

# **Local Development Framework**

## **Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document**

### **Sustainability Appraisal Report Non-Technical Summary**

**Spatial Policy Team  
Colchester Borough Council  
(January 2012)**

## **1. Introduction**

The Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) will provide a means for co-ordinating and directing the incremental change that will occur over the coming period as the Town Centre adapts. The SPD will help to fulfil the objectives of the cross-departmental Better Town Centre project.

Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is about asking at various intervals during plan preparation: "how sustainable is my plan?". A range of objectives are established and all options are assessed against these objectives to compare their environmental, economic and social effects and ultimately to assess how sustainable an option is.

We welcome your comments on this SA Report for the Town Centre SPD. Comments should be sent to:

FAO Spatial Policy Team  
FREEPOST RLSL-ZTSR-SGYA  
Strategic Policy & Regeneration  
Colchester Borough Council  
Colchester  
Essex  
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Alternatively comments can be emailed to [planning.policy@colchester.gov.uk](mailto:planning.policy@colchester.gov.uk) with 'Town Centre Sustainability Appraisal Report' in the subject box.

The closing date of the consultation is 27 July 2012.

## **2. Integrating SA with Colchester's Local Development Framework**

The Town Centre SPD is intended to ensure a holistic approach to the reinvigoration of spaces, uses and activity in Colchester's historic centre that will ensure its continued vitality in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century context of economic challenges, climate change and new ways of spending leisure time.

The SA has helped to ensure that all social, economic and environmental impacts have been carefully considered and where necessary mitigation and enhancement measures can be incorporated into the SPD.

## **3. Context for the Sustainability Appraisal**

A review of relevant policies, plans and programmes has been carried out with the overall message coming out of the review being the need to promote and enhance the vitality and viability of the Town Centre.

Colchester is the oldest recorded town in Britain and subsequently the Town Centre has a rich cultural heritage. The Roman Walls erected around the town continue to define the Town Centre, both by their physical presence in

many areas and by defining the compact commercial core of the town, which tends to be of a higher density and different character to development outside the walls.

Functionally, the Town Centre is characterised by a shopping core centred around the High Street, Culver Square, Lion Walk and the lanes running along the Town Walls. The St. Botolphs Quarter area to the east is the main focus for regeneration in the Town Centre, with the new Firstsite gallery providing the catalyst for cultural related development. Residential uses predominate in the historic Dutch Quarter tucked in behind the High Street, North Hill and Castle Park, while other residential units are scattered throughout the Town Centre above shops and mixed in with other uses. Office uses are concentrated in the Town Centre fringe, which contains a number of larger modern office buildings; although some of the historic Town Centre buildings have been adapted for office use.

The five main household Types within the Town Centre, which make up 71% of the population, are generally fairly transient. All of the Types are characterised by people who do not generally come from the area and have no family nearby. Many are also not likely to stay long term.

In 2010 Colchester had a Town Centre ranking of 74 according to the Javelin's Venuescore Listing. As a comparison with nearby centres, Chelmsford has a rank of 90 and Ipswich has a rank of 48. Other rankings put Colchester at a rank of around 50. The highest ranking Colchester Town Centre has had under the Javelin's Venuescore Listing was 58<sup>th</sup> in 2005. Since 2005 Colchester's Town Centre rank has declined, which is likely to be because it has not benefitted from any major retail development in many years unlike other centres.

The SWOT analysis, below, summarises the issues facing Colchester Town Centre.

**SWOT Analysis**

<p><b>Strengths</b>                  A large catchment pool from which to draw                  Robust population and spend growth                  An extremely diverse geo-demographic base                  A solid and rounded retail proposition                  A healthy balance between national multiples and local traders                  A compact retail pitch                  A largely pleasant shopping environment                  Historic character, including distinctive historic landmark buildings</p>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b>                  A High St in need of re-vitalisation                  Area of neglect/ under-investment in need of regeneration (e.g. Queens St, St Botolphs)                  Under supply in some key retailing segments                  Absence of some major retail and leisure names                  A disjointed/ un-coordinated independent/ local trader proposition                  Some problematic large scale vacant units (e.g. former Odeon, Co-op department store)                  Traffic and parking infrastructure issues                  Apparent negative perception amongst local residents</p>
<p><b>Opportunities</b>                  A more integrated and pro-active approach to Town Centre management and marketing                  Exploring the possibility of appointing a Town Centre Manager                  More coordinated branding, management and</p>	<p><b>Threats</b>                  Ongoing challenge of a depressed retail market generally                  Complacency and failure to evolve                  Standard retail developments unsympathetic to the historic character of the town</p>

<p>promotion of the independent quarter                  Investment in and management of the traditional high street                  Development of A3/ leisure uses to support the new cultural quarter                  Using this to regenerate wider Queen St and St Botolphs area                  Review of car parking infrastructure</p>	<p>Historic structures at risk</p>
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#### 4. Developing the options

Options have been identified for the following issues in this SPD:

- St Botolph’s Quarter;
- Retail options; and
- Street market.

The SA considered that the implementation of the remaining parts of the St Botolph’s Quarter Master Plan will result in the regeneration of this part of Colchester Town Centre and could stimulate regeneration of surrounding areas. Proposals for Vineyard Gate will result in new retail opportunities and possibly leisure opportunities. It is very likely that the implementation of the St Botolph’s Master Plan and preferred retail options will result in public realm improvements as high quality design will be required in accordance with Colchester’s adopted planning policies. There is potential for improved access to the Town Centre by sustainable modes. Vineyard Gate is adjacent the Town Wall, development must be sensitive to its setting. There is the potential for green roofs and for tree planting, which would enhance biodiversity and contribute to climate change adaptation. Improving connections between Vineyard Gate and the High St will increase the positive impacts of tourism by making it easier for tourists to get around the Town Centre and will also help those with mobility impairments. As part of improved connections between retail sites appropriate signage should be delivered. Redevelopment of key Town Centre retail sites offers the opportunity for sustainable design and low carbon energy options.

The impacts under the do nothing options are largely neutral, although there are some negative impacts. These principally relate to the potential difficulty in implementing Town Centre improvements without an SPD.

#### 5. Predicting and evaluating the effects of the plan and considering mitigation and enhancement measures

The SPD will encourage a mix of new Town Centre uses and continue the regeneration of the St Botolph’s quarter. The SPD and wider Better Town Centre Project have a focus on delivery and will likely result in more positive impacts than would be the case under the no plan option. The SPD recognises throughout the need to improve the public realm. This can be achieved as part of new development but also through improving existing areas of open space that are in need of rejuvenation. Improving the public realm, which this SPD promotes, is likely to have a positive impact on social cohesion by providing people with public areas to socialise. The SPD will contribute to the Council’s aim to achieve and maintain Purple Flag status but more information should be

included in the SPD to ensure that this is achieved. The development of a cultural quarter will result in an increase in tourists. Anecdotal evidence suggests that since the opening of Firstsite the Town Centre has experienced an increase in visitors.

The Town Centre wayfinding scheme will continue to improve access to the Town Centre for those with mobility impairments and by sustainable modes of travel. As part of the wayfinding scheme the Council will develop a Historic Town Walls route, which will promote the historic environment to visitors and shoppers. Interpretation of historic assets will promote their appreciation. New signs should be clear, concise and consistent and informed by the findings of research involving older people's use of the Town Centre. Measures to facilitate more journeys by bus, cycle and foot will continue to be promoted, which will promote sustainable travel.

The SPD will protect the historic environment and makes reference to the wide range of historic assets within the Town Centre. Reference should also be made to the need to protect the setting of historic assets and the desire to enhance buildings at risk, often by bringing these buildings back into appropriate uses. The SPD makes the link between protection and enhancement of the historic environment and tourism. The SPD recognises throughout the importance of local distinctiveness and the need to ensure that development is unique and responds to Colchester's identity.

The SPD requires development to have regard to air quality and refers to the emerging air quality management plan. Relevant actions identified in the management plan should be incorporated into the SPD.

The SPD encourages renewable energy and district heating networks in the Town Centre, which will mitigate the impacts of climate change. More information should be made available on the potential for district heating to ensure the SPD is supported by a credible evidence base. The SPD refers to the adopted Sustainable Design & Construction SPD. To maximise sustainability the SPD should encourage development to exceed the level required in the SPD. Alternatively good practice from BREEAM case studies should be highlighted.

Green roofs and walls are encouraged in the SPD, which will improve the green infrastructure network, enhance biodiversity and manage surface water. Whilst the proposed Tree Trail will not enhance biodiversity it will enhance people's knowledge and appreciation of the existing biodiversity within the Town Centre. To provide more certainty that this will occur the SPD should require applicants to provide justification if they are not including a green roof or green wall. Key open spaces have been identified in the SPD and the Council will support rejuvenation of these spaces. This is likely to come forward through CIL and grant funding.

No negative effects have been identified as part of the appraisal of the SPD and this is unsurprising considering that the SPD positively builds on existing initiatives and local planning policies, which have already been subject to SA.

No mitigation measures are therefore required, however a number of enhancement measures have been identified as part of the SA and are listed below.

- To ensure that the SPD really does have an impact on the night time economy measures under the Purple Flag initiative that are relevant to planning should be specifically referred to in the SPD.
- New signs within the Town Centre should be clear, concise and consistent.
- Relevant actions identified in the air quality management plan should be incorporated into the SPD.
- The Sustainable Design policy should encourage major development to achieve BREEAM 'excellent'.
- The following measures are taken from BREEAM's retail case studies and should be referred to in the SPD to demonstrate to applicants the type of measures that the Council will expect: locally sourced materials, a high level of recycling, use of local labour, natural ventilation, use of high efficiency lighting and intelligent lighting controls, rainwater harvesting, and high levels of insulation.
- Energy efficiency measures should be referred to in the Renewable Energy policy as it is more cost effective and greater energy savings can be made through improved energy efficiency rather than going straight to renewable energy technologies.
- To provide more certainty that green roofs/wall will be delivered the SPD should require applicants to provide justification if they are not including a green roof or green wall.
- The policy on Enhancing the Historic Environment should include reference to the need to protect the setting of historic assets.
- Linked to the above, the desire to enhance buildings at risk, often by bringing these buildings back into appropriate uses, should be referred to.

## **6. Monitoring**

This SPD and SA will be monitored as part of the Annual Monitoring Report.