

# Mile End Community Engagement Process – July 2011- Executive Summary

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In order to understand how local residents feel about living in Mile End (i.e. good points, issues, ideas for change etc.) and to ensure that any proposed developments in the area would be shaped with as much input from the existing residents as possible, Colchester Borough Council commissioned the University of Essex (as an independent agency) to deliver a community engagement process. This community engagement took place between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> of July, 2011.

The University of Essex designed a fully inclusive participatory process to enable representative community participation. The participatory process strongly emphasized visually oriented tools and used the following participatory appraisal methods in the Mile End Community Engagement process: participants' data sheets, map models, community timeline and a prioritisation matrix. Such participatory, interactive and visual work allowed views to be collected from across a wide spectrum of local respondents – people of all ages and abilities. A team composed of a cross-section of i) local residents, ii) professionals who work in the area (local business people, grassroots workers, ward councillors) and iii) University of Essex facilitators, took this process out to the wider Mile End community.



The community engagement process reached 435 local people. Respondents varied in age from children to older people; were made up of a mix of male (41%) and female (59%); and around half had lived in the area for less than 10 years and half for over 10 years. The majority (68%) work locally within 5 miles of Mile End although 28% of respondents worked 11 miles or over away. A little over half of participants said they were working, 21% are students or at school and 12% are retired.

Participants gave us 437 comments describing a huge variety of aspects that they feel are special about living or working in Mile End, ranging from comments about the amount and quality of greenspaces in the area, how tranquil many places feel, the good facilities etc. through to the sense of community spirit. The responses clearly indicate however that residents value local green and open spaces (especially High Woods Country Park and Chesterwell); the peacefulness and location; and the strong sense of community the most.

**What is special about Mile End.....**  
*"A natural open space that contributes to the health & wellbeing of people, provides a safe habitat for wildlife - and actually contributes to the image of Colchester"*  
*"Chesterwell area is the only large expanse of open countryside in Mile End which is probably unique to our area which is otherwise densely populated. It is used and enjoyed by many people for various reasons"*  
*Nice and quiet, lovely walks, close to town. Very friendly people, the community spirit, feel safe*  
*Good community, pleasant neighbourhood, green spaces, dog walks"*  
*"Lots of facilities here in easy walking distance"*

A total of 674 different issues and 383 different opportunities for change were identified on the map model of Mile End. These problems and the opportunities for improvement as identified by local

residents, have been grouped into key nine key areas: i) Transport and Roads; ii) Housing; iii) Education and Training; iv) Leisure and Recreation; v) Employment and Local Economy; vi) Crime and Security; vii) Environment and Conservation; viii) Community; and ix) Facilities and Services. The number of comments received about issues and opportunities in each of the 9 categories is shown in Table A.

**Table A. Number of 'problems' and 'opportunities' comments in each category**

Category	Problems		Opportunities for change	
	No. of problems	Percentage of total problems	No. of suggestions	Percentage of total suggestions
Transport and Roads	344	51%	139	36%
Housing	124	18%	33	9%
Education and Training	23	3%	23	6%
Leisure and Recreation	11	2%	24	6%
Employment and Local Economy	3	1%	4	1%
Crime and Security	23	3%	4	1%
Environment and Conservation	66	10%	25	7%
Community	19	3%	38	10%
Facilities and Services	61	9%	93	24%
Total	674	100%	383	100%

The majority of problems cited (79%) were about transport and roads; housing; or environment and conservation in Mile End. Regarding the transport and roads of the area, the main concern was about traffic – both generally in the area and particularly at North Station roundabout (n=188), with concerns about parking (n=73) and bus services (n=36) also being raised. Respondents cited 124 issues about housing within Mile End with the majority of these to do with a general concern related to the building of more housing within the area or indeed pleas for no more new housing (n=77). The next most frequently mentioned concern was that of how the new houses would impact on local services and there were calls for more local infrastructure before house building commences (n=23). Respondents also listed 66 problems related to environment and conservation of the area including worries over the development impact on greenspaces (n=23), concern over dogs fouling pavements (n=23) and concerns about litter (n=11).

**Problems in Mile End ....**

*"Traffic nightmare at North Station Roundabout"*

*"Parking. Commuters park in our spaces and then we have to pay to park outside our homes with a permit!"*

*"There is too much building for current infrastructure"*

*"Please no more houses. The station roundabout cannot cope"*

*"Have more places for teenagers to go because most things in the area are for children"*

*"Why are new houses being considered, building over open countryside, whilst there are many unoccupied and derelict dwellings within Colchester and surrounding areas?"*

*"Worried about development, loss of green space and loss of established trees"*

*"Amount of dog fouling on pavements"*

Mirroring respondents' concerns, suggestions for improvements to the local area focused primarily on improvements to transport (n=139); the provision of more facilities and services (n=93) and community related ideas (n=38); although ideas for community and housing also feature. Members of the community engagement team collated and analysed the opportunities for improvement comments and identified (where possible) 3 key opportunities in each sector. These key opportunities were then prioritised by the team (using a forced choice method) and were then sorted into a 'What happens next' matrix. The top three opportunities that the team voted for in the prioritisation exercise were: i) More community facilities (clubs, community centre etc); ii)

Alternative location for new housing (i.e. not in Mile End) and iii) Improve North Station roundabout area (i.e. transport infrastructure)

When addressing 'What happens next?', many of the opportunities (including suggestions for more greenery, better infrastructure and relocating building activity to brown field sites) were deemed by the team

the remit of local government agencies, service providers and local authorities. Other improvements, such as the provision of more facilities (such as shops, post offices and community spaces) were felt to be achievable jointly by the local community working together with other agencies such as local authorities. Whilst it was felt that encouraging more community spirit was something that the local residents themselves can do.

In conclusion, there are three major themes emergent from the findings. Firstly, there is an appreciation of the local green and open spaces in Mile End and a concern for their future. It is clear that residents value green and open spaces in Mile End and are therefore concerned about the possible loss of green space as a result of any future development and the potential to change the essential nature of Mile End, the greenness, the open spaces and the 'village feel', deemed so special by current residents.



Secondly the largest issue facing Mile End, as highlighted by local residents, is the limitation of the local transport infrastructure and the resultant traffic congestion (particularly around the North Station roundabout area). Related to this, the next most frequently mentioned issue in participants' comments was their concerns about the impact of further development in Mile End, especially the impact of further housing on existing facilities and infrastructure (e.g. possible pressure on local schools, services, further difficulties with roads and parking).

The third theme coming out of the findings is that of local facilities and services. Whilst there were many positive comments about the local sense of community, residents also expressed concerns about the lack of community facilities and suggested the need for a local community centre, more community groups, youth clubs and other facilities for young people. Respondents value existing education facilities, amenities, local clubs, groups, healthcare and public transport but felt that the area would benefit from more shops, Post Offices and options for entertainment, especially considering the local population increases associated with the building of hundreds of new homes in the area.

The engagement process has provided a valuable opportunity to obtain the views of a wide section of the population of Mile End and Braiswick. The findings from this process will be taken into account in the preparation of a Master Plan for the North Growth Area Urban Extension. The findings are also likely to be useful to Myland Community Council, other service providers and community groups in the area and therefore this report will be widely circulated.

**Opportunities for Mile End ....**  
*"Need to do more improve the bottle neck at North Station"*  
*"Something needs to be done to ease congestion around North Station,*  
*"Re-unite the 2 halves of Myland with proper footbridges over the NAR - at Mill Road and near the new school - essential once the A12 link is complete"*  
*"Development continues to take place and is generally positive for the area, but maintenance of local greenspaces plus infrastructure needs to be considered"*  
*"There is now an opportunity to 'get it right' for new housing developments?"*  
*"More outdoor activities for children and young people"*