

destination Colchester

A shared vision for the Abbeyfields Roman Circus

The Purpose of this document

- Against a background of limited progress (see next section) this document sets out a vision for how Colchester's Roman Chariot Racing Circus should be acknowledged, celebrated and interpreted. By its very definition this is a "Vision" not a plan. The purpose of a vision – and therefore this document - is to paint a compelling picture of what the end objective should be and thus allow all parties and all energies to focus on pursuing and achieving this vision.
- The document sets some high level objectives (the what) and initial strategies (the how) for achievement of the vision. Over time, the vision will remain largely the same, but the objectives and strategies for achieving it will change according to experience and external factors such as funding.

The Background

- There was great excitement in Colchester in late 2004 when The Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) uncovered the remains of Britain's only known Roman Chariot Racing Circus at Abbeyfields. The footprint of the circus (which measures some 450 metres in length) is shown at Attachment 1. In March 2007, a further dig in the gardens of the old Sergeants Mess (SM) confirmed the existence of eight starting gates.
- To celebrate the discovery of the circus, CAT initiated a community project – backed by the Local Heritage Initiative (Heritage Lottery Fund) – which resulted in over 1,500 schoolchildren building a 6 metre by 3 metre mosaic. The project commenced in November 2005 and the mosaic was completed in September 2006. In January 2008, the mosaic was unveiled on the site of the circus by Griff Rhys Jones. See attachment 2 for details of the mosaic. The temporary licence (from Bovis Homes) and planning consent for the mosaic site will expire in 2010.
- In late 2007, English Heritage (EH) applied Scheduled Ancient Monument Status (#36514) to the circus. This means that no future development can take place on the site of and within 10 metres of the circus.

- During 2008, Taylor Wimpey (TW) obtained residential planning consent for the conversion of the SM. As part of this consent, public day time access to the SM gardens was agreed. See attachment 3 for a schematic plan of the development.
- TW are prepared to sell the SM (building and gardens) and adjacent Educational Centre. To date, no acceptable bid has been received and the building currently stands empty.
- During 2008, Colchester Borough Council submitted a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) bid for a covered interpretation area for the circus. This bid was turned down in early 2009.

The Vision

Our vision for the Circus is:-

- to have as much of the circus footprint as possible in public ownership
- to create a grass mound (between 0.5 and 1 metre high and 2m wide) over the entire footprint (whether the land is in public ownership or not)
- to have the Visitor Interpretation Area within the old Sergeants Mess Building
- to have an above ground recreation of the starting gates in the Sergeants Mess garden
- to have a permanent internal home for the circus mosaic
- for it to become a major component of a Colchester Heritage Trail

Achievement of Our Vision

We recognise that one of the key limitations of our vision is funding. However, the purpose of a vision is to have something to strive for and to set the challenges for the widest community possible to respond to these challenges. Our first objective is therefore associated with widening support....

Objective 1 – We will obtain consensus support for our vision and recruit a wide range of active volunteers.

We will achieve this by:-

- Requesting CBC Councillors and Officers to adopt and develop this vision on a shared basis
- Requesting CBC to include the circus vision within their Strategic Plan (2009-2012)
- Requesting Essex County Council (ECC) to support the vision and incorporate within their plans for the area

- Requesting local MPs to support the vision and lend their active support to achieving our objectives
- Seeking the active endorsement of English Heritage (EH) who is responsible for the Scheduled Ancient Monument.
- Obtaining the support of various interested groups such as CAT, Colchester Archaeological Group (CAG); Colchester Civic Society, Chamber of Commerce, etc
- Producing a Marketing 'glossy' which can be used to communicate our vision
- Working with the local press to ensure awareness across the whole community.
- Requesting that there is a good supply of circus material in the local tourist offices, hotels etc...

Objective 2 – We will endeavour to have as much of the circus as possible in public ownership.

We will achieve this by:-

- Working with CBC in general and Planning in particular, to examine various ways of using the planning process (and guidelines) to achieve transfer of ownership
- Asking the current owners to consider a transfer of ownership – on an endowed basis. We believe that Bovis Homes have already indicated their willingness to 'gift' the triangle of land where the mosaic is sited

Objective 3 – We will enhance the visual impact of the circus by ensuring that the footprint is marked by a grass embankment.

(0.5 to 1.0m high and 2m wide). Whilst the scale of the embankment is different it will give a similar effect as the Circus Maximus in Rome – see Attachment 4).

We will achieve this by:-

- Seeking the approval of English Heritage
- Working with CBC in general and Planning in particular, to examine various ways of using the planning process (and guidelines) to achieve the required landscaping. In certain instances this will require the co-operation of the Ministry of Defence (MOD) where, for example, the circus cuts across the edge of their Sports facility.
- Working with local business (such as turf suppliers and groundwork companies) to reduce the cost and ensure a consistent construction

Objective 4 – We will secure public ownership of the Sergeants Mess and Gardens.

There is no doubt that this is the biggest challenge. The first step is to assess whether Taylor Wimpey will exchange the building (and gardens) for some other concession within the garrison master plan. Failing this, we need to establish what TW would be prepared to sell the SM for and whether they will allow a time window for the required funds and/or grants to be obtained. The HLF will not provide a grant for the purchase of the entire SM but there may be ways of structuring a part private part Heritage grant scheme. Another alternative would be to launch a public appeal to raise the funds to purchase the site. The building is too large (1550 sq.m) solely for use as a Visitor Interpretation Area (VIA) and therefore the funding requirement could be alleviated by a contribution (in capital or rent) from other occupiers of the building. Other possible occupants could include CAT, Museum Services (for storage), Community Organisations (e.g. nursery, surgery, library, social meeting space) or other commercial usages – offices, retail, snacks etc. A schematic of the building and an initial assessment of how the area could be split up is shown at Attachment 5.

We will therefore achieve our ownership objective by:-

- Establishing the feasibility of negotiating with TW (around section 106 agreements and goodwill) to 'gift' the building at best or alternatively set an agreed purchase price with a time to complete window of at least 6 months.
- As a parallel activity, we will look at the feasibility of setting up an ownership Trust – within dC – which then seeks, through a public appeal, or combination of HLF grant, public appeal and private equity, to obtain the required funds to purchase the SM. This may mean partnering with a developer who would utilise the balance of the building. This 'developer' could be CBC. The funding for fitting out the VIA (and garden – see later) would come from HLF and/or other grant bodies including, Esmée Fairbairn, Cory Environmental Trust, Essex Heritage Trust etc.
- Establishing a candidate list of other owners/occupiers and assessing whether a 'managing developer' may have an interest in acquiring the site and supporting our objectives for the VIA and gardens.

Objective 5 – We will create an above ground reconstruction of the circus in the Sergeants Mess Gardens.

Obviously for this objective to be practical we need to achieve Objective 4. It also needs to be stressed that we do not intend to create a literal reconstruction of the gates, but probably something built from a combination of timber, glass and fibre-glass that marks the outline are of the starting gates. CAT already have a facsimile Quadriga (chariot) and we feel that a recreation of the outline of the starting gate walls, with a timber construction of the central arch would

allow the Quadriga and dummy horses to be displayed behind a polycarbonate panel or similar. As this is very much an embryonic idea we would seek to involve CBC Museum Services and English Heritage (EH) in exploring options. We will then apply for funding through grants from HLF, EHT, Esmée Fairburn etc.

We will therefore achieve our objective by:

- Working with CBC and EH to agree an outline design
- Applying to HLF, EHT, EF etc for funding

Objective 6 – We will create a permanent indoor home for the circus mosaic.

We will achieve this by:-

- Working with CBC Museum Services on the design of VIA and agreeing a suitable housing for the mosaic.
- Working with local building contractors etc to transport and deliver the mosaic to its new site.

Objective 7 – We will establish the circus as a major component of a Colchester Heritage Trail.

We will achieve this by:-

- Working with CBC and other interested parties to establish and promote a formal Heritage Trail (as a separate project to the Circus). The circus is located close to the town centre with its intact Roman walls, making the Roman experience offered to visitors all the more complete
 - Asking CBC to assess the possibility of re-naming roads to reflect the adjacent Heritage (e.g. Circular Rd North to become "Circus Approach")
 - Creating a Heritage Trail Web Site (as part of the destination Colchester pages)
 - Ensuring that Tourist Offices, Hotels, Coffee Shops, Restaurants etc have a good supply of Heritage Trail leaflets
 - Advising the publishers of UK Travel Guides (e.g. Fodors, Frommers) of what's on offer in Colchester.
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Immediate Next steps

This is an ambitious Vision, but given the national importance of the circus, one we believe is achievable. To ensure buy-in to the vision, the first important steps are proposed: -

- Launch the Vision (as a draft) via the local press (Essex County Standard et al)
- Review with CBC and obtain support
- Review with ECC and obtain support
- Review with Town MPs and gain support
- Hold an early meeting with English Heritage to obtain support and suggestions
- Hold an early meeting with Heritage Lottery Fund (after first agreeing whether best to do as dC or dC and CBC) to assess best way of processing and obtaining a Heritage Grant
- Gauge interest of other parties in getting involved in the Sergeants Mess.
- Review and revise this document based on the outcomes of the above.

This Vision is presented by:

destination Colchester

a community interest company founded in 2009

Company No. 6841033

Registered Office:

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Regulated by the CIC Regulator

and prepared by -

Peter Herring, on behalf of dC; with support and advice from:

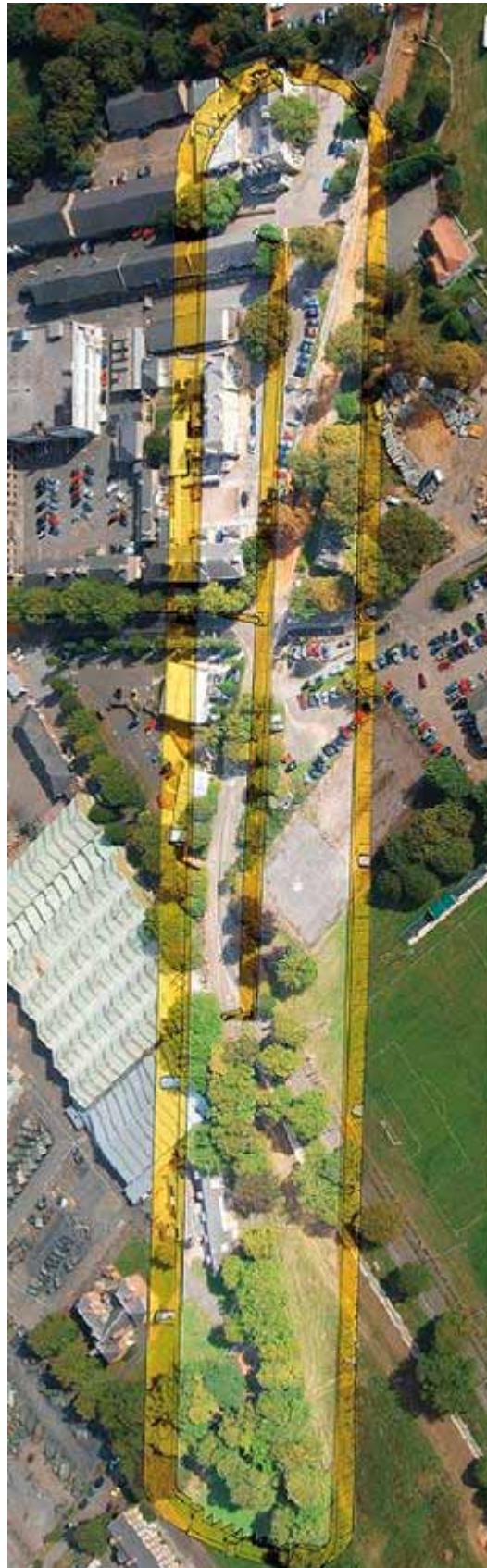
Philip Crummy, Colchester Archaeological Trust

John Mallinson, Colchester Archaeological Group

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Attachment 1

The Circus Footprint © Colchester Archaeological Trust



Attachment 2

The Mosaic Project



Attachment 4

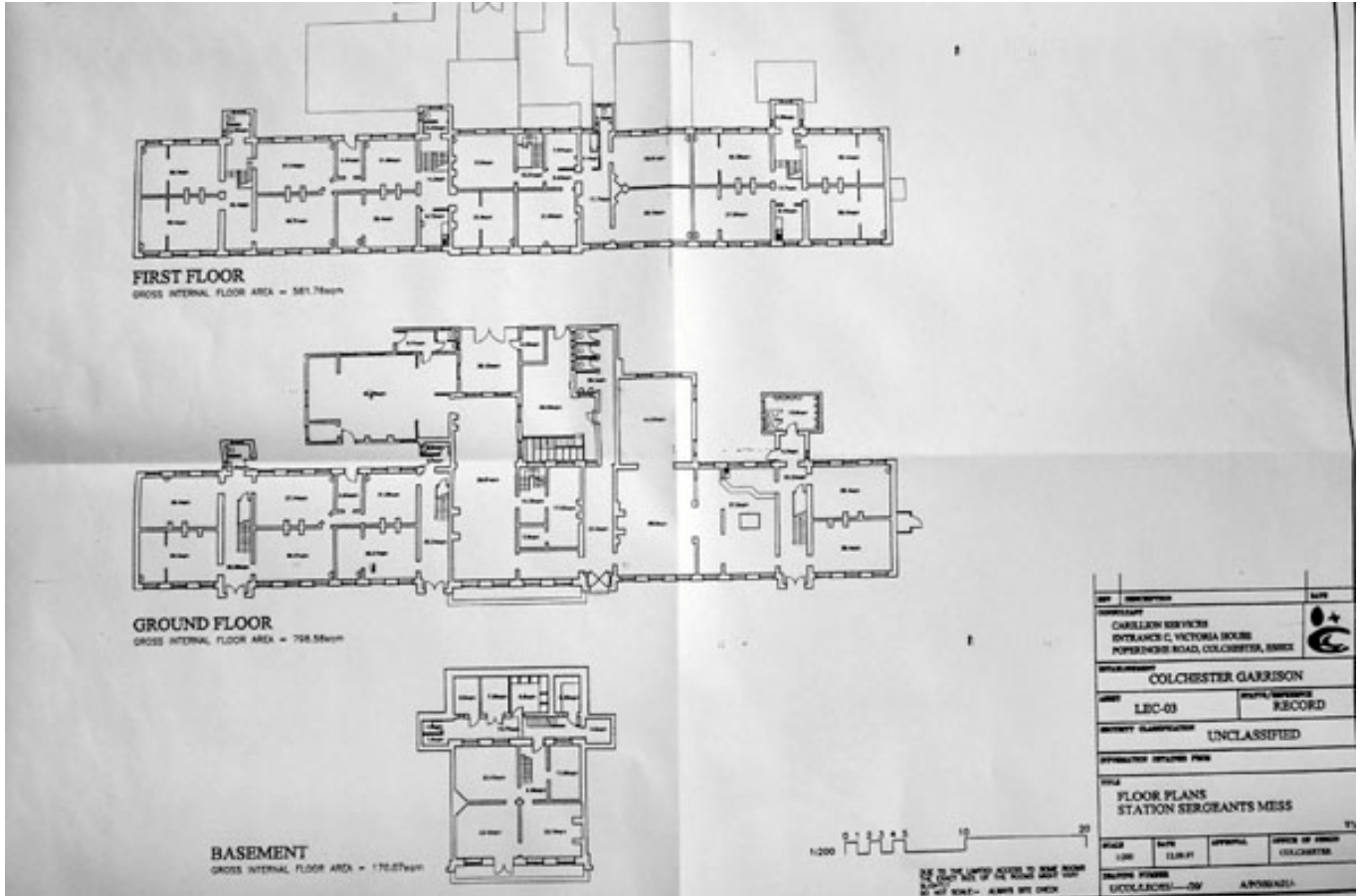
Rome - Circus Maximus



Attachment 5

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The Abbeyfields Sergeant's Mess



Attachment 5

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An illustrative example of how space could be utilised

The gross area of the SM is 1550 sq. m (798 sq. m ground floor, 582 sq.m first floor and 170 sq.m basement). From an initial assessment, and as an illustrative example, the building could be allocated as follows:

- The Visitor Interpretation Area, including an area for housing the mosaic, about 380 sq.m (25%) on the ground floor and first floor central area. The upstairs area of the VIA would enable visitors to overlook the site and view the overall size of the circus.
- CAT, for offices, storage and a finds processing area about 426 sq.m (27%) of which 170 sq.m is basement space and the balance is the ground floor East wing.
- The balance of 744 sq.m (48%) comprising both wings of the top floor, and the West Wing of the ground floor (including the 64 sq.m kitchen area) could be available for commercial or other community uses. The precise balance would depend on how the entire site is financed.
- Parking space at the rear of the building would be allocated on a pro-rata basis.
- The developer or building owner would either act as or appoint a 'low cost' management company to administer shared areas and ensure on-going maintenance of shared services. This would include external painting, ground lighting, building insurance etc. CAT could maintain the garden area on a voluntary basis outside this arrangement.
- CAT's occupation would provide an inbuilt policing/security of the site generally, thus deterring 'casual' vandalism. CAT may also be able to 'police' the VIA if it designed to be largely unattended – thus reducing annual running costs.
- A part of the SM could be made available for heritage related education – providing an expanded capability and relieving pressure on existing limited facilities.

Attachment 6

Heritage Lottery Fund - Heritage Grants (grants of more than £50,000)

Heritage Grants is our main grants programme offering grants of more than £50,000 for projects that relate to the national, regional or local heritage of the UK. Heritage Grant is a rolling programme and there are no deadlines for applications under £5million. However we make decisions six times a year on first-round applications for Heritage Grants between £1m and £5m.

We have three main aims which relate to learning, conservation and participation.

To receive a grant your project must:

Help people learn about their own and other people's heritage.

Your project must also do either or both of the following:

Conserve the UK's diverse heritage for present and future generations to experience and enjoy.

Help more people, and a wider range of people, to take an active part in and make decisions about heritage.

Heritage includes many different things from the past that we value and want to pass on to future generations. Heritage projects might include:

- people's memories and experiences
- histories of people, communities, places and events
- cultural traditions
- historic buildings and townscapes
- archaeological sites
- collections of items, archives or other materials
- natural and designed landscapes
- habitats and species
- sites and collections links to our industrial, maritime and transport history.

Can you raise part of your project costs from your own and other sources?

You must be able to raise part of your project costs from your own or other sources. If you are applying for a grant of less than £1million you must provide at least 10% of the project costs. If you are applying for a grant of £1million or more, you must provide at least 25% of the project costs.

Whether you are contributing 10% or 25%, 5% of the total costs of your project must be from your own organisation's resources, either in cash or in kind. Non-cash contributions can include goods or services offered without charge, and volunteer time.

Are you a single organisation or a partnership?

We welcome applications from single organisations and partnerships. We give priority to not-for-profit organisations and partnerships. If private owners are involved we expect the public benefit to be greater than any private gain.

Is there a deadline for applications under £5million?

There are no deadlines for applications under £5million. You can apply at any time.

Our Board meets six times a year to make decisions on Heritage Grants between £1m and £5m. So, if you want to receive a decision on your first-round application at a specific meeting, you should aim to submit your application no later than the following dates:

- 12 October 2009 for the Board meeting on 19 January 2010
- 15 December 2009 for the Board meeting on 23 March 2010