

Object: GC Policy 9: Infrastructure Delivery and Impact Mitigation

GC Policy 9: Infrastructure Delivery And Impact Mitigation - Object

My comments on this policy fall into two parts, firstly, timely delivery of infrastructure within the communities and secondly, timely delivery of the link road with its mitigation of surrounding road infrastructure.

Firstly

Whilst I support the statement that the 'required infrastructure to support the development will be delivered in a timely and, where appropriate, phased manner', I have to object to this policy on the grounds that it does not go far enough, as in specifying exactly what 'infrastructure to support the development' falls into this category, what the priorities are of the infrastructure types listed in the glossary, nor what constitutes delivery 'in a timely manner'. It is felt to be absolutely vital that, for example, nursery facilities and a primary school, together with some kind of healthcare facility and community space (which may be shared initially between all of these four) is in place alongside the building of the first homes. This is supported by the following from the TCBGC Infrastructure Delivery Phasing Funding Plan: 'There is a general requirement for infrastructure to be in place at the time it is needed and aligned with each phase of development. This leads to a general front-loading of requirements to ensure that the impacts of growth can be satisfactorily accommodated, and that certain services and facilities are available to people from when they are needed.' (p5)

The reason for this is so that there is no pressure exerted on these already over subscribed facilities in surrounding communities, and there is no reason to seek this provision further afield from the Garden Community, and thus avoids putting pressure on already congested local road infrastructure, either into Colchester or to Wivenhoe or Elmstead Market. It will also help to fulfil other objectives for the Garden Community as in modal shift, as these facilities should be in walking distance of homes, so no need to use the car. It is my belief that these types of infrastructure should be named and committed to within policy together with the 'timely delivery' defined as 'alongside the building of first homes' so as to ensure that these broader but equally essential goals of the Garden Community are fulfilled.

This requirement is also in line with GC Policy 6: Community and Social Infrastructure which states that: 'The provision of a local centre within each of the neighbourhoods will provide residents with access to services and facilities, reducing the need to travel and contributing to the creation of 'walkable neighbourhoods' and 'Infrastructure first is a Garden Community principle'.

I would strongly urge the Inspector therefore to include as main modifications in their recommendations to embed specific detail and timings about these key fundamentals of infrastructure that needs to be in place as the first occupants of the Garden Community move in.

Secondly

On a similar note, it is my grave concern that the current proposal to allocate £21 million of Housing Infrastructure Fund money to the provision of a hugely expensive but limited shelf-life RTS (Rapid Transit System) with all the implications for NOT mitigating traffic congestion on the A133 into Colchester but exacerbating it, has not taken into account an alternative more cost effective and vastly more future-proofed RTS solution which does NOT require the delay in building the full A133-A120 link road. This link road, once built, would immediately start relieving congestion on the A133 Clingoe Hill approach to Colchester and can also be utilised by a better purposed RTS with a looping anti-clockwise route out of the Garden Community and onto the A120 around and into Colchester via the Ipswich Road and Severalls Lane, up to the Northern Gateway, using already fit for purpose road

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infrastructure, linking key destinations and on the return of the loop through Elmstead Road, Capon Road and Boundary road, using already dedicated bus routes (First Buses, services S1 and 87) and completely avoiding the over-congested A133, Clingoe Hill. (See attached Alt_RTS_Route file).

It is strongly recommended that instead, the full HIF funding is allocated to the delivery of the full link road, and the alternative anti-clockwise RTS route utilising the link road up to the A120 Business Park onto the A120 and off at the junction of the A12/A120/ Ipswich road, Severalls Lane up to the Stadium, Colchester Leisure and Sport Park, Northern Gateway and back along Via Urbis Way to link to the Hospital and North Station, up Balkerne Hill (A134) stopping at the Embassy Rooms for Colchester city centre access, onto Southway, stopping at St Botolphs train station and then following the A134 down Magdalen and Barrack St, then Hythe Hill, with a stop at the bottom of Hythe Hill to access The Hythe train station, then again following the A134 along Hythe Quay, across the river, and then the railway bridge, and then turning right onto Elmstead Road, followed by Capon Road and Boundary Road where a stop there links to the Knowledge Gateway, Essex Business School, the Innovation Centre and the University of Essex. Boundary Road then leads to the B1027/8 and back to the Garden Community Park and Choose stop on the A133/Wivenhoe Road junction.

The benefits completing the link road in its entirety BEFORE commencement of homes being built together with an RTS that utilises the anti-clockwise route shown are as follows:

- 1) Using the route proposed, no building work for extra bus lanes etc needs to be done on Clingoe Hill, in either direction, thus avoiding the horrendous congestion that would result therefrom.
- 2) No expensive road alterations need to be made through central and historic Colchester. The new route would skirt the town centre, with a key stop at the top of Balkerne Hill by the Embassy Rooms to access the centre, and then again at St Botolphs train station.
- 3) This could potentially pave the way for central Colchester to be pedestrianised or remain as it is, being served by local bus routes.
- 4) The proposed alternative to Clingoe Hill (Elmstead Road, Capon Road, Boundary Road, B1028/27 back to A133) is already a dedicated bus route (First Buses Routes S1 and 87)
- 5) Much of the route is already in place and fit for purpose for an RTS (A120, Severalls Lane, Axial Way, Via Urbis, plus Elmstead Road avoiding Clingoe Hill above) thus presenting a huge cost saving.
- 6) The saved cost of works on Clingoe Hill alone would contribute a large proportion of the monies needed for the completion of the link road.
- 7) The completed link road would immediately begin to relieve pressure on Clingoe Hill by providing a through route for traffic going to North Station or the hospital or the A12.
- 8) Because of the immediate fast access via the RTS anticlockwise route to North Station or the A120 employment park in the north west corner of the Garden Community or even Colchester Business Park, or Colchester General Hospital, new Garden Community residents working in London or any of the other locations would very easily adopt this modal shift from the outset. If there is a wait of 5-16 years for the link road to be completed this opportunity will have been lost. Much of the soundness of the TCBGC derives from its having the link road and not having to be dependent upon routes into Colchester, either for employment, schools, hospital care, shopping or travel.
- 9) It would meet the previous inspection's criterion for soundness as the link road would be doing as it was intended in siphoning traffic with onward destinations beyond Clingoe Hill off from the A133 and onto the A120 or beyond.

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9) The Park and Choose on the Garden Community with the new RTS anti-clockwise route to access these destinations then also becomes a very real possibility from the outset.

10) Already it is painfully difficult to get a parking space in the hospital car park because it is so overloaded and people often have to drive around waiting for someone to leave before they can park. This will only be exacerbated with a larger demographic. However, with a fast RTS system adopting the proposed anti-clockwise route, residents from all communities east of Colchester can use the Park and Choose on the Garden Community to not only avoid battling with the traffic on A133 Clingoe Hill and beyond but avoid driving to the hospital at all using the RTS with the looping anti-clockwise route proposed by the CLG.

Without this radical shift in approach to delivering this key infrastructure, ie the A120-A133 Link Road, coupled with the revised looping anti-clockwise RTS route which doesn't require hugely expensive road improvements to operate in full from the outset, I strongly contend that none of the TCBGC goals for modal shift, links to transport hubs, including the A120 Garden Community Business Park and Colchester Business Park on Severalls Lane, and the benefits of a Rapid Transit System can be achieved. Instead, very real harms arise not only to TCBGC goals and residents but also to neighbouring communities and traffic utilising the A133 Clingoe Hill approach to Colchester. These are listed as follows:

a) the modal shift will fail because

b) the RTS will be unable to provide travel to key destinations rapidly such as the hospital and the main train station as limited to A133 routes into central Colchester and

c) by the time the link road is completed, in 5-14 years time, with the possibilities of a better looped anti-clockwise RTS route that that would have provided, the patterns of behaviour not supporting modal shift will already be in place.

d) It is in direction contravention of a key principle of the TCBGC which states that it will contain all the infrastructure and services for residents WITHOUT having to go into central Colchester

e) Congestion and traffic on the A133 and Clingoe Hill going into Colchester, already gridlocked at key times, will expand exponentially with both building bus lanes and the addition of RTS priority vehicles, together with the added traffic from the Garden Community who want to go to the A12, the hospital or North Station.

f) The addition of dedicated bus lanes to Clingoe Hill will narrow it and creating a further bottleneck, more congestion and tailbacks as more traffic attempts to squeeze through a single lane as opposed to the current dual carriageway provision which already has these problems.

g) It will cause even further distress to local communities and confirm all the fears and objections they have raised about the building of the Garden Community. The CLG proposal however would do the reverse in providing an RTS route that did not use Clingoe Hill, and a joined up link road that alleviated traffic on the A133 rather than exacerbated it.

h) The £21 million currently ring-fenced for this not fit for purpose RTS, which militates against all of the principles and aspirational and otherwise entirely achievable goals of the Garden Community, will ultimately be wasted, as well as sabotaging those goals, with the loss of £21 million, as the desired modal shift will not be achieved either in the Garden Community or in Colchester City Centre, and a wonderful opportunity to achieve both of these will have been lost.

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i) With only one way in or out of the Garden Community, and the route to Bromley Road as a potential exit blocked from onward travel, the incomplete link road accessing or egressing the Garden Community from or onto the A133 will act as a bottleneck, inevitably causing huge congestion problems on the estate at key times of day, a phenomenon seen already on the Turner Rise Retail Park which was equally built within only one entry / exit road, but at least does not contain hundreds / thousands of homes. This will have the effect of making the Garden Community less desirable as a location to buy houses in, with the potential buyers and existing residents feeling that they are 'trapped' on the development once there, with the knock-on effect that the monies to fund any later completion of the link road become increasingly remote.

Conclusion

Very much of the strength and soundness of the TCBGC project relies on its provision of self sustainability ie for schools, healthcare, employment and shopping without having to travel outside of the Garden Community either to put added pressure on road infrastructure, or services found in surrounding communities. The RTS route plan shown in the current DPD, based on a link road that does not link, is in direct contradiction of this. As the point of the link road is to reduce traffic going into Colchester and a central tenet of the Garden Community is to be self-contained, why are huge sums being spent to provide an RTS to increase this traffic and access services outside the Garden Community? And this is at the expense of the mitigating link road, and using the very route whose traffic the link road was intended to alleviate. This is also in direct contravention of the key principles of the Garden Community and one of the chief causes of controversy, concern and dismay, expressed from the outset, in local communities.

I would contend that the TCBGC Transport Evidence Base Part 2 Measures report commissioned by the Councils and provided by Ringway Jacobs is far too narrow and limited in its outlook and with its RTS proposals and routing is merely providing a very expensive sticking plaster which will not meet demands even 10 years into the future, as the report itself admits: p5 'The RTS HIF project is introducing priority measures on the approach to Greenstead roundabout which is expected to operate satisfactorily up to 2033 for RTS vehicles' but 'In the potential second phase of investment post 2033, it would be expected that the garden community would be continuing to grow but a general increase in car trips could be threatening RTS reliability and worsening RTS journey times on the route west of Greenstead roundabout, which would work against achieving mode share targets and sustainable travel aims.'

Recommended movement and travel routes must therefore adopt a much broader future-proofed approach to accommodate the transport needs of an additional 17,500 people (2.3 persons living in each of 7,500 homes) on the east of Colchester. This is represented by the proposal outlined here by the CLG in putting the unnecessary sticking plaster monies described above and proposed by the current plan, towards completion of the link road as originally intended by the Housing Infrastructure Fund, together with the wider circular and much more economical RTS revised route, shown in the attached file, which will accommodate a thriving community 50 years into the future and beyond, without impinging on or increasing congestion of surrounding road and central Colchester infrastructure. To do anything else is to render the whole of the good work done by the planners in other areas such as Land Uses and Spatial Approach, and the aspirations embodied in both the Section 1 Local Plan and other TCBGC policies hamstrung at best by this crippling and at best wholly inadequate approach.

It is my assertion therefore that it is absolutely vital NOT to delay the completion of the link road – it was deemed to be fundamental to the soundness of the TCB Garden Community by the last

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inspection and on it hang very many of the Garden Community's goals and aspirations. To leave it undone is to strike at the very heart of the soundness of the project. I would therefore urge the Inspector to include the CLG proposals – to complete the link road from the outset and to re-route the RTS using this same link road for a different non-A133 access to Colchester and other destinations – as main modifications in their inspection report to transform the DPD from what is otherwise an extremely unsound plan which may even see the vision of the TCBGC dashed entirely, to one that is sound, pragmatic and meets all its aspirations.