

TENDRING COLCHESTER BORDERS GARDEN COMMUNITY JOINT COMMITTEE

18 JULY 2022

A.3 RAPID TRANSIT SYSTEM UPDATE

(Report prepared by Ashley Heller, Head of Transport for Future Communities (Essex County Council))

PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To provide an update on the progress toward delivering a Rapid Transit System (RTS) serving the Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community and wider Colchester area.

Whilst the Joint Committee Terms of Reference do not cover decision making on the RTS (which is being brought forward by Essex County Council working closely with partners) it is recognised as an important component of the overall transport infrastructure requirements related to the Garden Community. This report does not require a decision and is for noting by the Committee.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key Points

- Since the award of the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) in 2019 Essex County Council (ECC) has been developing and implementing infrastructure to allow for the running of Rapid Transit style public transport services (RTS) from Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community to the wider Colchester area.
- One of a range of sustainable transport measures, the RTS is planned to be delivered by 2024/25, that is in advance of the first occupations at the Garden Community, reflecting an 'infrastructure led' approach to development with the objective to ensure the best possible usage of the RTS by new residents, thereby reducing the impacts of the housing on the existing road network.
- The RTS infrastructure is funded by the HIF and the scheme is being delivered in phases which ultimately link the Garden Community with the existing Park & Ride in the north of Colchester, via the Town Centre. Within the Garden Community itself it is intended that the RTS runs on a priority corridor provided and funded by the developer on a route alignment which best supports patronage, journey times and reliability of the service.
- The detailed design of the infrastructure outside of the Garden Community is coming forward in phases, with the first phases of the scheme shortly going out for tender with the view to secure a contractor to start work in 2023.
- The RTS will also include a Park & Choose facility at or adjacent to the Garden Community and potentially mobility hubs and high quality 'halts'. The details of these facilities are being developed by ECC and will be subject to further engagement with partners.

- The HIF, while funding infrastructure, does not fund the actual operation of the RTS service itself. As such ECC has now initiated a detailed 'operational planning' workstream to identify the operational parameters of the future RTS service including issues such as vehicle types, service frequency, branding, and hours of operation. This work will be brought forward in more detail in the context of a phased 'business plan' approach, including the issues around how any operational deficit may need to be funded before they come into commercial viability. Such matters are outside of the terms of reference of the Joint Committee, but it is understood that the success of the RTS is an important component of the overall transport requirements related to the Garden Community, and hence progress updates will be reported regularly to the Joint Committee.

BACKGROUND

Context

The successful Housing Infrastructure Fund bid saw funding provided for infrastructure works related to the provision of a new Rapid Transit System for Colchester. A RTS will be in place to connect the Garden Community with the University of Essex, Colchester Town Centre, Colchester Railway Stations, Colchester Hospital, Community Stadium, Northern Gateway Sport Park and the existing Park and Ride site in north Colchester. This will provide a high frequency, efficient public transport system with priority over general traffic within the Garden Community. The final route within the Garden Community will be confirmed with the Councils and agreed through the strategic masterplan.

A key feature of the RTS is the incorporation of Park and Choose facilities (P&C), provision of which was included in the Draft Plan. The concept for P&C is to be developed as part of, and support, the RTS being delivered. P&C extends the concept of park and ride (P&R) to include choice and work as a central hub for other modes. Principally this will be cycle or electric cycle hire but in time could be extended to electric scooters, e-cargo, etc. It can also provide space for users to store their own bicycles. Providing choice could appeal particularly to nearby potential users travelling to the University of Essex, but also to those travelling to destinations in Colchester further away from RTS halts and interchanges.

For North Essex, it is proposed that the ultimate aims will be to introduce a system akin to a trackless tram. This combines the advantages of light rail with the practicality and flexibility of bus rapid transit. ***The system can be built up incrementally, growing alongside future housing and economic growth.*** It adapts readily to early adoption of autonomous vehicle technology, and, in time, the main trackless trams would co-ordinate with automated pods to take passengers to final destinations.

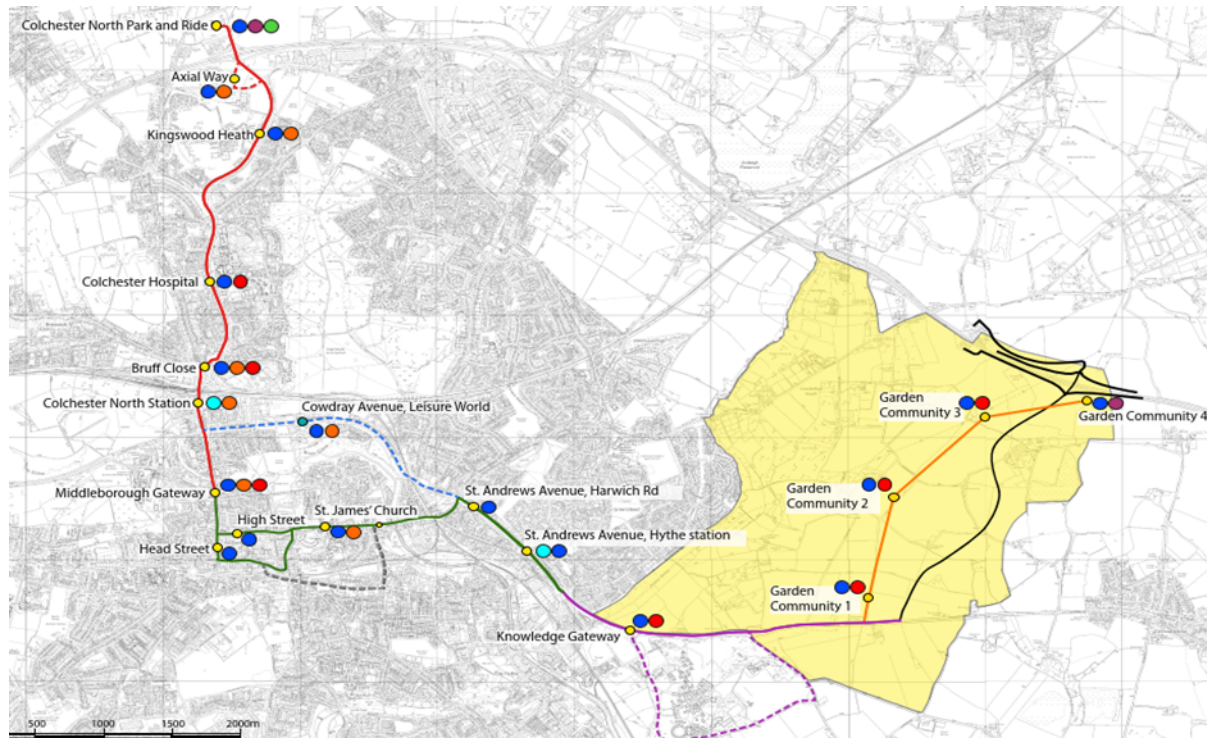
Public transport provision will need to be of a high quality from the outset. Achieving high shares for trips being undertaken by sustainable modes will be crucial in ensuring that growth in the housing supply occurs sustainably. The RTS should offer easy interchange with existing modes of public transport across the town, along with being well designed to facilitate walking and cycling.

Electric vehicles are already significantly gaining ground, and electric buses are in service or planned to be so across the UK. The aspiration is that the RTS will be operable with electric

vehicles, thereby delivering even greater reductions in emissions of both greenhouse gases and chemicals harmful to health.

Update on Progress

For the purpose of delivery, the RTS proposals have been split into four sections which were presented to the public in 2019:



Section A

Section A covers from the existing A12 Park & Ride Site to the Albert Roundabout. This includes the existing planning permission for a 'segregated busway' adjacent to the Northern Approach Road.

- Planning Consent – Discharge of Conditions to CBC, achieved January 2022
- Tender Publication – Summer 2022,
- Construction on site start – Spring 2023
- Construction Completion – Spring 2024

Section B

Section B covers from the Albert Roundabout to Greenstead Roundabout throughout the town centre. Within the centre of Colchester, limitations of space will see a focus of hurry-call (GPS based) priorities on traffic signals, utilisation of existing bus lanes, and measures to reduce traffic within the heart of the town centre.

- Design – Ongoing
- Tender Publication – Summer 2022
- Construction Start – Spring 2023
- Construction Complete – Summer 2024

Section C

Section C covers from Greenstead Roundabout to the future Garden Community connection (location along A133 to be determined). This will see the construction of a new segregated busway between Knowledge Gateway and Greenstead roundabout to provide dedicated capacity for the RTS/buses. Additional improvements will be made to the existing cycle network to support improved active travel provisions from the Garden Community, but also from existing suburb areas and the University as well.

- Design – Ongoing
- Tender Publication – Spring 2023
- Construction Start – Autumn 2023
- Construction Completion – Winter 2024

Section D

Section D covers the routing within the Garden Community itself and will evolve as the Masterplan develops.

Operational Model Development

Detailed work has commenced on establishing the service type to run on the RTS.

The fundamental basis of the RTS will be a passenger focused concept of High Quality Public Transport which in effect will provide the basis for future decisions on the operation of the service – recognising that if the RTS is to attract large numbers of passengers and to achieve ‘modal shift’ from cars to public transport, it will need to provide an ‘offer’ which is convenient, reliable, fast, affordable and which is focused on providing the best possible passenger experience.

Key activities will be

- Defining the target service standard (vehicles, frequencies, fares, branding, routes etc)
- Setting out a business case for achieving the target service standard in phases linked to the anticipated growth of demand for the RTS
- Establishing the role and phasing of Park & Choose linked to the Garden Community
- Set out the implementation plan for the RTS service including both the target operating standard and the initial operating standard reflecting a phased roll out of the service.

Outline Business Case – estimated completion by early 2023 for approval

Start the procurement of the RTS service by end of 2023 with a view to commence the initial phase of the RTS operations during 2025/26

Mobility Hubs and Halts

The RTS will need a number of ‘access points’ for passengers which will in effect be hierarchy of stops (or “halts”) which in certain locations will be more substantial ‘mobility hubs’ which could offer a range of transport and other services intended to support overall patronage of the RTS.

ECC is developing a consistent and programmatic approach to optimise benefits and support ongoing management and maintenance and has secured Government funding to:

- Review approaches and evidence elsewhere and decide on objectives.
- Develop typologies of Mobility Hubs appropriate to Essex and identify essential and desirable features.
- Identify locations with potential for Mobility Hubs to be successful.
- Develop high level concepts for Mobility Hubs based on a scalable and modular kit of parts which can be incrementally extended.
- Identify implementation, operation, and management options along with cost implications and revenue generation opportunities.
- Develop options for a programme of Mobility Hubs.
- Define the location, number, and design of halts for the RTS, again reflecting the objectives of the service to promote a high-quality public transport alternative to the car.

This work has a significant overlap with the 'operational study' outlined above in terms of understanding where and how mobility hubs can contribute to achieving a successful and commercially viable RTS.

All of these considerations, related workstreams and overall progress will inform additional evidence base work related to transport as part of the overall evidence base to be prepared to accompany the Final Plan to be submitted.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community Joint Committee notes the update on the delivery of the RTS infrastructure and operational model.