

<b>Report of</b>	<b>Assistant Director of Place and Client</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Karen Turnbull</b> ☎ 282275
<b>Title</b>	<b>Colchester's new Economic Strategy 2022-25</b>		
<b>Wards affected</b>	All wards		

## 1. Executive Summary

### 1.1 Colchester's new Economic Strategy is due for publication.

The strategy sets out the role Colchester Borough Council and our partners will play in maintain and boosting the strength of our economy. It:

- highlights the key assets and challenges of Colchester's economy
- sets out our vision and priorities, along with principal objectives
- provides case studies to illustrate the type of work we will encourage to achieve our priorities
- highlights the factors that influence the economy
- describes how we will work with partners.

## 2. Recommended Decision

### 2.1 To adopt the new Economic Strategy 2022-25 for Colchester.

### 2.2 To recommend to full Council that the Economic Strategy be adopted as part of the Council's Policy Framework.

## 3. Reason for Recommended Decision

### 3.1 With Colchester recently honoured with city status as part of The Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations, Colchester's new Economic Strategy is timely.

Colchester is a hot-spot for innovation and investment. Employment levels are high and businesses have proved their resilience. However, the combined impact of the pandemic, the UK's departure from the EU, the situation in Ukraine and climate change are presenting unprecedented economic challenges.

This Strategy aligns strongly with partners and their strategies to coordinate our efforts to support an inclusive economy. It charts a course to take Colchester's economy forward in partnership:

- supporting the economy to survive and thrive
- enabling Colchester to compete for future talent, investment and influence; and
- improving people's lives and tackling inequalities through gaining and improving skills, encouraging jobs growth, influencing health and transport choices; and delivering more effective digital connectivity and improved personal and commercial prospects from this.

## 4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 To not adopt the Economic Strategy. There are however clear risks to not having a robust evidence based strategy in place such as not achieving local priorities, not being able to evidence and articulate Colchester Borough Council's wider vision for the economy and not providing a strong focus to our partners about their contribution to meeting our priorities and helping economic recovery.

## 5. Background Information

- 5.1 This is Colchester's second Economic Strategy. The first covered the period from 2015-21 and focussed on sectoral development.
- 5.2 Following a detailed consultation and strategy development process as set out in 8. below, this strategy takes a themed approach based on four key priorities and clear aims associated with each of them.
- 5.3 Key Priorities

Colchester's Economic Strategy 2022-25 sets out our vision, four priorities for change and objectives to be achieved.

### **Vision: Colchester: unlocking our city's potential**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Objectives</b>
People	We support inclusive economic growth by encouraging business innovation, helping build the skills the local workforce will need to take advantage of future opportunities, and championing the Real Living Wage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify and facilitate opportunities to promote innovation and new businesses</li><li>• Work with partners and stakeholders to address skills shortages</li><li>• Tackle inequalities by enabling local people to access and develop new skills</li><li>• Sustain the local economy with high quality business support, information and guidance</li><li>• Encourage a higher wage economy</li></ul>
Place	We use our resources, knowledge, assets and connections to leverage inward investment in the City, and facilitate improved infrastructure, including digital infrastructure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify and secure funding to enhance Colchester and boost the economy.</li><li>• Identify and pursue projects which support key sector development.</li><li>• Support and encourage inward investment. Develop a new Digital Strategy as a competitive edge and to enhance skills</li><li>• Capitalise on Colchester's new status as a city</li><li>• Understand the future infrastructure needs of a fast-growing place.</li></ul>
Partnerships	We engage widely with partners and anchor institutions at the local, regional, national and international level to help Colchester capitalise on new opportunities for economic growth, jobs and infrastructure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Engage with partners to promote Colchester's economic interests.</li><li>• Support the work of partners in offering business support to enable recovery and growth.</li><li>• Mobilising the opportunity around our anchor institutions in community wealth building.</li><li>• Help develop a more connected and influential place</li></ul>
Planet	We work with partners to improve the environment of our place, accelerate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support initiatives to enhance the quality of the environment.</li></ul>

	the decarbonisation of Colchester economy and reduce the environmental impact of business activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help local businesses reduce their carbon emissions.</li> <li>• Support development of local green technology businesses</li> <li>• Identify new economic opportunities from the emerging 'green economy'</li> </ul>
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In keeping with the Colchester Can approach, this strategy prioritises an enabler/facilitator approach. Colchester's partnership arrangements are mature and effective, and through the pandemic our partnerships have strengthened with CBC being seen as a trusted anchor.

## **Delivery Plan**

The Delivery Plan for the new Strategy is in development and will set out the actions the Council, its partners and stakeholders will undertake to achieve the priorities. It will be accessible and meaningful so that local people can see opportunities which apply to them and how they can participate.

Workstreams and projects include:

- Developing a Shared Prosperity Funding Investment Plan
- Developing and delivering Levelling Up Fund Round 2 bid
- Developing a Rural England Prosperity Fund Investment Plan
- The Colchester Skills Programme led by The Colchester Ambassadors Group
- New Digital Strategy in partnership with Colchester Amphora Trading Ltd.
- Delivering the project programme for the Town Deal

### **5.4 Monitoring and Review**

The strategy will be a live document that will achieve its aims and objectives through the implementation of a 3-year Delivery Plan, which will be updated by Colchester Borough Council on a regular basis.

5.4 The plan will be monitored and progress reported to the Portfolio Holder.

## **6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications**

6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment on the Economic Strategy has been completed and a link to the document can be found here [Economic Strategy 2022 2025 EQIA Nov 2022.docx](#)

6.2 There are no Human Rights implications

## **7. Strategic Plan References**

7.1 The priorities in the new Economic Strategy will deliver against the Council's current Strategic Plan 2020-23 priorities in particular the pledge to "Growing a fair economy so everyone benefits". Specifically this means:

### **Priorities**

### **Goals**

Enable economic recovery from

- Ensure our borough becomes stronger post Covid-19 by supporting businesses to recover, adapt and build resilience.

## Priorities

## Goals

Covid-19  
ensuring  
all  
residents  
benefit  
from  
growth

- Work with partners to facilitate a high skill, high wage, low carbon workforce.
- Develop opportunities to ensure the new economy is greener, sustainable and more resilient.
- Work with our partners to enable Colchester town centre to be a more vibrant, resilient and adaptable to future change.
- Transform the Northern Gateway as a hub for improved wellbeing, physical activity, jobs, housing and renewable energy.
- Address the inequality of access to Gigabit Broadband in communities.
- Tackle local skills shortages working with businesses, University of Essex, Colchester Institute and other partners.

Work with partners  
to deliver a  
shared vision  
for a vibrant  
town

- Agree a Town Deal with partners and the Government to attract significant new investment.
- Collaborate with the town centre Business Improvement District (BID).
- Continue to regenerate Colchester Town Centre using Council assets, aligned private investment, the Town Deal and Town Investment Plan.

Create an  
environment  
that attracts  
inward  
investment to  
Colchester  
and help  
businesses  
to flourish

- Ensure our strategy for inclusive economic growth supports the ambitions outlined in the North Essex Growth Strategy, the Local Industrial Strategy and our Town Deal.
- Ensure a good supply of employment land and premises to attract new businesses and allow existing firms to expand and thrive.
- Encourage green technologies and innovative solutions to the Climate Emergency.
- Maximise the Social Value benefits derived from third party contracts.
- Ensure the Council's assets continue to contribute to economic growth and opportunity.

## 8. Consultation and Strategy Development

- Two consultation workshops were held with external partners and stakeholders as well as internal business facing services which both helped to shape the new Economic Strategy.
- Insights from local business surveys and other public consultations with residents on projects like the Town Deal and on subjects like the future of the town centre have been sought and included.
- Data and analysis from partner strategies and monitoring of official datasets and reports to understand macro-economic trends have also contributed to developing the

Strategy. The accompanying Data Digest is a summary of this deeper and more comprehensive evidence base.

- The draft Economic Strategy has been circulated to Officers for their comments.
- The Portfolio Holder for Local Economy and Transformation and the Portfolio Holder for Strategy have been given the opportunity to review the documents.
- The Cabinet have had the opportunity to review and requested new content, which has been included.
- The responses to consultations have been positive. Where comments, amendments and suggestions have been made these have been incorporated where appropriate.

## **9. Publicity Considerations**

- 9.1 The Economic Strategy documents will be published on the Council's website. A communications plan is being developed to publicise the Strategy and generate interest and commitment to the Delivery Plan.

## **10. Financial implications**

- 10.1 The strategy sets out a challenging and ambitious vision for the economy which will be delivered against a backdrop of significant reduction in funding for local government. In the current financial climate of reduced resources, the Council will need to look carefully at how it will use these resources to deliver the strategy from existing budgets.

The Council will work to encourage its partners to commit their resources to meeting the priorities set out in the strategy. As many of the organisations are partners, they have already helped to shape the strategy and have shown their commitment to its delivery.

## **11. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications**

- 11.1 Colchester is facing significant population and housing growth, demanding more jobs, more skills and more businesses to create an expanding economy to match. A strong economy is vital for Colchester to provide residents with the jobs, income, health and purpose they need; to allow businesses to flourish; to provide the infrastructure a growing place relies on and to keep our Borough vibrant and attractive.
- 11.2 The Government's Levelling Up agenda places a renewed emphasis on inclusive economic growth so that existing inequalities are reduced.

## **12. Health and Safety Implications**

- 12.1 There are no health and safety implications

## **13. Risk Management Implications**

- 13.1 There are no risk management implications

## **14. Environmental and Sustainability Implications**

- 14.1 Environmental and sustainability implications have been considered throughout the development of the new Economic Strategy. The need for cleaner growth is increasingly

critical to manage and reduce our impacts on the environment as we work toward sent Zero.

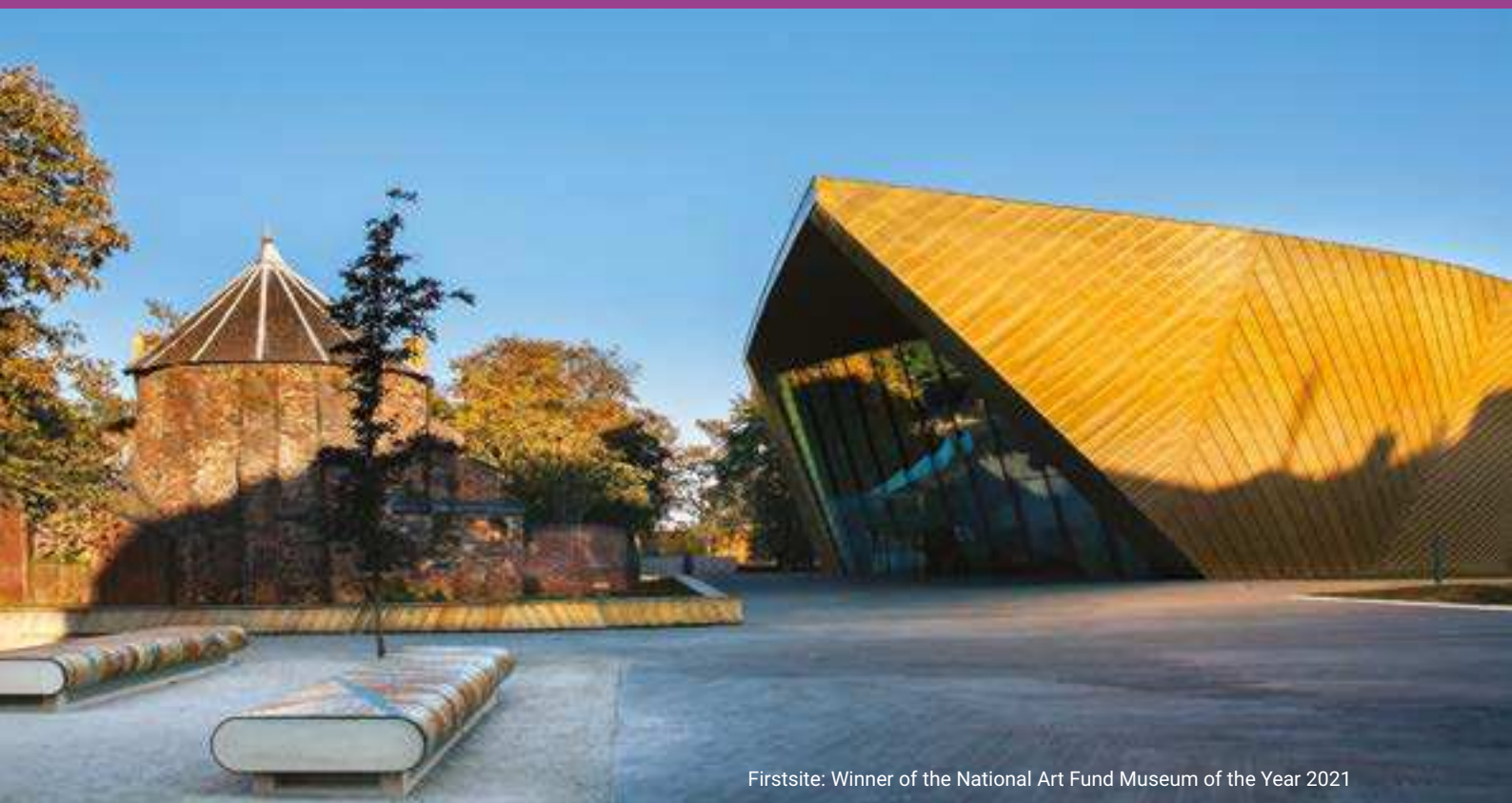
## **Appendices**

Appendix A Colchester's Economic Strategy 2022-25

Appendix B Economic Strategy Data Digest

# COLCHESTER'S ECONOMIC STRATEGY

Colchester: unlocking our city's potential



Firstsite: Winner of the National Art Fund Museum of the Year 2021

## 2022-25



Colchester  
City Council



Colchester  
Ultra Ready for Business



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## Preface

**Councillor David King**  
**Leader, Colchester Borough Council**

With Colchester being honoured with City Status by Her Majesty, The Queen, as part of her Platinum Jubilee celebrations, Colchester's new Economic Strategy has never been more relevant or timely. Colchester is a hot-spot for innovation and investment. Employment levels are high, and businesses have proved their resilience. However, the combined impacts of the pandemic, the UK's departure from the EU, the situation in Ukraine and climate change are presenting unprecedented challenges. For some sectors such as health and care it is a time of opportunity, albeit with severe constraints, for others in sectors like retail, tourism, leisure, and hospitality, it continues to be a time of great challenge. This strategy has been developed over a period of economic turbulence. The challenge for the Council and its partners will be to be sufficiently nimble to address fast emerging issues and to take advantage of new opportunities.

I believe that a period of rapid economic and social change drives technological innovation. Indeed, we are seeing the growing importance of artificial intelligence and the data-driven economy, and the skills needed to support and develop it. The need for 'cleaner growth' is increasingly critical to manage and reduce our impacts on the environment as we work towards Net Zero. Social and demographic change is driving demand for new goods and services delivered in revolutionary ways and in Colchester, significant population and housing growth are demanding more jobs,

more skills, and more businesses to create an expanding economy to match. While painting a picture of opportunity and potential, I also recognise that the combination of these strategic risks combines with underlying long-term economic trends which are disrupting existing jobs and business models, creating a sea-change in how our small enterprises do business, challenging their resilience and capacity.

This Economic Strategy charts a medium-term course to take Colchester's economy forward in partnership into recovery:

- ▶ putting it in the best possible position to survive and thrive
- ▶ enabling Colchester to compete for future talent, investment, and influence; and taking a more holistic approach to
- ▶ improving people's lives and prospects through better skills, jobs, health and transport choices; and more effective digital connectivity so that economic growth is more inclusive.

Recovery can be realised by helping entrepreneurs to achieve their ambitions, creating more and better job opportunities, developing skills, attracting investment, and providing transport and digital infrastructure to help businesses to thrive.

Our partnerships and relationships are stronger now, sharpened through the crises of the past two years. There is a mutual understanding and insight which is deeper than before, one which will provide a firmer footing as we face the challenge of recovery together.

In addition, we'll be working with other major institutions (known as 'Anchors'), which are also invested in Colchester and the wellbeing of our community, to help make the economy inclusive for everyone and to champion the Real Living Wage.



# Executive Summary

A **strong economy** is vital for Colchester. Vital to provide residents with the jobs, income, health, and purpose they need; to allow businesses to flourish; to provide the infrastructure a growing place relies on; and to keep our borough vibrant, and attractive.

The Government's Levelling Up agenda places a renewed emphasis on inclusive economic growth so that existing inequalities are reduced. It also includes new possibilities for devolved power which we will want to harness for Colchester's benefit.

This Strategy sets out the role Colchester City Council and our partners will play in ensuring our economy includes everyone and to championing the Real Living Wage. It:

- ▶ Highlights the key assets and challenges of Colchester's economy
- ▶ Sets out our vision and priorities, along with principal objectives.
- ▶ Explains the thinking behind some of our aspirations
- ▶ Provides case studies to illustrate the type of work we will encourage to achieve our priorities
- ▶ Highlights the factors that influence us
- ▶ Describes how we will work with partners

Colchester's economy is dominated by **small and micro businesses** representing 93% of businesses in the Borough. The core sectors creating jobs and growth in Colchester are **tourism, advanced manufacturing, financial services, and retail**. Growth sectors include **creative/digital/tech, care, green energy, and construction**.

Colchester is characterised by its:

- ▶ **Business diversity** – no one sector or employer dominates the Colchester economy.
- ▶ **Quality of place** – Colchester has a rich mix of heritage, museums, galleries, open spaces and leisure choices.
- ▶ **Growth potential** – By 2030 the Borough's population is projected to be over 214,000.
- ▶ **Business resilience** – Colchester's businesses demonstrated impressive adaptability during the crisis phase of the pandemic.
- ▶ **Connectedness** – Key partners work together in established relationships to capitalise on economic opportunities
- ▶ **Strong infrastructure investment** – Good road and public transport links are complimented by Ultrafast Broadband and 5G
- ▶ **Ambition** - Colchester is keen to realise its potential as a city to live, work, study, visit and do business.

However, the data and our engagement show our economy faces challenges we need to work together to overcome. These include:

- ▶ **Skills Gaps** – Colchester has lower levels of employees with higher level NVQs compared to the regional and national averages.
- ▶ **Polarisation of incomes** – Colchester's strengths in tourism, hospitality and care tend to be at the lower end of the pay spectrum compared to commuter salaries in The City.
- ▶ **Competition from other places** – As well as the need to capitalise on Colchester's new status as a city, there is a need to invest in Colchester to further modernise its digital and transport infrastructure, protect its appeal, and attract and retain businesses and the people who work in them.
- ▶ **Climate emergency** – Colchester's economy will be affected by the climate emergency and by the need to decarbonise. However, the shift to greener energy presents opportunities as well as challenges.

## We have adopted a new vision and four priorities for Colchester:

### Colchester: unlocking our city's potential

#### PEOPLE:

We support inclusive economic growth by encouraging business innovation, helping build the skills the local workforce will need to take advantage of future opportunities, and championing the Real Living Wage.

- ▶ Identify and facilitate opportunities to promote innovation and new businesses.
- ▶ Work with partners and stakeholders to address skills shortages.
- ▶ Tackle inequalities by enabling local people to access and develop new skills.
- ▶ Sustain the local economy with high quality business support, information and guidance.
- ▶ Aspire to develop a higher wage economy.

#### PLACE:

We use our resources, knowledge, assets and connections to leverage inward investment in the City, and facilitate improved infrastructure, including digital infrastructure.

- ▶ Identify and secure funding to enhance Colchester and boost the economy.
- ▶ Identify and pursue projects which support key sector development.
- ▶ Support and encourage inward investment.
- ▶ Develop a new Digital Strategy as a competitive edge and to enhance skills.
- ▶ Understand the future infrastructure needs of a fast-growing place.

#### PARTNERSHIPS:

We engage widely with partners and anchor institutions at the local, regional, national and international level to help Colchester capitalise on new opportunities for economic growth, jobs and infrastructure.

- ▶ Engage with partners to promote Colchester's economic interests.
- ▶ Support the work of partners in offering business support to enable recovery and growth.
- ▶ Help develop a more connected and influential place.
- ▶ Mobilise the role of Anchor Institutions in community wealth building.

#### PLANET:

We work with partners to improve the environment of our place, accelerate the decarbonisation of Colchester economy and reduce the environmental impact of business activities.

- ▶ Support initiatives to enhance the quality of the environment.
- ▶ Help local businesses reduce their carbon emissions.
- ▶ Support development of local green technology businesses.
- ▶ Identify new economic opportunities from the emerging 'green economy' businesses.



## What is Inclusive Economic Growth?

'Inclusive Economic Growth' is rising prosperity that includes everyone, that reduces inequalities, and is sustainable. We will work to achieve more inclusive growth in all our work. It takes a more holistic approach to improving people's lives because a fairer economy is a stronger economy which narrows inequalities.

Following the adoption of this strategy, we will develop annual action plans to ensure our work is directed to achieve our priorities.

We have not developed this strategy in a vacuum. Instead, we are actively involved in partnerships covering a wide range of issues, both economic and social, and have developed mature relationships with partner agencies. As a result, we have developed this strategy:

- ▶ By engaging with a local business, and with local and regional stakeholders
- ▶ Based on evidence emerging from relevant statistics and reports
- ▶ To align with the priorities of our neighbours and partners

Our engagement has taken the form of surveys of local businesses, 1-to-1 conversations, and engagement workshops. This has allowed us to test current thinking, explore opportunities and challenges, and identify possible priorities. It has confirmed that a new strategy is timely, and our enabling approach is appropriate.

More than 500 businesses responded to our surveys; and consultation workshops included representatives from the BEST Growth Hub, Colbea, Colchester BID, Essex County Council, Essex University, and Let's Do Business plus other Council teams, including Amphora Trading, Business Rates, Communications, Housing, Licensing, Planning, and Climate Change.

Themes which were stressed during these engagement workshops included the positive mindsets of most businesses, the skills challenge and how it differs between sectors, the importance of inclusive economic growth, the need for translation and support with the 'green challenge', and the support for working together to attract new investment. Analysis of partner strategies also confirms these general themes to be reflective of current key issues and thinking.

The typical comments from the consultations below coalesce around emerging priority areas.

"Businesses are facing unprecedented pressures. They need hand-holding if they are to go greener, they can't do it by themselves."

"There's a lot of people moving sectors right now. We are facing real difficulties recruiting and retaining staff. Skills development and keeping those skills in the business is a real priority for us now as we can't buy new people in as easily as before."

"The pandemic has really brought home that business is about people and trust. It has brought home how vital partnerships are in delivering our own ambitions. We need to create, sustain and build on that virtuous circle."

"The past 18 months has shown how Colchester is out-performing other places. We need to capitalise on this. Everything is here to make that happen now. We should be more confident about that."



The oyster fisheries at Mersea supply demand from around the world.



# Colchester's Economic Context

## Colchester's economic assets

Our appreciation of the key assets of Colchester's economy has informed our choice of priorities. By recognising these and building on them we can amplify our impact. Colchester's key assets include:

- **BUSINESS DIVERSITY** – no one sector or employer dominates the Colchester economy. 93% of Colchester's businesses are micro/small. This has helped Colchester to weather economic shocks such as the financial crisis of 2008/9.
- **QUALITY OF PLACE** – Colchester has a rich mix of heritage and archaeology, award-winning parks and open spaces including the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, unique communities such as Mersea Island plus nationally recognised cultural offers at Firstsite and the Mercury Theatre. Colchester Borough is truly unique and offers a high quality of life. Colchester and the surrounding area are increasingly appreciated by visitors. Recent

years have seen an additional 6 new hotels expanding visitor choice and changing Colchester from a daytrip to a short-break destination. Visitor figures demonstrate its increasing popularity: 6.6m trips were taken in the Borough in 2019 and the visitor economy was worth some £394m and supported more than 5400 jobs.

- **GROWTH POTENTIAL** – By 2030 the Borough's population is projected to be over 214,000. That's higher than the current populations of Norwich and Aberdeen. This growth presents economic opportunities, especially for key sectors like construction. The Borough has been open to growth and attracted an estimated £336m investment between 2014-2021.

Construction is one of Colchester's core economic sectors and one where skills are in great demand.

- **BUSINESS RESILIENCE** – Colchester's business community demonstrated impressive adaptability during the crisis phase of the pandemic. Businesses, joined together, supported each other, and pivoted business models to online and home deliveries, often within days.
- **CONNECTEDNESS** – The pandemic has drawn the key players in Colchester together like never before. Established relationships have been built on trust, with a willingness to work together showing results such as the £19.2m Town Deal regeneration programme. Colchester works together in partnerships which deliver meaningful connections into their respective networks. We look forward to continuing to work with We Are Colchester, the University of Essex, Colbea, the Our Colchester BID, the Chamber of Commerce and Federation of Small Businesses to maximise the economic value from these connections.
- **INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT** – with good road and public transport links, a strong transport investment pipeline plus a £48m further rollout of Ultrafast Broadband and 5G Colchester will be able to compete effectively, inspiring innovation, delivering more tech jobs and enabling people to improve their IT skills and employability prospects.
- **AMBITION** – Colchester is keen to realise its potential as a city to live, work, study, visit and do business. and work with our anchor institutions to make the economy inclusive for everyone and to champion the Real Living Wage.



Artist's impression of St Nicholas Square regeneration project in Colchester town centre, encouraging dwell time and improving the experience of the town.



Colchester has significant gigabit broadband reach and this is set to expand with a further investment of £48m of private investment from Swedish fibre installation specialist, VX Fiber.





The reimagined £11m Mercury Theatre which reopened during 2021 providing a welcome boost to the town centre following multiple pandemic lockdowns.

## Confidence in Colchester: Recent Investments

supporting growth and core sectors through inward investment. Bringing more businesses, more jobs and more choice to Colchester.

Colchester is an **investment hot-spot**. Between 2015 and 2021 £333.8m has been invested by the private and public sector. They brought new jobs, new opportunities for learning, added choice, improved quality of the experience of Colchester and made it even more investable. The previous

Colchester Economic Growth Strategy 2015-21 identified 8 core and growth sectors in Colchester's economy. This table identifies headline projects which have been delivered in this time period to showcase how these sectors have been supported, often with inward investment.

**1 TOURISM, HOSPITALITY & LEISURE – INVESTING IN BRITAIN'S OLDEST RECORDED TOWN AND FIRST CITY**  
**£86.4m** which brought a redisplayed Castle Museum, 6 new/refurbished hotels, David Lloyd Leisure and new Sports Centre and cycle circuit at Northern Gateway and the reimagined Mercury Theatre.

**2 CREATIVE, DIGITAL AND TECH**  
 The **£2.6m** Creative Business Centre was opened in the former old Police Station in Queen Street. It is operated by SPACE Studios and offers workspace for over 40 businesses.

**3 HEALTH AND CARE**  
 Partnerships have been formed to explore the potential around this sector. Given the ageing population in north Essex there is potential for more technological solutions to be explored. This is a long running project with high aspiration which will continue into the next iteration of the strategy.

**4 SUSTAINABLE ENERGY FOR HOMES AND BUSINESSES AT THE NORTHERN GATEWAY**  
 Our flagship Government funded **£3.5m** energy project sees the construction of a carbon-cutting,



The £12m Innovation Centre at the University of Essex, providing work and collaboration space for 50 tech companies.

District Heat Network at Colchester Northern Gateway to supply heat and hot water to the developments' homes and businesses.

Reducing our carbon emissions is an important part of meeting climate change goals and the Heat Network will significantly reduce carbon emissions caused by heating homes and offices and will generate a source of hot water to replace boilers in the new homes being built.

It also means better value for households as district heat networks offer competitive and stable energy prices over the long term.

## 5 SUPPORTING RETAIL

**Town Centre transformation – £55.1m** which delivered the new Fenwick store, the new Primark store, Ultrafast gigabit broadband, upgrade of Priory Street car park, a new public space around The Mercury Theatre and 9 'Parklet' wooden seats in the High Street and other projects in the pipeline.

**New retail routes to market and skills development** – working in partnership with other local authorities the Council commissioned Click it Local to work with the Our Colchester BID and local independent retailers to extend their skills to offer their products online free of charge through a universal shopping basket like Amazon. It has also helped new home-based businesses to test effective routes to market giving them the best possible start.

**New Retail beyond the Town Centre** offering shopping choice for a growing population **£72m** new retail centre at Stane Park, Stanway.

## 6 CONSTRUCTION

The majority of these projects support the construction sector and its lengthy supply chains, including many local businesses. In addition, there was:

- ▶ New Office Spaces for start-up and young businesses **£7.3m** which delivered Amphora I and II in Sheepen Road and the Creative Business Centre at 37 Queen Street.
- ▶ Investment in the Student Experience at the University of Essex and Colchester Institute – a strong skills pipeline for Colchester **£85.5m** which delivered a new STEM Centre at both institutions, the Essex Business School and Silberrad Student Centre at the University and a new Care Skills Centre at the Institute.
- ▶ New Businesses Encouraged to locate University at The Knowledge Gateway to capitalise on a global academic talent pool **£27m** which brought Parkside Office spaces and the Innovation Centre.





Replenishh is part of the Rapid Electronics group and is playing a vital role in supporting the Electronic Vehicles industry to build the UK's EV charging network.

## 7 FINANCIAL SERVICES

The lack of high quality office space was identified as a need in the previous strategy. This was partly addressed with the construction of two office builds constructed by the Council's sister company, Colchester Amphora Trading Ltd, which both support the financial services sector. Birkett Long LLP now operates from

the prestigious **£2.7m** Amphora Place shortly followed by insurance merger Aston Lark's neighbouring **£2m** office space.

## 8 ADVANCED MANUFACTURING

Very specialist and a mature sector in Colchester. The Ultrafast broadband digital infrastructure project supports the growth of this sector.

These major investments in Colchester over the past four years has come from both public and private investors. Their investment has: driven economic growth delivering significant numbers of new jobs, raised the ceiling value of commercial rents, improved the image and reputation of Colchester and has made it a better place to live, work, study, visit and do business.

The forward pipeline is positive too with 2022 promising to deliver **more multi-million pound projects** including:

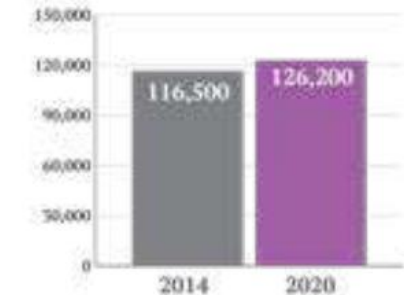
- ▶ the expansion of Ultrafast Broadband,
- ▶ a new teaching and business facility at Colchester Hospital,
- ▶ further expansion of the Parkside Office Village at the University of Essex,
- ▶ various projects commencing from the £19.2m Town Deal programme,
- ▶ and the installation of a 5G network.

## Colchester's Economic Profile



### WORKING AGE POPULATION

The working age population has grown by 8.3% over this time. It's also clear that considerable growth is taking place beyond the working age population, particularly in the older age groups.

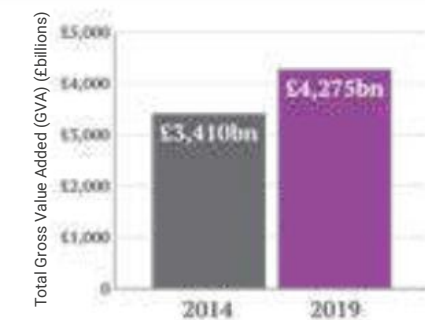


Source: Nomis ONS



### GROSS VALUE ADDED (GVA)

A measure of the Borough's total productivity. From 2014 to 2019 the Borough's GVA or productivity rose by 25.4%.



Source: EEFM



### INDICES OF MULTIPLE DEPRIVATION

The Indices provide a set of relative measures of deprivation for small local areas with an average of approximately 1,500 residents or 650 households across England. Colchester is characterised as having relatively low levels of deprivation.

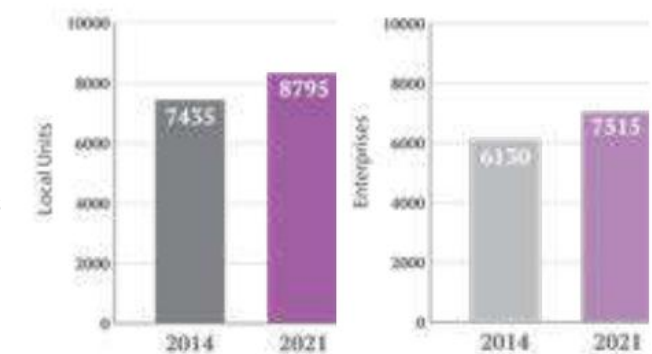


Source: Department of Housing Communities and Local Government, 2019



### NUMBER OF BUSINESSES

The difference between local units and enterprises can be explained by chain businesses. Tesco for instance is one business (enterprise) but has multiple units in Colchester (local units). There was an 18.3% increase in the number of local units over this period compared with a 22.6% increase in the number of enterprises.



Source: ONS



## Colchester's Economic Challenges



Our priorities will address the principal challenges the data and our engagement have highlighted. They are:

► **SKILLS GAPS** Colchester has lower levels of employees with higher level NVQs compared to the regional and national averages. Apprenticeships numbers are also falling. In addition, 17 neighbourhoods in Colchester are among the most deprived 40% in England for education, skills and training. Yet local employers have an increasing need for skilled employees who can adapt and flex as the needs of businesses change.

There is a rapidly increasing need for improved digital and tech skills, health and care skills and the need for innovation in delivering them. Colchester's strength in the creative industries combined with multi-million-pound investments in providing digital infrastructure and £1m training facilities at the former Wilson Marriage Centre provide a strong foundation to develop and retain these key skills.



The Business School at the University of Essex, providing highly skilled graduates into the workforce and helping companies through Knowledge Transfer Partnerships.



Woods Air Movement is a global player in building ventilation, fire safety and bespoke industrial projects.

► **POLARISATION OF INCOMES** The tourism, hospitality and care sectors which are strong in Colchester, tend to be lower paid compared to the higher paid work available to commuters to London. However, Colchester has an opportunity to attract more higher paid work through its investment in digital infrastructure and innovation in training opportunities. Projects such as the conversion of the old Bus Depot in St Botolph's Street into a £5.6m Digital Hub are intended to put Colchester on the leading edge of Artificial Intelligence, Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality technologies.

► **COMPETITION FROM OTHER PLACES** As well as the need to capitalise on Colchester's new status as a city, there is a need to invest in Colchester to further modernise its digital and transport infrastructure, provide more homes for a growing population, protect its appeal as a great place to live and work, and attract and retain businesses. Colchester is a strategic location for business in the region. Significantly, it also has well-located land available which adds to the inward investment

offer. However, businesses are facing difficult decisions to keep their business viable and to navigate their way through this challenging economic climate.

► **CLIMATE EMERGENCY** Businesses are facing the increasingly urgent need to meet the challenges of the climate emergency. The adaptations required to meet targets to decarbonise, as to capitalise on the opportunities these present, create a need for specialist business support. The Government's Ten Point Plan aims to support up to 250,000 jobs by 2030 for engineers, fitters, construction workers and many others engaged in supporting clean energy so there are significant skills gaps here too. The Government has announced over £5 billion to support a green recovery and enable the UK to meet the overall Government commitment to reach net zero emissions by 2050. Local consultation found businesses need help adapting to this agenda.



This Strategy acknowledges new economic realities at play. These compliment and challenge the traditional economy of companies and firms producing goods and services, employing people and needing skills, space, and land to do so:

- ▶ **Circular Economy** of recycling and upcycling
- ▶ **Sharing Economy** where purchase of new is replaced by the renting/ sharing/bartering and swapping of existing products
- ▶ **Local Economies:** economic impact of working from home, the potential for developing 'The 20 Minute Neighbourhood'
- ▶ **Online Economy** - last mile deliveries and 'Lockdown Entrepreneurialism'
- ▶ **The Gig Economy** - Traditional 9-5 jobs are declining and those that had them are leaving the labour market. Now we have the gig economy and portfolio incomes, especially for younger people. Previous strategies emphasised

core and growth sectors. However, The Pandemic has affected people; their ability to work, work productively and their future prospects across gender and age bands – so the socio-economic dimension needs to be included as does social value.

- ▶ **New forms of community power**, ownership and influence alongside the traditional private and public sector approach. Social entrepreneurship would include Community Interest Companies CICs, Social Enterprises VCSEs, Foundation Trusts – new forms of supply of products and services to meet demand from the community and beyond.



Colchester's e-cargo bikes capitalising on the rising demand for home deliveries and helping local independent businesses and the environment at the same time.

# Our Strategy

AN OVERARCHING VISION FOR COLCHESTER HAS BEEN ADOPTED:

**Colchester: unlocking our city's potential**

FOUR PRIORITIES HAVE BEEN ADOPTED:

## PEOPLE:

We support inclusive economic growth by encouraging business innovation, helping build the skills the local workforce will need to take advantage of future opportunities, and championing the Real Living Wage

### Where we will

- ▶ Identify and facilitate opportunities to promote innovation and new businesses.
- ▶ Work with partners and stakeholders to address skills shortages.
- ▶ Tackle inequalities by enabling local people to access and develop new skills.
- ▶ Sustain the local economy with high quality business support, information and guidance.
- ▶ Aspire to develop a higher wage economy.

## PLACE:

We use our resources, knowledge, assets and connections to leverage inward investment in the City, and facilitate improved infrastructure, including digital infrastructure.

### Where we will

- ▶ Identify and secure funding to enhance Colchester and boost the economy.
- ▶ Identify and pursue projects which support key sector development.
- ▶ Support and encourage inward investment.
- ▶ Develop a new Digital Strategy as a competitive edge and to enhance skills.

- ▶ Capitalise on Colchester's new status as a city.
- ▶ Understand the future infrastructure needs of a fast-growing place.

## PARTNERSHIPS:

We engage widely with partners and anchor institutions at the local, regional, national and international level to help Colchester capitalise on new opportunities for economic growth, jobs and infrastructure.

### Where we will

- ▶ Engage with partners to promote Colchester's economic interests.
- ▶ Support the work of partners in offering business support to enable recovery and growth.
- ▶ Help develop a more connected and influential place.
- ▶ Mobilise the role of Anchor Institutions in community wealth building.

## PLANET:

We work with partners to improve the environment of our place, accelerate the decarbonisation of Colchester economy and reduce the environmental impact of business activities.

### Where we will

- ▶ Support initiatives to enhance the quality of the environment.
- ▶ Help local businesses reduce their carbon emissions.
- ▶ Support development of local green technology businesses.
- ▶ Identify new economic opportunities from the emerging 'green economy'.



## By adopting this strategy we seek to:

▶ **Address the key challenges Colchester's economy faces**

▶ **Build on the strengths and assets of Colchester's economy and its new status as a city**

▶ **Harmonise our work with partners and their strategies**

▶ **Help positively shape our Place**

▶ **Capitalise on the new opportunities for devolution contained in the Levelling Up White Paper**

▶ **Help businesses play their role**

▶ **Mobilise the opportunity around Colchester's anchor institutions**

▶ **Aspire to a higher wage economy**

▶ **Understand the future infrastructure needs of a fast growing place**

## PEOPLE

*There's a lot of people moving sectors right now. We are facing real difficulties recruiting and retaining staff. Skills development and keeping those skills in the business is a real priority for us now as we can't buy new people in as easily as before.*

### PRIORITY

We support inclusive economic growth by **encouraging** business innovation, helping build the skills the local workforce will need to take advantage of future opportunities, and championing the Real Living Wage.

### OBJECTIVES

- ▶ Identify and facilitate opportunities to promote innovation amongst local businesses and to attract cutting-edge businesses to the borough.
- ▶ Work with partners and stakeholders to develop a Skills Programme which will link the needs of businesses with the improved skills of local people.
- ▶ Sustain the local economy by retaining and developing existing businesses with high quality business support: information, advice and guidance.
- ▶ Tackle inequalities by enabling local people to access and develop new skills.
- ▶ Aspire to develop a higher wage economy.

## CASE STUDY | THE COLCHESTER AMBASSADORS' GROUP

The Colchester Ambassadors' Group are a group of inspirational business people who run many of the borough's key organisations and share a vision and passion for the Borough. With members from industry together with representatives from education, the group is well-placed to understand the importance of acquiring and retaining skills in the workplace. This has been brought into sharp focus recently as the labour market is experiencing major supply issues as people move sectors, there are difficulties in recruitment and retention and new ways of

working are demanding rapidly changing skill sets. The Ambassadors' Group is working with Colchester Borough Council and its partners to establish strengths and existing work programmes which support the local skills pipeline. The task now is to identify a series of local actions which will meet the requirements of the imminent Skills and Post-16 Education legislation. It is hoped that this work will make it easier for local businesses to access the talent they need to recover and survive and improve local people's lives through improving their skills and prospects.



## PLACE

“*The past 18 months has shown how Colchester is out-performing other places. We need to capitalise on this. Everything is here to make that happen now. We should be more confident about that.*”

## PRIORITY

We use our resources, knowledge, assets and connections to leverage **inward investment** in the City, and facilitate **improved** infrastructure, including digital infrastructure.

## OBJECTIVES

- ▶ Identify and secure funding to enhance our place and boost the economy (such as the Shared Prosperity Fund)
- ▶ Identifying and pursuing projects which support key sectors in the economy to emerge, develop and grow
- ▶ Support initiatives to encourage inward investment, especially on designated available land
- ▶ Work with partners to develop a new Digital Strategy which delivers competitive infrastructure to enable the growth of our borough and enables the development of digital skills of people within the workforce
- ▶ Capitalise on Colchester's new status as a city
- ▶ Understand the future infrastructure needs of a fast-growing place



Wivenhoe House Hotel: home to The Edge Hotel School, developing future leaders of the hospitality industry by offering valuable, practical experience of running a 4\* country house hotel whilst studying for a Degree

CASE STUDY | **THE TOWN DEAL** REGENERATION PROGRAMME

March 2021 saw Colchester awarded £19.2m from the Government's Town Deal regeneration fund. The bid was led by We Are Colchester, a group of local stakeholders and partners who worked with Colchester Borough Council to identify where the need was and develop a series of projects for the funding to address those needs.

Colchester's Digital Strategy was launched in 2017 with an ambition to further its economic growth plans through improving connectivity. The Strategy set out its intention to become the best-connected place in the Eastern region making it a magnet for creative, digital, technology and IT businesses. Capable of competing with the better-known tech clusters around the UK like Edinburgh, Cambridge and Bristol.

The Town Deal funding has a project stream which will deliver:

- ▶ **Queen Street Digital Working hub** – which will provide high quality, local workspace on the site of the old Bus Depot in Queen Street. This will help to nurture local talent and put Colchester on the international map for leading tech, digital and creative businesses.

- ▶ **Wilson Marriage Centre** – will be redeveloped as a digital skills hub. This will support training, development, provide access to digital facilities and offer community activities. This will give adults across Colchester increased opportunities to re-skill and re-train so as to be better able to meet the needs of local employers.

- ▶ **5G provision** – this massive leap in technological capability delivered through mobile phones will transform our lives even further. This investment will give Colchester a competitive advantage, encouraging employers into the town, new businesses to be set up and enabling existing businesses to exploit new business opportunities.

These projects will transform places in and around Colchester by making them more accessible, more supportive of their communities and make Colchester a place known for its leadership in digital connectivity.

## PARTNERSHIPS

“The pandemic has really brought home that business is about people and trust. It has brought home how vital partnerships are in delivering our own ambitions. We need to create, sustain and build on that virtuous circle.”

### PRIORITY

We engage widely with **partners and anchor institutions** at the local, regional, national and international level to help Colchester capitalise on new opportunities for economic growth, jobs and infrastructure.

### OBJECTIVES

- ▶ Engage with partners and anchor institutions such as ECC, NEEB, the University of Essex and the NHS to promote Colchester's economic interests in their work
- ▶ Support the work of local partners to ensure that information, advice, and guidance for the Borough's businesses is sustained to enable economic recovery and growth
- ▶ Help develop a more connected and influential place
- ▶ Mobilise the role of Anchor Institutions in community wealth building

## CASE STUDY | THE OUR COLCHESTER BID LEISURE RECOVERY STRATEGY

The Our Colchester Business Improvement District (BID) is a business-led partnership that enables coordinated investment in the management and marketing of a defined area. In Colchester's case it is the town centre and the BID has a membership of around 500 businesses. Recognising that the town centre has a 24-hour economy and the impact that the Pandemic is having on tourism, leisure and hospitality businesses, the BID led on the development of a Leisure Recovery Strategy.

The Strategy is based on research with residents, visitors, students, businesses, public bodies, voluntary organisations and other valued stakeholders. The plan includes core strategies, objectives, actions and progress indicators to support the recovery of the town's leisure sector over the next 5-10 years.

Plans are taking shape as the Strategy is in the final stages of formation but it's clear that many businesses will need business support to stabilise and navigate into recovery.

Connections are being made so that duplication of effort is spotted and stopped, ensuring that the right experience and advice is given at the right time. When combined with the ability to come together and mobilise quickly to apply for funding the essence of partnership working is at its most effective.

It is hoped that these interventions will help leisure businesses to take their place in Colchester's leisure economy, offering customers a wide choice of places to go, things to see and do which are such asset to the people who live, work and visit the Borough.

## PLANET

“Businesses are facing unprecedented pressures. They need hand-holding if they are to go greener, they can't do it by themselves.”

### PRIORITY

We work with partners to improve the **environment** of our place and accelerate the **decarbonisation** of Colchester economy.

### OBJECTIVES

- ▶ Support initiatives to enhance the quality of our environment
- ▶ Work with partners to support businesses to reduce their carbon emissions to achieve net zero goals
- ▶ Support the development of green technology businesses in the borough
- ▶ Identify new economic opportunities from the emerging 'green economy'

## CASE STUDY | THE RACE TO NET ZERO BUSINESS SUPPORT PROGRAMME

November 2021 saw the UK host COP26 – The 26th Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. World leaders met negotiate international agreements to limit greenhouse gas emissions and global warming. But what can be done at local level?

Businesses are aware of the need for change and many are willing to make changes but Covid impacts are dominant currently and for many sectors it's about survival at the moment. Chains and large companies arguably have more capacity and are actively working for change than SMEs through their **Environmental and Social Governance policies** (ESG). But the majority of Colchester's businesses are small and micro enterprises who need support if they are to make meaningful change.

Colbea, the **Colchester Business Enterprise Agency**, has 40 years' experience in providing business support to Colchester businesses.

It is a well-respected organisation which has risen to the challenge of providing high quality business support, funded by CBC, over the past year. It has made a positive difference to Colchester's economic response to the pandemic and now it has the opportunity to do the same for green growth by providing a local business support programme which will take our SME business base through a targeted programme of positive environmental impact transition. It is hoped that this programme will enable local businesses to understand the scope of action needed, identify costs and savings associated with those actions, discover opportunities for new/ adapted products and services and target those markets which need them. Ultimately, reducing their environmental impacts across the board including waste, energy, materials, supply chain contributions, contract procurement competitiveness and carbon emissions in the race to Net Zero.



## A DEEPER DIVE INTO SOME ECONOMIC ASPIRATIONS FOR COLCHESTER



### Aspirations for a Higher-Wage Economy

The Minimum Wage came into effect in 1988. It is a legal requirement for those aged under 23. For those aged over 23 the National Living Wage applies. However, in recent years the concept of the Real Living Wage has emerged. This is an independent calculation of the cost of living based on a basket of household goods and services.

We recognise that employers are facing unprecedented cost pressures at the moment, but our ambition for Colchester is for a higher wage economy where all employers *that can afford to do so*, pay the Real Living Wage as a minimum.

Research from [The Living Wage Foundation](#) shows that adopting the Real Living Wage:

- ▶ improves company reputation
- ▶ enhances attractiveness when recruiting, especially in a competitive market
- ▶ increases motivation and staff retention
- ▶ is a point of difference from the competition
- ▶ improves relations between management and staff



### The Importance of Anchor Institutions in the Colchester Economy

Anchor Institutions are large, non-profit organisations which are the foundation of the local economy. Examples include local Councils, Universities and schools which have fixed assets, often employ local people and need substantial budgets to operate.

Anchor Institutions have a practical and leadership role in community wealth building through their procurement policies to benefit local businesses and places. They could redirect flows of wealth into locally rooted businesses which share the wealth they create with their employees, communities and consumers.

### Understanding the Future Infrastructure Needs of a Fast-Growing Place

The importance of infrastructure is highlighted in national planning policy and needs to meet the requirements set out in the National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Practice Guidance. This states that there's a need to engage with infrastructure providers and that plans should make sufficient provision for infrastructure for transport, telecommunications, security, waste management, water supply, wastewater, flood risk and coastal change management, and the provision of minerals and energy (including heat) and community facilities (such as health, education and cultural infrastructure) and emergency services.

Colchester City Council will be undertaking an audit of infrastructure provision and identifying gaps in provision. This will help the Council and other stakeholders to understand and prioritise the allocation of resources, deliver services in future and prepare investment plans. It will also support future bids for funding.



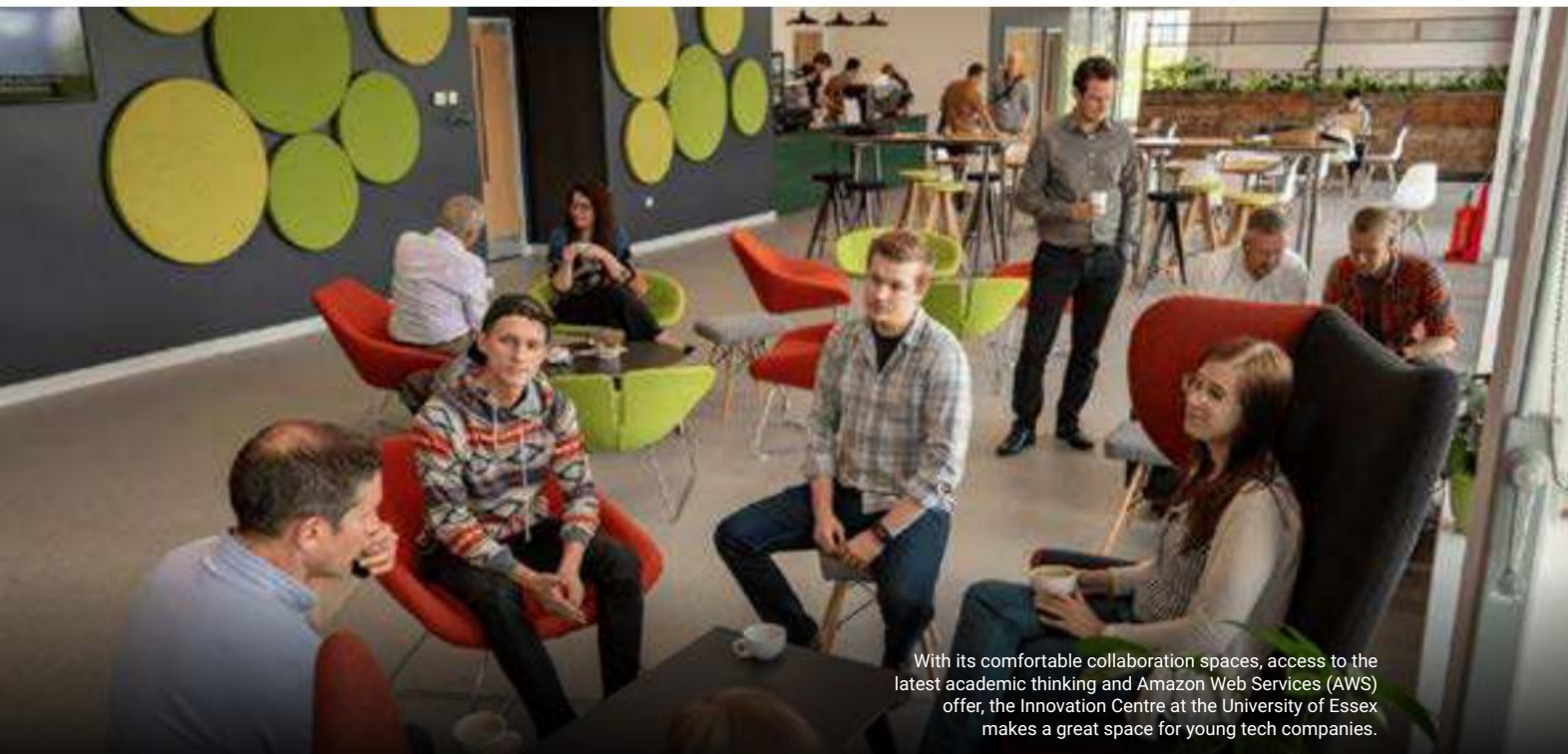


# How We Work

## Influences, Drivers and Partnerships

We work with partners from local to national and align with their strategies to achieve the **best for Colchester**. We use these strategies to help identify opportunities to attract investment for Colchester, often in the form of grants such as from the **Government's Towns' Fund**.

Nationally the **Government** plans to support economic growth through significant investment in infrastructure, skills and innovation and to 'level-up' ([Build Back Better](#)).



With its comfortable collaboration spaces, access to the latest academic thinking and Amazon Web Services (AWS) offer, the Innovation Centre at the University of Essex makes a great space for young tech companies.

Regionally, we work with the **South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP)**. This is one of 38 LEPS, established to provide the vision to drive sustainable private sector-led growth and job creation. LEPS were set up by the Government to be the key body determining strategic economic priorities while making investments and delivering activities to drive growth and create jobs.

[Working Together for a Faster, Smarter and More Sustainable Economic Recovery](#)

We are an active member of the **North Essex Economic Board (NEEB)**. The NEEB is a partnership covering Braintree, Chelmsford, Colchester, Maldon, Tendring and Uttlesford districts, and Essex County Council. It aims to ensure the area can rise to the economic challenges and opportunities we face. Spanning 2020 to 2040, NEEB's ambitious strategy is the first bespoke economic strategy covering North Essex. Through the NEEB we have pooled resources to offer increased business support and skills training.

[North Essex Economic Strategy 2019](#)

## HOW WE WORK

**Essex County Council (ECC)** aims to stimulate growth in Essex over the next 15 years through its new Sector Strategy [ECC Sector Strategy](#)

It aims to:

- ▶ Make Essex a centre of **innovation** and **entrepreneurial** spirit where the benefits of this growth are felt within the county
- ▶ Create an **Economy for Everyone** - ensuring every resident of Essex has the opportunity to gain the skills and experience to succeed in the future economy regardless of their background and identity
- ▶ Shape an **Economy Fit for the Future** - centring green growth as intrinsic to all future growth to ensure we meet our target for a net-zero county by 2035

It identifies:

- ▶ **Enabler Sectors** - construction and digital
- ▶ **Heartbeat Sectors** - care, ageing population
- ▶ **Moonshot Stars** - predictors for growth: advanced engineering, manufacturing, space
- ▶ **Investment and market opportunities** what contributes to our district goals
- ▶ **Catalysts and caveats** - indirect benefits and supply chain impacts

[Colchester Borough Council's Strategic Plan 2020-2023](#)

The Council's key goals are:

- ▶ [Tackling the climate challenge and leading sustainability](#)
- ▶ [Creating safe, healthy, and active communities](#)
- ▶ [Delivering homes for people who need them](#)
- ▶ [Growing a fair economy so everyone benefits](#)
- ▶ [Celebrating our heritage and culture](#)
- ▶ [Achievements and next steps](#)



Drone technology being used to monitor crop production to help farmers increase yields.



Health and care is a growth sector in north Essex due to its ageing population. Partnerships are forming to meet the challenge and the potential commercial opportunity.



The strategy has been developed in partnership with stakeholders. As well as setting out our priorities, it is intended to offer a framework for partners to inform decisions and investments.

This strategy forms part of a web of strategies and programmes which all contribute to driving economic and community development. For example, actions to address specific issues in the Tourism and Hospitality Sector are threaded through the Cultural Strategy, the Leisure Recovery Strategy, the BID's emerging Retail Strategy, the emerging Inclusion and Diversity Strategy, the Town Deal Investment Programme and our Levelling Up Fund bid.

## Other contributing strategies and plans:

[The Our Colchester BID](#) – town centre promotion, business support and lobbying including the Leisure Recovery Strategy.

[Colbea Business Plan](#) – business support, advice and guidance, preparing companies to become greener, preparing companies for procurement opportunities, skills and employability training.

We Are Colchester [Town Deal Investment Plan](#) – place shaping and skills.

[The South East Local Enterprise Partnership \(SELEP\)](#) – is a partnership for growth between business, government, and education.

[The BEST Growth Hub](#) - Growth Hubs are government-funded, which enables them to provide support that is free at the point of delivery. BEST is the Growth Hub for Essex and works closely with Colbea to support local businesses.

[Local Transport Strategy](#) – ability to get to work or study.

[Anchor institutions](#) – are typically large, usually non-profit, public sector organisations whose long-term sustainability is tied to the wellbeing of the communities they serve. Anchor institutions can be galvanised to maximise economic benefit locally: jobs, skills, supply chains, procurement.

[Essex County Council Everyone's Essex Plan](#) and [South East Local Economic Partnership Skills Strategy](#) – integration and development in association with Colbea and employers.

[North Essex Economic Board Strategy](#) / [Success Essex Prosperity and Productivity Plan](#)

[Haven Gateway Partnership vision and objectives](#)

[The Colchester Ambassadors' Group](#)

[University of Essex](#) – international ambitions, talent retention opportunity, business development aspect through knowledge transfer partnerships.

[Colchester Institute](#) – skills pipeline for key sectors.

[Essex Chambers of Commerce](#)

[Federation of Small Business](#)

[ECC Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy](#) – This public health strategy prioritises work that empowers people's ability to work.

Essex Employers [Family Friendly Charter](#). This charter commits organisations to develop and agree principles that govern effective family friendly employment practice across the county. Signatories will gain a charter-mark to them promote family friendly practice in the employment market and wider supply chains.

## COLCHESTER BOROUGH COUNCIL STRATEGIES, PLANS AND POLICIES

[Climate Emergency strategy and action plan](#)

[Communities Can](#) community enabling strategy.

North Essex Parking Partnership [Positive Parking Strategy](#) – affects Colchester's competitiveness as a place to shop, visit and work.

[Asset Management Strategy](#) – strategic land purchase for commercial (employment) use

[Housing and Homelessness Strategy](#) – security of tenure is a key factor in ability to work. Pandemic rent arrears and debt will increase poverty.

[Cultural Strategy](#) – importance in place shaping, image and reputation as well as quality of life in attracting families to invest their lives here (920 new homes a year), a different take on inward investment but arguably still valid.

[Colchester's Digital Strategy](#) - its impact on place competitiveness, new products, new markets, ability to work from home – inward investment opportunity.

[Licensing Policy](#) – affects business.

[Waste Vision and Strategy](#) – affects businesses

## COMMUNITY

Community Wealth Building: to include the [One Colchester](#) strategy, the [Livewell Campaign](#), the Suffolk and North Essex ICS [Integrated Care System](#) work, CBC's [Greenspace Strategy](#) for social prescribing and economic and social wellbeing.

The Mercury Theatre addressing skills shortages through helping young people with personal development and technical skills development so that more gigs, festivals and productions can take place around the region and beyond.



## Our Approach

At a time of limited resource for local government, we want to have as big a positive impact on Colchester's economy as possible. **We are open-minded to new opportunities, but our work is evidence driven.** We seek to make much more happen than we could directly do ourselves by working as envisaged in the Council's Communities Can approach:

- ▶ Constantly scanning the horizon to understand local need and what opportunities exist.
- ▶ Developing strong relationships to allow us to collaborate with others productively.
- ▶ Participating in effective partnerships to amplify the effect of our efforts.
- ▶ Encouraging partners to play to their strengths.
- ▶ Focusing on the borough's strengths rather than deficits to capitalise on opportunities.
- ▶ Using existing assets to leverage new investment, and
- ▶ Concentrating on our role as catalyst and facilitator rather than trying to 'do' everything ourselves.
- ▶ Understanding infrastructure needs around active travel, Ultrafast gigabit broadband infrastructure, 5G WiFi and the connectivity platforms required.



### WHAT WE DO

Influence

Collaborate

Partner

Research

Facilitate

Catalyse

Invest

In particular, we have developed strong and trusting relationships with local agencies such as the **BID** and **Colbea**; are active members of effective partnerships such as **One Colchester**, **We Are Colchester**, and the **North Essex Economic Board (NEEB)**; and are strengthening existing ties by agreeing shared priorities such as with our anchor institutions and particularly with the **University of Essex** through a new Civic-University Agreement.

## CASE STUDY | THE NORTH ESSEX ECONOMIC BOARD (NEEB)

– bridging the span between Government and District Councils through helping businesses when they need it most

Over recent years several councils across north Essex have been working increasingly closer together and never more so than during the Pandemic.

A strategic view was taken across the north Essex business landscape as Government grants came in during 2020/21. Realising that there would be a need to support businesses indirectly as they emerged into recovery, 10% of each district's grant fund was pooled to procure a variety of business support contracts across north Essex.

Each was put out to competitive tender and the Colchester Business Enterprise Agency (Colbea) was awarded five of these contracts. Ashleigh Seymour-Rutherford, Colbea Chief Executive, said: "Working with local councils to provide the best outcome for their businesses and residents is what we do best". "Colbea is delighted to be delivering a well-rounded and extensive suite of support and advice for new and growing business; we recognise that behind every business is a person needing the tools to succeed and we provide the space to work learn and grow."





## The training on offer is:

- ▶ **First Steps to Start-up Success** – an online comprehensive training course for those starting up or developing a new business. Split over two bite-sized sessions, this course takes you through the process of setting up and structuring your business.
- ▶ **Introduction to Finance** – an online course helping you to understand the fundamentals of finance and tax within your business.
- ▶ **Digital Skills** – six online sessions covering social media, project management, online sales, and your website.
- ▶ **Cyber Security** – an online session helping to protect you and your business from cyber threats and online fraud.
- ▶ **Import / Export Training** – six training courses available for those companies who are looking to start importing/exporting, or who are already in the industry and would like to enhance their skills.
- ▶ **Net Zero Business Support Programme** – offering a programme of business support activities to help SMEs across north Essex understand and lower their carbon emissions.

Most courses will be repeated throughout the year, so even the busiest schedules can be accommodated. Further information on all the courses will be available on the Colbea website: [colbea.co.uk/business-training](https://colbea.co.uk/business-training)

To complement the training courses, one-to-one advice sessions for those looking to start a business are also available with Colbea's expert advisors, as well as more specialised advice for the import/export sector.

Cllr Tom Cunningham, from the North Essex Economic Board, encourages businesses to sign-up for the support.

*"We are collectively funding this support because we know firms have had a tough time over the past two years, and the business landscape is ever changing,"* Cllr Cunningham said. *"There is so much opportunity in our growing area that we want to support local small and medium enterprises to really make the most of that – and what better way than to sharpen your skills and offer through this support."*

The North Essex Economic Board is also funding a skills programme, to ensure businesses can attract the right people to work for them, and other business support such as specialist sessions on key sectors.

## Implementation and monitoring

This **Economic Strategy** has a life span of **three years** and sets out our **high-level priorities**. Each year we will produce an action plan to detail how we will work to achieve these priorities.

We will use existing partnerships as well as convening project groups to pursue specific actions.

Particular **monitoring** arrangements are in place for some projects (such as for the Town Deal) and we will use these to monitor and report progress on them. Many of these are inclusive partnerships such as **We are Colchester**.

We will **support** annual surveys of local businesses to add local intelligence to quantitative economic data to understand emerging need, opportunities as well as the impact of our work.

On top of this we will **report progress** against each year's actions plan to senior managers and to the relevant Portfolio Holder.



## The Colchester Prospectus: a New City with Ambition and Potential

The conversation about Colchester has long been framed around the importance of its history and heritage. City status presents an opportunity to re-frame that conversation, to take a future view, to raise our gaze and discuss the kind of place it could and should be and how we might work with business to collectively realise its true potential.

## Colchester is:

### Extending and Intensifying its Enabling Digital Infrastructure

Colchester has long been a leader in investing in its digital infrastructure. The town has already secured more than £50m of government and private sector investment to build a large, open-access fibre network across much of the urban footprint. Gigabit connectivity is available in all the major residential and business clusters, with planned expansion closely interlinked with the exciting 5G and AR/VR programmes now taking shape.

Tim Robinson, Chief Executive of TechEast, the regional body responsible for accelerating growth of the digital and tech economy, said: *"Year after year 'team Colchester' is adding strategic new elements to its digital tech infrastructure and its new Angel network is already playing a key role in dealflow. As befits one of the UK's newest cities the range of digital skills support, startup incubators and plans for cross-sector innovation hubs is impressive and creates the conditions for the next wave of startups to form and then scale".*

Taking a view across these projects it's easy to see that Colchester has many of the ingredients fundamental to a tech cluster. A strong University majoring in computer science, data analytics, business leadership, incubation facilities at the Innovation

Centre on The Knowledge Gateway, a burgeoning creative sector and significant investment and delivery in a digital infrastructure.

It is also growing its own tech talent too and this, combined with flexible office space and significant housing growth and culture, heritage, sport leisure, shops, cafes, restaurants and bars and easy access to the coast and countryside, makes a compelling Colchester prospectus to attract further inward investment from all kinds of technology firms.

Such improved connectivity will enable the Internet of Things - devices and appliances connected together, 5G will bring much faster and more capable WiFi, improved cybersecurity, enable Blockchain technology development and sector specific tech developments.

But in the tech world it's often a breakthrough product which defines a link with its location. By nurturing and enabling tech start-ups and facilitating growth, skills and digital infrastructure Colchester is putting itself in a very strong position to become better known as a 'tech city.'

### An Investment Hot-Spot

Between 2015-21 an estimated £333.8m had been invested in Colchester by the private and public sector. They brought new jobs, new opportunities for learning, added choice, improved quality of the experience of living, working, studying and visiting Colchester and made it even more investable.

Confidence continues. June 2022 saw the announcement that Colchester would be the global base for the new The AIXR Centre for Immersive Innovation. This new centre will be built on the site of the former bus depot in Queen Street. It will become a world focus for all immersive innovations – the Metaverse

Formed in Colchester by Daniel Colaiani, who studied at the University of Essex, AIXR is an internationally respected

voice in the immersive industry. It is associated with global tech giants like Google, Microsoft, Oculus, hp, and Nvidia. Its purpose is to educate the world about XR – extended reality (an umbrella term for all immersive technologies), and what it can do for business.

The new centre will see Colchester as a global focus for all immersive Innovations in the XR industry and will form AIXR's base of international operations, institutionalising the technology for decades to come. It will be one central location, open to all within the community who want to learn about XR, grow within XR and connect with the most passionate people within the immersive world.





## Designing New Places Offering a Blank Canvas for Business

**The Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community (TCBGC)** is a joint project between Tendring District Council, Colchester Borough Council and Essex County Council. Given the national shortage of housing, Garden Communities are planned new communities designed to meet anticipated local growth, which will be a sustainable and attractive place to live, work and visit. The TCBGC is based on the Garden Community principles.

The Garden Community will be delivered through a genuine partnership approach between the public and private sectors, where risk and reward are shared and community empowerment enabled. The plan is for 7,500 – 9,000 homes (to be built over many years out to the 2050s), and is part of a long-term vision of Colchester and Tendring in partnership with Essex County Council to help meet the future growth of the area in a more strategic way.

A new Garden Community provides the opportunity to develop a community of sufficient scale to deliver and be served by new schools, health facilities, and job opportunities with good public transport links to existing town centres and employment areas.

The Covid-19 pandemic has introduced fundamental shifts to working patterns

that can be expected to result in lasting increases to home working and the need for supporting services in nearby centres. The Garden Community model is well-suited to support these new ways of working and we will provide high speed and reliable broadband to enable this.

The Garden Community is also well located, with the University of Essex nearby as well as international gateways with Stansted Airport and the ports at Harwich and Felixstowe along the A120 corridor. The TCBGC includes an allocation of 25 hectares of employment land and economic assessments have shown the equivalent of one job per new home built in the Garden Community is achievable. The 'one job per household' refers to both jobs within the Garden Community itself and within a sustainable commuting distance, so the employment area is wider than just the Garden Community.

And with new growth locations at the University of Essex's Parkside development at The Knowledge Gateway and at Colchester's Northern Gateway with easy access to the A12 trunk road and multiple opportunities to develop in the city centre, Colchester offers great choice for business location.







## Building New Homes for a Growing Population

Colchester's ambition continues around housing and has seen more new housing completions than any other of the 13 Local Authorities in Essex.

Colchester's build rate reflects the Council's willingness to work with developers to bring schemes forward. This growth will continue with a further 920 new homes a year being built out to 2033.

But it's not all about the numbers. There is a concern also to ensure quality of place so that communities can emerge and develop solid foundations too. With an Adopted Local Plan, a visionary approach to developing the new Tendring/ Colchester Borders Garden Community and a commitment to developing affordable housing and a high quality of life, Colchester offers a strong housing offer for people to invest their lives here.



## Investing in Skills Development

Colchester is working with partners in education and business to help build the skills the local workforce needs to take advantage of personal opportunities in the future and to enable businesses to compete effectively.

A known gap nationally is IT and Digital Skills and Colchester will be delivering a new:

- ▶ Digital Working Hub and grow-on space for the creative industries at the new AIXR Centre for Immersive Innovation in the old bus depot in Queen Street
- ▶ Digital Skills Hub - developing the Wilson Marriage Centre to offer improved and transformed digital adult learning opportunities
- ▶ A range of projects funded by the Shared Prosperity Fund to address sectoral skills needs

As well as offering a series of management and business training through the Colchester Business Enterprise Agency it is hoped that this will help to:

- ▶ Upgrade skill levels
- ▶ Offer more career choice for local people
- ▶ Provide a supply of talent to local businesses
- ▶ Raise wage levels in the local economy
- ▶ Enable local businesses to innovate and compete for business

## Increasing Business Support

Developing new spaces for businesses to grow to retain skills and talent to help businesses face the challenge and opportunity of growth, especially in the creative and digital sector. The new AIXR Centre for Immersive Innovation in Queen Street will also offer larger spaces for business as well as access to latest technologies.

The Colchester Business Enterprise Agency and other support organisations are working to enable businesses to access information, advice and guidance in ever new ways to enable businesses to survive, recover and compete effectively.

## Improving Transportation Links

Unlocking the full economic potential of transport corridors to improve access into and out of London.

- ▶ A120 Haven Gateway - London Stansted Airport - Harwich
- ▶ A12 Brentwood - Chelmsford - Colchester
- ▶ Great Eastern Mainline Rail improvements

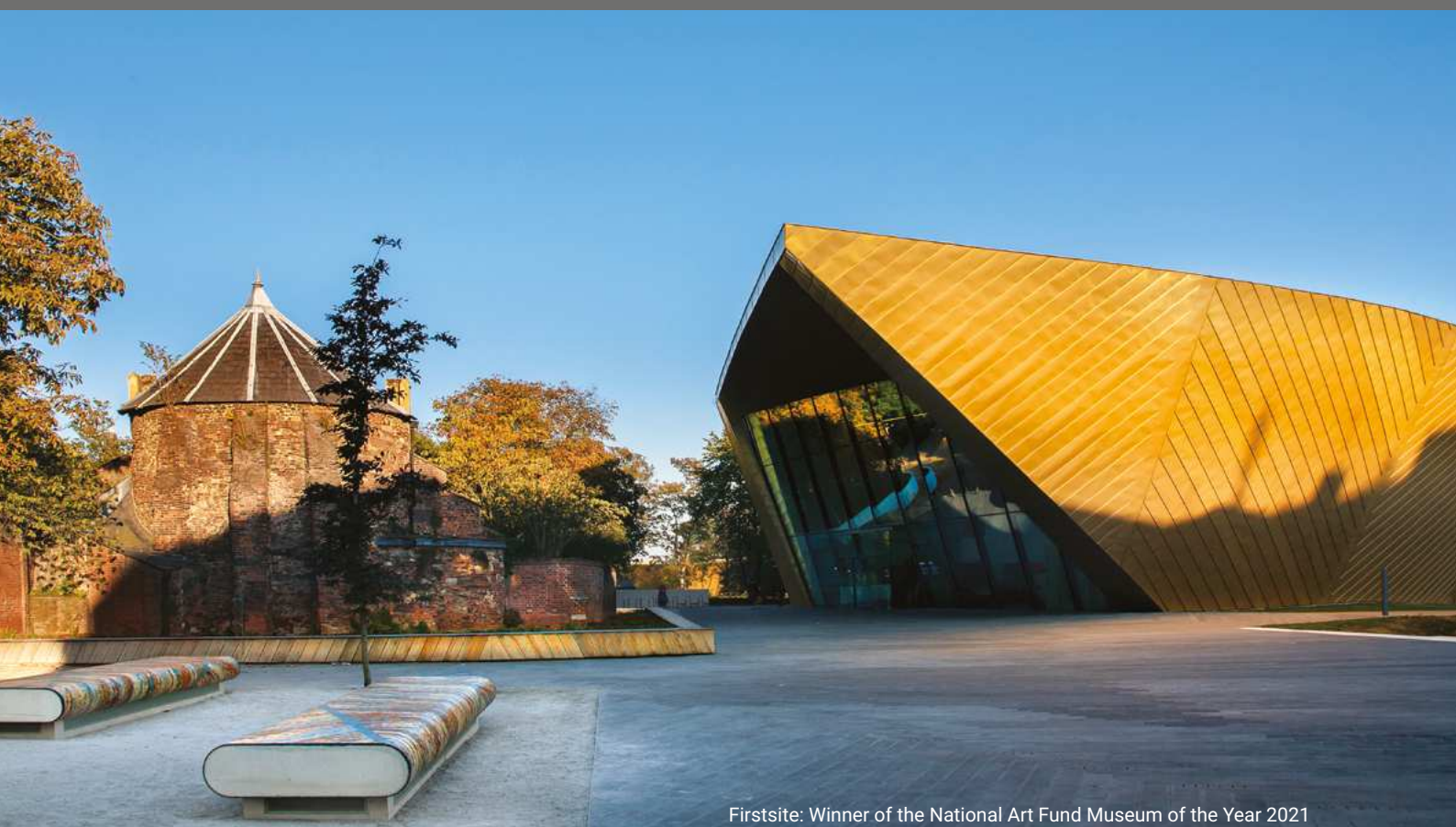
Find out more about how Colchester can help your business to meet your aspirations.  
Contact: [karen.turnbull@colchester.gov.uk](mailto:karen.turnbull@colchester.gov.uk) Tel: 01206 282915.

Colchester Borough Council  
Economic Development  
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[Enterprise@colchester.gov.uk](mailto:Enterprise@colchester.gov.uk)  
Twitter: @ColchBusiness  
Summer 2022



COLCHESTER'S ECONOMIC STRATEGY

# DATA DIGEST



Firstsite: Winner of the National Art Fund Museum of the Year 2021

2018-22



## Contents:

Colchester's new Economic Strategy is due for publication in 2022. It has been developed from a comprehensive evidence base. This includes insights from local business surveys and other consultations, qualitative feedback from workshops, data and analysis from partner strategies, and monitoring of official datasets and reports to understand macro-economic trends.

### **This digest is a summary of this evidence base and includes:**

- ▶ A data dashboard of Colchester's economy
- ▶ Key statistics from our consultation with local businesses
- ▶ Information and data on sector specific drivers for growth, and
- ▶ A summary of key macro-economic issues affecting Colchester businesses.

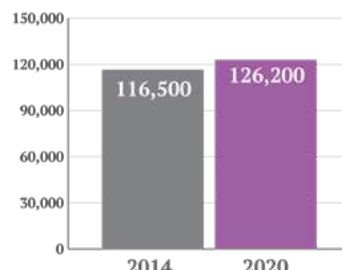


# Data Dashboard of Colchester's Economy



## WORKING AGE POPULATION

The working age population has grown by 8.3% over this time. It's also clear that considerable growth is taking place beyond the working age population, particularly in the older age groups.

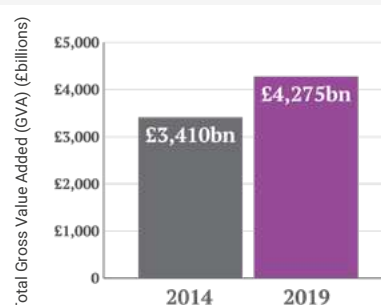


Source: Nomis ONS



## GROSS VALUE ADDED (GVA)

A measure of the Borough's total productivity. From 2014 to 2019 the Borough's GVA or productivity rose by 25.4%.



Source: EEFM



## INDICES OF MULTIPLE DEPRIVATION

The Indices provide a set of relative measures of deprivation for small local areas with an average of approximately 1,500 residents or 650 households across England. Colchester is characterised as having relatively low levels of deprivation.



Source: Department of Housing Communities and Local Government, 2019



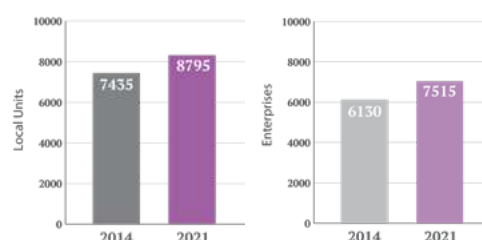
## NATURE OF BUSINESSES

**93%** are Colchester's businesses are micro/small enterprises (with under 50 employees)



## NUMBER OF BUSINESSES

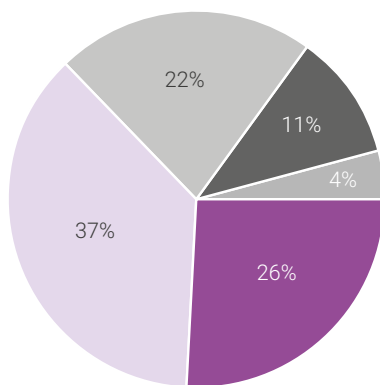
The difference between local units and enterprises can be explained by chain businesses. Tesco for instance is one business (enterprise) but has multiple units in Colchester (local units). There was an 18.3% increase in the number of local units over this period compared with a 22.6% increase in the number of enterprises.



Source: ONS

# Key Statistics from Colchester Businesses

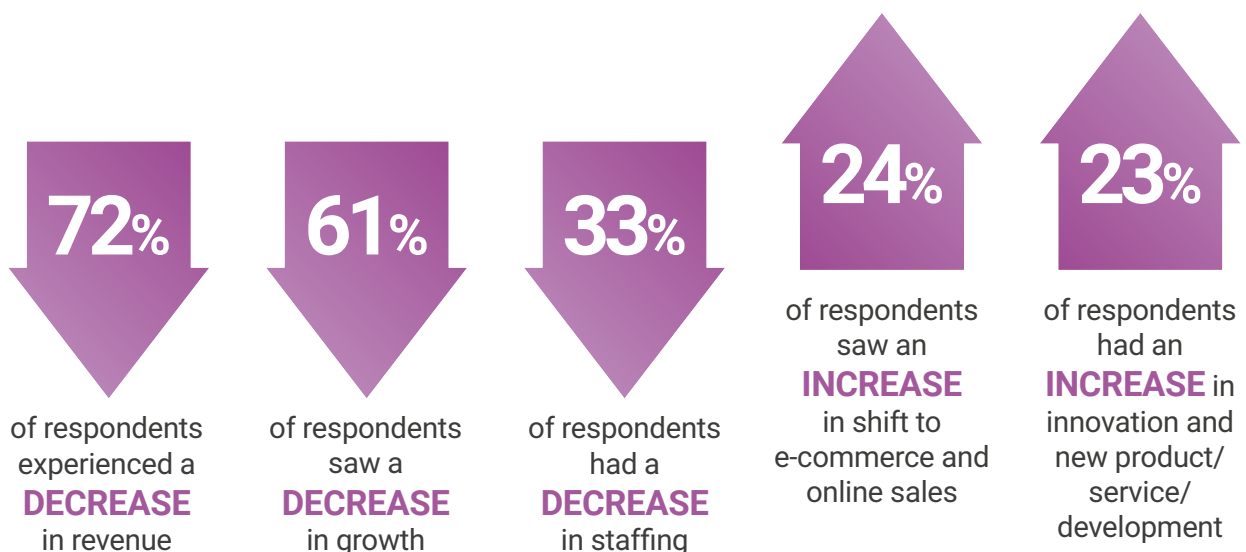
Consultation with businesses in September 2021 revealed that Covid has impacted the economy by driving change to business models and working practices but there is still confidence in Colchester as a place to do business.

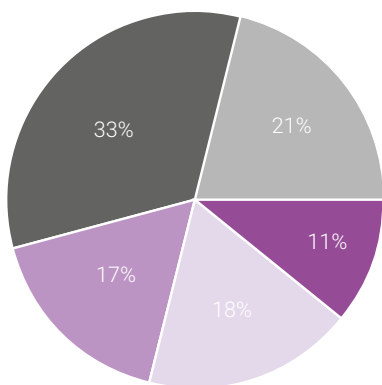


## CHANGES TO BUSINESS MODELS

- ▶ **26%** of respondents made **NO** changes to their business model
- ▶ **37%** of respondents made **MINOR** adaptations to products offered, markets targeted, and distribution channels
- ▶ **22%** of respondents made **SIGNIFICANT** adaptations to products offered, markets targeted and distribution channels used
- ▶ **11%** of respondents had to take a **MAJOR** new approach to products, markets and distribution
- ▶ **4%** of respondents introduced a **NEW** model with new products, markets and/or distribution channels

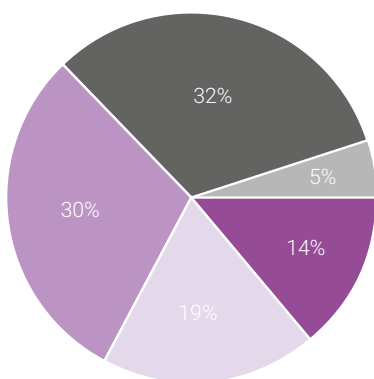
## OTHER EFFECTS ON BUSINESS IN THE YEAR TO SEPTEMBER 2021





## CONFIDENCE AROUND BUSINESS RECOVERY (and this picture also reflected confidence levels around sector recovery)

- ▶ 11% of respondents said **NOT AT ALL CONFIDENT**
- ▶ 18% of respondents said **SLIGHTLY CONFIDENT**
- ▶ 17% of respondents were **NEUTRAL**
- ▶ 33% of respondents said **FAIRLY CONFIDENT**
- ▶ 21% of respondents were **VERY CONFIDENT**



## CONFIDENCE AROUND THE RECOVERY OF THE LOCAL ECONOMY

- ▶ 14% of respondents said **NOT AT ALL CONFIDENT**
- ▶ 19% of respondents said **SLIGHTLY CONFIDENT**
- ▶ 30% of respondents were **NEUTRAL**
- ▶ 32% of respondents said **FAIRLY CONFIDENT**
- ▶ 5% of respondents were **VERY CONFIDENT**



## TOP 6 CONCERNS FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES

(@ September 2021, before the Ukrainian invasion)

FINANCIAL: REVENUE, CASHFLOW, COSTS	AVAILABILITY OF STOCK, MATERIALS, SUPPLY CHAIN ISSUES	FURTHER COVID OUTBREAKS
RECRUITMENT, RETAINING, SUPPORTING AND TRAINING SKILLED EMPLOYEES	OLD CUSTOMERS RETURNING/FINDING NEW CUSTOMERS	PEOPLE RETURNING TO THE HIGH STREET/ TOWN CENTRE

# Sector Specific Drivers for Growth

Colchester has four main growth sectors and four core sectors which have seen significant investment over the life of the current Economic Growth Strategy, eg: new hotels in the tourism sector, or have planned investment through the Town Deal, eg: the Digital Hub in the former Bus Depot in Queen Street.

► **GROWTH SECTORS:** construction, creative and digital, alternative energy and health and care

► **CORE SECTORS:** advanced manufacturing, financial services, retail and tourism

ECC's emerging Sector Development Strategy (2022) identifies five sectors with significant growth potential that could be realised in the county. They are: Construction and Retrofit; Clean Energy; Advanced Manufacturing & Engineering; Digitech; and Life

Sciences (including med-tech and care-tech)

Colchester's, strong cultural sector and visitor economy will also have an important role in building the profile of north Essex as an attractive place to visit, live, and do business to secure inward investment. Colchester's significant investment in the future development of 5G and Ultrafast Broadband will place it at the forefront of the tech opportunities identified within many of these sectors below.



## CONSTRUCTION:

### KEY DRIVERS OF SECTOR GROWTH WILL BE:

- **HOUSEBUILDING TARGETS** – ECC forecast over 40,000 houses will be built in Essex over the next five years, with the construction of six new garden communities over the next 15 years adding 55,000 on top of a further 93,000 homes allocated in local plans up to 2036. Colchester has an annual target to build 920 new homes a year to 2033 including the new Tendring/Colchester Borders Garden Community.
- **MAJOR INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS** – there are a number of significant projects both within the county and nearby that will drive demand in the sector, including the Lower Thames Crossing; and the creation of two new freeports at Freeport East (Harwich/Felixstowe) and Thames Freeport (London Gateway, Tilbury and Dagenham). Colchester has significant infrastructure investment planned or in delivery, including the £19.2m Town Deal investment plan and the £48m investment in digital infrastructure.

- ▶ **CLEAN ENERGY** – there are a number of important offshore wind projects that will draw on the construction sector such as Harwich (North Falls and Five Estuaries) and a number of solar opportunities throughout the county.
- ▶ **RETROFIT** – there is an estimated £1-1.75b economic opportunity to deliver retrofit across Essex.



## **GREEN ENERGY:**

### **KEY DRIVERS OF SECTOR GROWTH WILL BE:**

- ▶ The UK holds a leading global position in offshore wind capacity and the sector is expected to experience significant growth, with increase in demand for workers and skills ahead of the government's goal of 40 gigawatts (GW) of offshore wind by 2030.
- ▶ By 2026 nationally, the sector could employ around 70,000 workers (40,000 direct jobs and 30,000 jobs in the supply chain) compares to around 26,000 presently.
- ▶ The government's Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener sets out the ambition for:
  - ▶ Supporting up to 59,000 jobs in 2024 and up to 120,000 jobs in 2030 across all elements of the sector, from innovative hydrogen production to offshore wind, as well as mobilising additional public and private investment of £150-270 billion
  - ▶ Deliver 5 GW of hydrogen production capacity by 2030, whilst halving emissions from oil and gas
  - ▶ Fully decarbonising the UK's power system by 2035

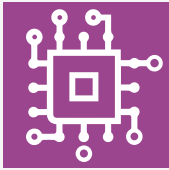


## **ADVANCED MANUFACTURING:**

### **A GROWTH SECTOR AS WELL AS AN ENABLING SECTOR**

- ▶ Essex has a rich history in engineering and manufacturing electronic devices, especially complex ones. Today Essex boasts a burgeoning and growing sector which specialises in the manufacture and use of different electronics used in space, from solar panels on the Hubble Space telescope to sensors and items used on the Mars rover. Colchester's long history of manufacturing is evolving to meet new opportunities. For example: Rapid Electronics is diversifying into supplying charging infrastructure for electronic vehicles through its subsidiary, Replenishh.
- ▶ The sector will be crucial to help build a more resilient and self-sufficient Essex economy to enable and support the planned growth in green energy, construction and retrofit sectors.
- ▶ The space industry is an important sub-sector for Essex with significant potential opportunities – the UK Government has an ambition to capture 10 billion of the global space industry by 2030, worth an estimate £40 billion per annum, and the Knowledge Transfer Network (KTN) and UK Space Agency have already identified a number of Essex businesses which are already operating within the sector.

- ▶ Essex is ideally placed to exploit the opportunity and create future sector growth, growing existing businesses, creating new highly paid and highly skilled jobs and attracting new businesses from UK and overseas to locate in Essex aligning with the strength of the space and satellite applications Sector.
- ▶ Essex-based space businesses play a key role in monitoring and predicting climate change; providing key components for the Copernicus and CO2m programmes which measure the levels of CO2 on earth. A future growth industry is predicted: businesses report on emissions, Essex is primed as one of the world's leading places to manufacture the sensors to enable this.



## DIGI-TECH:

### A GROWTH SECTOR AS WELL AS AN ENABLING SECTOR.

Industry 4.0 is driving demand for digital applications and software in traditionally offline industries. There are unique opportunities in some areas for Essex, in particular:

- ▶ Agri-tech – North Essex has a strong potential for growth in agri-tech, with a focus on agricultural use of land for food production and other uses. The University of Essex has developed partnerships with leading academic research centres, and recently opened the EPIC (Essex Plant Innovation Centre) which focuses on research in a broad range of plant science areas, including agri-tech (such as agricultural robotics which are being piloted at Wilkins in Tiptree).
- ▶ Digital health and care – There are wide ranging applications of digital technologies to support patients, clinicians, and non-clinical staff. Colchester is a hub for care services firms and ECC through its statutory role for social care can use this to leverage public investment to develop and deliver care-tech enabled services. Essex County Council has already established a new care-technology partnerships, and both University of Essex and ARU carry out research in this area. There are a number of examples of existing and developing digital technologies that could also bring benefit for Essex businesses, such as:
  - ▶ The internet of things – digital solutions beyond a single element or individual task, integrating into existing systems, linking them up with computers calculating the optimal processes, alongside the potential to automate those processes with robotics
  - ▶ Artificial intelligence (AI) – helping businesses across all industries to gain automated insights from complex data sets faster than in the past, enabling end-to-end efficiency, improved accuracy, and decision-making
  - ▶ Quantum computing – will play an increasing role in powering machine learning systems and AI platforms to better improve, understand, and interpret large datasets and calculations.





## LIFE SCIENCES (INCLUDING MED-TECH AND CARE-TECH): KEY DRIVERS FOR GROWTH WILL BE:

- ▶ Care and care-tech are important areas for whole-system partners such as the NHS. We have an ageing population and want to ensure that they can age and live well. Care and care-tech are an important part of that and represent real opportunity as well as challenge for the county. Colchester Borough Council is currently working with partners to explore the concept of a Care Tech and Med Tech testbed facility. This would enable researchers and entrepreneurs to test and develop new Care Tech and Med Tech products in an actual care-giving environment or range of environments.
- ▶ Essex has a rich history of developing, commercialising, and manufacturing key components and products for the med-tech sector. Building on these strengths there is a growing demand for med-tech products for diagnostics, digital health, and assisted living support that could be capitalised upon in the county. For example, home diagnostics is a burgeoning market, fast gaining popularity in a world battling the Covid-19 pandemic.
- ▶ The aging population and prevalence of chronic diseases have resulted in rising demand for home healthcare services in the UK.
- ▶ According to UK's Office for National Statistics (ONS), It is projected that there will be an additional 7.5 million people aged 65 years and over in the UK in 50 years' time.





# Five Wider Economic Issues Facing Businesses Today

1

**CLIMATE CHANGE** – Climate change affects most business operations from energy and water consumption, waste generated, consumer demand, supply chain procurement requirements and availability of raw materials among others. Research in 2019 by Deloitte revealed that there is an increasing pressure to act from a broad range of stakeholders:



- ▶ companies' climate responses focus mainly on measures that have a short-term cost-saving effect
- ▶ a thorough understanding of climate risks to the business is rare
- ▶ few companies have a governance, steering and monitoring mechanisms in place to develop and implement comprehensive climate strategies
- ▶ targets for carbon emission reductions are usually not aligned with the Paris Agreement

**Closer to home a study commissioned by the British Business Bank (2022) revealed that:**

- ▶ almost half (44%) of key decision makers at small firms believe the terminology and information around emissions reduction is overcomplex.
- ▶ more than half (58%) said they would find more information and advice about taking action to measure and reduce their business' carbon emissions helpful, while
- ▶ 42% want advice on measuring their carbon footprint.
- ▶ just under half (48%) do not know which information sources on reducing their carbon emissions to trust.

2

**GLOBAL PANDEMIC** – The Covid-19 pandemic has affected businesses and the local economy in a range of ways. Three national lockdowns in addition to more cautious behaviour by the public has had a significant adverse effect on footfall and custom. Changed migration patterns during the pandemic have affected labour supply, particularly key roles such as HGV drivers, in the hospitality sector, and seasonal workers. Changes to working patterns, such as an increase in home-working, presents businesses with both challenges and opportunities.



The easing of restrictions, whilst attractive to hard-hit sectors like aviation, have come with their own complications, with a rise in staff absence due to Covid infections leading to some airlines cancelling flights for example. Similarly, it is affecting the ability to service customer facing businesses such as tourism, retail, leisure and hospitality; sectors which were also worst hit during 2020/21.

3

### RUSSIA'S INVASION OF UKRAINE

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is adding to existing issues within global supply chains resulting from the pandemic, and other factors. It is affecting industries ranging from semiconductors to cars and food. Locally, Fairfield Crisps for instance, relied on Ukrainian rapeseed oil to produce its crisps and now sees the price of this oil and any substitute oils rising dramatically. The war may accelerate the shift from global to regional sourcing. But given China's dominance in manufacturing especially, the shift will only happen gradually and will require Government support. If further sanctions are introduced in response to pressure to manage the use of Russian oil and gas, the UK economy would continue to grow but the pace of growth would be significantly slower.



4

### BRITAIN'S EXIT FROM THE EU

Whilst other economies are seeing recovery from the pandemic in terms of exports, the UK is lagging behind. The Office of Budget Responsibility states that world exports are recovering from Covid growing 8.2%, while the UK has fallen 14% in 3 months to January 2022. EU exit affected trade with the EU. It has also affected labour supply as many EU nationals are not now working in the UK. The OBR claims UK productivity will be reduced by 4% over next 15 years.



## **BUSINESS COSTS** – UK businesses face double challenge of rising costs and lower sales (as at April 2022)



**ENERGY** – A fortnight into the Russian invasion of Ukraine and gas and oil prices peaked over 200% and 50% above their end-2021 levels respectively. Prices have since fallen back but remain well above historic averages. (Office of Budget Responsibility, March 2022)

**INFLATION** – If wholesale energy prices remain as high as markets expect, energy bills are set to rise around another 40% in October 2022, pushing inflation to a 40-year high of 8.7% towards the end of this year. Higher inflation will erode real incomes and reduce consumption, cutting GDP growth this year from the 6.0% originally forecast last October to 3.8%. With inflation outpacing growth in earnings and tax rises taking effect, real living standards are set to fall by 2.2% in 2022-23 – their largest financial year fall on record – and not recover their pre-pandemic level until 2024-25. This will affect consumer and business to business demand from Colchester's companies and beyond. (Office of Budget Responsibility, March 2022)

**TAX RISES** (The Chancellor's Spring Statement March 2022) – more future focussed than immediate support, lack of clarity around self-employed and non-premises based businesses and little to stimulate consumer demand which would help business cashflow, profitability and the ability to invest in the business for future growth.

- ▶ The 1.25% increase in National Insurance contributions from April 2022 is actually 2.5% for employed owner/managers paying PAYE as it applies to both employer and employee contributions.
- ▶ Business Rates – The Chancellor re-iterated the 50% business rates discount for the retail, leisure and hospitality sector as of 1 April but with a cap of £110,000 per company.

**THE UK LABOUR MARKET** – Staff costs rising due to skills and staff shortages (Bank of England, April 2022). The UK labour market has been buffeted by large changes in supply and demand as we emerge from the pandemic.

- ▶ **Labour supply falling** – There are around 350,000 fewer people in the labour market due to changes in work and life preferences as a result of the pandemic. Inward migration has also fallen, either as a result of the pandemic or Brexit. Migration data over the past two years suggest that net migration into the UK fell to around 35,000 people in 2020, compared to more than 250,000 in 2019.
- ▶ **Labour demand rising** – the pandemic increased the demand for labour in some sectors, particularly health. The number of employees on payrolls is now some 700,000 higher than before Covid, half of which are in health, social work, education or public administration. Some of this reflects a shift away from self-employment.



- Overall, the picture in the labour market coming out of Covid is a story of weak labour supply and strong labour demand which is pushing pay rates up and therefore adding to business costs. Pay has been growing faster than pre-pandemic rates since the final quarter of 2020. In the three months to January 2022 whole economy total pay grew at 4.8%, with private sector regular pay – perhaps a better measure of labour market strength – growing at over 4%. The majority of firms are likely to pass at least some of these increases into prices over the coming year, which will add to inflationary pressures.

**SUPPLY CHAIN COSTS RISING** – Manufacturers are indicating that ongoing supply shortages, greater caution among clients, escalating inflationary pressures and geopolitical tensions are all hampering economic recovery. There were also slower upturns in both stocks of purchases and employment and a lengthening of average supplier lead times. At the same time, input prices rose for the twenty-eighth consecutive month, with the rate of increase hitting a three-month high. Finally, business confidence fell to a 14-month low amid concerns about rising geopolitical tensions, inflationary pressures and labour shortages. (Markit Economics for the UK Purchasing Managers' Index, February 2022)



