NARRATIVE TO ACCOMPANY THE REVISED MASTER PLAN

OUT RISBYGATE CAMPUS

for

WEST SUFFOLK COLLEGE

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In April 2006 the College submitted master plan documentation to St Edmundsbury Borough Council based on the complete redevelopment of the Campus. An application for funding approval was lodged with the Learning Skills Council based on the principals of the development shown on the master plan.

The subsequent funding difficulties associated with the issues with the LSC have resulted in the scaling back of the development and it is this reduced scheme which is the subject of this revised master plan submission.

The vision of original master plan was to re-orientate the main front of the College to face the Copse. It was always the view that the historical main front of the College from Out Risbygate should continue to have importance. One advantage of the original master plan was to redirect the main student vehicular access to the new rear access road off Beetons Way and relieve the congestion in Out Risbygate at the peak student arrival and departure times. This advantage has been realised by the completion of the rear access road in 2008.

The scaling back of the development means that the reorientation of the main frontage can not now be effectively achieved and reinforces the importance of the Out Risbygate approach. The main student vehicular access will continue to be off Beetons Way with staff and visitors vehicles approaching from Out Risbygate in accordance with the original proposal.

The result of the funding collapse now means that whilst the funding for the first phase of work will be from College reserves and loans the funding of subsequent phases has not been identified. The dates for the commencement of the work on the subsequent phases can only be aspirational and this is reflected in the wording of the narrative that follows.

2.0 **THE PAST**

2.1 The Barracks (Western section of the campus)

Part of the College occupies the site of Gibraltar Barracks which was built in 1878 for the Suffolk Regiment. The perimeter of this area is defined by the Barrack wall which is a listed structure.

The original regiment was raised in 1685 by Henry, Duke of Norfolk and was known in its early years by the name of its current colonel. In 1751 when regiments were given numbers to mark their seniority, it was designated the 12th Regiment of Foot. It became the 12th, or East Suffolk Regiment in 1781 and the Suffolk regiment in 1881.

From 1878 to 1959 the barracks formed the training depot for the Suffolk Regiment providing basic training for the recruits.

In 1959 training ceased and the barracks was moved to Blenheim Camp in Newmarket Road.

The extent of the barracks can be seen from the historic photographs included in **Appendix 1** of this narrative. The photographs taken in the early 1950's show the barrack buildings including the large Hospital complex, Drill Shed, QM's Stores and

Theatre constructed in the woodland area now referred to as the 'Copse'. The location of these buildings is indicated in a broken line on the proposed master plan.

In 1968 West Suffolk County Council purchased the site from The Secretary of State for Defence and began a programme of development which, over succeeding years, saw the college expand to meet increased demand.

In 1974 ownership was vested in the new Suffolk County Council and was passed on to West Suffolk College Corporation in 1993.

2.2 **Eastern section of the Campus.**

The eastern section of the campus occupies the site of an old chalk quarry and open space including nursery gardens/allotments and was purchased in 1953 from the Bristol Estate. Construction of the first buildings on the site began in 1959 with Edmund House followed shortly after by Suffolk House and the Industrial Training Centre. Records show that old chalk works cavities were found during the construction of Suffolk House and an indication of the location of these cavities is shown on the building plans.

2.3 Archaeology

An archaeological study of the site has been carried out by the archaeological department of Suffolk County Council. Their report is attached as **Appendix 8**.

3.0 **THE PRESENT**

3.1 **Development to date**

Since construction began in 1959 West Suffolk College has developed on the spare land to the east and the site of Gibraltar Barracks to the west within the surrounding high brick wall. This process has unfortunately generated a development physically divided into four separate north-south strips A - D:-

- A. Suffolk House/Edmund House/ITC on the densely built-up strip to the east of the 'Barracks' site, bounded to the west by the high barracks 'perimeter' wall and existing site service road along it's full length, with the single main site entrance off Out Risbygate to the south.
- B. The Australia House/Gibraltar House/ Minden House/Courtyard less densely developed strip, which is at a significantly higher ground level to and separated from Suffolk House/Edmund House/ITC strip by the high barrack wall and bounded to the west by the main car park area.
- C. The full-length main open car park area, which occupies the site of the old parade ground bounded to the west by the 'Copse' and with a single vehicular access route across the southern end leading to the Out Risbygate single road access.
- D. The 'Copse', an under-used wooded parkland area on the site of the old barracks mess buildings and hospital, within the western half of the barracks perimeter walled enclosure. Restricted vehicular access is available only from the car park on to the old barracks road system and this is used for maintenance purposes. There is a network of both formal and informal footpaths. A programme of managed works within the Copse is being undertaken.

Since the adoption of the Masterplan, Leonardo House has been constructed and the new road into the site from the North West off Beetons Way has been completed. A proportion of the car park to the north of Leonardo House has been implemented.

Although the existing College buildings on each side of the barrack wall are connected by external steps and ramps off the north-south service road, the changes in level and the presence of the 'listed' barracks perimeter wall have made full integration of the College facilities very difficult to achieve effectively and will continue to have a detrimental effect on the overall development of the site in its current format. This is particularly noticeable with the 'Copse', which is currently a relatively isolated area and largely unused by the College. In addition, the age of the existing building stock and the increasing cost burden of upgrading the present buildings to meet latest education standards and course requirements, now make complete redevelopment of the College site a priority consideration.

4.0 THE FUTURE

4.1 **Proposals for the new College Campus (Constraints and Opportunities)**

Plans showing the constraints and opportunities considered in the development of the Master Plan are included in **Appendix 2** of this narrative.

The existing single road entrance off Out Risbygate was for some considerable time a major contributory cause of traffic congestion on this important east-west route out of Bury St Edmunds, particularly during 'rush hours'.

The completion of the Council's new West Suffolk House offices on the Western Way site and the consequential public road system improvements, presented a major opportunity to relocate the main College vehicular access to the north-west corner of the overall Campus site, off Beetons Way. This work has now been completed and has removed the majority of the College vehicular traffic from the Out Risbygate entrance and eased the periodic congestion previously experienced in that road.

Having opted to change the focus of the main vehicular access to the College site, it now affords a great opportunity to completely replan the layout of the whole site and integrate all areas into one single harmonious operation. The main public and staff access to the Campus remains off Out Risbygate. The existing entrance through Suffolk House reinforces the division of the site and to remedy this those approaching the site ideally should be directed to the heart of the Campus.

The 'Copse' would still be retained as a 'managed parkland' area, but will now be fully incorporated into the new Campus layout, with new designated pedestrian and cycle routes giving direct access to the new College buildings from both Out Risbygate in the south-west corner and Beetons Way in the north-west corner of the site. Use of this area would also now be actively encouraged, increasing the bonding of the College within the local community, with this natural quiet recreational area fully integrated into the every-day life and activities of the new Campus.

Opportunities can also be taken to embrace the Grade 2 Listed Keep building within the proposal to provide views of the building from and to the new campus. The listed barrack wall previously acted as a physical barrier and constrained the day to day operation of the College. The new plan uses the wall as a natural partition separating the trade/engineering building use and Higher Education facilities from the 'academic' Further Education building uses providing a visual and acoustic split. The wall will also now form a backdrop for the managed woodland. Further to this the safety issues of the narrow vehicular access from Out Risbygate will be addressed .

The benefit of the level changes can be exploited to reduce the impact of the car park proposed for the north east corner of the site and to enhance the elevation treatment of the new buildings overlooking the managed woodland.

The existing main aspect of the College is from Out Risbygate. This needs to be retained and the opportunity is taken to provide a landscaped frontage which will benefit from the open aspect provided by the existing open space known as St Peter's Pit.

4.2 The New Campus Layout

The College Master plan is included in **Appendix 3** of this narrative

The new West Suffolk College Campus buildings will be arranged around a new and much enlarged 'landscaped' courtyard area adjoining the eastern 'barrack' wall.

The vision for the landscaped courtyard began with the construction of Leonard House to the north which was completed in August 2007 and will continue with the new three storey 'FE building to the south side. The FE building will incorporate the 'Main Reception' and teaching facilities. The front entrance foyer will directly address the desired line from Out Risbygate via a new opening in the Barrack Wall. This building will act as the new pedestrian gateway to the Campus.

To the west of the new courtyard will be located the new 3-storey 'Australia House', a vocational training orientated building which will visually embrace the Copse and provide direct access to the woodland. The construction of this building will facilitate the demolition of the existing Australia House block which will finally reveal the full facade of Leonardo House and realise the landscaped courtyard vision. The existing Gibraltar House and Minden House buildings in the north east corner of the courtyard will be retained in a smaller intimate group.

Completing the Campus layout overall will be the new two storey 'Edmund House' building, located on the lower ground adjacent to the eastern site boundary, outside the 'barrack' wall and the refurbishment and over cladding of the existing Suffolk House to provide a dedicated Further Education facility.

4.3 **The New Campus Road System**

The new site entrance road provides direct access to the new parking areas to be located to the north of the new Campus buildings complex. These areas are partly at ground level on the dis-used land adjoining the east side of the existing Sports Centre building already formed and partly the new parking area to be formed in the northeastern corner of the overall site. These new parking areas would also provide the Sports Centre with the possibility of additional shared parking facilities at weekends and during holiday periods, when not generally required by the College. A car park traffic study was commissioned and included in the original Masterplan narrative. For reference purposes this is included in **Appendix 4** of this narrative. The results showed the peak parking times at the College and gave an indication of the times when the College car park is less full. A similar survey was carried out for the Sports Centre and, the results can be used to establish times when parts of the College car park can be shared with the Sports Centre visitors.

It is proposed that the new College site entrance/estates road system will not completely encircle the new Campus complex, but will provide ready access for emergency vehicles and servicing to all the Campus buildings. The road has been completed to link the new Beetons' Way entrance to the eastern side of the site. This will be extended as the eastern section is developed to terminate at the rear of the current Suffolk House. This new road system will be gated and 'barrier-controlled' on the north, east, and south legs, restricting passage to authorized emergency and service vehicles, plus designated priority users only. These barrier-control provisions will also include the existing entrance to be retained off Out Risbygate, giving limited controlled access to the new designated staff and visitor parking areas.

To mitigate possible annoyance to the adjoining residential neighbours of the College in Grove Park, the eastern boundary of the site will be generally upgraded, with the existing section of acoustic fencing extended for the full length and additional tree planting, to screen the new Campus buildings and service road from the adjoining gardens.

4.4 **Phased Construction of the New Campus**

Throughout the proposed redevelopment of the new West Suffolk College Campus, it is essential to maintain the ability of the College to function freely as a fully operational Educational establishment. To achieve this, it will be necessary to plan and programme the new construction works very carefully at all times around the existing building stock which will continue to remain in use by the College throughout the overall Campus redevelopment. This will be achieved by only demolishing the existing buildings when the permanent new fully-equipped alternative accommodation has been completed, handed-over to the College and is ready for full time occupation by the students and staff.

The following six construction phases indicate the proposed sequence for the replacement of the existing College buildings. This process has already commenced with the renovation of the existing Edmund House to enable the site for Phase 1 to be made available.

Drawings indicating the proposed phasing are included in **Appendix 5**.

The sequence would be:-

- <u>Phase 1</u> Demolish the existing Burma House and construct the new three storey FE Building on this site. Improve the vehicular access through the 'garrison' wall and re-align the pedestrian access to the site to focus on the new building. This will include remodelling the southern car park. The programme for this work is included in **Appendix 10**
- <u>Phase 2</u> Refurbish the existing Suffolk House to dedicate it to HE and College management, including the re-cladding of the existing main façade. The programme for this work is included in **Appendix 10**
- <u>Phase 3</u> Relocate the existing Industrial Training Centre, Mechatronics, Engineering and Vehicle Maintenance departments off-site, demolish their current buildings located in the north-east corner of the site and provide a new car park. The aspiration is for this work to start in 2015
- <u>Phase 4</u> Construction of the new main 3-storey 'Australia House' building on the middle section of the existing car park area, relocating the existing facilities in the existing Australia House. The aspiration is for this work to start in 2020.

- <u>Phase 5</u> Demolish the existing Australia House and create an enlarged landscaped 'Courtyard' at the heart of the new Campus complex. The aspiration is for this work to start on completion of the new Australia House.
- <u>Phase 6</u> Demolition of the existing Edmund House and construct the new 'Edmund House' and associate road, car parking and landscaping. The aspiration is for this work to start in 2025.

Within these proposals, four of the existing buildings will be retained within the new Campus layout, 'Leonardo House', the refurbished and reclad 'Suffolk House', 'Gibraltar House' and the 'Minden House' SEN facility including it's adjoining 'secure' teaching garden.

The proposed layout of the new Campus will endeavour to maximize the views towards the 'Copse' from all parts of the site and create exiting view corridors to the existing grade 2* listed castellated brick 'Keep' on Out Risbygate, the last remaining original building from the old 'Gibraltar Barracks', which appears to be within the general site area, although outside the College demise.

As can be seen from the proposed phasing of the works to the southern section of the Campus are a priority. The importance of this area as a principal feature and welcoming point for the College cannot be understated. The overall site layout will address the need to maintain a physical and easily recognizable 'presence' on Out Risbygate. This will include a new landscaped entrance via the 'Garrison' wall and realigned car parking masked by landscape and reclad Suffolk House . The existing trees in this area will be retained as far as possible. A hard and soft landscaping scheme will be prepared by the Landscape Consultant for approval before implementation.

Management of the construction works during all of the above phases will be carefully coordinated with the College at all times, to ensure minimal disruption to the staff, students and visitors alike, who will have continual access to and use of the College facilities throughout the course of the overall redevelopment.

The details for the new buildings will comply with the legislation current at the time of construction employing energy saving designs and techniques appropriate for their use.

4.5 **The Listed Buildings**

The Listed building and structures within the College boundaries and vicinity will continue to form a valuable part of the master plan.

The section of listed wall which forms the division between the trade/engineering and academic uses of the College currently provides a pedestrian link between to two areas via three openings in the wall. The rearrangement of these access points will involve some works or alteration to the wall to create the new main pedestrian access on to the site and the widening of the current vehicular access to provide safer egress and access to the site. Consideration will also be given to the infilling of one of the existing pedestrian access openings. This work will be carried out in a sympathetic manner fully considering this historic structure.

The wall figures highly on the College maintenance programmes and is included in the forward maintenance programme. The ongoing maintenance includes the removal of plant growth on the faces of the wall, the repointing and replacement of defective areas of brickwork and the infilling of redundant openings. This work will continue in the long term. The removal of the plant growth on the face of the wall has revealed the brickwork which will provide a suitable backdrop to the managed parkland.

The areas of wall in the vicinity of the new construction works will be protected in a manner which will not cause damage to the structure but will prevent damage from the works.

As mentioned earlier the barrack 'Keep' will be embraced within the proposal to provide views of the building from and to the new campus. The proposal seeks to remove the existing hedges and boundary fences to provide an open aspect. The boundaries between the college and the Keep will be defined without obstructing the view of this important building. Discussions are taking place between the College and the Regiment representatives to agree ways in which shared access could be provided such that visually the Keep will be part of the Campus setting.

The 'St Peter's' stone situated in the south east corner of the site will be integrated into the landscaping design for the realigned pedestrian access. The stone will be protected from damage as necessary during the course of any adjacent works.

4.6 **The Managed Parkland**

The College has commissioned a Landscape Consultant to advise on the arboriculture and ecological issues associated with the plan to deal with the 'Copse' and its incorporation into the overall plans for the Campus. The Landscape Consultants have drawn up a Landscape Management Plan for the works in the 'Copse' and this is included in **Appendix 6**. Please note that the Bio-Diversity Plan is a separate document.

The pathways and accesses through the parkland shown on the proposed plan are directly related to existing historic routes.

4.7 **The College Travel Plan**

West Suffolk College has commissioned a travel plan and a copy is included in **Appendix 7**

The College has a large catchment area including outlying districts not served by a regular public transport system.

The College has a responsible attitude to travel to and from the College and the need to reduce the level of car usage. To this end several initiatives are in place and these can be outlined as follows:

• The promotion of public transport use.

The Suffolk County Council finance bus and coach services to cover the outlying districts to encourage students not travel to the College by car.

A copy of the current bus timetables held in the Student Welfare Department at the College is included in **Appendix 7**

• The reduction of car usage.

The College has a flexi time arrangement to assist the staggered staff attendance timetables which facilitates car sharing in some instances.

This arrangement also allows staff arrivals and departures to be spread over a period of time and ease the strain on the exit onto Out Risbygate caused by peak departures and arrivals.

The flexi time arrangement can also allow staff to make use of more suitable off peak timetables for the public transport system.

• The promotion of cycling

The College offer a cycle to work scheme which includes the tax free purchase of cycles.

The College provide a number of cycle racks on the campus the numbers of which have recently been increased. Shower and changing facilities exist on the site.

A similar increase has been made in the provisions for motor cycle parking spaces.

The master plan makes provision for lit cycle ways through the managed parkland to facilitate better access to the campus off the neighbouring streets. A similar approach has been shown off Out Risbygate.

Provision for cycle storage will be made at the periphery of the campus but cyclists will be asked to dismount when crossing the student areas.

• The promotion of walking.

The master plan also makes provision for lit pedestrian ways through the managed parkland. This should improve access to the campus from the neighbouring footpaths.

4.8 Car Parking

The current car parking provision is 464 spaces. An equivalent number of spaces have been provided in the proposed master plan. This provision intentionally does not allow for an increase in student numbers and the College is investigating a plan to restrict the use of the parking provided on the Campus to essential users.

The College has an incentive in place to promote the use of the local multi-storey car park by offering a considerably reduced annual rate for the use of the car park by students Monday to Friday. They are considering the use of a shuttle bus service from the car park to the College, albeit a short distance to encourage students to park off campus.

5.0 **THE PROCESS**

5.1 **Public Consultation**

The process will include a public consultations to be held during January 2011. Copies of the attendance sheet and the questionnaires complete as a result of this process will be provided when available. Each attendee will be asked to complete a questionnaire under the headings of Traffic, The Copse, College Neighbours and The College Buildings. A copy of the proposed questionnaire is included in **Appendix 9**.

Feedback from past consultations has been incorporated into the revised Masterplan. These concerns included:

- Travel and car parking
- The Copse and trees along the new access road route
- Overlooking of properties in Grove Park and
- Archaeology

This process will continue arranging similar public consultations involving the local community (to provide an update on the proposal), service providers, public transport operators and the parish councils and other interested parties.

5.2 Implementation and delivery

The implementation of the master plan has been considered in relation to the anticipated funding. The programme for the new FE building and the refurbishment of Suffolk House to form the new HE facility is included as **Appendix 10**. The aspirational dates for the work to the subsequent phases are as given in the phasing section 4.4

The funding of the first phase will be from college reserves and loans. No funding has been identified for subsequent phases.

In order to maintain a coherent development design briefs and guidelines will be prepared for each phase. If necessary a design review/advisory panel will be appointed to monitor the design and ensure building compatibility.

At each stage of the development the proposals will be monitored against the principles of the original master plan and if appropriate amendments will be made. The master plan will be considered as a living document and kept informed of the proposals as they are developed.

5.3 **Planning Policy Background**

1.1 This Masterplan has been prepared to meet the requirements of the replacement St Edmundsbury Local Plan 2016.

1.2 Policy BSE16, of the local plan, relates to the expansion of the educational premises at the West Suffolk College site. It states that such expansion will be permitted provided that there would be no unacceptable impact upon the amenity of the site and surrounding area; provided that a travel plan is produced; and provided that a dditional car parking is provided. Further, Policy BSE16 requires that a Masterplan be produced for the site.

1.3 Policy DS4 Masterplans, requires the preparation of a comprehensive Masterplan for the site and sets out the elements that the Masterplan would be required to contain. Of those elements the following are considered to be relevant to the redevelopment of the West Suffolk College site:

- a) Site boundaries and phasing including growth beyond the plan period
- c) Major landscaping and open space proposals
- d) Bio-diversity plan
- j) Location and design principles
- k) Pedestrian and cycle links
- I) The basic road network and links to the existing highway network
- m) Public transport links and proposals to limit dependence on the private car
- n) Measures to promote sustainable living
- o) The expected phasing and funding release and implementation timetable, including beyond the plan period.

1.4 Policy DS4 also requires that the Masterplan is prepared in consultation with the community.

1.5 Policy T1 requires that a Transport Assessment demonstrating how the proposal seeks to minimise the need to travel and encourage journeys by sustainable modes should accompany proposals for major new development.

1.6 Policy T3 also requires that a Travel Plan be prepared. The Travel Plan would seek to encourage the use of sustainable methods of transport and enables agreed targets for the reduction in the use of the private motor car to be achieved.

1.7 Other policies included in the local plan of relevance to the redevelopment of this site are:

Policy DS3 (Development design and Impact) Policy L5 (Safeguarding parks and open spaces) Policy T2 (Hierarchical approach to site access) Policy T5 (Parking standards) Policy T8 (Cycling and pedestrian strategies) Policy HC1 (Alterations and extensions to Listed Buildings and development within their curtilage) Policy HC2 (Demolition of Listed Buildings) Policy HC9 (Sites and features of archaeological importance) Policy NE1 (Impact of development on sites of biodiversity and geological importance) Policy NE2 (Protected Species) Policy NE3 (Protection of the landscape) Policy FC2 (Utility services) Policy IM1 (Developer contributions)

1.8 In addition to meeting the requirements of the Replacement Local Plan regard has been paid to the guidance on preparing a supplementary planning document contained in Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Development Frameworks. Under this guidance a Sustainability Appraisal of the Masterplan is required to enable the Masterplan to be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document.

5.4 Sustainability Assessment

The West Suffolk College Masterplan Sustainability Assessment is included as **Appendix 11** of this narrative.

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