



Portfolio Holder for Strategy

Item

December 2019

Report of	Strategic Director Policy & Place	Author	Rachel Forkin ☎ 282625
Title	Response to ECC A120/A133 Link Road & Rapid Transit System Consultation		
Wards affected	All Wards		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Earlier this year, Essex County Council successfully bid for funding to help support planned housing growth across the county and in August 2019, it was announced that the A120/A133 Link Road and Rapid Transit System (RTS) had been successful in securing funding. Essex County Council are currently consulting on options for both the Link Road and Rapid Transit System schemes.
- 1.2 Essex County Council (ECC) is consulting on route options for both the Link Road and the Rapid Transit System. They have held public information events over the six week consultation period and the deadline for responses is 16th December.
- 1.3 ECC are consulting on two separate options for the Link Road, with different variants on the following:
 - A120 junction positions
 - A133 junction positions

All link road options are proposed to be a 50mph two-lane carriageway to carry the flow of traffic that is expected from existing and future growth in the area.

- 1.4 The RTS has been split into four sections, where the route varies into different options. Only Sections B and C are being consulted on at this time.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 To respond to the consultation as set out below.

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 The consultation concerns options for the Link Road between the A120 and the A133, and the Rapid Transit System route options into Colchester. Both of these schemes are considered critical pieces of infrastructure for the transport network in Colchester and this is an opportunity to influence the routes and design.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 Not to respond. This consultation provides the opportunity to influence more detailed routing. It is therefore appropriate that a response is submitted.
- 4.2 The Council could recommend an alternative route.

5. Background Information

- 5.1 Earlier this year, Essex County Council successfully bid for funding to help support planned housing growth across the county and in August 2019, it was announced that the A120/A133 Link Road and Rapid Transit System (RTS) had been successful in securing funding. Essex County Council are currently consulting on options for both the Link Road and Rapid Transit System schemes.
- 5.2 Investment in the Colchester road network as proposed by the Link Road will ensure that access becomes easier to strategic roads therefore reducing the use of more local roads. The RTS will support this strategy through providing a genuine alternative means of travel from the proposed garden community into key destinations within the town. The system will service a new Park and Choose site on the proposed community and help to better connect future growth areas with the rest of the town.
- 5.3 Essex County Council (ECC) is consulting on route options for both the Link Road and the Rapid Transit System. ECC has held public information events over the six-week consultation period. The deadline for responses is 16th December.
- 5.4 ECC are consulting on two separate options for the Link Road, with different variants on the following:
- A120 junction positions
 - A133 junction positions
- These can be seen in Appendix A.
- 5.5 The RTS has been split into four sections, and ECC are consulting on options for Section B and Section C. These can be seen in Appendix B.

Response to ECC Consultation

- 5.4 Colchester Borough Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposals and the ongoing continued engagement with Essex County Council on the proposals for the Link Road and the Rapid Transit System. The Borough Council continue to support the proposals for the Link Road and the Rapid Transit System, which is essential to supporting housing and economic growth across the Borough and beyond.
- 5.5 It is proposed that the response in Appendix C is sent to ECC as CBC's response to this consultation.

6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

6.1 There are no Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications in relation to this report.

7. Standard References

7.1 There are no particular references to the Strategic Plan; publicity considerations or financial; health, wellbeing and community safety; health and safety or risk management implications.

8. Consultation

8.1.1 Consultation is being undertaken by Essex County Council.

9. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

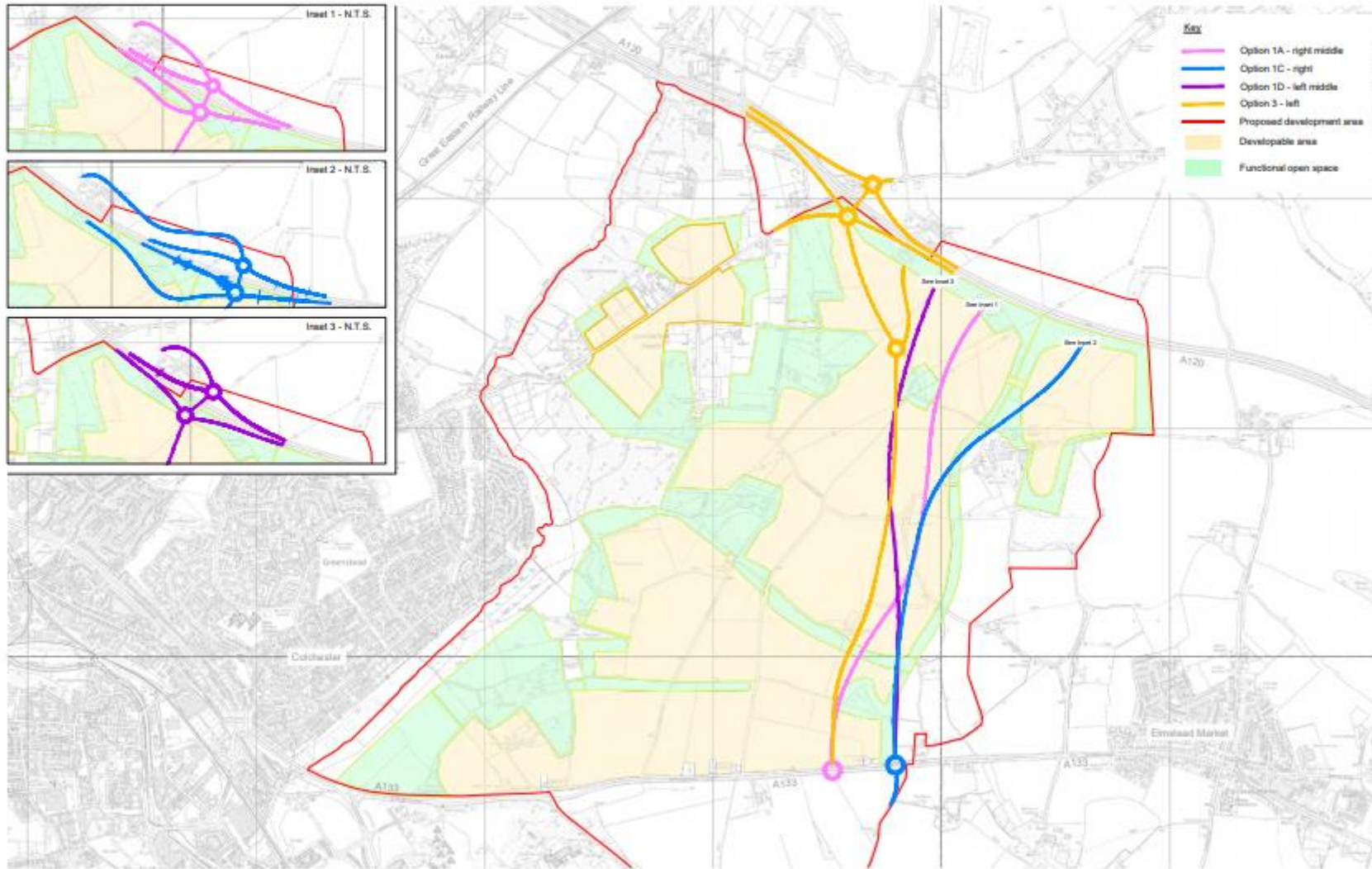
9.1 The Council has declared a Climate Emergency and has committed to being carbon neutral by 2030.

9.2 The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development as defined in the National Planning Policy Framework. Achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways. These are economic, social and environmental objectives.

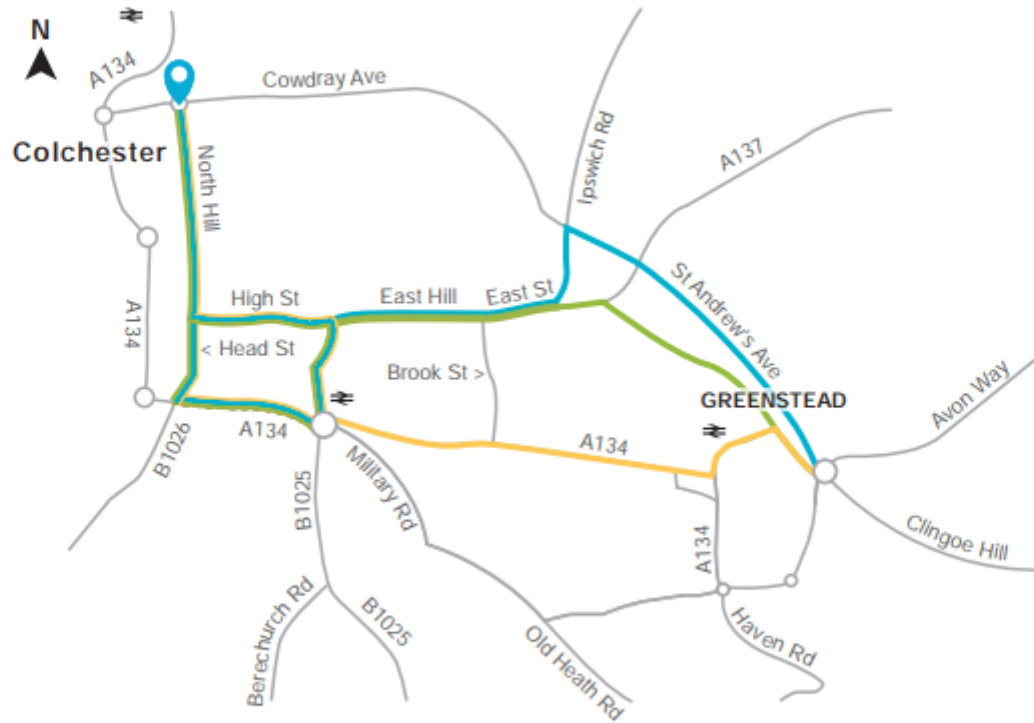
9.3 This report has taken into account the Climate Emergency and the sustainable development objectives set out in the NPPF. It is considered that on balance the proposal is considered to represent sustainable development. The RTS is intended to remove cars off the road and increase the use of more sustainable modes of travel. The link road will bring economic benefits to businesses in the area and will remove traffic from the local road network which will hopefully result in air quality improvements.

Appendices

WHAT ARE WE CONSULTING ON?



WHAT ARE WE CONSULTING ON?



- Key:**
- Section B - Option 1
 - Section B - Option 2
 - Section B - Option 5



Appendix B: RTS Route Options (Extract from consultation document)

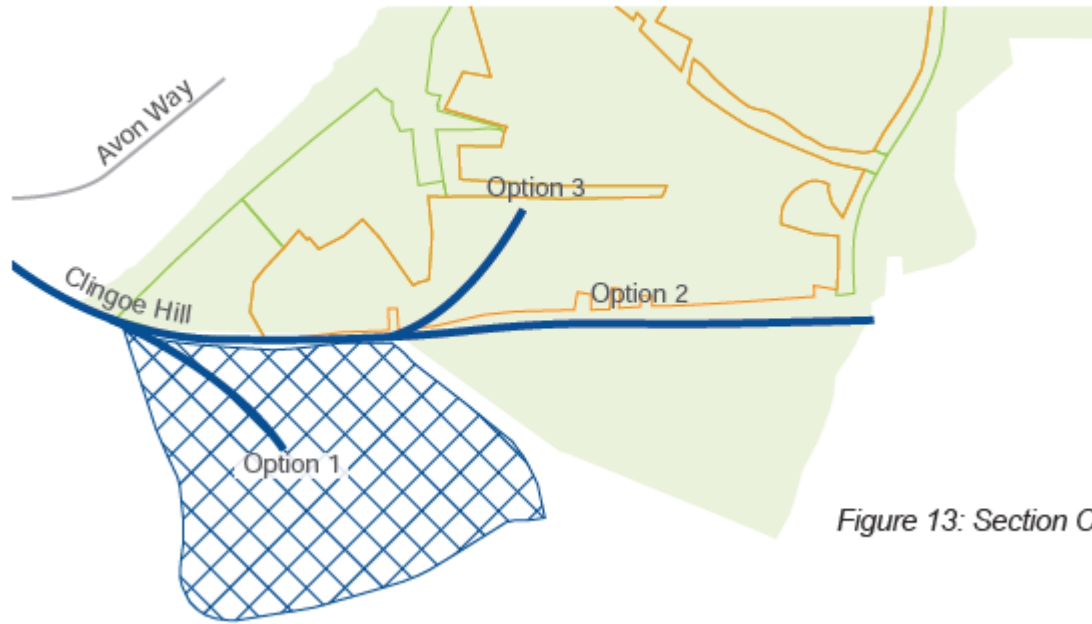


Figure 13: Section C

Appendix C: CBC Response to ECC Consultation

Colchester Borough Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposals and the ongoing continued engagement with Essex County Council on the proposals for the Link Road and the Rapid Transit System. The Borough Council continue to support the proposals for the Link Road and the Rapid Transit System, which is essential to supporting housing and economic growth across the Borough and beyond.

Colchester Borough Council response to A120/A133 Link Road Consultation

The Link Road is regarded as an item of strategic importance to the transport network both within Colchester and the surrounding settlements as well as supporting key east-west traffic movements from within Tendring. Colchester Borough Council (CBC) consider the link road will need to achieve two objectives:

- Delivering improvements to the strategic road network which are capable of improving journey times and relieving congestion in Colchester and the surrounding area. The Council recognises the need for the link road to serve a wider than local function and as such its design will need to ensure the efficient flows of traffic to and from the A120 and A133.
- Facilitate suitable primary access to the Garden Community, not encroach on to the developable area and ensure that the road is designed in an appropriate way in line with the principles of the proposed Garden Community.

In addition to these objectives CBC also recognise the importance of reducing negative impacts on the local environment including:

- existing residents and businesses;
- areas of natural habitats including mature woodland; and
- heritage assets including below-ground archaeological remains, listed buildings and their settings.

Any future link road will therefore have to demonstrate it can achieve these objectives without unacceptable negative impacts on the local environment. CBC acknowledges the work that has already been carried out in relation to the environmental impacts of the scheme, and that further work will be carried out as the options are developed further.

Furthermore, where new groundworks are required an archaeological assessment should be prepared that assesses the significance of archaeological remains on the route and the potential impact of all groundworks. This includes the proposed park and choose locations which should be the subject of archaeological field evaluation to establish the archaeological significance of these areas. Although the link road is located outside of the Borough, we would expect ECC Place Services to be consulted early on this.

Comments on Route Options

ECC are consulting on two separate options for the Link Road, with different variants on the following:

- A120 junction positions
- A133 junction positions

All link road options are proposed to be a 50mph two-lane carriageway to carry the flow of traffic that is expected from existing and future growth in the area. The height of the road will vary north to south to blend with existing landscape. The A133 junction will be designed at the level of the current road (at grade) and the A120 junction will be raised over the A120 carriageway with slip roads to join the A120 (grade separated).

Comments are provided below on the options in line with the objectives above and the information provided as part of the consultation.

Option 1A

Option 1A does not significantly encroach on to the Garden Communities developable area. Its location could form the eastern boundary to the potential residential area.

In terms of negative impacts, Option 1A adversely affects the Strawberry Grove wooded area, routed through the middle of the wood and therefore resulting in the loss of woodland. It would also impact on properties in the area including the Grade II Listed Allen's farmhouse.

Option 1C

Option 1C is the most easterly route and therefore would not encroach on to the Garden Communities developable area. Its location could therefore form the eastern boundary to the potential residential area. This is also the shortest route and no land is required from the A120 services or the Waste Transfer Station.

In terms of negative impacts, the proposed slip roads as shown would negatively impact on Strawberry Grove wooded area, removing existing connectivity between the woodland and the natural landscape with potential loss of some woodland. The slip roads as shown appear excessively long. It is considered that this junction arrangement could be reconsidered to assess the potential for the slip roads to be closer to the A120, which although may result in the loss of some of the Strawberry Grove wooded area, would mean that it was not enclosed by roads.

Option 1D

Option 1D is the most westerly of the Option 1 routes and is the longer option. It avoids the areas of woodland, apart from the top corner of the Strawberry Grove wooded area and is further away from the Listed Building.

In terms of negative impacts, the route is further west and therefore has potential to impact on the proposed Garden Community developable area.

Option 3

The northern section of Option 3 runs further westwards than Option 1. The new junction would utilise the existing location of the Bromley Road overbridge, which would be removed and replaced on a different alignment close by. In terms of the relationship to the Garden Community Option 3 is likely to encroach on to the developable area.

In terms of negative impacts Option 3 requires the closure of the existing slip roads to the Waste Transfer Station and traffic may therefore be required to use the local road network. The route also passes close to existing properties and may cause significant impacts on residential amenity. The route would also impact on the Public Right of Way network.

A133 Links

Two locations are proposed for Options 1 and 3 for the junction of the Link Road with the A133. The eastern option would link with Elmstead Road (south of the A133). The second location is slightly to the west of this option. No detail is provided on the impact the two different locations may have on travel patterns. It is considered that further information is required to understand the impact on the local road network. In particular, the eastern option may result in additional traffic on Elmstead Road south of the A133 and therefore CBC would like to see further detail on the potential increase

in traffic on Elmstead Road for this option, and mitigation measures that could be undertaken, prior to a decision being made. The Borough Council would wish to continue the close working and dialogue with the County Council, to further understand the impact on the local road network, particularly on Elmstead Road and links into Wivenhoe, before a decision is made on the location of the junction of the Link Road with the A133.

Conclusions on Link Road Route Options

CBC has reviewed the route options contained in the consultation material in terms of their ability to meet the objectives of serving as primary access for the Garden Community (without encroaching into the developable area), its ability to relate to the design of the garden community, as well as their potential impact on the local environment (residential properties, natural habitats and heritage assets).

In conclusion CBC consider Option 1 as preferable in terms of its ability to meet the objectives. It is considered that Option 1C may be preferable in terms of it being the most easterly proposed layout. However, it is felt that the design of the slip roads in this option are currently too long and result in the area of woodland being left isolated. If this option is taken forward, consideration should be given to redesigning the slip roads to overcome this. CBC considers that continued close liaison with the North Essex Authorities is important to ensure that the road is designed in line with the Masterplan and design principles for the proposed Garden Community, to ensure an appropriate relationship between the road and the future community.

At the southern end of the Link Road, CBC would like to see more detail on the impact on the road network to the south of the A133 before a decision is made on the options.

Colchester Borough Council response to North Essex Rapid Transit System Stage 1 Options Technical Note

The Rapid Transit System (RTS) is a critical piece of transport infrastructure to not only support sustainable transport provisions at the Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community but also to improve public transport services across the North Essex sub-region. The RTS will achieve this through the provision of a public transport system that links key growth areas at the Garden Communities with established employment, leisure and retail areas including Colchester town centre.

That being the case the future route options of the RTS need to be considered from the perspectives of a variety of users, e.g. future Garden Community residents, existing public transport users and persuading existing car users to switch to the RTS. These perspectives need to be recognised in decisions made on the route of the RTS as well as other considerations relating to the operation of the service including journey times, number and locations of stops, frequency of service, and integration with the existing transport network (public transport hubs and walking and cycling measures).

The provision of RTS is included in Section 1 of the North Essex Local Plans and as such the North Essex Authorities have published evidence to demonstrate its deliverability. These documents consist of the *North Essex Rapid Transit System Study* published in December 2017 and the *North Essex Rapid Transit System: From Concept to Plan* which was published in July 2019.

Comments on Stage 1 Route Options

Essex County Council are consulting on Route Options for the RTS route. The RTS has been split into four sections, where the route varies into different options:

- Section A forms the part of the route from the town centre to the existing Colchester Park and Ride site north of the A12;
- Section B covers the part of the route through Colchester town centre through to the eastern edge of the existing urban area at Clingoe Hill;
- Section C is the part of the route which links the urban edge of Colchester with the University of Essex and the Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community;
- Section D is the routing with the proposed Garden Community.

Section A

Section A covers the existing route of the Colchester Park and Ride service from the parking area to the north of the A12 to Middleborough at the edge of Colchester town centre. Much of this route already has a segregated bus lane in operation. In addition to the existing bus lane on Via Urbis Romanae there is a strip of land located to the west of the Northern Approach Road which has been successfully safeguarded by CBC and ECC for future public transport infrastructure. As this part of the route has been agreed previously it is not being consulted on.

Section B

The Section B route options covers the RTS from Middleborough to Greenstead Roundabout. Due to the nature of the built environment in the Section B area, there are key issues to factor into the evaluation of route options, including:

- minimising conflicts with existing uses, including on street parking for residents and businesses;
- integrating the RTS with the wider transport network in Colchester (including walking, cycling and other forms of public transport – rail and bus);
- maximising the potential for street scene improvements along the route (including new tree planting).

The above points have been factored into CBC's comments on the route options in Section B. Two options for Section B were considered but are not being taken forward as part of this consultation. These were:

- *Section B Option 3*: adjacent to the rail route between Hythe and Colchester Town Stations. This route was not taken forward at this stage due to number of engineering constraints along the route. However, this route could present a viable option for future improvements of the RTS. CBC considers that this option should be considered in line with a longer-term strategy for using this land for future public transport use. However, it would not support use of this land if it compromised the operation of the Colchester Town railway service.
- *Section B Option 4*: This is a southern route via Military Road. This route is significantly longer than other options and would require land purchase.

The options that are being taken forward are considered below:

Section B, Option 1 - Hythe Level Crossing

This option utilises the existing bus route through the town centre, heads eastbound along the High Street and Southbound along Queen Street, with the westbound RTS route utilising Osborne Street and Head Street. Once southeast of the town centre the route uses Magdalen Street between St Botolph's Roundabout and the Hythe, before following the Hythe Station Road bus lane into Greenstead Road.

Option 1 provides a relatively direct route from Middleborough to Greenstead Roundabout. CBC notes the concerns as to the operation of an RTS which would be in conflict with the level crossing at the Hythe and could result in reliability issues for the RTS. However, it may be that these issues could be overcome, and it is considered that this should be explored before this option is ruled out. In addition to the level crossing conflict CBC also has concerns that Option 1 would require substantial removal of on street parking along Magdalen Street. Any reallocation of road space will have to be carried out in consultation with affected residents and businesses.

Section B, Option 2 - East Gates Level Crossing

This option utilises East Hill, east of the High Street and continues along East Street and over East Gates level crossing to Greenstead Road, before following Greenstead Road to Greenstead Roundabout.

Option 2 also provides a direct route from Middleborough to Greenstead Roundabout albeit with the same concerns as those highlighted in respect of Option 1, above. CBC also notes that the conflict with the East Gates level crossing is more severe than Option 1's conflict with the Hythe level crossing due to the additional train services which run along this section of the railway. As above, it is considered that it may be that these issues could be overcome and this should be explored before this option is ruled out. Again, CBC has concerns that Option 2 would require substantial changes to the road layout including the removal of on street parking. Any proposed changes to existing uses along the route should therefore be carried out in consultation with affected residents and businesses.

Section B, Option 5 – St Andrew's Avenue

This option utilises East Hill, east of the High Street and continues along East Street to the Ipswich Road Junction, before heading north to the A133 / A1232 Ipswich Road / St Andrew's Avenue Junction, and then towards Greenstead Roundabout.

Option 5 runs along the same route as Option 2 but importantly it removes the conflict with the East Gates level crossing by routing up Ipswich Road over the railway bridge. CBC notes that St Andrew's Avenue has benefits as an RTS option due to its relatively wide highway area. However CBC has concerns that the road forms part of the Avenue of Remembrance with extensive tree planting along its sides, the vast majority of which are protected by Tree Protection Order.

Many of these trees were planted to honour fallen servicemen and are therefore considered an important part of the town's history. CBC considers the whole of the Avenue of Remembrance to be a war memorial (as formally designated by the Imperial War Museum: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/item/memorial/45601>) and therefore any road works which would result in the removal of trees will require careful consideration of this designation. Any further evaluation and feasibility works will therefore require consultation and further consideration by CBC and other interested stakeholders.

From a landscape perspective if Option 5 is taken forward, it would need to be carefully considered as, in addition to the potential loss of an important avenue of trees it may also compromise the setting of the Avenue of Remembrance in other ways, e.g. potential loss of deep grassed verges which form part of the Avenue as the historic setting for the trees.

Section C

This section covers the RTS route from Greenstead Roundabout to the Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community.

Section C Option 1 – University

This route option utilises existing roads (including Boundary Road) within University of Essex's grounds which have existing bus gates and ANPR barrier systems. Boundary Road is a private road and agreements with the University will be required to facilitate their use as part of the RTS. East of the University new road construction would be required to allow dedicated access into the Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community by crossing the A133.

CBC recognises the University of Essex as a major stakeholder in both the RTS and the Garden Community and the integration of both with the University will be essential to the future success of the projects. CBC therefore supports the consideration of this option and more widely the RTS utilising roads within the grounds of the University in accordance with any future agreement with the University.

From a landscape perspective Option 1 needs to be carefully considered, as it may have a visual/landscape impact on the Grade II listed Wivenhoe Park. Also, it would potentially involve the loss (breaching) of a number of sections of hedgerows protected by the Hedgerows Regulations 1997 (HR97) to facilitate construction of the link from the University to the B1027. It is recommended that under Appendix K, the Environmental Risk Assessment, when submitted, be informed by a Townscape/Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment, Arboricultural Impact Assessment and HR97 surveys (the latter will need to be undertaken by the LPA (i.e. CBC).

Section C Option 2 – A133

This route will require the installation of RTS lanes along the A133 (configuration and extent to be determined) between Greenstead Roundabout and the proposed junction with the A120-A133 link road. The link road will then provide access to the Garden Community.

CBC considers that this option entails a direct route from the Garden Community to Greenstead Roundabout (without diversion through the University) which offers benefits to the journey times of the RTS. However, CBC recognises that there will need to be careful consideration about the road layout at Clingoe Hill to ensure that congestion is properly managed.

Section C, Option 3 – Direct Access into Proposed Garden Community

This option entails a direct access into the southwestern area of the Garden Community via an access road which will be determined through the future masterplan.

CBC notes that this route is the most direct and therefore will offer the most benefits to RTS journey times however it would also reduce the potential to integrate the RTS with the University which as a significant destination in the area and would warrant a stop on the system. CBC would therefore only support Option 3 if such integration can take place.

Consideration of the access point should take into account potential for land earmarked for other purposes such as future country park along the Salary Brook corridor as it is likely that these two land uses would be incompatible.

As with Option 2 there will need to be careful consideration about the road layout at Clingoe Hill to ensure that congestion is properly managed and that the RTS does not conflict with other traffic.

RTS Town Centre Routing

The current proposals utilise the existing one-way system through Colchester town centre. However, CBC considers that the impact on the town centre, and the potential to alleviate the current challenges of the town centre, should be examined carefully in line with work currently being carried out on the Colchester Transport Strategy and other studies in the town centre including reduction in traffic in the High Street.

RTS Stops/Halts

CBC considers that critical to the operation of the RTS, its use, and growth in Colchester town centre is the location of the stops on the RTS routes. The Council acknowledges that the stops should be spaced far enough apart to ensure that it is rapid. However, CBC considers that, in addition to stops at the stations and the High Street, stops should be considered on Middleborough and at other key potential locations along the route.

Archaeology

In general, the options for the RTS follow existing roads and, therefore, they will have limited impact on below-ground archaeology. However, where new groundworks are required, relating to modifications for the project, there could be the potential for disturbing and damaging archaeological remains. Consequently, an archaeological assessment should be prepared at the earliest opportunity that assesses the significance of archaeological remains on the route and the potential impact of all groundworks.

Conclusions on RTS Route Options

CBC has reviewed the RTS route options contained in the consultation material to ensure that the RTS is considered from the perspective of a variety of users including existing and future residents, existing public transport users and encouraging modal shift. These considerations relate to the operation of the service including journey times and reliability and the option taken forward should

therefore be reliable with consistent journey times. This is particularly relevant to the options that cross the railway line in Section B.

If the route in Section B Option 5 is taken forward, any further evaluation and feasibility works will require consultation and further consideration by CBC and other interested stakeholders to ensure that the scheme does not impact on the avenue of trees along the Avenue of Remembrance.