

6th March 2019

Report of	Assistant Director Policy and Corporate	Author	Matthew Brown
Title	Future High Streets		☎ 07970 822571
Wards affected	Castle Ward		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides further information on a proposed 'ambition statement' to inform the submission of an Expression of Interest to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) 'Future High Streets' programme, followed by a public consultation on the options.

2. Action Required

- 2.1 The Panel notes the report and background information on the Government's 'Future High Streets' programme, and the development of a draft ambition statement in collaboration with key stakeholders.
- 2.2 The Panel is requested to review the draft ambition statement presented in this report, consider the extent to which this meets the key priorities for revisioning and repositioning Colchester's Town centre and any comments be submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Business and Culture for consideration.

3. Background Information

- 3.1 In December 2018, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) launched the 'Future High Streets' programme; <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-high-streets-fund-call-for-proposals>
- 3.2 The key attributes of this fund are as follows:
- The objective of the fund is to **renew and reshape town centres and high streets in a way that improves experience, drives growth and ensures future sustainability.**
 - £675m nationally is available to help town centres and high streets evolve and adapt to significant changes in how people live, shop, use services and spend their leisure time. Notionally this represents around £5m government investment to every large town in the UK and will be released via two competitive calls.
 - The prospectus identifies the following priority themes for investment:
 1. Investment in physical infrastructure,
 2. Acquisition and assembly of land including making improvements to the public realm,
 3. Improvements to transport access, traffic flow and circulation in the area,
 4. Supporting change of use (where appropriate) – housing delivery and densification,

5. Supporting adaptation of the high street in response to changing technology.

- There is a further strand focusing on heritage high streets.

3.3 In response CBC has formed a small working group comprising key interests from Business, Community, Heritage, Creative and Cultural sectors as well as Transport to develop ideas that demonstrate a collective ambition for Colchester's Town Centre, as outlined in section 3.5 below. This work has also been informed by the discussion on Pedestrianisation at the meeting of the Panel on 9 January.

3.4 The draft ambition statement therefore articulates how Colchester's distinctiveness, through its cultural and heritage assets and accessibility can underpin and drive footfall to the town across all groups of visitors and users; including (but not limited to); retail, tourism, an attractive place to meet and socialise (including the night-time economy), a place to work and a place to learn.

3.5 Taking these themes, the 'Future High Streets' programme would be to identify the broad types of intervention which will maintain and further boost the capacity, diversity, attractiveness and long-term sustainability of the town centre as it responds to changes in consumer behaviours and needs; whilst also addressing the significant population growth in the Borough and wider catchment area to the town.

3.6 The draft ambition statement is as follows:

Future High Streets - Colchester

AMBITION: Create a sustainable economic heart for a growing community

OBJECTIVE: Utilise the Town's key heritage assets and distinctiveness to unlock & enable;

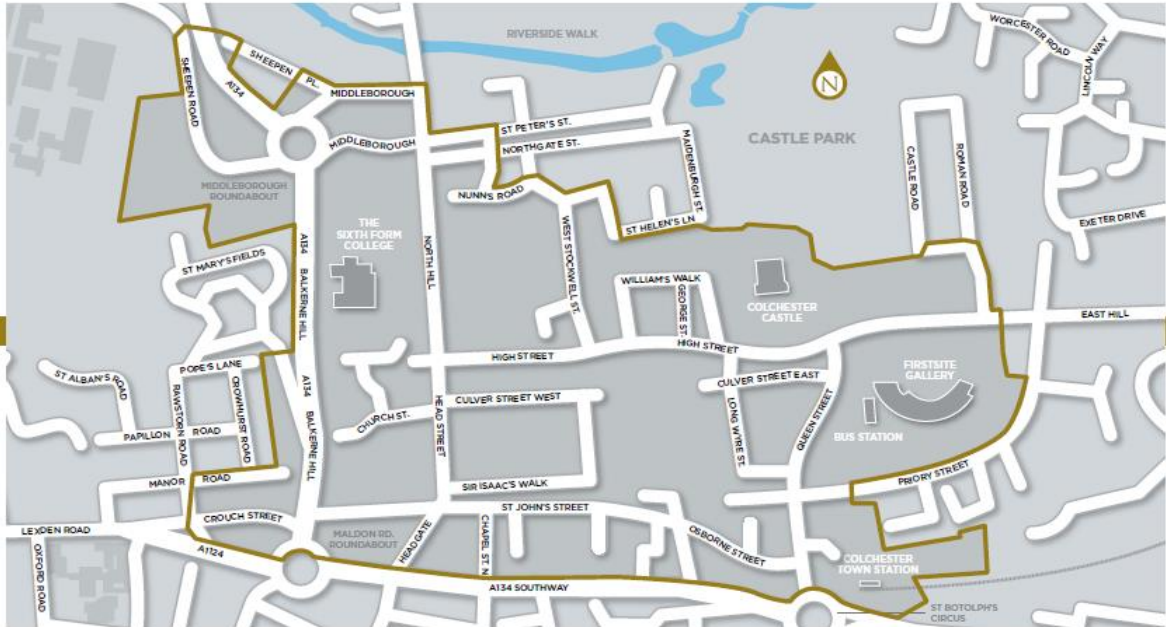
STRATEGY:

1. Bringing key buildings and spaces back into use

2. Enhancing accessibility and capacity; improving experience

3. Showcasing our rich cultural and heritage offer

3.7 For the purposes of the Expression of Interest, the geography is taken as that of 'Our Colchester'; the Business Improvement District (BID) as follows:



3.8 Crucially, Colchester must also present a strong evidence base of the challenges it faces which support the ambition. For Colchester the positioning of key challenges and evidence will be based on halting the decline in several key areas, whilst ensuring the Town is able to fulfil its role supporting significant forecast population growth. Areas to focus on might include:

- Air quality, traffic congestion and journey time reliability
- Crime and perception of crime in the Town Centre
- Number of empty retail units in the Town Centre
- Patterns and trends in the residential population in Castle Ward, and the Wards to the immediate South of the Town Centre
- The demographic of visitors, employees and residents to help inform future requirements
- Future retail trends and the implication for traditional town centres
- Condition of certain heritage and historic assets, including buildings in the Town Centre which together could play a significant role in driving footfall, broadening the appeal and increasing the capacity of the Town Centre.

Next Steps

- 3.9 It is proposed that the themes in section 3.2 to 3.6 will be used to complete an Expression of Interest, ensuring that it provides a compelling ambition for the Town Centre in line with the 'Future High Streets' programme prospectus.
- 3.10 As well as engaging all of the key groups and stakeholders; including the Business Improvement District (BID) in finalising the ambition statement, letters of support will be sought from these key stakeholders in the Town Centre, prior to submitting the Expression of Interest on 22nd March 2019.
- 3.11 Estimated timescales for the following stages of the Programme will be:
- Summer 2019: announcement on places moving to Phase 2 (business case development)
 - Late 2019: first round of final business cases for Phase 2 to be submitted by local authorities

- Spring 2020: all remaining final business cases for Phase 2 to be submitted
- Not before 2020: Second round of applications to the Future High Streets Fund opens

4. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

- 4.1 Any schemes that may subsequently be developed if the bid is successful will require full consideration to be given to equality and diversity impacts. An Equality Impact Assessment will therefore be completed as part of the project, initially as part of the consultation phase.

5. Strategic Plan References

- 5.1 Working with partners to create a shared vision for a vibrant town centre is identified as a priority in the CBC Strategic Plan.

6. Consultation

- 6.1 It is proposed that ongoing public and stakeholder consultation should take place throughout this project. The next stages of this work will include undertaking consultation on the ambition statement described in this report.
- 6.2 The current requirement is for Colchester Borough Council to submit an Expression of Interest. If the Council progresses to subsequent stages of the programme (as outlined in section 4.6 above), a public and communication plan will be established to maximise publicity and awareness about the programme and to ensure optimum engagement with communities and stakeholders.

7. Publicity Considerations

- 7.1 Publicity will arise as a result of the report/consultation which may be positive in relation to taking a partnership approach to enhance the town centre but could be negative in relation to the 'challenges' being identified in the bid.

8. Financial implications

- 8.1 There are no financial implications at this stage of the programme and the Expression of Interest is being developed within existing resources. If the CBC application progresses to subsequent stages of the programme (as outlined in section 4.6 above), business cases will be developed in line with Colchester Borough Council's established approaches.

9. Health, Wellbeing, Community Safety, Health and Safety and Risk Management Implications

- 9.1 No implications are identified at this stage.

Background Papers

- Future High Streets Programme: (includes Supplementary Guidance on programme): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-high-streets-fund-call-for-proposals>
- Revitalising Town Centres (Local Government Association): <https://www.local.gov.uk/revitalising-town-centres-handbook-council-leadership>
- Our Colchester (Business Improvement District) Vision: <https://ourcolchester.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Our-Colchester-BID-Business-Plan-Web.pdf>
- 'The High Street Report' and 'High Street 2030 – Achieving Change': <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-high-street-report>
- Grimsey Review 2: <http://www.vanishinghighstreet.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/GrimseyReview2.pdf>
- Colchester Town Centre Plan – Supplementary Planning Document: <https://www.colchester.gov.uk/info/cbc-article/?catid=adopted-guidance&id=KA-02222>