

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

## Year End Report covering April 2022 - March 2023

### Themes:

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

- **Tackling the climate challenge and leading sustainability: (Andrew Tyrrell/Rosa Tanfield)**
- Respond to the Climate Emergency (Place and Client)
- Conserve and enhance biodiversity (Environment)
- Enable more opportunity for walking and cycling around Colchester (Place and Client)
- Strategic Priorities achievements and next steps (Environment)

### Respond to the Climate Emergency (Andrew Tyrrell)

- The Council's carbon emissions have been reduced by 10.1% since 2019/20 and the current "pathway to net zero" shows a remaining gap forecast of circa 2,700 tonnes of carbon to be achieved by 2030 at present; with new works planned to reduce this to 2,500 tonnes, and further offsetting work to be explored to address this gap over coming years.
- The renewable heating and ventilation system at Rowan House was successfully installed after the Climate Change Team secured £500k of Salix grant funding for this project to replace 30-year old gas boilers, significantly reducing carbon from the building.
- 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 the planning application stage. Meanwhile the Council has completed the

## **Respond to the Climate Emergency (Andrew Tyrrell)**

detailed design work for the Energy Centre and Heat Network connections at the Northern Gateway ready to proceed to construction.

- Work started on a new Carbon Management Plan for 2023-2028 and seven (7) properties had Heat Decarbonisation Plans completed; to understand further carbon reduction possibilities and costing for our assets. One of these will be progressed into a funding bid in 2023/24.

## **Conserve and enhance biodiversity (Rosa Tanfield/Nick Christo)**

- Officers have continued to develop plans to transform Cymbeline Meadow into a Nature Reserve, by replacing agricultural land and enhancing existing areas to deliver a diverse and rich mosaic of habitats across the whole site. Concept plans have been drawn up detailing areas of hedge planting, pond and wetland creation, areas of nectar rich grassland, scrubland, bird seed rich crop areas and tree planting, including areas for future coppice woodland. Officers will be working collaboratively with the current Tenant Farmer and are seeking advice and guidance from a variety of organisations such as Natural England, Essex Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust and others.
- A funding bid to plant 125 large street trees was submitted via the Essex Woodland Partnership to the Forestry Commission in June 2022. The bid resulted in the Council being awarded grant aid of £28,375 in September 2022 and the 125 trees have now been planted at various locations around the City, many sites being suggested by ward members.
- The 16th 'Trees for Years' initiative took place between 27th February and 11th March 2023. For the second year the click and collect system was used and proved very successful. All four sites operated a drive thru system which was used by approx. 95% of customers. The average time each customer was on site was less than 5 minutes. Over the 16 events a total of 66,169 trees/shrubs have been given away across the City.

### **Conserve and enhance biodiversity (Rosa Tanfield/Nick Christo)**

- Following many months of planning between the various stakeholders a new “Miyawaki Forest” has been planted in the grounds of the Unity Primary Academy on the Greenstead Estate. The project was sponsored by a private individual and delivered by The Conservation Volunteers aided by experts from Essex University and the Earthwatch organisation. The “Forest” is the first of its kind to be planted within a school site anywhere in the whole of Essex and will be largely maintained by the children themselves as the trees grow into maturity over the coming months and years.

### **Enable more opportunity for walking and cycling around Colchester (Andrew Tyrrell)**

- After the Sustainable Travel Team secured an unprecedented 4th consecutive round of Defra funding in 2021-22, we have secured a unique 5th bid for an overarching project to combine the previous 4 projects and targeting increased use of sustainable, healthier travel and cleaner air quality.
- Work in 2022/23 included an innovative (Defra-funded) eCargo Bike “concierge service” implemented for the city centre Christmas shoppers to have their shopping delivered to them by bike so they could travel without needing a car and be free to spend more leisure time in the centre. To help behaviour change, the award-winning CAREless pollution and ‘No idling’ campaign was completed and demonstrated positive impacts on air pollution as we worked with schools and businesses to produce a range of signage, media and events.
- The Council awarded a contract for the first E-Car Club to Enterprise, who opened this shared electric vehicle offer in Colchester in Autumn 2022 and will now provide a growing network of electric cars available for hire use over the coming years.
- The Council has supported Tier in introducing 100 E-Hire Bikes to supplement the E-Scooters and add choice for different demographics from April 2023, whilst the Council supported ECC and Tier in extending the E-Scooter trial until May 2024 to help with over 18,500 people now subscribed, and over 8,000 regularly active riders in Colchester and more than 445,000 total rides now taken.

### **Enable more opportunity for walking and cycling around Colchester (Andrew Tyrrell)**

- The infrastructure for sustainable travel has also been boosted by a new secure cycle hub that had leases finalised and premises prepared through 2022/23 ready to open on 29 April 2023. The secure cycle hub can be accessed easier as the Levelling Up Fund bid and Town Deal projects included a number of walking and cycling improvements alongside the Fixing the Link and Active Travel Fund 2 projects that also progressing ready to deliver the Local Cycling Walking Infrastructure Projects (LCWIP) with Essex County Council.

### **Strategic Priorities achievements and next steps (Rosa Tanfield)**

- Worked towards the council being operationally net zero by 2030, delivering some carbon savings and with a clearer delivery plan of what may be achieved in our buildings and fleet, with the remaining offset gap needing a strategy that can start being formed.
- Continued to progress the Heat Network, Solar Park and microgrid at the Northern Gateway, which will continue to develop whilst we explore other opportunities emerging across the City.
- Improved biodiversity across all areas of the city by delivering the council's Woodland and Biodiversity Plan. This includes transforming Cymbeline Meadows into a nature reserve.
- Simplified waste and recycling services and progress towards government recycling collection targets of 70%.

### **• Creating safe, healthy and active communities: (Communities)**

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

### **Build on community strengths and assets (Michelle Tarbun)**

- 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 Alliance Review, Neighbourhood Model / Live Well domain way 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 (Michelle Tarbun)**

- 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.
- 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 (Michelle Tarbun)**

- 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 (Michelle Tarbun)**

- 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 cost of living action plan to help residents through the current cost of living crisis, both short and long term. Maximise the effectiveness of our outreach interaction with our communities and residents.
- 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: (Place and Client)**

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

## Increase the number, quality and types of homes (Andrew Tyrrell and Matt Sterling)

- The Strategic Plan target for 2020 to 2023 is to deliver 380 affordable homes (set pre Covid). By year end 2023 the number of homes delivered was 390 homes.
- During 2022-2023 a total of 172 homes were delivered including 100 with Registered Providers via S106 agreements, 42 via 100 Homes & Acquisitions, 20 Council new build and 10 First Homes (the governments' new Home Ownership product).
- 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.
- The "Phase 2" Garage Sites were all completed and occupied, bringing new build Council homes into benefit, whilst all 5 sites for the "Phase 3 Garage Sites" obtained planning permission to deliver more new Council-owned affordable homes in 2023/24.
- 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 "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.
- The Council has progressed several deals, the first of which should complete in early 23/24 year, to diversify the methods in which new build social homes are provided by the Council; and is starting to explore the use of Modern Methods of Construction to help unlock sites in the existing estate.

### **Prevent households from experiencing homelessness (Matt Sterling)**

- The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Delivery Plan actions have been reviewed for 2022-23 and an updated Delivery Plan and Progress Report has been published.
- During 2022-23, homelessness was prevented for 209 households and 77 households were assisted into accommodation under the relief duty.
- During 2022-23, the Rough Sleeper Team provided support and assistance to 137 rough sleepers and accommodated 53, whilst 29 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 (Karen Syrett)**

- 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.
- Infrastructure Audit commenced to inform future local plan and site allocations.
- Work progressed on Joint DPD for TCBGC. Joint Committee and Full Councils at CCC and TDC agreed to consultation and submission of the DPD for examination.

### **Strategic Priorities achievements and next steps (Karen Syrett)**

- Local Plan adopted
- Supplementary Planning Document on Affordable Housing adopted February 2023.



- Supplementary Planning Documents being prepared on Housing Standards and Specialist Housing as well as Climate Change and Sustainability and Active Travel
- Working with ECC and EPOA on new parking standards guidance.
- Submission of Joint DPD for TCBGC to provide a framework for the development of a new community. Consultation will take place in May/June and examination expected in Autumn. Further work taking place on viability and delivery of infrastructure.
- Work with the local community to review ecology evidence and secure a country park/nature reserve at Middlewick
- Infrastructure Audit has commenced, and consultants will be commissioned to provide specialist expert advice.

### **Growing a better economy so everyone benefits: (Place and Client)**

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

### **Enable Economic Recovery from Covid-19 ensuring all residents benefit from growth (Matt Sterling)**

- 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.
- 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 (Matt Sterling)**

- 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 starting delivery work on 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 (Matt Sterling)**

- Our £20m bid to the Government's Levelling Up funding for the Town Centre was successful and so we are carrying out the necessary preparatory work.
- We have submitted Investment Plans for our £1.3m allocation of the Government's Shared Prosperity Fund and c£500k Rural England Prosperity Fund. We have been notified the former was successful and are waiting on the later.
- The new Economic Strategy has been adopted and we are developing actions to deliver 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 and we continue to approve of applications in line with policies to attract new businesses and allow existing firms to thrive.
- A new Asset Management Strategy was commissioned to be undertaken by CIPFA starting in April 2023; this new Strategy will focus on post-Covid growth and change policies, engaging with services and partners through May, June and July, so that we can

### **Create an environment that attracts inward investment to Colchester and help businesses to flourish (Matt Sterling)**

adopt a new Strategy in September 2023 aiming for Council owned assets to maximise the benefits of the social, environmental and economic value of our operational, investment and surplus estate.

### **Strategic Priorities achievements and next steps (Matt Sterling)**

- Town Deal Business Cases approved and projects starting delivery work.
- Levelling Up Funding approved, and programme mobilisation work underway with Team Colchester partners.
- Shared Prosperity Funding allocated to community projects and Rural England Prosperity Fund to be open for applications in late May,
- City Centre Masterplan drafted and consultation for Planning Policy to start in June.
- Economic Strategy Delivery Plan agreed to ensure the priorities in the Economic Strategy are achieved.

### **Celebrating our heritage and culture: (Communities)**

- Agree and implement a new Cultural Strategy that supports our cultural assets (Communities)
- Strengthen Colchester's tourism sector and welcome more visitors each year (Communities)
- Protect, enhance and celebrate Colchester's unique heritage (Communities)
- Strategic Priorities achievements and next steps (Communities)

### **Agree and implement a new Cultural Strategy that supports our cultural assets (Claire Taylor)**

- 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.
- 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 across 29 projects under 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.
- Match funding provided to the Arts Council England sponsored Colchester LCEPP (Local Cultural Educational Partnership) based at the Mercury Theatre, including ringfenced grant to run a project with secondary schools exploring what city status means to young residents.

### **Strengthen Colchester's tourism sector and welcome more visitors each year (Claire Taylor)**

- To help build back awareness of and confidence in Colchester as a visitor destination with the group travel industry and mitigate costs and other issues which can deter groups from visiting, a coach and group tourism incentive scheme supported by a targeted promotional campaign including free bookable city centre coach parking (previously pay and display and not reservable), refreshment/shopping vouchers for drivers/couriers and a discount to the Castle was launched. In the first year of the scheme 50 groups registered bringing nearly 2000 additional visitors to the city centre between May and Dec 2022.

## Protect, enhance and celebrate Colchester's unique heritage (Frank Hargrave)

- Visitor numbers for 2022/23 at the Castle exceeded pre-pandemic levels with total admissions and school groups reaching 89,634 people – a figure only previously reached in the years immediately after the castle's redevelopment in 2014.
- Income was more than £100,000 higher than in 2019/20 due to higher admissions, price increases, events and after-hours activities delivered by staff, e.g. Knightzzz at the Castle and School sleepovers. Retail across all venues also performed very strongly.
- Visitor numbers have returned to pre-pandemic levels at the Natural History Museum but are approximately 20% lower at Hollytrees, potentially as a result of a slower return of international visitors to the city and therefore the VIC.
- 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.
- Hollytrees Museum has been awarded a £230,000 grant from the DCMS MEND scheme for a number of repairs and improvements to be implemented from 2023.
- The Castle welcomed the King and consort as part of the celebration of city status.
- Colchester + Ipswich Museums Service was awarded an uplift in Arts Council funding – totalling £1.2m for the period 2023 – 2026. The increase will fund improvements in the learning programmes, digital outputs and access as well as funding annual exhibitions that will include 'Gladiators; a day at the Roman Games' at the castle in the summer of 2023.
- With the completion of a feasibility study and extensive consultation, the team is now preparing a funding application to the NLHF towards the redevelopment of the Natural History Museum.
- Re-Imagining the City Centre regeneration work includes range of heritage assets, including better access and interpretation of The Priory, Holy Trinity Church and Jumbo Water Tower.

## Strategic Priorities achievements and next steps (Frank Hargrave)

- 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 – Test pits and sampling conducted in March '23 indicate that there are further issues due to high voltage cables running over the mosaic and officers are reviewing options.
- 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. Duncan's Gate and other sites in and around the Castle were filmed for a 'History Hit' documentary and a YouTube video that has had 100,000 views.