

## Policy CC1 City Centre

Our Colchester BID would like to see business uses maintained at street/ground floor level within the whole of the city centre/Primary Shopping Area. It would not object to upper floors above street/ground floor level being utilised as residential where appropriate. It may object to any change of use at street/ground floor level.

It would formally object to any HMO application within the city centre on the grounds of:

- Impact on commercial character and community cohesion
- Parking and traffic congestion
- Strain on local infrastructure
- Safety and anti-social behaviour (ASB)

and feels this use would be wholly inappropriate within the city centre/Primary Shopping Area. It would further insist that a **Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) assessment** be rigorously carried out *before* any final planning permission is granted.

## Policy PP1: Britannia Car Park, Colchester

Our Colchester BID is unable to support the change of use of this car park to residential because it undermines the shared objective of a thriving, accessible and resilient city centre economy. The BID's overriding priority is to safeguard the trading environment for businesses in Colchester city centre and the BID zone and to ensure policy decisions support, rather than weaken, that goal.

### - **Protecting city centre businesses**

Our Colchester represents the collective interests of hundreds of levy-paying businesses whose success depends on reliable access for customers and staff. The proposed loss of centrally located spaces at Britannia Car Park would materially reduce capacity at the very point of access closest to key retail, hospitality, cultural and professional services in the BID area, increasing perceived and actual barriers to visiting the city centre.

City centre businesses already face structural pressures from online retail, out-of-town destinations and rising operating costs, and parking availability is a critical factor in decisions about where people shop, eat and spend leisure time. Any policy that removes a major provision of convenient parking without guaranteed, like-for-like alternatives risks depressing footfall, shortening dwell time and weakening business confidence across the BID zone.

### - **Policy context and regeneration aims**

Our Colchester recognises and supports the Council's wider objectives around climate action, sustainable transport and city centre regeneration, including the Positive Parking Strategy and related infrastructure upgrades. These objectives can and must be delivered in a way that keeps the city centre commercially viable, protects existing employment and underpins investment in new jobs and spaces within the BID area.

However, the redevelopment of Britannia Car Park must not proceed on the assumption that demand can simply be displaced to other locations or modes in the short to medium term. Even with planned improvements at alternative car parks and investment in public transport, the removal of this single asset represents a step

change in capacity that will be felt most acutely by small and medium-sized enterprises whose customers value proximity, convenience and perceived safety, particularly in the evening economy.

- **Impact on staff, recruitment and inclusion**

The BID is particularly concerned about the impact on employees working in the city centre, many of whom rely on Britannia Car Park for early-morning, late-night or shift-pattern access when public transport options are limited. A substantial reduction in central parking risks making it harder for businesses to recruit and retain staff, raising costs and reducing the attractiveness of BID-area employment compared with other locations.

There is also a risk that reduced central parking capacity will disproportionately affect workers and customers with mobility needs, caring responsibilities or safety concerns about travelling longer distances on foot, especially at night. Any policy change must therefore be assessed not only against environmental and transport metrics but also against equality, inclusion and safety impacts on those who depend on convenient access to the city centre.

- **Colchester City Council research**

Colchester City Council's research may suggest that closing Britannia Car Park will not reduce total parking capacity across the wider city. Still, Our Colchester continues to believe the closure would significantly harm businesses, staff and customers in the city centre and BID zone. The core concern is not just how many spaces exist in total, but where those spaces are located, how easy they are to use, and what this means for the trading environment.

- **Why “no net loss” still harms businesses**

Even if overall city-wide parking numbers remain stable on paper, removing spaces in one highly central, well-used location changes behaviour in ways that affect businesses. Spaces that are further away, harder to find, or perceived as less safe in the evening are not equivalent for customers who want convenient access to shops, hospitality and services in the BID area.

“Spare” capacity in distant or less attractive car parks does not compensate for the loss of a major gateway site that many regular visitors habitually use. For time-pressed visitors, families, older people and those travelling in from surrounding areas, added distance, complexity or uncertainty can be enough to deter a trip altogether or shorten their stay, directly impacting footfall and spend for city centre businesses.

- **Challenging the assumptions in the Council's evidence**

The Council's modelling appears to focus on typical occupancy across all city centre car parks, often showing spare capacity at certain times of day or week. However, this approach smooths out peak pressures and does not fully capture pinch-points such as weekends, events, bad weather or the evening economy, when the convenience of a location like Britannia matters most.

There is also a difference between what is technically available and what people actually use in practice. Behavioural factors such as driver familiarity, signage,

real-time information, perceived safety and walking routes to key destinations are critical to how “usable” a space really is. If drivers struggle to find or feel comfortable using alternative car parks, the theoretical spare capacity will not translate into real-world support for the BID-area economy.

The BID is ready to work constructively with the Council, transport providers and developers to co-design solutions that align with net-zero and regeneration ambitions while protecting the commercial core that funds local services, supports thousands of jobs and underpins Colchester’s role as a leading city in the region. Until such safeguards are in place, Our Colchester must firmly oppose the closure of Britannia Car Park in its current form and will continue to advocate for policies that put the long-term health of BID-area businesses at the centre of decision-making.

## **Policy PP2: Vineyard Gate, Colchester**

Our Colchester BID is unable to support the change of use of this car park to residential because it undermines the shared objective of a thriving, accessible and resilient city centre economy. The BID’s overriding priority is to safeguard the trading environment for businesses in Colchester city centre and the BID zone and to ensure policy decisions support, rather than weaken, that goal.

### **- Protecting city centre businesses**

Our Colchester represents the collective interests of hundreds of levy-paying businesses whose success depends on reliable access for customers and staff. The proposed loss of centrally located spaces at Vineyard Gate Car Park would materially reduce capacity at the very point of access closest to key retail, hospitality, cultural and professional services in the BID area, increasing perceived and actual barriers to visiting the city centre.

City centre businesses already face structural pressures from online retail, out-of-town destinations and rising operating costs, and parking availability is a critical factor in decisions about where people shop, eat and spend leisure time. Any policy that removes a major provision of convenient parking without guaranteed, like-for-like alternatives risks depressing footfall, shortening dwell time and weakening business confidence across the BID zone.

### **- Policy context and regeneration aims**

Our Colchester recognises and supports the Council’s wider objectives around climate action, sustainable transport and city centre regeneration, including the Positive Parking Strategy and related infrastructure upgrades. These objectives can and must be delivered in a way that keeps the city centre commercially viable, protects existing employment and underpins investment in new jobs and spaces within the BID area.

However, the redevelopment of Vineyard Gate Car Park must not proceed on the assumption that demand can simply be displaced to other locations or modes in the short to medium term. Even with planned improvements at alternative car parks and investment in public transport, the removal of a single asset represents a step change in capacity that will be felt most acutely by small and medium-sized enterprises whose

customers value proximity, convenience and perceived safety, particularly in the evening economy.

- **Impact on staff, recruitment and inclusion**

The BID is particularly concerned about the impact on employees working in the city centre, many of whom rely on Vineyard Gate Car Park for early-morning, late-night or shift-pattern access when public transport options are limited. A substantial reduction in central parking risks making it harder for businesses to recruit and retain staff, raising costs and reducing the attractiveness of BID-area employment compared with other locations.

There is also a risk that reduced central parking capacity will disproportionately affect workers and customers with mobility needs, caring responsibilities or safety concerns about travelling longer distances on foot, especially at night. Any policy change must therefore be assessed not only against environmental and transport metrics but also against equality, inclusion and safety impacts on those who depend on convenient access to the city centre.

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### **Policy PP6: Land at Colchester North Station Mixed Used**

This area is allocated mixed use, OurColchester BID would not like to see any significant retail development offered at this site as it would threaten and likely dilute the retail offering of the city centre.

### **Policy OA4 Northern Gateway**

- a. Provision of approximately 650 new dwellings of a mix and type of housing to meet evidenced needs which is compatible with surrounding development;
- b. Provision for employment on land north of Axial Way as shown on the policies map allocated for employment, primarily for office use within E class;

Reference b. OurColchester BID would not like to see any significant retail development offered at this site as it would threaten and likely dilute the retail offering of the city centre. We would consider the employment use to be for professional services/office provision.

Our Colchester welcomes the council’s requirements for any small retail / leisure uses within this local centre must be subject to the requirements of Policy E4 in respect of the sequential test and for proposals above 350sqm gross floorspace a retail impact assessment will also be required.

### **Policy PEP3 Land South of Tollgate West**

Our Colchester BID would not like to see any more significant retail offered at this location. The existing Tollgate offering together with Stane Park are already a major retail attraction pulling custom away from the city centre/ Primary Shopping Area. Any further expansion of retail will significantly impact the economic viability of the city centre and pull even more custom away.

### **Policy PP9: North-East Colchester**

Although this area is allocated as residential OurColchester BID would not like to see any significant retail development offered at this site as it would threaten and likely dilute the retail offering of the city centre.

### **Policy PP10: Land South of Berechurch Hall Road, Colchester**

Although this area is allocated as residential OurColchester BID would not like to see any significant retail development offered at this site as it would threaten and likely dilute the retail offering of the city centre.

**Growth and Opportunity Areas : Hythe Opportunity Areas consisting of : Policy OA1: King Edward Quay Opportunity Area/ Policy OA2: Land East of Hawkins Road Opportunity Area**

These areas are likely to be allocated to residential, OurColchester BID would not like to see any significant retail development offered as it would threaten and likely dilute the retail offering of the city centre.

**Marks Tey Growth Area consisting of : Policy PP18: Land North of A120, Marks Tey Growth Area: Policy PP18: Land North of A120, Marks Tey Growth Area**

Although this area is allocated as residential OurColchester BID would not like to see any significant retail development offered at this site as it would threaten and likely dilute the retail offering of the city centre.

**Policy PEP5 Land South of A12, Marks Tey**

This area is allocated to employment, OurColchester BID would not like to see any significant retail development offered at this site as it would threaten and likely dilute the retail offering of the city centre.

**Policy PEP6 Anderson's Site, Marks Tey**

This area is allocated to employment, OurColchester BID would not like to see any significant retail development offered at this site as it would threaten and likely dilute the retail offering of the city centre.

**Policy PEP7 Highland Nursery, Tiptree**

This area is allocated to employment, OurColchester BID would not like to see any significant retail development offered at this site as it would threaten and likely dilute the retail offering of the city centre.

**Policy PEP8 Land South of Factory Hill, Tiptree**

This area is allocated to employment, OurColchester BID would not like to see any significant retail development offered at this site as it would threaten and likely dilute the retail offering of the city centre.

**Policy PP19: Land North of Oak Road, Tiptree**

Although this area is allocated as residential OurColchester BID would not like to see any significant retail development offered at this site as it would threaten and likely dilute the retail offering of the city centre.