

Masterplan 2023 - Responses

These responses are submitted by Rowena Macaulay (founder, Walk Colchester).

My interests in the above capacity are in the design of urban space in support of *walking for all*, and the *specific needs of mobility-restricted walkers and chair users* in particular.

I include the needs of visually impaired (vi) within the term 'mobility-restricted' but am less able to comment in a representative capacity. However I know these issues are covered by others.

Where views are my own alone, I have indicated.

There is also some cross-over with Colchester Civic Society representations in relation to St Botolph's proposals, since I contributed to this, also in my Walk Colchester capacity.

Quotes from the Masterplan are italicised.

General comments

Re Walking

I am very supportive of course of the many references in the Masterplan to sustainable transport options, and walking and cycling as in particular as design priorities:

...a safe, healthy, active and accessible city centre Integrating improvements to the public realm with increased cycle access and enhanced pedestrian experience of the city centre, including for those with different abilities.

As many people as possible should walk, cycle or use public transport to travel into the city centre.

...attractive and easy walking and cycling routes

It waits to be seen though, how manifest in practice are the gains for walkers specifically. As a member of both the LCWIP and Active Travel steering groups over the past 4 years, I have consistently argued that walking is often lumped in with cycling (not unique to Colchester/Essex!) and treated as if the needs and desires of both are the same. And then the money follows cycling. The questions remain:

- What is the Masterplan doing to identify key walking routes in ways that are not dependent on either cars or bicycles?
- What is the Masterplan doing to *improve* walking routes?

Key Issues and Proposals

- *Leisure walking* should be treated as equally important to utilitarian walking even within the city centre and urban fringe. Making walking pleasurable for leisure purposes I see as the most effective way of encouraging *new walkers*; new leisure walkers learn the benefits of walking for other kinds of journeys and the routes...
- Consideration should be given to *desirable off-road routes and their improvement* eg across King's Meadow, and walking connections beyond KM in the direction of both the station and Leisure World; walking routes along either side of the Colne that make lateral links with walking routes in/out of the centre (the riverside connection on the south side of the Colne, between Middleborough and Middle Mill Weir is an important one); the walking route along the south bank from Middleborough to North Station roundabout, as it is quiet and effectively off-road. Despite its immediate proximity to the river though, its connection with it is poor - unimaginative and unloved – so there is scope for great improvement here!
- *Footway widths*: improved widths are promised in some key places, but there is also more than one instance where footway width is to be compromised by (LCWIP) plans; either physically reduced to better accommodate a cycle lane (Head St, Crouch St), or shared with cyclists when previously not (Avon Way). Priority areas for increased paving width and surface improvements are: Butt Road; Queen St / St Botolph's St / Osborne St / John's St; Culver St West (and East); Mersea Road (especially city end); High St.
- *Footway paving choices*: strongly support the plan's call for a design code. Paving choices must be a key component, for the obvious functional and aesthetic reasons. Within this, accessibility must be a *priority*. The city has a smorgasbord of paving, with some poor previous choices for accessibility (Culver St West is particularly difficult for chair users).

In a few places, the desire to inject character and represent heritage has directly compromised accessibility eg the ramped entrance to St Mary's Arts Centre (a bad example as the paving choices made here actually went in *in the name of* accessibility), and the High St, where cobbled decoration is incorporated in places within the footway (at Lion Walk entrance). I don't believe it is ever necessary to compromise accessibility for aesthetic priorities; accessible choices need not be unattractive, and aesthetics can be achieved by other means.

- *Accessible walking – key routes and obstacles* (dealt with below)

Re Accessibility

Accessibility and inclusivity should be an overarching and holistic goal of the Masterplan

Accessible and Inclusive City Centre: Any new intervention should comply to the highest standard of accessibility and inclusion requirements

- Strongly support of course. However, please don't rely on eg building regs and architects to ensure compliance (with eg Part M). 'Compliance' is not in any event aspirational, and the city centre won't achieve the highest standard aspired to above unless CCC itself *fully embraces* this aim, goes above and beyond minimum legal requirements, chooses the gold version over the bronze/silver.

It would convey much in terms of seriousness of intent therefore to commit to working to the following guidance, in the same way that LTN 1/20 and Gear Change are constantly cited in relation to provision for cycling):

1. British Standard BS 8300-2:2018 Design of an accessible and inclusive built environment in all design briefs and tenders, procurement policies etc
2. Inclusive Mobility (DfT, 2021) in all aspects of inclusive city design (This *is* the 'highest standard of accessibility')

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1044542/inclusive-mobility-a-guide-to-best-practice-on-access-to-pedestrian-and-transport-infrastructure.pdf

In general I feel the Masterplan is thin on a *disability access* perspective.

- The aspiration of inclusive access is repeated but little flesh as to what is meant, who it is aimed at and what solutions are proposed.
- In 'Setting the Scene', no mention of specific inclusive access issues forms part of the bullet points under either *Opportunities* or *Challenges*
- No mention of topography issues for disabled people within the city centre (only in relation to North and East Hills). But north-south gradients are a big issue: Queen St/St Bots St and St John St entail significant gradients.

I can imagine that the adopted approach has been to factor in *inclusion* and *accessibility* principles throughout, rather than accord them a principal status. This is understandable to a point, except that 'accessibility' is a very broad term. Within it the needs of older/disabled walkers and chair users, which are highly specific, are easily lost. These users are minority groups, yes, but significant ones nonetheless, and legally entitled users of the same spaces, whose 'protected characteristics' status also makes a case for proactive attention.

If disability gets lost in general accessibility, significant issues facing mobility-restricted walkers and chair users will remain unchanged. It *needs* specific attention because no others face the same issues or experience them the same way.

Provisions made for mobility-restricted walkers generally also benefit all, so don't necessarily entail additional expenditure at the expense of the majority. Without specific attention to certain minority needs though, a well-intentioned document and approach can end up perpetuating the very aspects of exclusion the intention has been to avoid.

Specific issues/proposals:

- The plan would greatly benefit from an inclusive access section and supporting map - a dedicated review of travel routes and issues across the city centre for mobility-restricted users. I *can't stress enough* how important and valuable an exercise (and emergent resource) this would be.
- Supplementary to the above, master-planning should include the development of a user-oriented map of all Blue Badge parking in the city centre, including double-yellow line availability as well as designated parking spaces.

In recent years, we have lost a significant amount of accessible parking opportunities, in particular at the west end of the city example, leaving a dearth of availability here (eg loss of double yellow line parking on Head St, loss of same outside the Mercury for non-Mercury users; loss of spaces on north-west High St for Park and Ride buses). These changes have happened without user consultation. Suffice to say, the planning for and retention of blue badge parking remains a very sensitive area.

The proposed map, in addition to its obvious benefits to badge holders, would go a long way to restoring confidence for the future: it would greatly serve the interests of transparency, and aid planning and consultation on future changes.

- The plan recognises that: *The hilly terrain poses issues of accessibility for disabled and less able bodied people, particularly when accessing the city centre from the north and east (p22)*

However nowhere in the document is there explicit recognition of the *north to south* access issues within the city centre, compounded by the fact that both of the city's major transport hubs are located at the bottom of the hill on the southside.

- Accessibility and building redevelopment / planning consent etc: CCC should not exempt itself from proactive involvement in discussions relating to accessibility of city centre buildings with street frontage (shops/cafes/leisure etc), simply because the legal responsibility falls to the building owner, where this is not CCC. If CCC is serious about inclusion, it should be working with building owners at every level (including planning consent, but not limited to) to encourage, educate/inform etc.

Example: Preto (previously Café Rouge) on the High St is a good example of a building made less accessible in the past ten years by the inclusion of a step at its entrance where it was previously ramped. A complaint to CCC at the time was met with the response that they agreed it was likely to be illegal but it was not their responsibility

as the building did not belong to them.

CCC do however get involved in other equivalent (arguably less important) design aspects e.g. shop front signage/aesthetics, so clearly whether or not to intervene is as much a value-based decision as one determined by legal responsibility?

Re approach to existing and new buildings (personal comment) **(Personal comment)**

Retention of older buildings

I strongly support the retention of older buildings where there is scope for refurbishment, to ensure mix, architectural continuity and character. The plan advocates for this, which is great.

My concern is for the wholesale redevelopment of areas such as implied at Osborne St where I feel this mix could easily be lost. In particular, I would like to see saved:

- The corner building at the junction of St Botolph's Street and Osborne St.
- The buildings on Arthur Street
- The three-story red brick buildings to either side of Arthur St on Osborne St.
- 15 Queen Street. There are representations elsewhere suggesting it might be demolished or significantly altered to provide better sight lines through to Firstsite. I strongly oppose. This is a handsome, beautifully proportioned building, made more interesting by the fact that it stands alone and has walkways either side. Firstsite reveals itself slowly, and was surely designed that way? 15 Queens St is also a feature building at the end of Culver St East, contributing to the potential character of this undervalued street (which does need redeveloping!)

Design of new buildings

Alongside older, I am not against contemporary designs, and in many cases prefer some of these over pastiche architecture. But they must at least make a nod to the local vernacular and be mindful of it. And either way quality is paramount.

Regarding new build residential accommodation in the city centre though (i.e. not when this entails redevelopment of existing buildings), I do believe that keeping storey height down, to say 4 storeys maximum, helps residents feel a connection with the ground and with any surrounding green space, and contributes to a sense of ownership and responsibility for that (shared) space.

In addition, I feel that *all* flats should have some immediate connection with the outdoors via incorporation of a balcony of sufficiently decent size to sit out at a small table.

I would really like to see a local design code for all newly built accommodation – the question is: what do we regard as the minimum/optimum standards that people should be able to expect from their accommodation? Does such a thing exist?

Finally what accessibility standards are being built into new accommodation and how will meeting these standards be police? Re we just talking about a lowest common denominator Part M approach (how will even this be achieved for certain), or will plans have higher aspirations?

Re city life, leisure and retail

(Personal comment)

There is much mention in the Masterplan of the creation of a café culture, and restaurant and bar life, in various new strategic sites. This is great up to a point but important to remember that the plan is also looking to significantly increase city-centre dwellers – which I generally support - and these residents need to eat ordinary food too!

Most residents are presumably not out every day frequenting cafes, but more often cooking at home and making packed lunches etc, which leads on to the observation that we are extremely short of food retail in the city centre, especially of any independent/ interesting kind. In recent years, we have lost all our greengrocers (save North Station Rd), our butchers, bakers, wet fish shops, delicatessens, off-licences. There remains *not one* of any of these in the city centre.

I feel this impact directly. I have lived right in the city centre for 27 years, and now have PA support with shopping. In the past 2-3 years, my PA has taken to doing my shopping outside the city centre on the way in, as she can't guarantee getting everything in the centre (notwithstanding the existence of Sainsburys) and it saves her two trips. These are not for extraordinary items I promise!

Re Public Realm

Comments on public realm are largely made under St Botolph's proposals below, but also relevant elsewhere.

Wide, clear walking passages through public realm are important for all walkers but vital for visually impaired walkers. Function and aesthetics are both equally important. Aesthetic design to be employed in a way that is conscious of its potential to convey meaning when used proactively for that purpose; but equally to confuse, when used for decorative purposes only.

Careful siting of street furniture, benches/rest points, bins etc so that these align and don't compromise clear passages, and avoidance of clutter very important.

Green public realm must include trees and planting of significant size; ornamental trees will not cut it!

Responses to Specifics in the Masterplan

Actively respond to the climate emergency

Linking to Communities in the Wider Area

Improve cycling and walking routes - strongly support Active Travel goals in principle. However, by far the majority, if not all, walking routes follow cycle routes which *follow roads*. What evidence is there of the needs and desires of walkers *as distinct from* cyclists?

I do not think Priory St can support a wider cycle route if this is being taken from either road or footway, nor think it needs one with one-way traffic and being relatively quiet.

Rapid Transit System – I not entirely sure what this will look like in practice or how it will operate. However, I cautiously support in principle, so long as not at the expense of pedestrians.

Colchester's Park and Ride facility was partly accommodated by the loss of some pedestrian crossings (eg most notably at the top of Queen St, and at the junction of St Botolph's and Osborne St, although the latter has now been reintroduced), alongside other bus stops.

Buses - strongly support the possibility of 'a frequent shuttle service from Colchester rail station through the city centre' but advocate for the extension of this to the city centre rectangle itself, comprising High St, Queen's St, St Botolph's St, Osborne St, St John's St, Head St.

City gateways - this concept slightly concerns me in its implications for disabled network users who might have to make additional changes outside the city centre in addition to navigating the centre itself for potential onward travel, but I appreciate the aim of keeping traffic to a minimum within the centre

Improvements to existing car parks

Ensure parking provision continues to meet demand when carparks earmarked for redevelopment are redeveloped

- Yes, support, but also hope we can aim to *reduce* carparking provision overall in the future, in line with increased availability of sustainable travel options, especially where our space numbers are above recommended levels (which I understand they are?). With the eventual aim of reclaiming some land at Priory St and Vineyard St as public realm / green space.

Accessibility and inclusivity

Implement inclusive and accessible wayfinding focussed on movement between arrival points and places of interest

- Support of course! But propose we move away from giving estimated journey times and return to distances please? Everybody can work out their own approx. times given a distance, but suggesting an average time is very exclusive of those who can't move freely or fast.

Environment and Sustainability

Car-lite access restrictions - support this approach to the High Street.

Reducing motor traffic levels to volumes (500 vehicles per hour or lower)

- What % is this of current traffic levels? It's hard to gauge what kind of a difference we're talking about...

City centre corridors

...north-south corridors that aim to consolidate and extend pedestrian-friendly streets, create coherent active travel experiences between key sites

- Support, but not sure why north-south (especially) walking corridors are reduced by the plans to quite such a single framework, and do not include among them 1) Butt Rd/Head St/North Hill and 2) Queen St and St Botolph's. Since these routes, alongside those indicated in the plans, all run parallel, they provide a really easy navigation framework for the city centre.
- Surely it is in everyone's interests to have a broader network of walking options? Limiting the network will most likely simply mean that people stray off it or don't use it at all?

Expand and enhance the existing shared micro mobility offer (cycles for hire, e-scooters)

- ...not without serious attention to pickup/drop-off points and policies because of the threat posed to accessibility for disabled path users in particular, as already presented by scooters.

Provide a Safe, Healthy, Active and Accessible City Centre

Permeability and connectivity

Accessible and Inclusive City Centre: Any new intervention should comply to the highest standard of accessibility and inclusion requirements –

- Agree! Though important to reiterate, statements of principle are easy; it's the fleshing out in detail of actual plans that any scheme will be judged upon.

Implement inclusive and accessible wayfinding focussed on movement between arrival points and places of interest –

- Agree, and see comment above re importance of giving distance rather than average time (or at least both). Time only is exclusive of slower walkers and chair users.

Improved connection to Colchester mainline station along North Station Road - Improved pedestrian environment including wider footpaths, cycling infrastructure, signage, etc

- Agree, but also via Kings Meadow – this is the quiet, green, low air pollution route – why would we not promote? Likewise along the river on the south side, connecting Middleborough with the weir and Castle Park/Maidenburgh Street i.e. off-road into town
- Lateral connections are important too - not simply in/out of town - to form a proper walking network, serving both functional and leisure purposes.

Improved key junctions and introducing new pedestrian crossings –

- Agree, most importantly those lost on Queen St to the Park and Ride. New public transport initiatives must not compromise existing accessibility eg removal of crossings, lights and bus stops. The city centre must place inclusive pedestrianism at top of the transport hierarchy.

Improved [...] pedestrian crossing at Queen Street junction with Culver Street East - YES!

Improved pedestrian links –

- Yes to Vineyard Gate to Eld Lane improvements (including lift/ accessible route), but not here alone. Alongside proposed accessible route up via St Botolph's (lift or ramp), and with connecting inclusive pedestrian route between them?
- Re the long-term aspiration of reinstating the Culver Street East and West connection, I (personally) struggle to see how this would work, but do view Culver St East as one of the most undervalued spaces in town, and would very much support attention to this end of it. If something good could be achieved here, that would be sufficient ambition in my eyes, given the difficulty in reconnecting.

Public realm, open space and landscape

Develop design vision for Queen Street / St Botolph's Street and St John's Street / Osborne Street that integrates public transport, cycling and walking and create attractive and safe streets at all times of day and night

- Agree, but no mention of disability-related issues here and this is a KEY route.
- Also, sensitivity required to the risk of over-sanitizing an area (around St Bots) that I see as one of the most vibrant and happening stretches in town around the clock. It has its problems, but a lot going right for it as well.

Develop design vision for Southway, integrating at-grade crossings, tree planting and pavements

- If it can be achieved, fantastic!

Continue to improve lanes within core city centre area as level surface streets to improve accessibility for pedestrian users, in particular people with mobility and visual impairments

- This needs further discussion. I don't believe vi users themselves are arguing for level surfaces (if this means kerb-free)? Kerbs are very important for navigation for vi walkers supported by guide dogs or who are white cane users. Please consult with Jonathan Dixon, Essex Sight.

Develop riverside access and amenities - e.g. paddleboarding, swimming, canoeing (personal response)

- I am mostly opposed to human leisure activities on the Colne (other than walking/cycling along its banks), except perhaps at the Hythe where it widens and deepens. I don't believe this particular river can support it; it's not wide or deep enough to do so without threatening its biodiversity which should be our 1st priority.
- I totally support the river's need for 'investment' in the sense of: celebration, active protection, connectivity of access and walking opportunities along its length, protection from development along its banks (especially in more rural sections, and where this prevents continuity of public access); I want people to be able enjoy it better; I just don't feel it should be 'animated' in the way suggested (i.e. water sports)
- Re improved riverside public realm – definitely support, so long as i) biodiversity (and connectivity of biodiversity) remains 1st priority, ii) no development is allowed that prevents or compromises public access to the riverbank.

Introduce public realm design code covering surfacing, lighting, street furniture and planting to ensure consistency and legibility –

- Strongly agree, but disability MUST be a key component of thinking in this, since there is so much scope to use design and procurement to address issues for disabled people eg surfacing choices, colour choices and use, signage etc

Diversify City Centre Uses to Encourage Footfall

(Personal comment)

Land Use Strategy

Retail and city centre uses, including restaurant, bar and cafe uses, cultural and community facilities, and other entertainment and leisure uses –

- Agree, but see comment on p6 above (Re city life, leisure, and retail)

Building Heights, Density and Built Form

Maximum heights determined by the prevalent building form within each character areas –

- I support a mix of heights, and the above as a general principle, but I do feel some suggested here are too high, particularly in the area between Firstsite and Curzon.

Support the City Centre Economy to Everyone's Benefit

(personal comment)

This means ensuring that there are options in the city centre that aren't only about shopping

- the implication here is leisure shopping, but 'shopping' is also shopping for food. We have a lot of chain eateries; it's independents that will make us interesting, and we've managed to let many of them go over the years. Can we encourage/support independents by lowering rates?

...events, festivals, heritage tours etc [...] strengthening of cultural spaces

- Agree, absolutely.

The local economy can also be supported through updates to the current outdoor market. –

- Agree. With the exception of our farmers market and the fruit and veg stall on Trinity Square, our market is not great. How can we attract a more interesting mix?

New uses for empty department stores –

- Well yes, there must be, but *what* new uses is very important. I know I just sound old but... go-kart racing in our old Debenhams?!

Diversify and enrich the city centre offer -

- Agree, but again, no real mention here of independent shops and specifically food retailers – the city centre is chronically short of groceries/butcher/bakers/fish/deli. An indoor FOOD MARKET would be GREAT! I might even retire early and volunteer to run it...

Make the Most of Colchester's Rich Heritage (personal comment)

Protecting and enhancing existing heritage assets [...] and improving the setting and connections between them –

- Strongly agree.

Placemaking within the city centre

Shopfront design strategy –

- Agree. However, if we can insist on this, we can surely also insist on new shop developments and change of use premises following Building Regs Part M?

Public art strategy including temporary commissions and installations

- YES, very important, but must include development of policy and protocols on how such work is treated, as and when it is taken down, moved or disposed of...

A recent case makes the point:

In 2022, CBC-commissioned artworks by Lisa Temple Cox were removed from the Lion Walk public toilets when they were refurbished. No consultation took place within the community as to the future of the artworks, even though many had contributed to their design because they were about Colchester culture and people. The artist herself was not informed they'd been disposed of; she was not offered the artworks back or informed of their new whereabouts. The situation only came to light when a friend of the artist discovered the installations for sale in an antique shop in Norwich. Further enquiries revealed that they were picked up by the dealer at Marks Tey car boot sale, and it seems that a single unnamed person benefitted from the sale. Earlier this year, the installations were purchased/recovered from Norwich and brought back to Colchester. A decision is still to be taken about their future.

I think most people would agree this is not the way we should be treating either publicly commissioned works or the artists who produce them. A policy that would make impossible in future events such as described above would be a great step forward.

Consider mini heritage action zone approach for run down streets eg. East Hill

- Support yes, but in the particular example given, include East Street too? All the way from East Gates to the top of the hill.

Key Sites: High St

...blue badge holder access is maintained

- Agree, very important. No further loss of spaces and ensure distribution of spaces up to the Head Street end. The west end of the city has lost a significant amount of accessible parking in recent years (to Park and Ride at northwest High St; outside Mercury for non-Mercury parking, and Head St.)
- A further detailed study should be conducted to ensure that sufficient blue badge parking is provided across the city centre and to identify gaps. – extend review to whole city centre and provide a user-oriented accessible parking map, showing location and type of different parking possibilities

Ensure footway at each end of the High Street is widened for the first 30-40m to avoid loading bays dominating the gateways to the High Street –

- Yes, but not at the expense of blue badge parking (above), so needed at this end

Cycle contraflow (east to west) on High St –

- Strongly disagree with this proposal, as counter-intuitive to non-motorised users, since one-way to all others, and likely to be dangerous. Unsure also how the Culver Street alternative will work in an area which operates in practice as almost pedestrianised.

Blue badge parking / drop-off currently on south side of the street results in passengers exiting into the path of oncoming traffic.

- Blue badge parking on south side *does not* necessarily result in passengers exiting into the path of oncoming traffic, because it depends whether the badge holder is the driver or passenger. A street-side exit will always be preferable to a wheelchair user because it is always level. The pavement side presents height difference (unless completely flush) which impacts on transfers, and a lack of wheelchair stability (same) if there is any room at all for a castor wheel to slip down between pavement and vehicle, as there mostly is.

Some areas have no kerb level change at all but very careful design for visually impaired users which has resulted in good feedback from this part of the community

- Strongly advise against going ahead with designs on this basis without further consultation with vi users specifically.

Removal of kerbs I know is not a design policy supported by Essex Sight. As for chair users, kerbs are not a problem so long as supported by regular good crossing points, and dropped kerbs that are properly dropped, wherever these are installed.

Low raised kerb is good for visually impaired user safety and does not intrude visually –

- Ensure we are not simply building in trip hazards for eg older and/or ambulant disabled walkers.

Inclusive Mobility advises: ‘Dropped kerbs should preferably be flush with the road, but with a maximum 6mm tolerance if not, provided that a rounded bullnose is provided at the change of level’.

Good quality street trees added which will mature to a significant scale, strengthening the urban character of the street

- Agree! It would be fantastic to green the High St with more trees, especially if we can accommodate mature trees of a decent height (not simply ornamental)

Southway and St John’s Street / Osborne Street

Osborne St car park and ground floor bingo hall: Encourage change of use...

Could ground-level redevelopment here accommodate indoor/undercover bus/coach station waiting area and ticket machines etc?

Former Bus Station Site

(personal comment)

Improve pedestrian and cycle link from Firstsite to Culver Street East. Consider if no. 15 Queen Street might be redeveloped to improve visibility of Firstsite and more generous entrance to the public

- Strongly disagree with any change to 15 Queen St. Please don’t destroy! This is a handsome character building in its own right. It would be a backward step to compromise this in any way, to achieve small benefit of another kind. Remember elsewhere in the Masterplan the commitment to retaining older and character buildings? Why would we let this one go? It also forms a triangle cluster of character buildings with the red brick (Georgian?) buildings opposite on Culver St East and the Natural History Museum. And offsets the modern Curzon next door.

As for approach to Firstsite, chancing upon a site/building can be exciting too, or

accessing a surprise open space via a small one? Could better signage not be the simple solution here?

- Would it not be a great relocation for the Visitor Information Centre? Right in the heart of the Cultural Quarter, with dual aspects/entrances. This way also, no one would miss finding Firstsite, if that's the issue.
- Or, better still, relocate both Food Coop and Visitor Information Centre to the empty but fully accessible, glass-fronted-on-both-sides, retail space adjacent to the Curzon. Fantastic!

Improve Culver Street East to create more street level activity, screening service yards with active frontages -

- Agree. Culver St East, especially moving away from Queen St towards the centre, is one of the most undervalued streets in the city centre and there is surely great scope for development here that would both extend the retail offer, much improve connectivity and create greater vibrancy, especially as a key route down to Firstsite.

The development of this site should include a wide range of uses at ground floor level...

- Please ensure decent open public realm here. The city has no public square (well, only a private one). This seems to be the perfect opportunity to create some sense of this, with development (if there must be development) bordering it and having frontage onto it.

But ground floor space adjacent to the Curzon remains empty – why is this and what are the implications for filling further retail space on this site? Will smaller retailers be able to afford it? It would be awful if we created retail spaces for just the big chain names to dominate...

New fully accessible pedestrian link through the Roman wall from Priory Street, to connect into St Botolph's Priory and Colchester Town Station

- Agree, *but we must revisit options* here with older/disabled walkers and chair users. Forget previous debates which took place solely in the context of Alumno controversy and recommendations which were a direct response to those proposals which are no longer relevant.
- My own argument is for a second lift with adjacent stairs, as at Vineyard St, but this is contingent on policies supporting them both, which would include a greater investment and commitment to keeping them open over longer and more consistent hours, and greater resources invested in maintaining both, ensuring they remain more consistently in operation and that any breakdowns are speedily attended to.

I am sensitive to the heritage aspect of this site and do not favour a giant ramp as a solution. A long ramp is not a perfect access solution in any event, and even though

favoured by some (because of the unreliability of the Vineyard St lift), it is wished for *in addition to a lift*, which is unlikely to be an option, since the possibility of a ramp alone has already courted such controversy.

Public realm and heritage setting / Height and Massing

Expand existing public realm to create larger multi-functional square, ensuring the balcony of the Curzon cinema retains its view of Firstsite.

- If this benefit (the view) is to be retained, please also then work with Curzon to 'encourage' them to make this balcony wheelchair accessible. It was allowed to open, post re-development/change of use (i.e. so Part M to the Building Regs applied) with a luxury open balcony feature that completely excludes wheelchair users, who must sit inside and look on whilst the beautiful people of Colchester sip their gin and tonics!

Site Strategy: Use Mix

Consider an allocation for residents' use of annual parking permits to Priory Street car park

- Yes, definitely support. But unless *free* as opposed to subsidised, it may disadvantage just the same. Disabled people are generally lower paid on average, even when in work.

Design and Public Realm (Personal comment)

Multifunctional public square suitable for outdoor performances and events as well as informal day to-day use including by young people

- Yes, support, but remember this lovely sunny spot is about to have its south-facing aspect blocked by new buildings, so not quite so lovely and balmy for sitting outside for performances!

Public realm must be activated by active frontage uses adjacent to City Wall

- Yes, absolutely – please keep buildings as far back as possible from the city wall, and building heights lower at this end of the larger space, to protect sightlines from Priory St.

Potential visual landmark / taller structure facing square

Hmm unsure – not confident that we'll achieve anything beautiful enough to be worthy of the site/purpose, and sufficiently uncontentious. And Firstsite is meant to be the feature building here, no?

Related wider area improvements

Improved public realm on Queen Street including crossings from Culver Street East, Priory Walk and Short Wyre Street

- I regard this as one of the most important streets for improvement for older/ambulant disabled walkers and chair users. Queen St / St Bots is steep, but also unavoidable for many purposes (even with new access point on Priory St), but has so much scope for improvement in terms of pavement widening, surface improvements, decluttering, camber etc

If I had to draw on a map what I see as one of the most important challenges (and potential for solution) for the Masterplan insofar as disability access is concerned, it would be this junction: St Bots and Queen St, the whole way from bottom to top, linking major transport hubs (train and bus) with key cultural sites and visitor attractions, AND crossing it halfway, the Vineyard St/Priory St junction linking the two lifts (or alternative types of access)

It should be a relatively quiet street in terms of vehicles, because of changes to High Street permissions (save for existing pedestrian activity and a bundle of retail character, both of which welcome), so having greater permeability in terms of additional crossing points should be able to be accommodated.

- In the list given, the crossing point I regard as one of the most important of all is not included. That is a crossing at the *junction of Priory St and Vineyard St*. A crossing here reflects the fact that the site is a significant junction for walkers, and for chair users in particular, as it represents a relatively level (and relatively quiet for a city centre) east-west route, approximately halfway up a difficult hill, and links what will become the two key options for lift access (hopefully) between south and north city centre, and between two of the centre's most important accessible parking options.

Without it, it is also a long section down to the bottom of St Bots (126m, a 30m difference), although there is also possibility for a point at St Bots Church Walk too.

It's these kinds of things that will make a great deal of difference to disabled people. In sum:

- Please include additional crossing point at Priory St and Vineyard St junction
- Consider making proposed crossing point at Priory Walk *north* of the entrance opposite to Firstsite rather than south, i.e. closer to the crossing point removed several years ago (and much missed!)
- Widen wherever possible and improve surfacing to footways on both sides (particular attention at the High St end – can anything be done about east-side pavement widths here?)
- Pay particular attention to the pavement at the corner of Priory St and Queen St (heading up); both sides of the road here are in fact particularly difficult.

Britannia Yard

(Personal comment)

Mostly agree with plans for improved permeability/connectivity and walk/cycle routes, but please keep separate wherever possible and pay as much attention to walkers!

Height and Massing

Mansion block typologies up to 5 storeys / 15m on south part of site

- I regard 5 storeys as too high here. I feel it would begin to dominate the Priory.
- Please include some outdoor access for all flats by way of genuinely useable verandas as well as ground level public realm

Design and public realm

Potential long-term opening from Queen Street to Priory, to give greater visibility to the important frontage of the Priory

- Disagree with demolition of older buildings on Queen St to achieve this (the report doesn't spell out which buildings would be lost?). Certainly the building to the right, facing St Botolph's Church Walk from Queen St *must* be saved. But my preference would be to retain buildings on both sides, and the narrow (surprise/secret!) approach. Just as argued further up the hill, at approach to Firstsite, it's lovely sometimes to chance upon special sites; they don't always need a grand approach. And there are other ways to improve the existing one.

Public Realm Scale Comparators

Re bottom two images on p. 81

- These images show how the space might look, as an open market/creative space. But I look at them and worry that, with the market gone, it could feel like a rather desolate expanse of hardstanding then? Needs some serious green planting; high enough to give it a sense of 3-dimensionality too. And seating.

Vineyard Gate

Design Principles

...integrating a good quality walking and cycling route from east to west as part of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan.

- Absolutely yes, but hence also need for crossing point here for disabled walkers and chair users in particular, otherwise those with most need for it fail to benefit from this pro-walking initiative.

...much of this character survives albeit in a poor condition. Development should restore and enhance the best of this character through tight-knit and carefully designed infill...

- (Personal comment) Could a grant scheme be explored that might enable public-minded existing owners the opportunity of applying for eg match-funding to improve the southerly aspect of their properties?

Create north-south pedestrian link connecting Osborne Street to Vineyard Street along Arthur Street (new steps/ramp required).

- Yes, agree, this would be a useful access point, but (personal comment) this is a site with significant history (evidence suggests previously a bull-baiting ring and prior to that, bear-baiting...) so it would be great to support improvements here with information board etc

Acquire further parking areas at the west end of the site to enable a comprehensive approach to provision of blue-badge and business parking

- Agree, but nonetheless welcome a city-centre-wide review of accessible parking with user involvement, so that any additions here (or in any one place) are not subsequently used as an argument against additional parking in other sites that need it equally/more. Provision of Blue Badge parking needs to be considered right across town.

Retain and reuse existing buildings

- (Personal comment) I strongly support this where it is a means of developing sustainably and creating a sense of architectural/historical continuity

Consider land acquisition to enable further infill development along St John's Street and encourage redevelopment of low-quality premises along Osborne Street which are reaching end of life

- I have mixed feelings about this – overall I prefer not to support the acquisition of buildings that are functioning independent businesses, and/or have character, in order to achieve some bigger redevelopment goal. I think mass purchases such as this risk losing continuity - architecturally and in terms of community.
- If ECC made purchases along the way, as buildings come onto the market, that's different, although the character issue remains.

Related wider area improvements: Osborne Street / bus station reconfiguration

- Another key issue for disabled bus users, notwithstanding lift access midway, is the journey from Osborne Street to eg the High St, for main High St retail and facilities but also onward travel. Please give serious consideration to shuttle bus provision,

circuiting the city centre on a regular basis (i.e. several per hour, no more than 10 min wait?), via St John's St, Head St, High St, Queen St, St Botolph's St and Osborne St. Free to Blue Badge holders and 66+. Maybe expensive, but would be a fantastic initiative (assuming my dream *tram* must remain a fantasy!)

St Botolph's Junction

Planning and Design Framework

It's fair to say that strong views have been expressed both for and against the remodeling of St Botolph's to a crossroad from a roundabout.

For some people (including mobility scooter users) it works well. Reports of anti-social behavior are very possibly historical and kept alive more in people's minds than they are a reality, especially bearing in mind that this is a space that has been neglected in terms of both maintenance and policing.

It also is a relatively quiet and peaceful sunken space (in context), with mature trees and planting. It needs investment and care but is not - for walkers - the disaster that it is painted to be. It is however difficult for manual chair users; it cannot currently accommodate cyclists within the parameters of good practice; and some may fear its use for safety reasons at different times of the day, even if this threat is more perceived than real. Finally, surface level crossing improvements are vital either way (particularly at Mersea Rd exit, but also the connecting route from Colchester Town railway station to the bus station).

The remaining comments are made based on the assumption that redevelopment is likely to go ahead as the best way to meet the needs of the fullest mix of users.

Surface crossings

Largely support details but note that the Magdalen Street and St. Botolph's Street crossings are both shown as two stage crossings, which is not best practice.

Strongly support:

- Return to drawings to achieve straight across crossings, including...
- Separation from cyclists
- Efforts to achieve pedestrian crossings on all immediate four sides of this junction (i.e. including Southway), instead of or in addition to Stanwell St. Greater permeability with St John's Green is welcomed, but there is another crossing proposed that would achieve this (at Abbeygate St on Southway)

Separation of walkers and cyclists

It is not clear from the drawings whether cyclists will be separated from pedestrians in the new public realm on all sides. We strongly advocate for separation and would be opposed to any proposal otherwise.

Entrance to Magistrate's Court and Colchester Town

Priority here should be clearly given to pedestrians and cyclists travelling *across* the entrance to this site, rather than to vehicles exit/entering – the plan drawings seem to suggest otherwise.

Public Realm

Welcome plans to enlarge/enhance public realm but strongly of the view that:

- Design and quality is all-important - of *equal importance* to traffic engineering. Detailed plans would be welcome please - before any signing-off.
- It must feel like *a green space*. The plans entail losing an already mature green space, and in its place it's easy to imagine that a street level solution could very easily feel like a vast expanse of tarmac and paving. A few bushes and ornamental trees will not be sufficient.
- Public realm should have 3-dimensionality/height, with mature trees included and native trees. Expert advice taken on what would be suitable.
- Wide, clear walking passages through public realm are vital – function and aesthetics, but no clutter. Careful siting of street furniture, benches/rest points, bins etc so that these align and don't compromise clear passages.
- Careful thought must be given to the edges between road and public realm – for safety and aesthetics' sake. There needs to be a clear distinction (maybe low wall/planting?), that provides a really good buffer between road and public realm, redirecting attention and noise away from road, and creating a both real and felt sense of safety from traffic.

Apologies for the length of this response, but I hope helpful!