

Better Colchester Strategic Plan Action Plan (SPAP) 2020 – 2023 Year End Summary Report covering April 2021 – March 2022

Themes:

- **Tackling the climate challenge and leading sustainability**
- **Creating safe, healthy, and active communities**
- **Delivering homes for people who need them**
- **Growing a better economy so everyone benefits**
- **Celebrating our heritage and culture (Communities)**

Tackling the climate challenge and leading sustainability:

- Respond to the Climate Emergency
- Conserve and enhance biodiversity
- Enable more opportunity for walking and cycling around Colchester
- Strategic Priorities achievements and next steps

Respond to the Climate Emergency

- The Council's carbon emissions were reduced by 12.8% (791.5 tonnes of CO₂e) since 2020 in line with our latest climate Emergency Action Plan.
- The Climate Change Team secured £500k of grant funding to replace Rowan House's 30-year-old gas heating system with a low carbon system.
- Tools such as the Sustainability and Carbon Reduction Assessment Checklist were embedded to help service areas and projects achieve behaviour change and best practice.
- CAReless pollution 'No idling' campaign was awarded 'Highly Commended' at 'Sustainability Leaders Awards 2022' and achieved a 53% reduction in idling car engines at traffic lights in our Air Quality Management Areas.

Conserve and enhance biodiversity

- Stopped the use of glyphosate weedkiller on Colchester Borough Homes sites through consultation with residents.
- Urban planting has been completed.
- First year of wildflower and naturalising has taken place, having a positive impact on biodiversity.
- Supported Wivenhoe 'no mow, no sow' trial and started discussions to include further sites and the support for other Parish and Town Councils to adopt the same approach.

Enable more opportunity for walking and cycling around Colchester

- The Sustainable Travel Team secured an unprecedented fourth consecutive round of Defra funding for projects in Colchester targeting increased use of sustainable travel, healthier travel, and cleaner air quality.
- The Council's E-Cargo bikes project saw over 13,000 miles travelled on cargo bikes instead of in cars and vans.
- Over 15,000 people are now subscribed to use E-Scooters in Colchester, with over 286,000 miles travelled on scooters during 2021-2022.
- Progressed projects such as Colchester's first E-Car Club, and first Secure Cycle Parking Hub, that will both be ready to operate in Summer 2022, as well as secure future "active travel" schemes that are included in the Town Deal, Levelling Up Fund bid, Active Travel Fund 2 project and Local Cycling Walking Infrastructure Projects (LCWIP) with Essex County Council.

Strategic Priorities achievements and next steps

- The greening policy continues to be progressed, reviewed and developed.
- All initiatives to support residents to reduce, reuse and recycle their waste, such as litter engagement campaign, additional operative resource and smart bins have been completed.
- The investment project into Shrub End depot has progressed well and to plan, whilst a long-term strategy is still under development.

Creating safe, healthy and active communities:

- Build on community strengths and assets
- Tackle the causes of inequality and support our most vulnerable people
- Provide opportunities for young people
- Strategic Priorities achievements and next steps

Build on community strengths and assets

- Embedded Communities Can with the system, partners and communities including training and awareness, learning from best practice, capacity building and outcomes focus, enabling an Asset Based Community Development Approach.
- Review, promotion and support of Community Assets already in place to maximise their benefit to our residents including maximising the S106 development contributions available to support this.
- Collaborated and influenced outcomes through the new Alliance Neighbourhood Model of working across NEE with all system partners.
- Worked with Communities to maximise and deliver community infrastructure to mitigate the impacts of development (Community S106 programme).

Tackle the causes of inequality and support our most vulnerable people

- Improved the advice, support and signposting to grants to reduce the impact of increasing fuel prices and improve energy efficiency in homes.
- Worked to address the housing issues that exacerbate inequalities and impact on the most vulnerable, including supply, healthier homes, being able to remain in your home and tackling criminal landlords.
- Used new CCG funding to build capacity and improve outcomes which tackle inequalities across Colchester and Tendring.
- Influenced and worked with partners to leverage external funding aimed at improving outcomes for those suffering from Domestic Violence & our Refugee and Asylum Seeker Communities.

Provide opportunities for young people

- Maximised the Youth facilities Town Deal project funding with other monies to provide the best youth provision possible in Colchester.
- Used the Local Delivery Pilot to invest in projects to encourage physical activity in our young people.
- Worked with the Alliance partners in the Start Well domain to ensure that all young people have the best possible start in life.

Strategic Priorities achievements and next steps

- Communities Can approach embedded across the System with well trained staff, supportive Members and a community led or co-produced approach that realises the potential and delivers tangible outcomes that reduce the inequalities faced by many.
- Maximising the value of significant investment made by the CCG, aimed at reducing inequalities across Colchester.
- Implementing the newly agreed Cost of Living action plan to help residents through the current cost of living crisis, both short and long term.

Delivering homes for people who need them:

- Increase the number, quality and types of homes
- Prevent households from experiencing homelessness
- Create new communities and adopt a new Local Plan that delivers jobs, homes and the infrastructure to meet the borough's future needs
- Strategic Priorities achievements and next steps

Increase the number, quality and types of homes delivered by the Council

- The Council's commercial housebuilding company, Colchester Amphora Homes Ltd, completed their first mixed-use development including 30% affordable homes.
- The "New Council Housebuilding Programme" delivered a total of 78 additional affordable homes in 2021-2022, remaining on track to meet the target of 380 additional affordable homes between 2019-2024.

Increase the number, quality and types of homes delivered by the Council

- A new HRA Asset Management Strategy and 30-Year Business Plan was agreed to provide a viable long-term programme for the 7,000 affordable homes managed by Colchester Borough Homes to maintain them with high levels of decency, safety compliance, and energy efficiency works; to benefit tenants.
- The “100 homes” project completed, ‘buying back’ 100 former council homes and undertaking works to improve their energy performance before making them available for new tenants.

Prevent households from experiencing homelessness

- The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Delivery Plan actions were reviewed, and an updated Delivery Plan and Progress Report was published.
- During 2021-2022 homelessness was prevented for 190 households and there were 108 households assisted into accommodation under the relief duty.
- The Rough Sleeper Team provided assistance to 124 rough sleepers and accommodated 38, whilst 16 were accommodated under the governments’ “Protect and Vaccinate” initiative, and 9 rough sleepers were reconnected.
- The Council secured £457,500 capital and £105,700 revenue funding under the governments “Rough Sleeper Accommodation Pathway” (RSAP) to purchase 6 ex-Council one-bed flats as “move on” accommodation and provide a support worker for 3 years.

Create new communities and adopt a new Local Plan that delivers jobs, homes and the infrastructure to meet the borough’s future needs

- Inspectors found the Local Plan sound, which allocates sites for housing, employment and associated infrastructure.
- Review of S106 processes undertaken to ensure infrastructure is delivered in accordance with strategic priorities.
- Work progressed on Joint DPD for TCBGC and first Joint Committee held.

Strategic Priorities achievements and next steps

- Adoption of the Local Plan.
- Produce Supplementary Planning Documents on Affordable Housing/Housing Standards and Specialist Housing as well as Climate Change and Sustainability.
- Submission of Joint DPD for TCBGC to provide a framework for the development of a new community.
- Work with the local community to review ecology evidence and secure a country park/nature reserve at Middlewick.

Growing a better economy so everyone benefits:

- Enable Economic Recovery from Covid-19 ensuring all residents benefit from growth
- Work with partners to deliver a shared vision for a vibrant town
- Create an environment that attracts inward investment to Colchester and help businesses to flourish
- Strategic Priorities achievements and next steps

Enable Economic Recovery from Covid-19 ensuring all residents benefit from growth

- Support and grants have been provided to businesses to support them through the pandemic. As well as providing direct grants, we have worked with partners in North Essex Economic Board to jointly fund business support using Government funding. This has included: Click it Local which provided a year-long pilot online shopping portal for independent local businesses, a suite of business advice services (Digital, Financial, Import/Export, Skills), A Net Zero Business Support Programme.
- The support we have provided was recognised by the Local Government Chronicle with the Council shortlisted for a national award.

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

- We have started work with Essex County Council and partners to develop a Masterplan for the Town Centre.
- We have worked with the Colchester Business Improvement District (BID) to deliver new parklets on the High Street in October 2021 and are working with them to install new gateway signage to promote use of local town centre retail which will be installed later in 2022.

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

- Our work with 'We are Colchester' partners to deliver the Town Deal will include improved public spaces, easier transport, better digital connection, and new community facilities. We have prepared and submitted Business Cases to access funding and have completed considerable feasibility and design work.
- We have prepared a bid to attempt to attract Government Levelling Up funding for the Town Centre.

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

- We have prepared a new Economic Growth Strategy for the borough. This sets out our priorities for supporting the Borough's economy and job creation, focus our Economic Development work, and respond to Strategies of partner agencies such as Essex County Council.
- We have an up-to-date Local Plan in place that allocates sufficient land and contains policies to encourage economic growth.
- We continue to approve of applications in line with policies to attract new businesses and allow existing firms to thrive. The former Andersons Yard at Marks Tey is being redeveloped and extended to facilitate this.
- The Asset Management Strategy was updated to focus on post Covid recovery and asset management initiatives continued to be undertaken on Council-owned sites (operational, investment and surplus) during 2021. Continued strategic and asset management of regeneration and development sites including Colchester Northern Gateway, Hythe, and the Town Centre.

Strategic Priorities achievements and next steps

- Town Deal Business Cases prepared and ready for delivery to commence.
- Masterplan work started – engagement with stakeholders underway.
- Economic Strategy Delivery Plan will be agreed to ensure the priorities in the Strategy are achieved.

Celebrating our heritage and culture:

- Agree and implement a new Cultural Strategy that supports our cultural assets

- Strengthen Colchester's tourism sector and welcome more visitors each year
- Protect, enhance and celebrate Colchester's unique heritage
- Strategic Priorities achievements and next steps

Agree and implement a new Cultural Strategy that supports our cultural assets

- Specialist agency Counterculture were appointed by open tender to deliver the Strategy, working with a Project Group including external stakeholders.
- Following extensive public and stakeholder consultation the new Cultural Strategy was endorsed by Cabinet in March 2022.
- The Council committed to extending Strategic Arts Partner funding to 2026, providing continuity of support to the key cultural assets underpinning delivery of the Cultural Strategy.
- Responding to feedback received during the consultation an early outcome achieved against the Strategy Action Plan was the launch of the Cultural and Creative Events Fund, which will support 28 projects in 2022.

Strengthen Colchester's tourism sector and welcome more visitors each year

- 2021 tourism campaigns aligned with the Government Roadmap Out Of Lockdown and included the 'Colchester and the Beautiful Borough Welcomes You Back' film and 'Colchester Roman Holiday' themed staycation campaign with sponsorship of the Liverpool Street ticket gates (Network Rail 915,206 verified passenger contacts).
- Partnership working with Visit Essex included a targeted consumer campaign featuring London Underground advertising; two of the five campaign images used were in the Borough of Colchester.
- Local tourism businesses support included free or discounted advertising on www.visitcolchester.com (extended into 2022).
- New tourism products developed; Hidden Colchester Walking Trail, Colchester to Wivenhoe Art and Heritage Trail (funded by Welcome Back Grant) and the Family Roman Trivia Trail.

Protect, enhance and celebrate Colchester's unique heritage

- With the easing of COVID related restrictions, all three museums reopened during the summer with visitor numbers and income swiftly returning to pre-pandemic levels at the Castle, outperforming parallel museum services.
- The recovery at the castle was aided by the delivery of the Arts Council funded exhibition, 'Decoding the Roman Dead', a partnership research project with the University of Reading with digital outputs reaching more than 500,000 people through a collaboration with 'History Hit'.
- School numbers were slower to return but pre-pandemic levels were achieved in the last months of the financial year.
- A feasibility study for the redevelopment of the Natural History Museum was conducted by a consultant team alongside public and stakeholder consultation.

Strategic Priorities achievements and next steps

- A Roman mosaic in Lion Walk, originally discovered in the 1980s was located by Colchester Archaeological Trust and a consultancy appointed to excavate and display it under glass and in situ – anticipated completion late in 2022.
- A collaboration with the University of Durham was founded to conduct geophysical surveys in and around Gosbecks Archaeological Park to take place in 2022 ahead of a research project by the university on parallel sites throughout the UK.
- Vegetation cleared by Parks Team at Duncan's Gate and scheduled monument consent acquired for clearing and 3D scanning of Roman drain as well as the excavation of a nearby anomaly – scheduled for spring/summer 2022.
- Lighting was installed in the trees around the Castle and Natural History Museum with Welcome Back funding.