CLG Further Statement on Main Matter 7 (GC Policy 7) Movement and Connections

Are the requirements of the Policy justified by appropriate available evidence, having regard to national guidance, and local context?

The CLG (Community Liaison Group) is completely committed to the vision and implementation of the Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community (TCBGC) with its inspirational and aspirational goals to provide sustainable future-ready homes and neighbourhoods based solidly on garden community principles as laid out in the DPD and including the absolute necessity of the A120/A133 link road as the bedrock of what supports the soundness of the development and outlined in the DPD (Development Plan Document), Chapter 8 (GC Policy 7) Movement and Connections, p111. This soundness of the TCB Garden Community, endorsed by Inspector Roger Clewes in 2014, was based on the securing of Essex County Council's Housing Infrastructure Fund bid for 'improved and sustainable transport links for the Tendring/Colchester Borders development' https://www.colchester.gov.uk/info/cbc-article/?id=KA-03194 and on which, as the DPD outlines, hang key goals of the new development, including unprecedented modal shift, relief of congestion in the wider locality and connectivity for employment/economic links.

However we do not believe that the elaborate specification of the link road as described in GC Policy 7 on p111 in the DPD is justified based on:

- Initial needs for a 2.4 km stretch of road which do not justify a full dual carriageway, 3 roundabouts (instead of less expensive light-controlled junctions) and a full dumbbell grade-separated junction onto the A120, of the ilk found on much bigger motorways and not that represented by the A120, with the huge cost of earthworks involved, and the very real possibility of subsidence of the A133 due to the dewatering process accompanying excavation of minerals for road construction, rather than a less expensive 'at grade' roundabout, such as those found on the A1 and elsewhere on the A120, which does not need such extensive earthworks joining the A1331 (link road) to the A120.
- Availability of HIF funds (insufficient) to build the A120/A133 link road in full to that specification.

We would contend that in failing to adapt the specification of the link road in the DPD to a simpler lower cost model more suited to local context and in order to, most importantly, ensure the road can fulfil its purpose and join the A120 with the A133 from the outset, essential to the fulfilment of Garden Community goals, there has been a serious disconnect between evidence and justification. This threatens the whole fabric of the Garden Community design as it sets up the link road project to fail from the start due to its over-specification and consequent overpricing leading to the planned construction of only the first two-thirds before the money runs out.

The fact is that the requirements of the policy in terms of this very highly overspecified 'link road', as described on p111 of the DPD, will not be justified until the delivery of the full circa 8000 homes in 30 years time and potentially not even then. However, the delivery of a road which links the A133 to the A120 from the start, albeit of a simplified and less costly design, is fully justified - in fact essential - to enable the new TCB Garden Community to meet prescribed and visionary goals. It is also one of the key measures of 'soundness' for the development as adjudged at the previous Examination in Public in 2014.

Unfortunately, however, the rigid adherence to this original over-specification coupled with today's financial constrictions which limit its length and fall short of linking its two end points, as is currently proposed, dashes from the start the benefits (connectivity for employment/business, congestion alleviation, use by the Rapid Transit System (RTS) to bypass A133 congestion and link more directly to key destinations via A120) that such a link road would provide and on which it is accepted the fundamental soundness of the TCBGC relies.

It is respectfully requested therefore that the Inspector use his powers to instigate a main modification to re-assure the soundness of the scheme by using the simpler less expensive design proposed in bullet point 1 above (thus enabling it to be built in full before housing commences) to replace the current overspecification in the DPD but with the inclusion notwithstanding of a potential expansion in the later stages of the development into dualling the carriageway and a new dumbbell grade-separated A120 junction based on future need and empirical evidence of usage and capacity, and linking such upscaling of road infrastructure to developer profits derived from the greater build-out that may render it necessary, using the S106 agreement as a mechanism.

Partial construction

The over-specified partial construction of the A1331, falling short of a complete link up with the A120, we would suggest has no evidence to justify it. It is a travesty of responsible spending as it achieves no goals, and failure to complete the road in full to join the end points automatically annuls any possibility of achieving the entirely justifiable and desirable goals, strengths of the TCB Garden Community plan, that it was intended to support. Outlined on p111 of the DPD, these are:

- To support growth at the Garden Community,
- manage congestion in the wider locality and
- improve connectivity for employment and business purposes via the A120 corridor.

Without the adjustment described above lowering the specification of the link road to enable it to link the A133 with the A120 before house building starts, it will

- fail to meet the scheduled opening in 2026 (p111, DPD)
- fail to 'manage congestion in this wider locality'. The RTS will be serving a congested central Colchester and adding to the congestion on Clingoe Hill A133 – even the start of building works on the St Andrews Avenue / Avon Way roundabout to accommodate this is causing huge and what are now likely to be permanent and pollution generating tailbacks in the residential area along Avon Way on the eastern edge of Colchester in direct contradiction of the stated intention to alleviate congestion. Similarly, any siphoning of traffic on the congested A133 into central Colchester via the link road onto A120/A12 will not be possible without its actually linking the A133 to the A120.
- fail to 'improve connectivity' (as the A133 will not be connected to the A120)
- fail to open up employment / business links (as above)
- fail 'to support growth at the Garden Community' (p111, DPD) – lack of connectivity to key end points for employment such as Harwich and Felixstowe International Ports and London Stansted airport, as well as North Station, Colchester Business Park and the General Hospital via the A120, and all traffic being channelled through a heavily congested city centre is likely to discourage potential home buyers who work or are contemplating work outside the immediate area. And as development of further infrastructure is dependent on home takeup, and home takeup is being hindered by lack of complete link road, this in itself could lead to stasis and stagnation and a dismal failure of the development instead of the vibrant, thriving and prosperous communities we are hoping to build.
- fail to supply the 'provision of key infrastructure and services for early phases of development to ensure sustainable travel patterns from first occupation' (p96, DPD) (due to the RTS being limited to an unjustifiable out of date central Colchester route which does not meet existing local residents' (as these have changed since 2016 when the initial modelling was done for RTS route, post-Covid and since the loss of key retail outlets from the city centre) or future TCBGC residents' destination needs)
- signally fail to demonstrate the 'principles behind a Garden Community' which 'is that **it is infrastructure-led'** https://www.tendringdc.gov.uk/sub-content-pages/what-makes-a-garden-community-different and directly contradicting the FAQ on Tendring District Council's

website which asks: **Will the new A120/A133 road be in place before the housing building starts?** And answers: 'Absolutely. We are committed to the 'infrastructure first' approach. The condition of the road funding we successfully secured requires that it is built on a tight timetable, so it will be delivered during 2024, in time for people to move into the first homes.' https://www.tendringdc.gov.uk/sub-content-pages/will-the-new-a120-a133-road-be-in-place-before-the-housing-building-starts . Even with the time adjustment to 2026, this statement is now sadly untrue – the approach hamstrung by failure to complete this key piece of infrastructure in time for the first homes.

There is also extremely good evidence that the lower spec fully linked road would provide the following additional benefits:

- Provide the potential for an RTS route to avoid the congestion on A133 Clingoe Hill and the city centre by utilising the A120 around Colchester for a more direct route to key destinations such as Colchester Business Park, the Community Stadium, Colchester Sports Park, North Station and Colchester General Hospital, returning via the University Boundary Road to link the University of Essex and Knowledge Gateway. This in fact is broadly similar to the northern RTS route examined in the Colchester Rapid Transit Report Strategic Outline Business Case September 2016 but was discarded in favour of the easterly route via A133 Clingoe Hill into Colchester due to what we understand was an outdated belief that the town centre was the primary destination for residents – something we believe with the loss of key retailers from the city centre and their move to Stane Retail Park near the Northern Gateway area of Colchester is no longer the case. The work for the section from the Northern Gateway to North Station (which was shared by both route options) is already in progress.
- Were the RTS to make this route, together with a Park and Ride facility, available at the outset even before TCBGC homes are built, it would attract many residents of local communities such as Elmstead Market and Wivenhoe, even east Colchester, who currently have to struggle through the congestion on A133 and central Colchester routes to reach destinations such as the General Hospital and North Station and struggle with parking once there. This would then help to fund the fledgling RTS, rather than it running at a loss subsidised by the developer until there is sufficient takeup by TCBGC residents. It would also help to cultivate a desirable modal shift change in culture from private car use to public transport in local communities, helping to meet the UK Net Zero Carbon Strategy and Transport Decarbonisation Plan.
- Similarly, were the RTS to be using this route when the first residents moved into the new Garden Community, this would help to 'ensure sustainable travel patterns from first occupation' (p96, DPD) as more likely to provide services and destinations aligned with actual user needs, and 'on the basis that travel behaviour patterns are harder to change once engrained' (p110, DPD). The evidence is here, as stated in the DPD, that the time element of ensuring the fully linked road is available from the start is critical to support these modal change travel behaviour patterns.
- The currently intended RTS route following the congested A133 Clingoe Hill into the equally congested city centre is recognised by its own authors as being of limited shelf-life, stating in the **TCBGC Transport Evidence Base Part 2 Measures** document p11 that 'The RTS HIF project is introducing priority measures on the approach to Greenstead roundabout which is 'only expected to operate satisfactorily up to 2033 for RTS vehicles', and recognising that it is an 'already congested arterial route' which 'could become further burdened' (p10), and looking at additional works to enhance the RTS route post 2033, post 2041 and similarly post 2051 with diminishing returns due to limited capacity. The alternative northern route via the A120 however suffers from no such affliction, would actively alleviate the congestion burden on the A133 Clingoe Hill bottleneck and has ample capacity to cater for needs to 2060 and beyond.

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Having invested considerable time working with the planners to agree a plan which is sound in so many aspects apart from this policy, we do not want to see it fail when a much better, future proofed and more cost-effective alternative is available. And whilst we appreciate the lengths that Essex Highways have gone to to design a link road with the detail and quality in the current Plan, we believe that this design far outweighs current or initial need, potentially for the next 20-30 years, and no evidence can be found to justify it. This particularly applies to the grade-separated dumbbell junction at the A120 end – where a simple 'at grade' roundabout should be explored, as is in fact seen at the Weeley roundabout on the A133, or the roundabout at the junction of the A133 and A120 prior to that. Local residents who drive the A120 regularly during the week testify that all the 'at grade' roundabouts and junctions on the A120 are more than adequate for the traffic capacity using it, at all times of the day and night.

It is also noted that in the **A120-A133 Link Road and Rapid Transit System Public Consultation Document** p14 the example used to explain the dumbbell junction is that found at Junction 28 on the A12 near Colchester Stadium – where the A12 is a 4-6 lane dual carriageway, not the more modest 4 lane carriageway like the A120. Even on the A1 motorway, a full arterial dual carriageway like the A12, there are numerous roundabouts which are likewise 'at grade'.

We would therefore submit that there is little evidence, locally or beyond, to support this very expensive design, that it exceeds practical need both now and for the foreseeable future, and the result of this overspecification and partial construction will directly lead to the failure of its primary purpose – to fully link the A133 to the A120 at the critical start of the project, infrastructure first, to provide connectivity to employment and business options, alleviate wider congestion, help to influence modal shift travel behaviour patterns, and enhance the attractiveness of the development to future homeowners. Later connection will be too late. These opportunities – the very same which make the TCB Garden Community viable and sound on numerous different levels – will have been missed.

Community Liaison Group Statement, GC Policy 7 Movement and Connections, TCBGC DPD Examination in Public

16 April 2024