

Better Colchester Strategic Plan Action Plan (SPAP) 2020 – 2023

Half Year Report covering April - September 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**

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 agreed to develop a 17.5 Hectare Solar Park and Microgrid at the Northern Gateway and has completed RIBA stage 1 and 2 feasibility/viability work, now proceeding onto a planning application stage.
- The Council has completed the detailed design work for the Energy centre and Heat Network connections at the Northern Gateway ready to proceed to construction stage in 2023.
- The HVAC renewable heating system at Rowan House was successfully installed after the Climate Change Team secured £500k of Salix funding for this project to replace 30-year old gas boilers.

Respond to the Climate Emergency

- Work started on a new Carbon Management plan 2022-2027 and seven (7) properties are having detailed Decarbonisation Plans prepared that will be ready in November 2022; to understand further carbon reduction possibilities and costing for our assets.
- The Council's carbon emissions for financial year 2021/22 increased by 9.7% (525 tonnes of CO₂e) compared to 2020/21; however, 2020/21 was a year where operations were significantly impacted by Covid-19 (buildings shut for long periods and some operations stopped) so the 2021/22 emissions do reflect a 4.3% decrease compared to 2019/20 (pre pandemic).
- CAREless pollution 'No idling' campaign has produced a short film showcasing what local people are doing to tackle air pollution, worked with 22 schools and has promoted the campaign through sharing resources with businesses and the public and a range of media and events over the summer.
- Study 3 of the signage project testing psychological based messages in Brook St and Eastgates to encourage drivers to switch their engine off continued and finished in September. Results will be available at the end of October.
- Research has been undertaken with a number of logistics software companies to explore opportunities to develop the app for the new Defra funded eCargo Bike concierge service to be developed for the town centre for shoppers to have their shopping delivered home or to a locker in an outlying carpark leaving them free to spend more leisure time in town.

Conserve and enhance biodiversity

- The Colchester Woodland and Biodiversity Project will continue to develop in 22/23 by continuing to plant trees in suitable areas and by focusing on the naturalisation of sites, enhancing the biodiversity further, reviewing the management regimes and continue to communicate changes to our communities.
- To commemorate the Queen's Jubilee year, we delivered the Jubilee Tree Canopy Project in partnership with our local communities. We received requests for 22 Jubilee Oak Trees from Town and Parish Councils 11 of which have now been planted with a further 11 due to be planted during November 2022 when the planting season begins again.

Conserve and enhance biodiversity

- We delivered a Blossoms Circles programme, commemorating 2020 at King's Meadow. Around 124 volunteers helped plant the blossom circles. Four local poets were invited to write poems which are now displayed at the site, and the poetry reading event took place in April which was a huge success.
- We will shortly be planting 125 street trees in 16 different locations following a successful application to the Local Authority Tree Scape fund. These locations have been suggested by local Councillors.
- Now that the policy has been in place and we have extended it to other sites, a review is currently being undertaken on the impact and effectiveness, and recommendations or changes will be made as appropriate.
- Working in partnership with Wivenhoe Town Council, a total of 24 sites are now left longer incorporating the 'no mow, no sow' principle.
- Discussions have been held with Ward Members in Greenstead to explore possible Nature Recovery sites. Locations have been agreed at Magnolia Fields and Hickery Avenue to be left as wildflower sites. It is anticipated that more discussions will be held with other Town and Parish Councils and local Councillors to identify further sites across the Borough.

Enable more opportunity for walking and cycling around Colchester

- After the Sustainable Travel Team secured an unprecedented 4th consecutive round of Defra funding in 2021-22, we have submitted a 5th bid for an overarching project to combine the previous 4 projects targeting increased use of sustainable, healthier travel and cleaner air quality.
- The Council awarded a contract for the first E-Car Club which will open in Colchester in Autumn 2022 and provide a growing network of electric cars available for hire use over the coming years.
- The Council supported ECC and Tier in extending the E-Scooter trial until May 2024 with over 18,500 people now subscribed, and over 8,000 regularly active riders in Colchester, with over 300,000 miles travelled on scooters across more than 445,000 total rides now taken.

Enable more opportunity for walking and cycling around Colchester

- The Council has supported Tier in introducing E-Hire Bikes to supplement the E-Scooters and add choice for different demographics from Autumn/Winter 2022.
- “Fixing the Link” started the planned “Phase 2” projects with the replacement of the yellow flags from North Station to High Street, funded by Greater Anglia, ECC and CBC.
- The first Secure Cycle Parking Hub has progressed through final legal and fire safety checks, ready to open in Autumn/Winter 2022.
- Two shared pay as you go eCargo bike hubs are under development with the Council led Town Centre hub anticipated to be launched in Autumn 2022 and the Old Heath recreation ground hub in 2023. The scheme has been promoted over the summer at local events and over 200 residents have had a go on an eCargo Bike and given feedback.
- The Levelling Up Fund bid included a number of walking and cycling improvements and the Active Travel Fund 2 projects have been progressing ready to deliver the Local Cycling Walking Infrastructure Projects (LCWIP) with Essex County Council.
- The Council’s E-Cargo bikes project has collectively ridden over 25,000 miles to date saving approximately 7,710 tonnes of carbon compared to equivalent car journeys

Strategic Priorities achievements and next steps

- Continue to develop plans for tree planting along parts of the River Colne, as well as works to manage flooding from riverside lake near Castle Park.
- Completed workshops in collaboration with the University of Essex considering a participatory budgeting approach to the development of the Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy, considering the River Colne. Present the findings from the workshops to Policy Panel as part of the strategy development.
- Continued with preparations of a new Castle Park Management Plan.
- Completed site safety measures to reduce the risk of unauthorised site incursions.
- Undertake consultation with key stakeholders on proposed plans at Cymbeline Meadow.

- **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

- Embedding 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, funding is being sourced for a dedicated post to sit in C360.
- Continual 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, including mapping warm spaces for the cost of living support
- Collaborate and influence outcomes through the new Alliance Neighbourhood Model of working across NEE with all system partners.
- Work 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

- Improve the advice, support and signposting to grants to reduce the impact of increasing fuel prices and improve energy efficiency in homes
- Work 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.

Tackle the causes of inequality and support our most vulnerable people

- Using NEE ICB funding to build capacity and improve outcomes which tackle inequalities across Colchester and Tendring
- Influence and work with partners to leverage external funding aimed at improving outcomes for those suffering from Domestic Violence & our Refugee and Asylum Seeker Communities.
- Programme of system support, advice, communications and signposting in place to assist resident with the cost of living crisis

Provide opportunities for young people

- Maximising the Youth facilities and Heart of Greenstead Town Deal projects funding with other monies to provide the best youth provision possible in Colchester.
- Using the Local Delivery Pilot to invest in projects to encourage physical activity in our young people.
- Working 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 NEE ICB, 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.
- Programme of system support, advice, communications and signposting in place to assist resident with the cost of living crisis

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

- The Strategic Plan target for 2020 to 2023 is to deliver 380 affordable homes (set pre Covid). Currently 267 homes have been delivered.
- From April – end of September 2022 a total of 41 new homes were delivered including 18 with Registered Providers via S106 agreements, 15 via 100 Homes & Acquisitions and 8 Council new build.
- Colchester's new Housing Strategy 2022-25 was developed by the Council and its partner organisations and adopted by Cabinet in July. The Strategy sets out our ambition for housing over the next 5 years including increasing the supply of affordable homes that are energy efficient.
- Military Road was completed, providing 8 new affordable homes owned by the Council and now occupied by tenants from the housing needs register.
- All 5 sites for the "Phase 3 Garage Sites" obtained planning permission to deliver more new Council-owned affordable homes in 2023.
- The tender of the contract to build Cross Cottages, a garage site in Boxted, was issued in order to progress into a construction phase for this site.
- The Council agreed to enter into 2 new "package deals" to acquire land with affordable homes, and is progressing the legal agreements on this new method of delivering affordable homes owned by the Council.
- The "Accessible Homes" Project was agreed, and initiated, to seek sites to deliver 10 new affordable homes specifically targeting and unmet need for fully adapted properties.

Prevent households from experiencing homelessness

- The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Delivery Plan actions are due to be reviewed for 2022-23 and an updated Delivery Plan and Progress Report will be published.
- Between April and the end of September 2022, homelessness was prevented for 96 households and 43 households were assisted into accommodation under the relief duty.
- Between April and the end of September 2022, the Rough Sleeper Team provided support and assistance to 43 rough sleepers and accommodated 14, whilst 19 rough sleepers were reconnected.
- The Council secured £811,599 funding under the governments “Rough Sleeper Initiative” (RSI) for 3 years (2022-25), to continue to provide outreach, tenancy support and accommodation for rough sleepers or those at risk of sleeping rough.

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

- New Local Plan adopted, 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 Joint Committees held.

Strategic Priorities achievements and next steps

- Local Plan adopted in July
- Produce Supplementary Planning Documents on Affordable Housing/Housing Standards and Specialist Housing as well as Climate Change and Sustainability and Active Travel SPD

- 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
- Undertake Infrastructure Audit

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.
- We are working with partners on the North Essex Economic Board to provide specialist support to businesses including on cost reduction and decarbonising.

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

- Our bid for City Status was successful and we are engaging partners to agree how to capitalise on this
- Work with Essex County Council and partners to develop a Masterplan for the Town Centre is well underway with strong engagement with partners and stakeholders.
- We are working with the Business Improvement District to support businesses through their Leisure Recovery Strategy and on projects such as to install new gateway signage to promote use of local town centre retail.
- Government has approved all of our Town Deal business cases and so projects are mobilising to deliver improved public spaces, easier transport, better digital connection, and new community facilities.

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

- We have submitted a £20m bid to the Government's Levelling Up funding for the Town Centre.
- We have agreed an Investment Plan for our allocation of the Government's Shared Prosperity Fund and submitted it for approval.
- We are taking the new Economic Strategy through adoption and developing actions to deliver if 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.

Strategic Priorities achievements and next steps

- Town Deal Business Cases approved and projects mobilising.
- Masterplan work underway– 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 (Communities)

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

- Delivering on the priority action in the Cultural Strategy 'Build on existing sectoral and cross sector partnership working and collaboration' by funding sector body Creative Colchester to set up a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) and providing organisational capacity to build on this via a grant from the Shared Prosperity Fund (TBC).
- The Shared Prosperity Fund will also support three projects to be delivered by Creative Colchester; business support for the cultural sector and creative industries in Colchester; a new monthly cultural offer in the City Centre bridging the gap between the day and night economies and a project working with local schools to encourage young residents to pursue careers in our local cultural industries.
- Funding has been allocated for Year 2 of the Cultural and Creative Events Fund as per the recommendation in the Cultural Strategy to provide micro grants to arts, cultural and heritage activity.

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

- To help build back awareness of and confidence in Colchester with the group travel industry and mitigate costs and other issues which can deter groups from visiting; launch of coach and group tourism incentive scheme supported by targeted promotional campaign including free bookable town centre coach parking (previously pay and display and not reservable), refreshment/shopping vouchers for drivers/couriers, discounts to attractions.

Protect, enhance and celebrate Colchester's unique heritage

- Visitor numbers in the first half of 2022/23 have largely returned to pre-pandemic levels with income higher than 2019/20. Hollytrees Museum numbers remain down although investment is planned over the next 12 months.
- The recovery of the Castle has been aided by the delivery of the exhibition, 'Wicked Spirits' that sustained visitor numbers despite weather during the summer that would typically inhibit museum visits.
- School visits have also returned to pre-pandemic levels. Schools were the slowest audience to return so the resurgence of their visits has been significant.
- With the completion of a feasibility study and extensive consultation, the team is now identifying and preparing to secure funding for the redevelopment of the Natural History Museum.

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 – it is now anticipated to be completed in the summer of 2023 - later than planned due to the complexity of the project.

- In collaboration with the University of Durham, geophysical surveys have been conducted of 60 hectares of farmland to the west of Gosbecks Archaeological Park. The subsequent report provides much improved data for the area and will inform future university led research as well as future plans at the park itself.
- Following scheduled monument consent, the area around Duncan's Gate was cleared of vegetation by the Parks team, the Roman drain cleared of invasive plants and 3D scanned. This will protect the monument for years to come and provide a digital record.