Walk undercroft deliveries route on the south carriageway of Osborne Street. By reducing the pedestrian pavement to 2.4 metres. Remove bus stops except for one for the rapid transit vehicles Remove existing waiting room and create a wider turn into Stanwell Street.
- Demolish the north side of Osborne Street from, but not including the shop on the corner of St Botolphs Street, to the junction with Stanwell Street North, incorporating the listed period cottages into the design. That allows space to create two new lanes of four stops of covered bus station bays plus a lane of layover bays in Stanwell street.
- To the north of these a row of three storey buildings, which are waiting rooms, shop, toilets and florist etc., residential (12- 18 homes) over.
- To the north of those, a row of two storey buildings built on the higher level, abutting, being shops and cafes servicing the Roman Wall parkway.
- Vineyard Street from junction to St Botolphs Street becomes pedestrian and cycle access.
- Create elegant bridge from Eld Lane (infill shop to be acquired and demolished) to top floor of shop buildings with pair of internal lifts.
- Ensure pedestrian priority by Pelican crossing (normally in favour of pedestrians, changing automatically when rapid transit approaching) from the South pavements to the bus lanes.
- Demolish the redundant Stanwell House and replace with iconic 14 story residential building (43 -50 homes) with views to Roman wall park, St Johns Green and Gateway. This must be of exceptional design to add to our skyline offer together with the proposed tall buildings on Britannia Gate.
- Repair and enhance the buildings on top of Roman Wall, Encourage owners to make good all the dilapidations and to paint the visible parts in controlled bright colours.

THE RIVER through the park area.

- The privately owned river in the Lower Park to the east of the weir successfully had kayaking and canoeing for some years, but the river has changed and now has kingfishers and otters that it did not then. So for the sake of biodiversity and preservation, such activities are not to be permitted between the Weir and East Bridge water extraction plant.
- The World War 2 defence blocks on the south bank need to be further protected and interpreted.
- The section of river from North Bridge to the weir could possibly be used for water activities - there have been duck races in the past - but it needs aerating to be rid of algae.
- (Not in masterplan area): Clean up the Colne Bank watersports area.

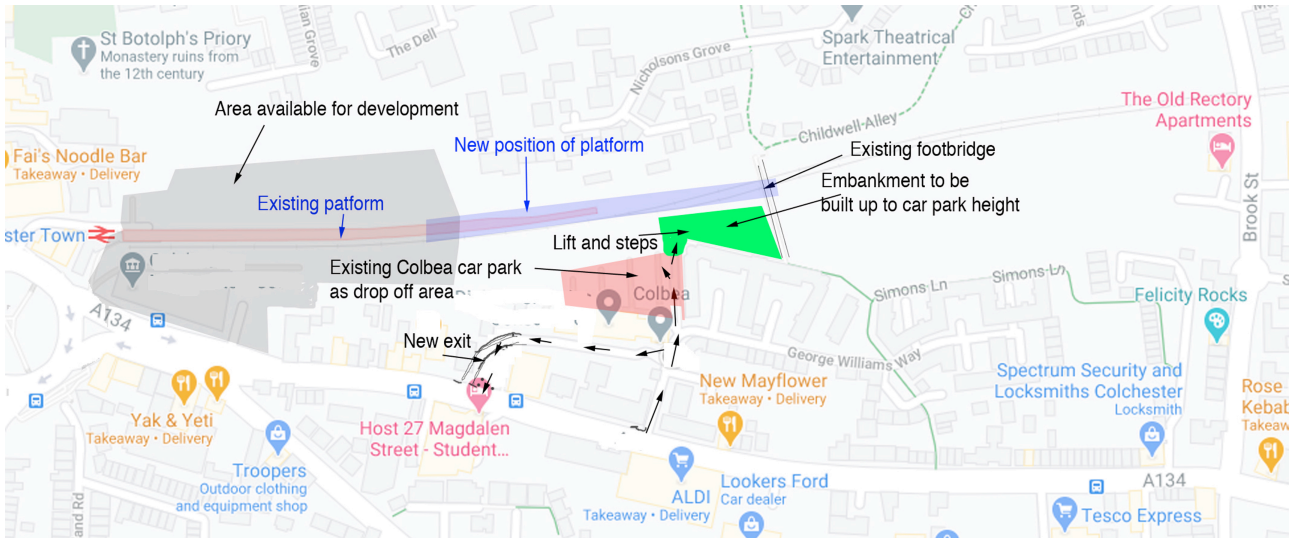
THE DRAWINGS:



DRAWING A: Concrete amphitheatre, Firstsite shown behind.

At the rear of the D-Shaped stage (not a raised stage) is a part of a terrace of building on two levels which are artists studios with living accommodation. The North end of this building is devoted to dressing room and storage, and has a patio style window access to a small balcony, and at ground level, two doors to a plain room beyond. The South end is a glass conservatory and café.

Light pillars are not as shown but brought in as required in the form of vertical 300 x 300 truss, floor anchor and power will be required.



DRAWING B Suggested Relocation of Colchester Town Station



Drawing C - The Dome over St Botolphs Circus... (yes I know the sun is rendered all wrong....)



DRAWING D : Ideal layout for Amphitheatre, Artist studio block, Artwork and green space



DRAWING E: Position of stage and screen wall on John Ball Square