

Middlewick Ranges

Introduction

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) is investing in new military firing range capabilities for Colchester Garrison which will release Middlewick Ranges for disposal.

This presents an opportunity for the site to contribute towards Colchester's need for new housing, and the land has been identified in the draft Colchester Local Plan as being suitable for up to 1,000 new homes and supporting local infrastructure.

The Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO), on behalf of the MOD, undertook public consultation in the summer of 2019 on some initial ideas

on how 1,000 homes could be sensitively and suitably brought forward. Due to the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated social distancing restrictions, we are unable to hold further public events this year as we had previously planned.

We have designed this newsletter to provide local residents and groups with an update on the work we have been undertaking since last summer.

About the site

Middlewick Ranges is an operational firing range located on the southern edge of Colchester. The site will be surplus to requirements once upgrade works have been completed at nearby Fingringhoe Ranges.

This map shows the area in **red** which is to be released by the MOD and which has been allocated by Colchester Borough Council for new housing in the draft Local Plan.

The area outlined in **blue** to the south of Birch Brook will remain within the ownership of the MOD and continue to be used actively by the military for training exercises. It will however also be used for some ecological mitigation work linked to the redevelopment of the ranges (*more information on this over the page*).



Public consultation

The DIO undertook a public consultation exercise in July and August 2019. More than 500 people took part by attending one of the two consultation events and providing feedback on our initial concept plans.

There were some clear themes of feedback received at these events. We have set out some of the most common themes of feedback and questions we received, as well as responses from the project team.

Green space and parkland

- Will people still be able to walk across the site?
- Will the existing public rights of way be kept?

Our Response:

- Our illustrative masterplan shows that **over 63%** of the allocation site would remain as green space open to the public, including children's play spaces, sports pitches and allotments.
- Large, accessible and usable green spaces are shown within our masterplan, opening up areas of the site to the public which are currently restricted.
- Existing rights of way will be retained, with the potential for additional connections to the surrounding residential area.

Traffic and transport

- Will local roads be able to cope with the additional traffic?
- Will there be support for local public transport?



Illustrative view of the development

Our response:

- Our transport modelling has shown that with appropriate mitigation, the potential impact of the development on local roads can be positively managed. The design of the scheme will encourage low reliance on the car but with support for hybrid and electric vehicles
- The link road through the site, between Mersea Road and Abbots Road, would provide an alternative route through the area and lessen traffic pressures along Abbots Road
- Bus and cycle links will also be provided through the site, with bus stops within the site itself. The Colchester Orbital route and other pedestrian routes will be integrated across the site.

Ecology and environment

- How will the acid grassland on site be considered?
- What work have you done to understand the ecology of the site?
- How will you be protecting the biodiversity of the site?

Our Response:

- Our approach has sought to minimise impacts on ecology and biodiversity.
- Extensive assessment and surveys have been undertaken to help us understand where these sensitive areas are and the species which they are likely to support, which has informed the emerging design
- The redevelopment of the site will deliver a net gain in biodiversity, through mitigation and enhancement measures implemented across the site and on land to the south of it (the area outlined in blue on the illustrative masterplan)

A Consultation Report has been prepared setting out the feedback received during these events in more detail. This can be found on the project consultation website (see back page).

Work undertaken since Summer 2019

We have been busy behind the scenes since our consultation events in Summer 2019. We have:

- Continued to meet with planning and technical officers at Colchester Borough Council and Essex County Council;
- Provided briefings to local councillors and MPs;
- Updated our transport modelling and strategy;

- Completed soil sampling;
- Prepared draft evidence base and impact mitigation strategies;
- Agreed methodology for biodiversity assessments;
- Sought specialist opinion on acid grassland preservation strategy; and
- Further developed and refined the overall masterplan based on consultation feedback.

This illustrative masterplan shows one way in which the site could be redeveloped with new homes, to help inform the emerging Local Plan.



- Up to 1,000 new homes in a mix of sizes and styles
- A new local centre with primary school and community facilities within walking distance of all homes
- Pedestrian and cycle connections complemented by green corridors and links
- Existing hedgerows protected and included within the green corridors
- Retention of an area of acid grassland
- Heritage features protected and incorporated into the development

Our work supports the allocation of the site within the emerging Local Plan as a suitable location for new homes. This will be considered further by the Inspector at the Local Plan Examination.

We can only show an illustrative level of masterplanning here. We are working with Colchester Borough Council to help inform the Local Plan Examination and make sure there are clear policies set out within the Local Plan to guide the future redevelopment of the site.

As well as delivering much-needed new homes for Colchester, the redevelopment of the site will see money reinvested into the defence estate supporting our armed forces.

KEY

Site boundary	Proposed sports pitches	Primary road	Enhanced hedgerows and tree lines
Ecological mitigation land within MOD land ownership	Proposed focal spaces	Vehicular site access	Key grassland habitat
Residential	Allotments	Indicative orbital route	Heritage asset and setting to be sensitively incorporated
Education	Existing hedgerows, trees and woodland	Public Right of Way (footpath)	Public Right of Way (bridleway)
Local centre	Proposed green corridors	Potential for green community uses	Village green

Next steps

We currently expect the Local Plan to be considered by an independent government planning inspector as part of the Examination in Public (EiP) in early 2021. We had previously thought this would have taken place during 2020 but it has been delayed due to the need for Modifications to the Section 1 part of the Local Plan to be considered.

If the EiP concludes in 2021 and the Local Plan is found to be 'sound' it could be adopted by the end of the year. The Middlewick Ranges site would then be formally allocated for a new housing development.

If the land is allocated for residential development it will be brought forward only once the works at Fingringhoe Ranges are completed. The owner of the site at that point (either the MOD or a developer which has acquired the site) would then bring forward a planning application. We think this could take place during 2022, although that is only indicative at this point.

This developer would need to undertake their own public consultation and people will have further opportunities to provide feedback on the draft proposals.

Although the site has been identified for future disposal, at present it remains a heavily used military training site. When accessing the Ranges we ask that the public respects the dangers associated with military training to keep both themselves, and our military, safe.

Winter 2020 (now)

Submission of evidence to Local Plan inspector

Winter 2021

Anticipated adoption of new Local Plan

2022

Likely work on planning application for site by future developer

2023 onwards

Expected phased redevelopment of site

By 2033

Anticipated completion of site redevelopment

Contact us

If you have any questions about this newsletter or the project generally, you can contact us via DIO-DEOPublicConsultation@mod.gov.uk

You can also visit the project consultation website <https://MiddlewickConsultation.co.uk> on which you can find:

- a copy of the materials shown during the 2019 consultation;
- a summary report from that consultation; and
- the Vision Document and associated technical studies due to be submitted to the planning inspector as part of the Local Plan review.



Illustrative view of the development from Abbot's Road