



## Magdalen Street Rail Sidings

### Site Brief

Adopted by Local Plan Committee  
on 18 August 2014

As an extension to the Adopted Magdalen Street Brief  
(February 2014)

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 This Development Brief has been prepared to set out an appropriate redevelopment solution for a site described as 'The Railway Sidings/Land to the North of Magdalen Street.' This Brief outlines the parameters and aspirations for such development in order to ensure that the site's potential is maximised, whilst meeting the sustainable development objectives and the Colchester Borough Council (CBC) Development Plan objectives.

1.2 This Brief has been prepared in consultation with Essex County Council (ECC), including the site specific details discussed during the preparation of the Site Allocations DPD. The Brief has been prepared having regard to the wider Adopted brief for Magdalen Street. This is available on the Council's website.

1.3 This Brief sets out the policy framework relative to the redevelopment of the site, and identifies the site's opportunities and constraints based on the topographical survey and analysis. Against this background information, the Brief concludes with the development proposals/potential design solution and other development control matters which will be relevant in the determination of a formal application.

1.4 In line with the adopted Site Allocations DPD, this Brief also identifies the extent of land required for safeguarding purposes for the future East Transit Corridor (ETC), as agreed with ECC.

1.5 This Brief is not intended to be prescriptive, but is to be used to guide future development at the site.

## **2. POLICY CONTEXT**

2.1 Any development at the site should have regard to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and allied Guidance (NPPG).

2.2 In addition, the following policies of the local policy framework are relevant for the future development of the site, and should be noted.

2.3 Within the adopted Core Strategy (December 2008) policy SD1 identifies the "East Growth Area" (which includes the site) as a strategic area for new development. Policy H1 confirms that housing development will be focused in strategic areas, to meet the Borough's housing target – with 2,600 new homes to be provided in the East Growth Area up to 2021. Under policy SD2, new development will be required to provide relevant infrastructure, community facilities, and open space, as appropriate.

2.4 The site's specific allocation within the adopted Site Allocations DPD (October 2010) is also relevant. The site forms part of "Land to North of Magdalen Street", which is allocated for 'predominantly residential' development under policy SA EC1, for around 70 units. The site is also within "East Colchester Special Policy Area 3" (Magdalen Street) – policy SA EC5. Here, housing development will be extended and consolidated, and other small scale uses that are compatible with overall housing proposals will be permitted. In addition, the policy confirms that land will be safeguarded adjacent to the railway line, in order to provide for a future transit link (ETC) which will also include footpaths and a cycle way.

2.5 Policy SA EC8 refers to 'Transportation in East Colchester', and confirms that land will be safeguarded for the transit link between Colne Causeway and Recreation Road, and alongside the south of the railway from Hythe Station (Station Road) to Colchester Town. Supporting paragraph 5.80 confirms that the exact requirements of safeguarding shall be agreed on a site by site basis either within an agreed Development Brief.

2.6 In addition to the overall strategic objectives of the Core Strategy, the following policies (as amended by the Focused review August 2013) are also relevant to consideration of this site:

- H2 – confirms that new development must make efficient use of land and relate to context;
- H3 – developments should provide a mix of housing types to suit a range of different households;
- H4 – seeking to secure 20% of new dwellings as affordable housing for sites of 10 or more
- UR1 – East Colchester as a regeneration area;
- UR2 – securing high quality design in new developments;
- PR1 – access to private/communal areas of open space for new homes;
- TA1 – locating new development in accessible areas;
- TA2 – promoting walking and cycling;
- TA3 – an East Transit Corridor providing public transport services, and
- ER1 incorporating measures to reduce carbon emissions

2.7 Policy SA EC2 of the Site Allocations DPD also sets out criteria with which new development must comply if it is to be permitted: a balanced/integrated mix of uses; consideration of flood risk; contributions to be sought towards infrastructure (including river enhancement, the ETC, environmental enhancements and an urban park).

2.8 Within The adopted Development Control Policies DPD (October 2010) the following policies are relevant for this site:

- DP1 - all development to be designed to a high standard, with regard to social, economic and environmental sustainability;
- DP2 – Health Impact Assessments required for all residential development in excess of 50 units;
- DP3 - planning obligations will be sought where appropriate, in accordance with details set out in SPD;
- DP12 - housing development to be of high standards of design, construction and layout; • DP16 - provision of private amenity space for all new dwellings;
- DP17 - developments are required to seek to enhance accessibility for sustainable modes of transport;
- DP19 - minimum parking standards for residential development of 1 space for every 1-bed dwelling and 2 spaces for every 2-bed or more dwellings with 0.25 visitor spaces per unit (lower standards may be accessible in highly accessible locations);
- DP21 – proposals will need to be supported by an ecological survey, where necessary, and conserve or enhance the bio-diversity value of the brownfield sites, and
- DP25 - applicants are encouraged to incorporate renewable energy technologies into all development where viable.

2.9 In addition to the above policies, several adopted supplementary planning guidance/documents are relevant, including:

- Affordable Housing SPG (March 2004); • External Materials Guide for New Development SPG (July 2004); • Vehicle Parking Standards SPG (August 2001) – average of 2.25 including visitor parking. spaces per dwelling, but a maximum of 1 space per dwelling acceptable in accessible locations;
- Provision of Open Space, Sport and Recreational Facilities SPG (July 2006) – as per the 10% provision set out in policy, and children's play facilities (or contributions for such) may be required;
- Provision of Community Facilities SPD (September 2009), and • Sustainable Construction SPD (October 2007).

### **3. SITE AND AREA ANALYSIS**

#### **The Site and Surroundings**

3.1 The site is located approximately 200m from the eastern edge of Colchester Town Centre and lies immediately to the south of the railway line. The location of the site is shown on the location plan and aerial photographs attached at Appendix 1. The site extends to approximately 2 hectares, with its northern boundary along the railway line and its southern boundary adjacent to a relatively new housing development (on George Williams Way, off Magdalene Street). The former railway sidings make up a large part of the site, which is currently underused and overgrown. The existing railway line and part of the Development Brief site are identified for safeguarding purposes for the proposed ETC by ECC.

#### **Movement and Accessibility**

3.2 Currently the direct pedestrian access to the site is limited to the existing access off Magdalen Street, and an unused point off George Williams Way. There is a footbridge from the north of the railway line to the residential area to the south and footpaths to the site access points via Magdalen Street. There is no cycling route to/from the site. Therefore, the site presents the opportunity to improve the accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists.

3.3 The site is within walking distance from the town centre. Moreover, the site is well served by public transport – the nearest bus stop is on at Magdalen Street, approximately 200m away, from which a frequent service to Colchester Town Centre and main station is currently operated.

#### **Existing Land Use and Activity**

3.4 The site is located in an area of predominantly residential use both to the south and to the north, on the other side of the railway line. The housing development off George Williams Way is predominantly flats, accommodated in buildings of up to 4 storeys. The appearance of the buildings is mixed buff brick and painted render. The flat blocks have pitched roofs with grey tiles. Other housing development in the area is of mixed design, with both newer and more traditional two-storey buildings of - largely - red brick construction.

3.5 The existing development known as South Central has little usable open space and lacks green spaces. The development area provides 'borrowed amenity' currently and any

scheme should seek to provide a suitable contextual setting for the existing adjacent areas of development.

3.6 In terms of community facilities/services the existing Brooklands nursery forms part of the eastern end of the site. The loss of this facility may be compensated through developer contributions for community facilities to enable existing facilities in the Magdalen Street area to be updated. Such facilities include the YMCA Hall. The local shopping centre at Barracks Street also provides services to the local community. The main shopping and other facilities/services are also available in the main town centre.

#### Constraints/Viability

3.7 The levels of the site based on the topographical survey are shown on the drawing attached at Appendix 2. The significant level drop from the southern boundary – a 7m level difference - imposes a number of constraints in terms of the site's development potential and deliverability. A number of options have been considered, and the assessment indicated that the costs associated with creating a level site would not be viable.

#### Air Quality

3.8 Both Brook Street and Magdalen Street form part of an Air Quality Management Area. The creation of additional congestion on either road could lead to a worsening of air quality. It is important that any application is accompanied by a detailed air quality report to ensure that the existing situation is not worsened and if possible, that opportunities are taken to improve the existing situation.

#### Biodiversity

3.9 The site contains regenerating habitat including wetlands (towards the western corner) and it is important that a Phase 1 habitat survey is carried out to enable any protected species to be identified and appropriate mitigation measures incorporated into any scheme.

#### Noise and vibration

3.10 The close proximity of the site to the active rail line requires an appropriate design and construction response to mitigate any adverse impact.

#### Heritage

3.11 The former Brooklands building at the eastern end of the site is a locally listed building which needs to be re-used as part of any scheme. The setting of this building also needs to be respected including the mature Holme Oak (*Quercus ilex*) that makes a positive contribution to the Brook Street streetscene.

#### Topography

3.12 The site is effectively split into two, an elevated upper level at the southern and eastern ends of the site, and a lower level that comprises the majority of the site (at grade with the rail line). The access road into the site will be restricted to a moderate gradient in order to achieve vehicular access to the lower level of the site.

3.13 Given the topography, any access road along the southern boundary would require a substantial retaining wall at significant cost to the developer. The retention of the regenerating woodland belt along the steep incline across the southern and eastern periphery of the site would retain this important amenity and maintain slope stability. Trees are also known to ameliorate air quality. This area could counts towards the open space provision on site.

3.13 As such, any redevelopment for this site would require a careful design to secure a deliverable and viable scheme which addresses the constraints identified whilst ensuring that the planning objectives for the site are met.

#### **4. DESIGN REPONSE & DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES**

##### Principle of Use

4.1 The principle of redevelopment of the site is well established, through both the allocation of the site within the adopted Site Allocations DPD and the Core Strategy. The site presents a number of opportunities:

- The site is 'brownfield land' and constitutes previously developed land in planning terms. It is therefore entirely appropriate for redevelopment and is sited in a sustainable and highly accessible location. The impact of contamination and the economics of remediation need to be considered.
- The site is currently regenerating with self sown trees greening the site. Therefore, the redevelopment will need to visually enhance the appearance of the area and respect biodiversity.

##### Quantum of Development

- The site is in close proximity to the Town Centre. As such, suitable development to create connectivity between this part of the Town and main Town Centre is desirable. A cycle way/pedestrian access needs to be provided to allow ease of movement between Brook Street and Magdalen Street/St Botolphs.

##### Contributions.

4.2 The absolute level of contributions will be dependent upon viability appraisal. Contributions will be sought in accordance with adopted policy to deliver:

- Affordable housing: 20% of the total to reflect overall mix of types;
- Community facilities: A contribution calculated in accordance with SPD
- Leisure and open space: Calculated in accordance with SPD;
- Highways & transportation: Funding to upgrade two bus stops in Magdalen Street residential travel packs. The provision of a cycle route from east to west (not necessarily segregated) and the retention of the 12 m buffer to the south of the rail line to allow for the future development of the East Colchester Rapid Transit corridor;
- Education: Contributions for Early Years, Primary and Secondary places within the local planning group of schools.

## Uses

4.3 The following uses are appropriate to be accommodated on the site:

- Residential units of mixed type and tenure;
- Supporting Infrastructure, such as access roads and open space, and
- Potential for ancillary community uses in Brooklands at the east end of the site, such as a doctor's surgery/clinic.

4.4 It is considered that the site could accommodate circa 70 residential units, with associated infrastructure and uses. Parking will be provided in accordance with adopted standards and in line with the site's accessible location. Open space areas should be provided in accordance with adopted policy.

## Safeguarding Land

4.5 The Council have confirmed that approximately 12 metres of land will be required for safeguarding relative to the ETC – measured from the nearest running railway line.

4.6 On this basis, only the land north of the blue line shown on the site location plan at Appendix 3 is required for safeguarding purposes, and it is considered that there are no significant impacts on the redevelopment of the site.

4.7 The proposed ETC will include bus links and quality walking and cycling paths, as indicated in the adopted Site Allocations DPD.

## 5. Design Principles

4.8 The illustrative scheme layout shown at Appendix 4 is based upon a direct response to the existing level constraints shown on the levels plan at Appendix 2 and the current property market condition. The scheme shown presents a viable option at the time of preparing the development brief taking into account site's constraints and required contributions.

4.9 Due to the levels of the site, it is considered that buildings ranging from 2 to 3 storeys could be accommodated.

4.10 The scale and massing of the development are determined by the type of residential development proposed, albeit reference should be taken from the local vernacular and particularly the adjacent areas.

4.11 The levels difference across the site from the south to the north and boundaries provides a constraint but also a tranquil setting apart from the bustle of the surrounding area:

- By retaining the best of regenerating woodland on the southern and eastern embankments this could provide an instant setting to the development
- A mix of home types could help deliver the community's aspiration for regeneration and diversity.

4.12 It is proposed that the existing site entrance to the south from George Williams Way is utilised together with the existing access ramp approximately parallel to the south

perimeter connecting each of the new blocks of two-three storeys surrounded by garden land and parking.

4.13 The blocks and the level difference between the site and access road leading to George Williams Way acts as a buffer between the garden space and the road, providing a secluded private space for residents.

4.14 Detailed design of the buildings on site will have regard to surrounding development, drawing on the character of the local area. However, the relative sense of isolation resulting from the change in level allows for the creation of a greater individuality.

4.15 Planning permission (ref: 08794) was granted in November 2009 for new vehicular/pedestrian junction to Brook Street to provide future access to residential development. The subsequent renewal of this consent was withdrawn as significant problems were raised in connection with the AQMA. This issue has become increasingly important as the eastern side of Brook Street has been redeveloped for new homes. It is now proposed that access to the site is taken from the south rather than the east as sought previously.

4.16 Car parking will be provided in accordance with the relevant CBC parking standards. Any differentiation will be justified at the application stage.

4.17 In terms of the access by pedestrians and cyclists, the proposed ETC will provide improved walking and cycling paths as well as a bus link. This will significantly improve the accessibility by pedestrians and cyclists. Part of the site is safeguarded for the ETC for these provisions.

4.18 The requirements set out in the adopted Development Policies for private amenity space and public open space should be achievable. Any deviation will need to be justified at the application stage.

## **6. DEVELOPMENT PROCESS**

### **Application Process**

5.1 The detailed proposals and the scope of the application as well as the realistic level of contributions towards social and physical infrastructure will be discussed and agreed with CBC at the pre-application stage. Potential contributions are identified above.

5.2 This detailed scope will confirm the documents required for any application submission, but these will include:

Air quality Assessment; Affordable Housing Statement; Travel Plan; Biodiversity Survey and Report, Daylight and Sunlight Assessment, Contamination survey, Health Impact Assessment, Viability Appraisal. Please refer to the local validation check list on the website: [Link to validation Local Check List](#)

### **Planning Obligations**

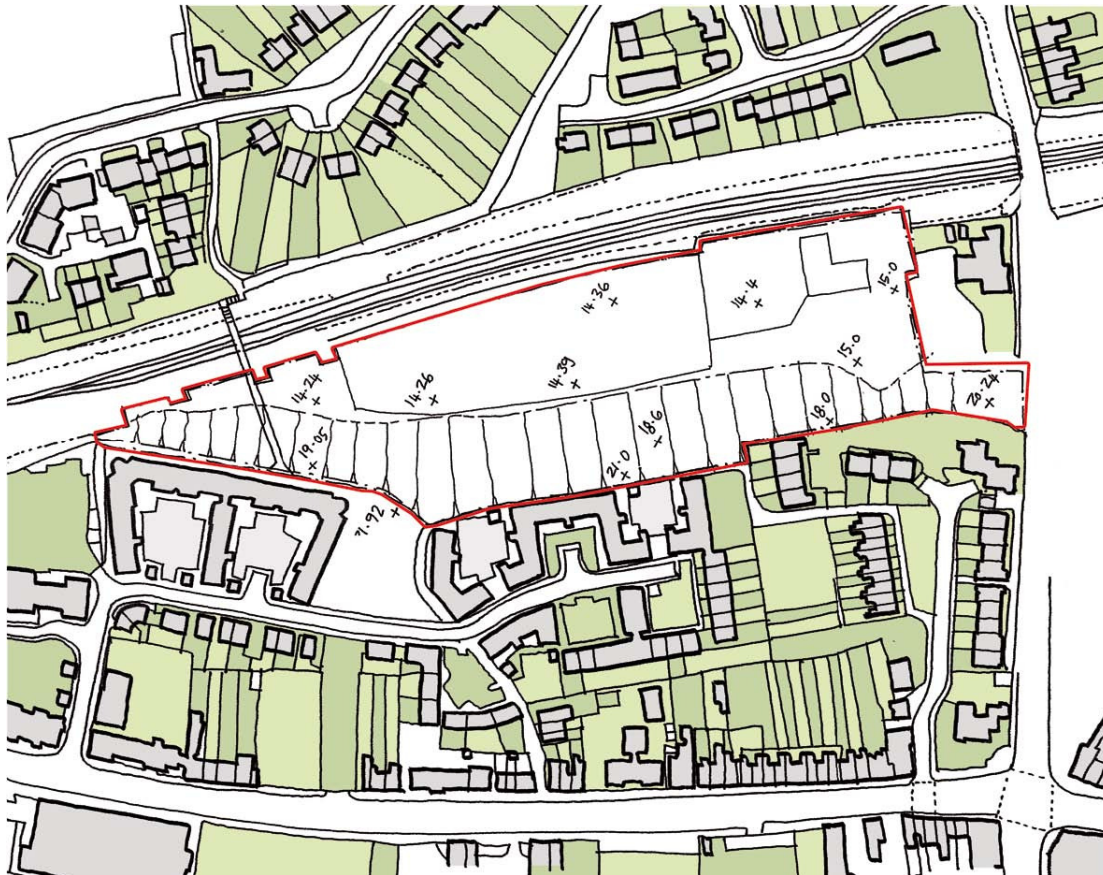
5.3 Future developments will be required to make a financial contribution towards the provision of additional infrastructure facilities. The precise details will be negotiated between the future developer/applicant and the Council's planning and housing officers, taking into account the economic and site circumstances at the time of the application.



APPENDIX 1 - Aerial Photographs of the Site  
Not to Scale



APPENDIX 2 - Levels and proposed Safeguarding for Rapid Transit Link  
Site Boundary Land for Safeguarding  
12m from Southernmost Rail  
Scale: 1:1250  
Point of entry 7m above lower level





APPENDIX 3 – Suggested conceptual layout highlighting key issues (Not to scale)





APPENDIX 4 - Illustrative Scheme Layout for ca 70 units

