

## Environment and Sustainability Panel

31 January 2023

**Present:** Councillor Tracey Arnold (Deputy Chair)  
Councillor Molly Bloomfield  
Councillor Michelle Burrows  
Councillor Mark Goacher  
Councillor Kayleigh Rippingale  
Councillor Lee Scordis (Chair)  
Councillor Michael Spindler  
Councillor William Sunnucks

**Substitutes:** Councillor Pat Moore for Councillor Sue Lissimore

### 81. Minutes of the previous meeting

*RESOLVED* that: the minutes of the meeting of 29 November 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

### 82. Sustainable Travel Projects Update

The Panel considered a report updating it on Colchester City Council's (the Council) sustainable travel projects, and setting out the progress made since the development of "Sustainable Travel - Our Approach".

Andrew Tyrrell, Client and Business Manager, attended the meeting to introduce the report and assist the Panel with its enquiries. There had been a national recognition of the importance of sustainability, and particularly sustainable travel, in terms of economic impact and recovery from the Coronavirus lockdowns, and the benefits which were provided for health and wellbeing. There had been a move towards providing alternative methods of transportation to cars as an option, with the capacity to include those who were not car owners. The Panel were reminded that Essex County Council (ECC) were the Highway Authority and much of the transport network, including busses and rail, came under their remit, however, the Council did work closely with ECC, and was one of the few Councils in Essex which had its own dedicated sustainable travel team who worked very closely and successfully with the Highway Authority.

The Colchester Future Transport Strategy was an ECC document which the Council had had a significant amount of input into, and there had been a massive amount of engagement with local residents and businesses by ECC in respect of this. A significant amount of the funding available under the Active Travel Fund had been allocated to Colchester, which was a testament to the work undertaken with ECC, and the Council's proven track record of delivering successful projects. Just under

£20m of funding had been received under the Town Deal and significant funding had also been awarded from the Levelling Up Fund, which included money for transport infrastructure including walking and cycling.

All of the projects and funding tied in with the Masterplan which was now online and open for public consultation, and which would be shaped with this consultation over the coming months, with a focus on public transport and sustainable and active means of travelling to Colchester.

Emily Harrup, Transport and Sustainability Joint Lead, attended the meeting and addressed the Panel, outlining the Council's approach to sustainable travel which was based on the Council's Strategic Plan, the Air Quality Action Plan, Climate Change Plan and community engagement work. Two key goals had been identified which were to increase the proportion of short trips made via sustainable transport and a reduction in air pollutants in the Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) translating into better health.

Care had been taken to consult with the public over the preceding year, including attending 6 events at which over 800 people were engaged with, and carrying out surveys, focus groups and door knocking. Of those people spoken to the Colchester Eco Festival, 95% said that they could consider replacing some car journeys if they had access to electric bikes, and 88% said they would consider cycling for shorter journeys if cycle infrastructure separated them from cars on the road. Fear of cycling on the roads, the disjointed nature of the cycle network, lack of clear signing and fear of theft of bikes were some of the reasons preventing people from cycling more. Key areas of support that residents wished for had been identified and included information on secure cycle parking, advice on cycling with children, and support to build confidence to cycle.

Jane Thompson, Transport and Sustainability Joint Lead, attended the meeting and addressed the Panel. The Panel heard that the Council worked with a very large number of partners to help to deliver against the goals which had been set. To increase the number of trips which were made by sustainable transport, the Council lobbied for investment to improve infrastructure by working with Transport East and responding to consultations on regional strategic plans. Work was undertaken with ECC on its plans for the Rapid Transit Route, and additionally to develop the Colchester Future Transport Strategy and the Local Cycling and Walking Investment Plan (LCWIP). Approximately £1.7m had been identified in student development s.106 contributions and planned projects to help encourage walking and cycling in East Colchester and a number of projects were planned to encourage residents and students to walk into town more frequently. The Fixing the Link project was a partnership between ECC, Greater Anglia and the Council to encourage people to walk the route from the railway station to the city centre, and £120,000 had been identified from the partners to support the project. Secure cycle parking was planned in Portal Precinct in the city centre, and the unit would also house the e-cargo bike library and the Colchester Bike Kitchen, teaching people how to maintain their bicycles.

The Council was working with ECC to help design and deliver the capacity to walk, cycle and wheel safely across town, including LCWIP routes and additional sustainable access to the city centre from the south and the east of the borough.

Emily Harrup provided the Panel with an update on behaviour change projects during 2022 which had contributed to meeting the Council's goals. These projects had been funded through £880,000 of funding secured through 5 successful bids to the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and the Department for Transport (DFT) since 2019. Additionally, funding of £30,000 per year was in place to support the Colchester Travel Plan Club, and during 2022 the Council's e-cargo bike champions had ridden over 30,000 miles, saving over 9 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e in the process. The roadside signage trial that had been undertaken in Brooke Street and Eastgates had led to an 11% increase in engine switch offs, and 100 adults had received training to national cycling standards.

One of the Council's key focusses was to provide a range of flexible and affordable transport choices for business and residents to provide a viable alternative to first or second car ownership, and this included setting up 2 electric cargo bike hubs. The first electric car club had been started in Priory Street and currently had 17 members. The Council was working in partnership with ECC to test 6 interventions which would compliment the national bikeability training which was provided to children in year 6. These interventions had been developed with focus groups and survey work and would be tested with 4 schools over the coming months. Signage promoting the off road cycle route between Monkwick and the city centre was to be installed to raise awareness of the route.

Supported by funding from DEFRA, a new e-cargo bike delivery service was to be trialled in the city centre, allowing shoppers to drop their shopping off at a central location to be delivered to their home via an e-cargo bike. This would support economic development in the city centre by allowing shoppers to remain for longer unhampered by shopping bags, and would enable shoppers to choose active or sustainable travel options for visiting the city centre thereby relieving pressure on car parks and congestion. Partnership working with the North Essex Parking Partnership and ECC supported the scheme, and the Council's delivery partner was the Colchester E-Cargo Bike Delivery Project. Good feedback had been received from customers who had used the scheme during a trial over Christmas, and it was intended to roll the scheme out formally over the coming year.

The Panel heard that future areas of work included continuing to work with ECC on the integration of busses with active and sustainable transport, supporting communities in travel choices outside the urban areas, and to support other organisations to set policy directions which suited Colchester. The key message was that residents wanted to travel more sustainably, but wanted to feel safe and supported when doing so. The Panel was asked to support the work of Officers in helping to get investment in infrastructure, and to promote the Council's projects to residents at every opportunity to help encourage residents to choose sustainable travel options.

Following a disturbance in the public gallery, Cllr Scordis, in his role as Chair of the Panel, invited 2 members of the public to address the Panel under the Council's

Have Your Say! provisions. Jimmy, a Colchester resident, was concerned by the contents of the presentation, and sought clarification on what was meant by DEFRA and behaviour change. Emily Harrup explained that DEFRA was a government department, and Colchester had a number of AQMAs where air pollution was dangerously high, and as a result of this it was possible for the Council to apply for funding from DEFRA to support behaviour change projects. These projects were concerned with supporting and encouraging people to look at alternatives to using their cars, with the aim of improving air pollution levels, and a lot of the work was carried out with people who lived within easy walking or cycling distance of the city centre. There was no intention to force people to stop using their cars, merely to reduce the number of vehicles on the road which would have the effect of reducing congestion and air pollution.

Rachel Matthews requested further information about the surveys which had been carried out, and it was clarified that Officers had attended 6 events over the summer and spoken to over 800 people. Of these events, one had been Eco Festival, and the other 5 had been community events throughout the borough. The people that had been spoken to were likely to be those who wanted to walk and cycle more, as they would have been attracted to the Council's presence. The general population had not been surveyed, however, the Council's intention was to support those who wished to take advantage of alternative methods of transport.

Councillors Scordis encouraged those members of the public present to contact their local Councillors if they had concerns about any of the issues which had been raised via their email addresses which were all published, or to attend a Full Council meeting to raise their concerns.

The Panel noted the fears which were associated with cycling in the city centre, and supported the introduction of secure cycle parking and improved cycle routes to address some elements of these. It was important to ensure that bus services were reliable and cheap, in order that there were options available to people to car use which were attractive and easy to access. A Panel member raised concerns about the production of batteries which were used in electric vehicles, and considered that the Council should try to source ethically produced batteries where possible.

A Panel member did not consider that the current level of consultation in respect to the Sustainable Travel Plan had been comprehensive enough, and although they supported the Plan, it was noted that proposals such as the new bike hub could be divisive due to a lack of consultation. It was important to take account of residents who felt that owning a car was not an option for them, and there was a need to lobby ECC in relation to the provision of cheaper bus fares.

A Panel member supported the voicing of different views from members of the public at the meeting, and did consider that there was a climate change problem which needed to be addressed. They wished to see encouragement offered to the public to use more ecologically friendly modes of transport as opposed to penalties or enforced change. It was important that enough was done to support drivers as well as users of the rapid transport and economic incentives would encourage people to behave in the right way. Although congestion charging was not remotely on the agenda, they would support paying such a charge if it led to less congestion on the

roads. It was again emphasised that the intention behind the Council's activities was to provide different options for people to travel across the city, if they wished to use these as an alternative to using a car.

In response to enquiries from a Panel member, the Panel heard that the Animating King Edward Quay and swing basin project was a designed to improve the public realm in this area in a bid to encourage use of the river area and the Wivenhoe and Rowhedge trails, via the use of S.106 funding obtained from developments in the area. In response to a query about the cost to use the secure cycle parking in the town centre, it was clarified that the cost would be set in a manner that was designed to encourage the use of the parking, and working out the optimal charge would take some time, which would be determined by the company who would be managing the cycle parking.

In discussion, the Panel commented on bus services prices and reliability, and considered that consideration be given to street lighting being on for longer to encourage people to feel safe walking or cycling. In his role as Chair of the Panel Councillor Scordis volunteered to write to ECC on behalf of the Panel to raise these issues, together with the suggestion of the provision of school busses to ease congestion at busier times.

A panel member considered that the older architecture of the city centre could have an impact on feelings of safety for pedestrians, as it had sometimes been poorly lit, and improvements to this infrastructure would assist in helping people feeling safe while using active travel. Street lighting was key in this, and this was an ECC matter which Councillor Scordis would mention in his letter to them. Councillor Scordis, as Chair of the Panel, reminded the Panel and attending members of the public that the draft Masterplan had been published online, and comments on this were invited as part of the open consultation.

In response to an enquiry from a Panel member regarding behaviour change, Emily Harrup explained that a key part of the Council's messaging had been focussed on health, as this had been highlighted as a concern when speaking to the public about air quality. Lots of the Council's projects were pilot projects, and the feedback from these from as diverse a range of people as possible would inform future activities. Colchester's Business Improvement District (BID) had been fully engaged with the e-cargo bike delivery service project, and had worked with ECC on the Colchester Future Transport Strategy. Although available funding was currently focussed on the Council's Air Quality Management Areas, the provision of cycle hangars was something which would be considered in the future if appropriate.

*RESOLVED* that: The Panel supported the progress being made by the City Council in delivering the key goals and outcomes for sustainable travel in Colchester.

### **83. Have Your Say!**

Rik Andrew attended the meeting and, with the permission of the Chair, addressed the Panel under the Council's Have Your Say! provisions. Mr Andrew had yet to receive a response to his previous submission to the Panel. Mr Andrew considered that the congestion in Colchester was becoming unmanageable, and the solution to

this was not to build more roads, but to consider other methods of transport such the provision of an additional railway station, or the introduction of trams, subject to consulting with an independent expert. There was a need to provide attractive alternatives to use the car, and Mr Andrew considered that what was currently being offered in terms of cycle paths was not good enough to do this. In stead of developing further strategies, immediate work was needed to deliver the routes which it had already been acknowledged were needed, and to make these routes high quality and safe. Colchester should take control of its own bus service, and become its own autonomous highway authority to take control of the roads in the city.

Councillor Scordis, in his role as the Chair of the Panel, responded to Mr Andrew, acknowledging the points which he had made. The rapid transport system which was proposed may be the best mechanism for including the provision of trams, potentially including trackless trams. He agreed that the current cycle route provision was not good enough, however, ECC had advised that the costs associated with providing routes were extremely high and hampered their implementation. Councillor Scordis believed that it was currently not possible to set up a bus company without the approval of the Secretary of State. The Panel was reminded that several years ago, the Council had debated becoming a unitary authority, however, it had been considered that Colchester was not yet big enough to provide all of its own services that would be required, including education and social care as well as highways.

#### **84. Climate Emergency Action Plan Update**

The Panel considered a report detailing key progress made with the Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP), and other relevant updates since November 2022.

Ben Plummer, Climate Emergency Project Officer, attended the meeting to present the report and assist the Panel with its enquiries. Following the work which had been undertaken with an independent consultant, the results of surveys carried out on 6 Council sites had been considered to assess the various energy efficiency and decarbonisation measures which had been outlined. The total costs of all the works suggested would be £10.28m, and would reduce the Council's carbon emissions by 1,590.4 tonnes. Consideration was being given to which measures would be most appropriate to implement to identify those measures with the most effective payback times, or which potentially tied in with other building development work or maintenance which was planned. Discussions were at an early stage to understand the service needs of staff who operated within the buildings, and how these could be aligned with the Council's climate emergency ambitions. A long-term plan would be developed, however, short-term actions would also be taken to try to reduce the Council's energy use within its estate, supported by the appointment of an energy manager.

A Panel member considered that it was currently far too easy to cut down listed trees, which may have been growing for hundreds of years, and considered that the Council should implement a requirement for a second opinion from an expert before any such action was allowed. The Panel's support was sought in respect of this proposal to generate more protection for listed trees. Andrew Tyrrell, Client and

Business Manager, explained the process in respect of planning applications which encompassed a listed tree. The Panel heard that the owner of the tree would instruct an arboriculture consultant, who were bound by heavily regulated professional standards, and this private consultant's report would be submitted to the Council with the planning application. The Council employed their own expert tree consultant who would inspect every tree in person, and who would consider the health and lifespan of the tree with the presumption that no tree would be cut down if it could be saved or was of any merit. It was not considered that the production of a third professional report from an arboriculture consultant would add a significant amount to the process, and would introduce additional costs and delays to the planning process. Over 2,000 planning applications were received each year, and a large percentage of these would include a tree impact assessment, representing a significant amount of work. Councillor Scordis, in his role as Chair of the Panel, recommended that the Councillor speak to the relevant portfolio holder in relation to seeking support for the suggestion.

In discussion, the Panel wondered whether consideration had been given to alternative means of burial to offset the costs associated with the crematorium. The high cost of implementing the suggested decarbonisation measures was noted, and the source of the funding for this work was queried. The Panel heard that alternative burial options would be considered, and the main grant fund for any of the larger projects that would be carried out was the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme, which was issued each year. Some of the smaller projects had relatively quick payback times, and would generate savings to cover the cost of the measures within a couple of years.

The Panel heard that it was intended that fully costed and detailed outlines of any decarbonisation work proposed would be produced setting out the practical solutions which were suggested. The work which had been undertaken to date was to be considered as the first step towards formulating a much more detailed picture of the options which were available to the Council.

Andrew Tyrrell confirmed to the Panel that for the first time, the Council now had a quantifiable list of changes or amendments which could be made to its estate, and the total cost of implementing all of these changes would be £10.28m. It was not proposed that all possible improvements would be made as some options would not be practical or cost effective, and careful consideration would be given to any action which was to be taken to ensure that it was carried out at the most effective time, potentially tying in with other planned or necessary works. It was considered that offsetting would be required to assist the Council in reaching its 2030 carbon emission targets, and this would be considered as part of the larger picture.

In discussion, the Panel made some recommendations for inclusions in the proposed Supplementary Planning Documents, including the requirement to have solar panels on all new buildings, together with electric vehicle chargers. It was also recommended that new properties should have a water recycling system, as well as space made available for the storage of wheelie bins, together with recycling facilities made available in all flats.

**RESOLVED** that: the contents of the report be noted.