Wivenhoe Town Council’s comments on EB/006 North Essex Transit Study

The document begins with a ‘Limitation statement’ where it is stated that ‘Jacobs accepts no liability or responsibility whatsoever for, or in respect of, any use of, or reliance upon, this report by any third party.’ If an evidence based document cannot be used in this capacity then by its very nature is it not unsound? Can we assume that ‘The Movement and Access Study for garden communities which has proposed ‘ambitious targets’ for travel public transport and active modes,’ could also be viewed as an unreliable?

In Chapter 1, Harwich is identified as a significant area for employment growth. Then additionally in chapter 2, Table 2-3: Tendring Colchester Borders - top four flows to work illustrates the second largest movement of people is towards Tendring. Having identified this movement of workers, it is subsequently ignored in all rapid transport solutions. It is clearly counterintuitive for the residents of the new TCBGC to go into Colchester to get the train back out to Harwich. However no additional public transport routes, or road improvements are proposed from this location to Harwich. However, what we do learn from the ‘Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community - Concept Framework’, (another new document not sent to us as a statutory body to be consulted on, but found on-line after the deadline for submissions to the hearing), that there is a plan is to strangle the A133 at the junction with Wivenhoe, thus creating even more congestion in order to ‘encourage prioritisation for public transport’. Wouldn’t it just make sense to build the houses nearer Harwich? The document states ‘The vision has been derived from the draft Development Planning Documents (DPDs) for the three North Essex garden communities, which are at the time of writing, being consulted on publicly. These documents present a refined view of the options and ideas developed in technical studies and masterplans introduced in Chapter 1’. Although not the subject of review at the hearing it should be noted at this stage that these latest consultation documents ‘CBC Issues & Options Oct 2017’ and the above mentioned ‘ Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community - Concept Framework’ do not address either current transport problems, or future ones. In fact they actually add to them with proposals like speed restrictions and physical highway works on the A133 in order to marry the divided community either side of the road, whilst also making misleading claims about what the real options for rapid transport are.

Within Table 2-6: Off peak and peak service frequencies, it shows that there is one train an hour from Wivenhoe to London. It is reasonable to assume that somewhere in the region of 10 percent of the new inhabitants of the TCBGC will be commuting to London. Yet there is no provision for this via a train station on site. The lack of parking at Hythe will mean Wivenhoe is the only serious option for rail commuters, who otherwise would have to battle their way through peak traffic to access the rail station the other side of Colchester. There
is however no mention of how these additional numbers will be accommodated either on the trains themselves, given that the capacity on the main line is already stretched, or what measures can be taken to prevent additional parking on already heavily congested surrounding streets in Wivenhoe.

A park and ride is proposed on a site ‘on the A133 adjacent to the Tendring Colchester Borders garden community.’ The latest consultation plan show this site, but not within the community itself but across a national speed limited dual carriage way to the south of the A133. This would effectively split the new community with total disregard for garden community principles or the green wedge that should define existing settlements.

Within 4: Challenges in serving existing conurbations, existing problems are identified like ‘key employment, health and education facilities are on the periphery of city centre so can not be accessed by public transport’, but the document fails in any way to provide any solutions to these existing issues.

So for instance the University is 3km south-east of the city centre – if the university is so key to the employment viability of the TCBGC why isn't a train station being added to access it?

The document acknowledges that ‘Recent studies have identified how existing congestion hotspots will worsen with forecast levels of development. And how it is not possible to increase capacity on the road network within Colchester’. Is it sensible, having identified irresolvable existing problems, to proposal adding more traffic to the roads? Thereby making access to the town centre even more difficult for existing settlements, as well as any new ones.

Within Chapter 3 ‘The NEGC Movement and Access Study (Jacobs, 2017) proposed that the new garden communities aspire to a 40:30:30 modal split across all journeys in favour of active modes defined as walking and cycling. Currently, public transport accounts for 10% of journeys’. ‘Hence to achieve a 40% share of journeys on a rapid transit system will take a sea-change shift in travel behavior.’ The focus then moves to the shift in behavior of new residents. What about the rest of the population? Wivenhoe currently has a very good bus service. This is both regular and inexpensive compared to the train and therefore very popular. No amount of education is likely to affect its usage. People still use their cars and will continue to do so as the destinations accessible by bus are limited.

Chapter 4 Rapid transit choices – We are somewhat confused by the examples of systems that work in places like London, Manchester, Bristol, Sheffield and Edinburgh. These are hardly comparable transport models when considering the population of Colchester. Even Reading has a population double the size, and here the example is that the only viable
system is a bus. Oxford may well have been a good choice as nearly as small as Colchester and with an historic centre. Therefore the project drivers are similar, but once again the only viable solution here is a bus. In the illustration of places like Oxford and Reading, it would also be interesting to know the statistics as to what percentage of local people have opted to drive to alternative destinations and never these centres again, rather than use the bus.

However we are told in conclusion that a bus network is 'unlikely to match local vision for quality and presence!' And so the bus at this point is not acknowledged as the only viable option!

5 Route choices and future proofing – Issues to do with routes are best dealt with via C-BUS. WTC would point out however, if there was one obvious route that could work as a segregated route it would have been identified by now.

The document mentions health concerns about diesel engine emissions, but is then not clear if because of this any proposed new system will be an electric or a hybrid option. Has the financial viability of this been studied?

The document also talks about 'Changing patterns of car ownership and use', but without Government control and new legislation these aspirations will not make a significant difference in the lifetime of this project and should not be used as a mitigating factor.

Although the section on 'Delivering a personalised transport experience' is all possible and the ambition admirable, however assuming funds are available, maybe it would be better to improve the existing road network, (as the best we can hope for is a bus), before we launch into these systems. It's difficult to take the document seriously when local pavements and roads look like something from a third world country due to lack of investment. We would suggest a big enough bus station/shelter to get away from the rain is more relevant to passengers than a charging point for their phone.

Within Chapter 7 the assumption is made that a bus will attract just as many users as a guided bus or a tram, suggesting that they can be as fast and reliable when 'either wholly segregated, or segregated where there is congestion'. WTC would like to know how it is physically possible to create this segregation across the entire length of any bus journey? WTC also doesn't support the notion that a bus will be viewed as attractive to the public as any other alternative.

In the conclusion it is stated 'Furthermore, a rapid transit system is compatible with design principles for garden communities, which will encourage a modal shift away from private car travel and contribute to the design of high-quality living places.' WTC do not believe this can be achieved with the proposals as they stand. Additionally we would like to see
public consultations that are not misleading about the options for rapid transport. If the most viable option is a bus then don’t put a picture of a tram in its place, and don’t claim it will be a rapid transport option when clearly it is not possible beyond the traffic lights on Clingoe hill.