

# Policy Panel Meeting

**Grand Jury Room, Town Hall, High Street,  
Colchester, CO1 1PJ**

**Wednesday, 02 August 2023 at 18:00**

**The Policy Panel** provides legislative, improvement and policy advice to Cabinet and Portfolio Holders on issues that may affect executive functions. The Panel considers issues at the request of Cabinet and Portfolio Holders and must seek approval from Cabinet on whether and how issues proactively identified by the Panel are examined. The Panel also considers initiatives for review from members of the public.

## Information for Members of the Public

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<https://colchester.cmis.uk.com/colchester/MeetingCalendar.aspx>.

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## **Policy Panel – Terms of Reference**

- (1) To consider strategies, policies and legislative changes identified by Cabinet that may require review and improvement and to seek Cabinet's agreement as to whether and how they should be examined.
- (2) To review issues at the request of a Portfolio Holder and to make recommendations back to the Portfolio Holder for decision.

**COLCHESTER CITY COUNCIL**  
**Policy Panel**  
**Wednesday, 02 August 2023 at 18:00**

**The Policy Panel Members are:**

Councillor Jocelyn Law	Chairman
Councillor Lesley Scott-Boutell	Deputy Chairman
Councillor Kevin Bentley	
Councillor Sue Lissimore	
Councillor Sam McCarthy	
Councillor Rhys Smithson	
Councillor Julie Young	

**The Policy Panel Substitute Members are:**

All members of the Council who are not members of the Panel.

**AGENDA**  
**THE LIST OF ITEMS TO BE DISCUSSED AT THE MEETING**  
**(Part A - open to the public)**

**Please note that Agenda items 1 to 5 are normally dealt with briefly.**

**Live Broadcast**

Please follow this link to watch the meeting live on YouTube:

[\(107\) ColchesterCBC - YouTube](#)

**1 Welcome and Announcements**

The Chairman will welcome members of the public and Councillors and remind everyone to use microphones at all times when they are speaking. The Chairman will also explain action in the event of an emergency, mobile phones switched to silent, audio-recording of the meeting. Councillors who are members of the Panel will introduce themselves.

**2 Declarations of Interest**

Councillors will be asked to say if there are any items on the agenda about which they have a disclosable pecuniary interest which would

prevent them from participating in any discussion of the item or participating in any vote upon the item, or any other registerable interest or non-registerable interest.

**3 Substitutions**

Councillors will be asked to say if they are attending on behalf of a Committee member who is absent.

**4 Urgent Items**

The Chairman will announce if there is any item not on the published agenda which will be considered because it is urgent and will explain the reason for the urgency.

**5 Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The Panel will be invited to confirm that the minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2023 are a correct record.

**Policy Panel Minutes 28 June 2023**

7 - 10

**6 Have Your Say! (Hybrid Council Meetings)**

Members of the public may make representations to the Panel meetings on any item on the agenda or any other matter relating to the business of the Panel. This can be made either in person at the meeting or by joining the meeting remotely and addressing the Panel via Zoom. Each representation may be no more than three minutes. Members of the public wishing to address the Panel remotely may register their wish to address the meeting by e-mailing [democratic.services@colchester.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@colchester.gov.uk) by 12.00 noon on the working day before the meeting. In addition, a written copy of the representation should be supplied for use in the event of technical difficulties preventing participation at the meeting itself.

There is no requirement to pre-register for those attending in person.

**7 Colchester Landscape, Nature and Waterways Strategy**

11 - 18

The Panel will consider a report setting out changes proposed to the development of plans and strategies within the Council in relation to landscape, nature and waterways.

**8 Grounds Maintenance Contract and Transition Update**

19 - 26

The Panel will consider a report providing a summary on the activities undertaken since the meeting of the Policy Panel on 12 January 2022, where recommendations were made to Cabinet to

extend the current grounds maintenance contract and for officers to continue with plans for an inhouse delivery model.

9 **Work Programme 2023-24**

27 - 30

The Panel will consider a report on its work programme for the remainder of the municipal year.

10 **Exclusion of the Public (not Scrutiny or Executive)**

In accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 to exclude the public, including the press, from the meeting so that any items containing exempt information (for example confidential personal, financial or legal advice), in Part B of this agenda (printed on yellow paper) can be decided. (Exempt information is defined in Section 100I and Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972).

**Part B**  
**(not open to the public including the press)**

## **POLICY PANEL**

### **28 June 2023**

**Attendees:** Councillors Bentley, Law, Lissimore, McCarthy, Scott-Boutell, Smithson and J. Young.

**Substitutes:** None.

**Also in attendance:**

#### **75. Minutes of Previous Meeting**

*RESOLVED* that the minutes of the meetings held on 1 March 2023 and 24 May 2023 be approved as correct records.

#### **76. Work Programme 2023-24**

**Councillor Bentley (by reason of being Leader of Essex County Council) declared a non-pecuniary interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7 (5).**

The Panel discussed ideas for its Work Programme for the current municipal year, including the potential for updates on items it considered in 2022-23, such as on the Landscape, Nature and Waterways Strategy development proposal [formerly the Green/Blue Infrastructure Strategy], cost of living, Year of Celebration, and on Member Champions. The Chairman stated that it would be good to get a range of issues, with some in reserve in case time became available to consider them. Councillor Cory, Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Resources, explained that the approach to the Landscape, Nature and Waterways Strategy development proposal had changed, and that this was now part of a process to develop a wider strategy on this, led by the Local Plan Committee. Rosa Tanfield, Head of Neighbourhood Services, gave more detail on how the Planning Team was leading on a broader strategy, including development matters, and would be taking this to Local Plan Committee. Options were being looked at as to how the Policy Panel could assist in scoping or drafting.

A Panel member requested seeking permission to review the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy. The Deputy Leader agreed that this would be a good idea, and that it would be useful for the Panel to look at policies which could benefit from being updated. Equality and Diversity policies dealt with officers, councillors and members of the public.

A Panel member recommended looking at how to help attract new retail outlets to improve the retail offering, arguing that there was much that was positive in the City Centre Masterplan, but that the retail offer was not improving. The Deputy Leader noted that Colchester's rate of occupied retail units was good compared to many

places, and suggested that the Business Improvement District [BID] could be asked to present and join discussion of how to attract more.

A request was made for the Panel to seek permission to examine the Leisure and Sport facilities in Colchester, including an audit of what existed, which venues made money, which didn't, and the carbon emissions of each.

A further suggestion was made that the Panel could examine community facilities, what facilities existed and where there were gaps in provision. An example was given of the St Mark's Community Centre in High Woods. Another Panel member suggested that the Panel could request permission for a separate, wider review of local facilities of community value, incorporating public, private and charitable sector facilities, looking at what was available in each area of Colchester's wider area. The Deputy Leader agreed that it would be good to get an examination of the Community Asset-based Infrastructure Strategy. An asset register held details of all Council assets, and the Local Plan Committee had access to a list of buildings of general community value, and could examine and update this. The Deputy Leader noted that it was possible that there may be some assets which fell between the lists and were not included on either. A Panel member requested that the Panel review the Council's Policy on communities' right to bid on assets which were to be sold, as this had not recently been reviewed.

A Panel member asked if it would be possible to scrutinise the Council's Parking Policy and income from car parks, looking at how best to manage income whilst encouraging more people to move to active travel options. The Deputy Leader cautioned that this might lie with another committee already, but stated that the Council's Parking Strategy could be appropriate for Panel review, with Richard Walker, Head of Parking, providing an update and assisting in discussions as to the balance between income protection and the encouraging of active travel options. The Head of Neighbourhood Services agreed to look into whether this was something which could come to the Panel.

The Council's policy on mowing was raised, and the potential for the Panel to seek ways to help avoid complaints. The Deputy Leader noted that this fell under the Grounds Maintenance Contract, which was already coming back to the Panel. The Head of Neighbourhood Services explained that the next annual update on the Contract, and work to move it in house, would come to the Panel in March 2024, with a focus on the transition to new arrangements. Concerns raised about the current contract were being taken onboard and the Head of Neighbourhood Services committed to raise these with colleagues following the meeting.

A Panel member suggested that it would be worth checking and updating all Council Policies over time, and seek assurances as to compliance with them. This led to a further query, as to whether the Policy Panel's Terms of Reference could be altered, to remove the ambiguity shown in the first term of reference. Councillor Cory, Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Resources, gave assurance that, whilst Cabinet can ask the Panel to examine and develop policies, the Panel could also request permission to examine and develop policy on its own initiative. Concern was still raised that the words 'identified by Cabinet' should be amended and the wording tidied up.



A request was made from a Panel member for an examination to be carried out on how to get best value for money from the Council's waste policy, with a specific focus on the potential for using shared-service options to save money. The Deputy Leader explained that parts of the Council's approach to waste management were already going to Scrutiny Panel for consideration and was in the remit of the Environment and Sustainability Panel. The Deputy Leader stated that Cabinet would look at who would be best to examine this. The Head of Neighbourhood Services noted that the Recycling and Waste Strategy for Colchester was expected to go through the Scrutiny Panel before being considered by Cabinet. All options would be looked at, including use of shared services.

The Panel considered the potential for options to consider whether the Panel could help draft a policy on commemorative installations and/or events. The Deputy Leader agreed that this would be good for the Panel to consider, and that the Council already had a policy on flags. A Panel member pointed out that there was no policy on Covid memorials or other memorialisation.

A Panel member asked if the Licensing, Food and Safety Policy needed reviewing, as it was due to expire in 2024. Matt Evans, Democratic Services Officer confirmed that this was not a Policy which was reviewed by the Council's Licensing Committee. The Head of Neighbourhood Services confirmed that she would seek officer advice on how to bring this to the Panel, subject to Cabinet approval.

The Panel considered a request for it to seek permission to look at a wider-scale project, potentially to draft a policy to ensure that rural wards do not lose out on funding, compared to urban wards. A Panel member posited that additional funding for urban wards often came from Section 106 funding [contributions from developers as Planning Obligations].

The Panel discussed the ideas raised and a member recommended letting officers consider how to bring the necessary reports and information to the Panel on the items to which Cabinet gave approval. The Head of Neighbourhood Services suggested that updates on performance under the current extended Grounds Maintenance contract and work on the Colchester Landscape, Nature and Waterways Strategy be brought to the Panel meeting scheduled on 2 August 2023, and that the 27 September 2023 meeting receive an update on the cost of living crisis, financial inequality and benefit matters, as shown in the draft Work Programme.

The Panel discussed whether policies or issues should be considered which fell under the heritage theme of the Strategic Plan, potentially looking at assets of community value across all wards, what should be considered to be on the list of assets and how they could be protected, such as the protection of parts of Middlewick Ranges.

*RESOLVED* that the Panel receive the following updates:

- a) Colchester Landscape, Nature and Waterways Strategy, and an update on performance under the current Grounds Maintenance contract on 2 August 2023;

- b) Financial inequality and cost of living, on 27 September 2023

*RECOMMENDED* to CABINET that the Policy Panel be given approval to examine the following subjects:

- a) Equality and Diversity Policy;
- b) The Council's Policy on Procurement;
- c) Commemorations locally, including benches, flags and statues;
- d) Ways to support an increase in the retail offer of Colchester and economic draw of its shops;
- e) Sport and leisure facilities and provision;
- f) Mapping and examination of community assets and asset-based community development approach;
- g) The Licensing, Food and Health and Safety Policy;
- h) Policy on rights to bid on assets of community value, when up for sale;
- i) A review of the Parking Strategy.



## Policy Panel

Item

**7**

2<sup>nd</sup> August 2023

<b>Report of</b>	<b>Head of Sustainability &amp; Head of Planning</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Head of Neighbourhood Services</b> ☎ 0330 053 8047
<b>Title</b>	<b>Colchester Landscape, Nature and Waterways Strategy update</b>		
<b>Wards affected</b>	All Wards		

### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out changes proposed to the development of plans and strategies within the Council in relation to landscape, nature and waterways.
- 1.2 Since the presentation to the Policy Panel in 2022 on the proposal to develop a Colchester Landscape, Nature and Waterways Strategy, a wider and more broad ranging project is proposed. This will develop a baseline map of the green assets and waterways in Colchester. It will be consulted on to develop an understanding of barriers and areas of improvement or opportunity, before creating new guiding principles for the Council. These guiding principles and baseline evidence will then inform the Local Plan Review, and the delivery and operational plans for the Parks & Countryside Team, negating the need for a specific and separate strategy, ensuring consistency across the Council in the planning and management of the assets.

### 2. Action Required

- 2.1 For information only.

### 3. Reason for Review

- 3.1 For information only.

#### 4. Background Information

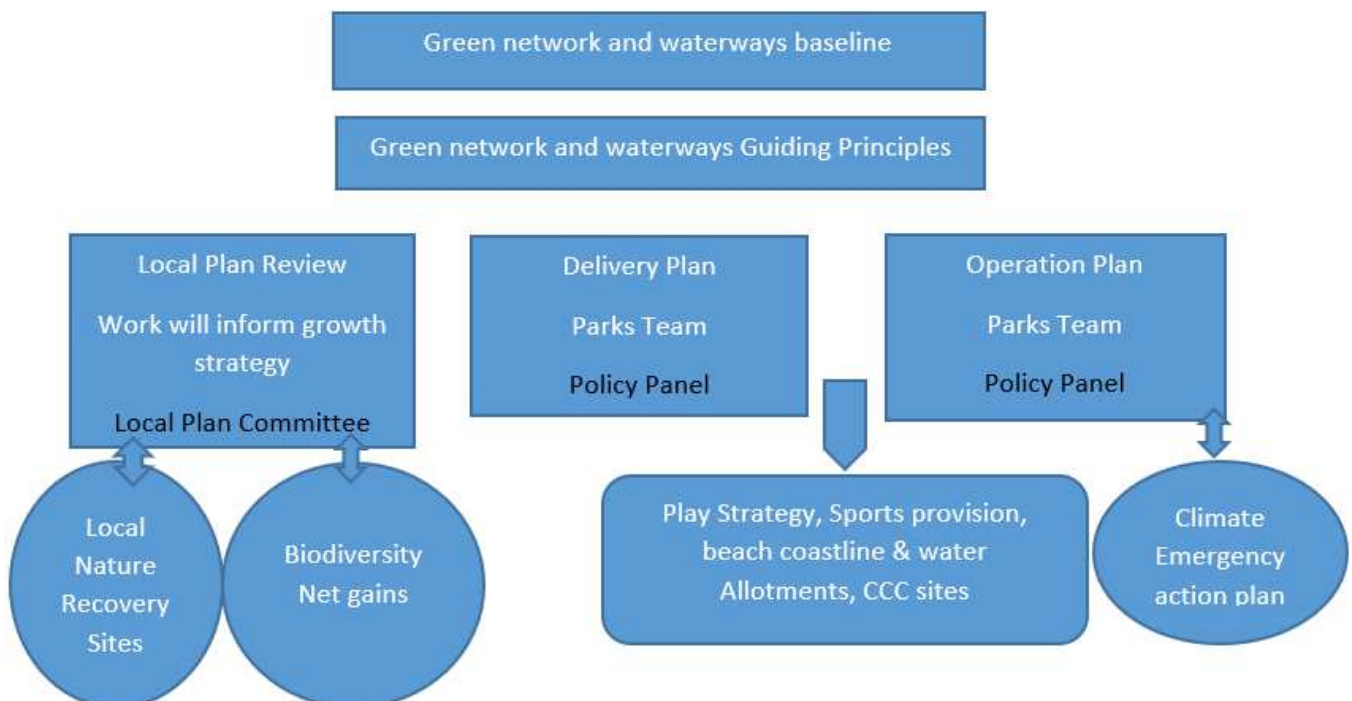
4.1 A report was presented to the November 2022 meeting of the Policy Panel outlining proposals for a Colchester Landscape, Nature and Waterways Strategy. It was proposed that the Panel set direction for the strategy which would include open spaces, natural assets, waterways and coastline, using a series of workshops to produce ideas to bring to a future meeting of the Panel for formal consideration and recommendations to be considered for making to Cabinet. This related to a pilot project undertaken with the University of Essex on participatory strategic development.

#### Colchester City's green network and waterways

4.2 Since the pilot project has been completed and the presentation to the Policy Panel, the Planning Policy Team and Sustainability Team have started to work together to create guiding principles for Colchester City's green network and waterways. These guiding principles will then be taken forward by both teams as part of the work on the Local Plan Review and form the foundation for the development of several delivery and operational plans managing the city's open spaces, negating the need for a separate Landscape, Nature and Waterways Strategy to be formally presented to the Policy Panel, ensuring a single evidence base and consistency of approach across the Council.

#### Proposed scope

4.3 The diagram, below, sets out the proposed outputs of the project and explains the various steps and how the outputs relate to one another. A description follows of each of the outputs with key milestones set out at the end of this project scope. There is potential for interest from other Council teams and further work which is not outlined in this paper.



4.4 This project is in early development, but it is proposed that officers will begin by building an accurate spatial understanding of the existing green network and waterways- this will form the 'baseline'. An interactive map of the green network and waterways will be prepared and published on the Council's website for public consultation. The public and stakeholders will be asked if officers have mapped the

baseline correctly, for their comments on the condition of the existing network and opportunities for enhancement.

- 4.5 From this, officers will develop guiding principles which will then inform the Local Plan Review, the work of the Sustainability Team and the Parks & Countryside Team.
- 4.6 The priority for the Local Plan Review, including the spatial strategy and indeed the whole Plan, will be enhancing the green network and waterways and the linked consequential benefits of achieving this. Officers intend to do this by seeking to protect the existing green network and waterways, create linkages between green spaces and enhance the network through the creation of new green spaces, in locations where it is most needed. The consultation comments and guiding principles will inform this work.
- 4.7 The next section provides some background and context with reference to the Environment Act. Further sections explain more about each of the outputs set out in the diagram above.

#### **Environment Act and 25 Year Environment Plan**

- 4.8 The [25 Year Environment Plan](#) was published in 2018. The Environment Plan sets out the government's goals for improving the environment within a generation. It aims to leave the environment in a better state and details how government will work with communities and businesses to do this over the next 25 years.
- 4.9 The [Environment Act 2021](#) puts the 25 Year Environment Plan into law and creates a statutory framework for environmental principles. The Act introduces a Nature Recovery Network and Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS), which will establish priorities and map proposals for specific actions to drive nature's recovery and provide wider environmental benefits. Under the Environment Act 2021, all planning permissions granted in England (with a few exemptions) will have to deliver at least 10% biodiversity net gain. Biodiversity net gain will be measured using Defra's biodiversity metric and habitats will need to be secured for at least 30 years. In addition, and of relevance, the Environment Act includes a strengthened legal duty for public bodies to conserve and enhance biodiversity and new biodiversity reporting requirements for local authorities.
- 4.10 A Nature Recovery Network is a strategy to tackle biodiversity loss. 500,000 hectares of additional wildlife habitat will be created. Wildlife sites will be connected, and opportunities will be provided for species conservation and the reintroduction of native species. Green networks will be an important part of the Nature Recovery Network. The government intends that as well as helping wildlife thrive, the Nature Recovery Network could be designed to bring a wide range of additional benefits, including public enjoyment, pollination, carbon capture, water quality improvements and flood management.
- 4.11 Local Nature Recovery Strategies are spatial strategies that will establish priorities and map proposals for specific actions to drive nature's recovery and provide wider environmental benefits. Local Nature Recovery Strategies aim to actively restore the natural world and halt the decline in species abundance by 2030. Local Nature Recovery Strategies will apply at county level. Colchester City Council is a Supporting Authority and will work with Essex County Council (the Responsible Authority) to ensure that we influence the LNRS, and that relevant Council work is taken into account as part of the LNRS.

- 4.12 Biodiversity net gain (BNG) is an approach to development, and/or land management, that aims to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was beforehand. BNG requires developers to deliver for nature, setting a minimum requirement to increase biodiversity by 10% compared to the baseline (net gain). The idea behind BNG is that the environment does not suffer as a result of development, and that there will be higher-quality places for wildlife to thrive and for people to enjoy.

#### **Green Network and Waterways Baseline**

- 4.13 The green network and waterways project will begin with the preparation of a map of the existing green network and waterways.
- 4.14 All local green spaces (above a minimum size threshold) will be mapped including, public and strategic private open space and nature conservation designations such as Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation, Ramsar (wetlands), Sites of Special Scientific Interest, local wildlife sites and the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Waterways will also be mapped including coastal areas, rivers and other strategic waterways such as Abberton Reservoir.
- 4.15 The green network and waterways map will be interactive, and users will be able to select layers. It will be useful to view CCC owned open space and, as part of further work on the green network and waterways, consider the potential for improving connections between CCC open spaces. Engagement will take place with the public and stakeholders to check that the baseline map accurately records the green network and waterways, secondly to ask for comments on the condition of the green network and waterways and thirdly to ask for ideas on opportunities to improve the green network and waterways.
- 4.16 Ideas for opportunities to improve the network will be mapped and considered, alongside opportunities for offsite biodiversity net gain (BNG) sites, as part of the development of the Local Plan Review spatial strategy.

#### **Green network and waterways Guiding Principles**

- 4.17 Officers intend to use the consultation comments from the publication of the baseline map, Natural England's green infrastructure strategy and other strategies such as the Woodland & Biodiversity Project and Essex County Council's green infrastructure guidelines, to prepare guiding principles for the green network and waterways. A member workshop will be held to ensure member views are incorporated. These guiding principles will be taken forward and incorporated into the work of the Planning Policy Team and Parks & Countryside Team.

#### **Local Plan Review**

- 4.18 The Planning Policy Team intend to use Colchester's green network and waterways and the 'creating a better environment' agenda as the starting point of the Local Plan Review.
- 4.19 Green spaces and waterways have multiple benefits including for wildlife, active travel, health and wellbeing, climate change adaptation, air quality, flood and water management. New development can facilitate new and improved green spaces and biodiversity net gain (BNG) and provide opportunities to create a better environment.
- 4.20 As part of the call for sites officers are proposing asking for BNG offsite sites, green spaces and improvements to waterways, as well as housing and employment sites and any other land uses as appropriate. This will provide the Council with intelligence on potential BNG offsite sites at an early stage of plan making.

- 4.21 Officers also consider there maybe potential to allocate sites to deliver biodiversity net gain and corridors to enhance connections between existing and new wildlife sites. This could help inform decisions on the future spatial strategy and will help officers plan for the highest gains for biodiversity as part of the plan making process.

#### **Parks & Countryside Delivery Plan and Operational Plan**

- 4.22 The strategy referred to in this report will form part of the Delivery Plan element of the project and work will follow once the guiding principles have been agreed. The Operational Plan will include details on the biodiversity and management of CCC sites. The Operational Plan will influence the Climate Emergency Action Plan and vice versa.

#### **Governance and timeline**

- 4.23 The green network and waterways project outlined in this report is wide ranging and affects many different aspects of the Council's work. Governance has been explained in the descriptions of each of the outputs above, but this section summarises the governance of each part of the project.
1. The baseline map is factual and will be prepared by Officers (Summer /Autumn 2023).
  2. The guiding principles and will be prepared by Officers (Winter 2023/2024).
  3. The Local Plan Committee (LPC) has authority to determine on behalf of the Council preparation of the Local Plan. LPC Members, will be updated on progress (Ongoing).
  4. The Delivery Plan and Operational Plan will be approved by the Policy Panel (2024/25).

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

- 5.1 This report sets out proposals for an approach to developing a new strategy. It does not propose or set out to make any service changes at this stage and to that extent it does not impact on the promotion of equality and overcome discrimination in relation to gender, gender reassignment, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, age, and race/ethnicity. However, any proposed changes through the development of the strategy will give proper consideration to equality, diversity, and human right implications.

### **6. Strategic Plan References**

- 6.1 This project will cut across all aspects, priorities and outcomes of the Council's Strategic Plan 2023-2026.

### **7. Consultation**

- 7.1 As set out earlier in the report, consultation will be undertaken, with the intention to use an interactive map to help ensure that the baseline map accurately records the green network and waterways. It will also seek to gain feedback from stakeholders and partners on the condition of the green network and waterways and lastly to see ideas on opportunities to improve the green network and waterways.
- 7.2 Ideas for opportunities to improve the network will be mapped and considered, alongside opportunities for offsite biodiversity net gain (BNG) sites, as part of the development of the Local Plan Review spatial strategy.

## 8. Publicity Considerations

- 8.1 There are no implications at this stage, but as the project develops and the consultation is undertaken, due consideration will be given to the approach to publicity.

## 9. Financial implications

- 9.1 There are no implications at this stage, but as the development of the strategy takes place, proper consideration of financial implications will be made. For example, operational budgets, the wider impact and benefit of natural assets on the local economy, the development of partnership and/or applications for external grant funding, creating attractive areas for investment, supporting the environmental resilience of economic sites, promoting economic growth, employment and skills improvement, supporting local businesses, tourism and visitor destinations, and responding to growth of Colchester.

## 10. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications

- 10.1 Any proposed changes through the development of the strategy will consider health, wellbeing, and community safety implications.

## 11. Health and Safety Implications

- 11.1 There are no implications at this stage, but as the development of the strategy takes place, proper consideration of health and safety implications will be made.

## 12. Risk Management Implications

- 12.1 There are no implications at this stage, but as the development of the strategy takes place, proper consideration and reporting of risk management will be made.

## 13. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

- 13.1 The consideration of environmental and sustainability implications of the decision being taken is set out in the table below:

<b>Sustainability theme</b>	<b>Positive environmental impact</b>	<b>Neutral impact/ Not applicable</b>	<b>Negative environmental impact</b>	<b>What are the positive and negative impacts on carbon reduction / environment?</b>	<b>How will positive impacts be enhanced/ encouraged? And negative impacts minimized or eliminated</b>
Energy		✓		n/a	n/a
Waste		✓		n/a	n/a
Procurement		✓		n/a	n/a
Biodiversity and green spaces	✓			The proposed approach to the development of the project set out within	n/a



				the report will have clear objectives to improve the management and planning of green assets and waterways.	
Transport		✓		n/a	n/a
Adaption		✓		n/a	n/a
Water		✓		n/a	The proposed approach to the development of the project set out within the report will have the opportunity to improve the management and planning of waterways and wetlands.
Digital		✓		n/a	n/a
Community		✓		n/a	n/a
Housing/ Development		✓		n/a	n/a
Carbon Emissions saving	✓			The proposed approach to the development of the project set out within the report will have clear objectives to improve the management and planning of biodiversity net gains. Creating and enhancing habitats can lead to greater storage of carbon.	n/a



**2 August 2023**

<b>Report of</b>	<b>Head of Sustainability</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Head of Neighbourhood Services</b>
			<b>☎ 0330 053 8047</b>
<b>Title</b>	<b>Grounds Maintenance Contract and Transition Update</b>		
<b>Wards affected</b>	All Wards		

**1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1 This report provides a summary on the activities undertaken since the meeting of the Policy Panel on the 12 January 2022, where recommendations were made to Cabinet to extend the current grounds maintenance contract and for officers to continue with plans for an inhouse delivery model.
- 1.2 The report sets out contractual and performance standard changes in order to meet the Council's financial challenges, particularly in relation to weed management and grass cutting.

**2. Action Required**

- 2.1 For information only.

**3. Reason for Review**

- 3.1 To provide an update to the Policy Panel, as agreed by Cabinet on 9 March 2022, which resolved that:
  - a) authority be delegated to the Assistant Director of Environment to extend the contract with the existing contractor for three years in accordance with the existing terms.
  - b) the recommendations by the Policy Panel at its meeting on 12 January 2022 referred to in section 3 of the Assistant Directors report, be approved.
- 3.2 At its meeting of Policy Panel on 12 January 2022, the following recommendations were made:
  - a) the contract with the current contractor Idverde be extended on the same terms. There is provision within the current contract for an extension of three years [only] if the Council decides up to 72 months from the commencement date. The last date for extension notice is 1 April 2022.
  - b) Officers should continue with plans for an inhouse service, meeting the objectives agreed for commencement at the end of the contract extension.
  - c) an annual update be provided to the Policy Panel on progress of plans towards bringing the grounds maintenance service inhouse, with confidential sections to allow discussion of commercially sensitive matters where necessary.

3.3 At its meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2023, the Policy Panel requested an earlier update than proposed, which would include an overview of performance of the current Idverde contract, particularly in relation to weed management and grass cutting.

## 4. Background Information

### Current contract

- 4.1 The Council currently has a grounds maintenance contract with Idverde. This contract has been extended through to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2026, as recommended by Policy Panel at its meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2022 and agreed by Cabinet at its meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2022.
- 4.2 During the extension of the contract, the officers and contractor have set out a commitment to develop service improvements. This includes such things as:
- Delivering a carbon neutral service.
    - Continuing to invest in new, cleaner, and more efficient fleet, be that electric or zero emission alternatives.
  - Investment in technology.
    - Using technology to improve communications through a service management system, which will be introduced more comprehensively within Colchester. It is designed to enhance supervision, digitise monitoring, and make communication and reporting more transparent.
  - Sustainability and biodiversity.
    - Support the delivery of Colchester's biodiversity strategy.
    - Increase community activities.

### 2023/24 financial challenge

- 4.3 Like all local authorities, Colchester City Council is facing significant financial challenges. Faced with a significant budget deficit, and £10m of extra costs. The council has agreed to a raft of savings and income generation measures to balance its books. In this context a range of budget options for saving and income generation were approved by Full Council in February 2023.
- 4.4 Due to the ongoing financial challenges that is faced, the Council sought savings against the Idverde contract totalling £212k (13% of the contract value). These savings were earmarked to be delivered against three distinct areas:
- Sports Pitches - £50k
  - Castle Park Cricket Maintenance - £80k
  - Highway Verges - £82k
  - *Total - £212k*

#### Sports Pitches

- 4.5 There is a £50k saving target attributed against sports pitches in 2023/24 and a further £50k will be saved in the financial year 2024/2025.

#### Castle Park Cricket Maintenance

- 4.6 Colchester and East Cricket Club currently have a long lease with the Council on the club house within the grounds of Castle Park Cricket Field. For a number of years (20+) they have played cricket games on the Council owned Castle Park Cricket Ground, exclusively paying a nominal annual rent.

4.7 The cricket ground is currently maintained to a County Standard as on occasion, Essex County Cricket Club have played on the pitch attracting many visitors to the area. Essex's first team have not visited Colchester in a few years. By the Council maintaining this pitch to a County Standard, the Council is effectively subsidising the Cricket Club circa £80k. Therefore, a proposal was submitted to reduce the maintenance of the Cricket Pitch to 'Club Standard' and still facilitate Colchester Cricket Club's games, with the option to enhance the maintenance of the outfield if and when Essex County Cricket Club would visit, in agreement with the Council as landowners. In recognition of the economic climate and the role the Cricket Club play in supporting Colchester's economy, along with its provision of sports, health and wellbeing for the community, the fee for 2023/24 was renegotiated for the short-term. However, it does not meet the Council's subsidy of circa £80k. Discussions continue on future arrangements that support both organisations.

#### Highway Verges

4.8 Currently, the Council spends £144k per year carrying out functions on behalf of Essex County Council (ECC), notably cutting highway verges and border maintenance. The expectation from ECC is that highway verges are cut twice per year and the funding the Council receives for this function covers that. But the Council have undertaken fourteen cuts per year, therefore subsidising this work circa £82k annually. ECC have declined to fund more than 2 cuts and confirmed they would continue to support the payment to cover this only.

4.9 The proposal forming the above savings proposal (£212k) was to cease to subsidise the highway verge cutting on behalf of Essex County Council and revert back to their expectation, therefore saving the Council circa £82k. In January 2023, Cabinet decided to support the above identified savings. However, the baseline saving was reduced to a total of £130k to keep the highway verge cutting at an acceptable level. It was recognised that the highway verges should not receive more cuts than Colchester's amenity grass, however there was an aspiration to provide enough cuts to keep the areas looking tidy:

- Castle Park Cricket Maintenance - £80k
- Sports Pitches - £50k
- *Total - £130k*

#### Contract and performance standard changes

4.9 Throughout this process, there have been ongoing discussions with Idverde about how the above savings could be met. Due to the way the contract is operated (economies of scale), it is not possible to just save against one specific function. Therefore, many discussions have taken place exploring different options to minimise the impact of the savings expected whilst still delivering a service to Colchester and officers have looked across the whole contract to make the targeted savings.

#### **Changes to standards to deliver savings**

4.10 In working through savings on the contract, the standards have been changed and the financial impact is set out in Section 9:

#### Grass cutting

4.11 The first cut is undertaken in April and the last cut is in September, with the rotation of the cuts throughout the period varying and adapted to the weather conditions:

- Open spaces – was 14 cuts: now 8 cuts.
- Highways – was 14; now 6 cuts.
- Allotments – was 9 cuts: now 4 cuts.

4.12 The Council has several sites that it continues to maintain for wildflower, and these are cut once a year, along with further open spaces that are being encouraged to naturalise. The sites and standards for these have not changed. However, whilst the Council this year has applied 'No Mow May' to a number of sites across Colchester, the proposal for 2024 onwards will apply 'No Mow May' only to the wildflower and naturalising areas only.

#### Hedge cutting

4.13 Once a year (outside of bird nesting season)

#### Border maintenance

- Parks and open spaces – was 9 visits, 5 visits (4 in summer, 1 in winter)
- Highways – was 4 visits, 2 visits (1 in summer, 1 in winter)

### **Weed management and the reduction of glyphosate-based products**

4.14 The Greening Colchester policy was first presented at the Environment and Sustainability Panel on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2020 and agreed by Cabinet on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2020, including the approval of:

- a) the phasing out of the use of glyphosate-based chemicals (herbicides) in grounds maintenance operations on Council owned land and trial alternative methods of weed control as set out in this report and appendices.
- b) a change in grass cutting frequency on selected grass verges and areas of open space to be managed as areas to encouraged wildflower or naturalisation as set out in this report and appendices.

4.15 The policy aimed to achieve the following 3 priorities:

- i. *stop using glyphosate-based products through a phased reduction of use on its land and land owned by partner organisations, Colchester Borough Homes, and Amphora – this has been completed.*
- ii. *encourage glyphosate free/reduced use across Colchester including providing advice to internal and external partners, Town and Parish Councils, businesses, schools, and other organisations who may use glyphosate-based products for the control of weeds, moss, and lichens.*

- The Wivenhoe Project

In January 2021, Wivenhoe Town Council (WTC) worked with the Council's officers to trial "no mow" management regimes between March and September 2021 at 12 designated open spaces and residential verges in the town. The objectives were to work more closely with communities and establish if a local approach could increase biodiversity and to assess public reaction. This would be the first approach of this type undertaken by the project team, undertaken as a trial, so that if it was successful, it could be

used as a template and example to roll out to other Councils and partners. Several town and parish councils have expressed an interest in the approach and WTC have hosted presentations and shared their experience and approach with others, supported by Council officers.

- Providing advice, guidance and sharing knowledge

In 2021, the Group Manager presented details of the Woodland and Biodiversity Project, of which the Greening Policy features to UK Local Authority leaders and senior managers at the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) Annual Seminar and to UK Local Authority industry specialists at the APSE Parks and Open Space Seminar. Officers have also been approached by other authorities, including Essex County Council for information and advice on the application of the policy. Officers will continue to offer support and advise.

iii. *stop or reduce grass cutting in specific areas. Changing the management regime to improve the biodiversity and visual amenity of the grass verges, leaving the areas to be left to re-wild and be managed as wildflower areas or left to naturalise as woodland – these sites are listed on the Council’s website and are added to at the request of Ward Councillors and following an assessment.*

- To improve engagement and education about these sites, signage has been produced and installed. In addition, Community Enabling colleagues, working in partnership with the Essex Local Delivery Pilot launched Street Tag, a free interactive app that promotes physical activity in a fun and accessible way. Street Tag turns physical activity into a game by converting walking, running, and cycling into Street Tag points (tags). It is a way to transform streets and parks into a giant virtual playground for local communities. Competitors compete to top the leader board and win prizes. More information can be found here: [www.colchester.gov.uk/street-tag](http://www.colchester.gov.uk/street-tag). In linking to this project, tags have been added to all the rewilding sites and encourage users to monitor the locations (e.g., the number of butterflies they see).

### **Transition to an inhouse operating model**

4.16 This report follows an update provided on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2023 within which a description of the reorganisation of the Parks, Countryside and Greening team ('Greening team'), to create the foundation to develop a more comprehensive team in the future. The core objectives of the reorganisation being to:

- Create greater focus, ownership, and accountability for performance of the service.
- Develop resilience and future proofing the service.
- Focus on Strategic Priorities
  - Sustainable services
  - Green, biodiverse Colchester
  - Safe, well, enabled residents and communities.
  - Supporting economic development

4.17 This new structure has been embedded but has suffered from three long-term sickness absences, maternity leave, and the departure of the Operations Manager. However, a new Operations Manager started with the Council at the



end of July 2023, vacant posts have been filled and additional resource is being provided across the Council to support the team.

- 4.18 Some initial work has been undertaken to consider the future operating model. This work will be further accelerated when the new Operations Manager is in post.

## **5 Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications**

- 5.1 Whilst equality, diversity and human rights have been considered, as there are no new policies or major changes to a policy being asked for approval in this report, an Equality Impact Assessment has not been completed.

## **6 Strategic Plan References**

- 6.1 The work outlined in this report directly supports the [Council's Strategic Plan](#) and objectives to 'respond to the climate emergency'; and in particular the priority to 'conserve and enhance biodiversity', and 'deliver modern services for a modern City'.

## **7 Consultation**

- 7.1 As there are no new policies or major changes to a policy being asked for approval in this report a consultation has not been undertaken.

## **8 Publicity Considerations**

- 8.1 The Council's website has been updated to reflect the changes to standards: [Grass cutting and grounds maintenance · Colchester City Council](#)

## **9 Financial implications**

- 9.1 Whilst Officers, in working with the contractor have been unable to make the specific savings as agreed by Full Council in February 2023, including those associated with the Cricket Club, the changes in standards and contract have enabled the Council to make a savings of £131k in the financial year 2023/24. Officers will continue to work with Idverde and partners to consider and prepare for further savings required in 2024/25.

## **10 Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications**

- 11.1 The Council must do all it reasonably can to promote positive health benefits to our residents whilst reducing, removing, or minimising any unintended consequences to health that may arise from services or decisions. The changes to the 'Greening team', with the introduction of the Senior Ranger for 'people' enables the Council to have greater focus on this area of our work; this has materialised in a successful funding bid (£57,000) to the Local Delivery Pilot Inequalities Fund for an Education Ranger. Additionally, the introduction of Greening Officers enables us to have more officers within our public open spaces, which we hope will help to improve and prevent crime and disorder and reduce the fear of crime in certain areas.

## **11 Health and Safety Implications**

- 11.1 There will be no harm to the health and safety of the general public.

## 12 Risk Management Implications

12.1 There are no risk management implications.

## 14. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

14.1 The consideration of environmental and sustainability implications of the decision being taken is set out in the table below:

Sustainability theme	Positive environmental impact	Neutral impact/ Not applicable	Negative environmental impact	What are the positive and negative impacts on carbon reduction / environment?	How will positive impacts be enhanced/ encouraged? And negative impacts minimized or eliminated
Energy	✓			The approach to reducing cutting regimes and a like will reduce visits and hence the energy used.	n/a
Waste		✓		n/a	n/a
Procurement		✓		n/a	n/a
Biodiversity and green spaces	✓			The Council continues to deliver on its Greening Colchester Policy that aims to improve biodiversity across Colchester.	n/a
Transport		✓		n/a	n/a
Adaption		✓		n/a	n/a
Water		✓		n/a	n/a
Digital		✓		n/a	n/a
Community	✓			The new structure ensures that there is resource to enable and support communities to be active in green spaces.	n/a
Housing/ Development		✓		n/a	n/a
Carbon Emissions saving	✓			The approach to reducing cutting regimes and a like will reduce visits and hence the energy used.	n/a



## Policy Panel

Item  
**9**

2 August 2023

Report of	Group Manager – Neighbourhood Services	Author	Owen Howell ☎ 282518
Title	Work Programme 2023-24		
Wards affected	Not applicable		

### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the dates of the Work Programme for 2023-2024 for the Policy Panel and gives the Panel an opportunity to consider what subjects for which it may wish to request Cabinet approval for the Panel to consider in the 2023-24 municipal year, and to formally make recommendations to put these to Cabinet for approval. Cabinet may also wish to consider what subjects it might want the Policy Panel to consider during 2023-24.

### 2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 The Panel is asked to note the dates of the Panel's Work Programme for 2023-2024 as set out below and to consider the proposed scheduling and whether it wishes to request Cabinet approval for work items to be added.

### 3. Alternative Options

- 3.1 This function forms part of the Panel's Terms of Reference and, as such, no alternative options are presented.

### 4. Background Information

- 4.1 The Policy Panel's Work Programme will evolve as the municipal year progresses. Items can be added to the Work Programme by request of Portfolio Holders and/or Cabinet requesting policies, strategies or other issues to be reviewed.
- 4.2 At its meeting of 12 July 2023, Cabinet approved a number of requests by the Panel for permission to examine topics in this municipal year, but cautioned that the Panel might wish to prioritise which it chooses to take on, given the number of topics raised. Following that meeting, relevant senior officers were informed of the subjects raised within their remits, and offered scheduling advice.
- 4.3 Two items were approved by Cabinet, but have not yet been scheduled, as officers have noted that the Council's approach in these areas is dictated by national statute and regulations, leaving extremely limited scope for the Policy Panel to make recommendations. These two items are:
- The Licensing, Food and Health and Safety Policy
  - Policy on rights to bid on assets of community value, when up for sale

Policy Panel may still add these to the Work Programme if it wishes to do so, but colleagues in the Licensing and Planning Teams have stated that these would be more for information and discussion, rather than having scope for recommendations to be made to Cabinet.

## 5. Standard References

- 5.1 There are no specific references to publicity or consultation considerations; or financial; equality, diversity and human rights; community safety; health and safety or risk management implications.

## 6. Strategic Plan References

- 6.1 Policy review is integral to the delivery of the Strategic Plan’s priorities and direction for the City as set out under the themes of:
- Respond to the climate emergency;
  - Deliver modern services for a modern city;
  - Improve health, wellbeing and happiness;
  - Deliver homes for those most in need;
  - Grow our economy so everyone benefits;
  - Celebrate our City, heritage and culture.

### Policy Panel Work Programme 2022-23

<b>28 June 2023</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work Programme 2023-24</li> </ul>
<b>2 August 2023</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grounds Maintenance Contract update</li> <li>• Landscape, Nature and Waterways Strategy development update</li> <li>• Work Programme 2023-24</li> </ul>
<b>27 September 2023</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial inequalities and cost of living</li> <li>• Future of Retail Vision</li> <li>• City Centre: Marketing and Inward Investment</li> <li>• Work Programme 2023-24</li> </ul>
<b>29 November 2023</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equality, Diversity and Inclusion</li> <li>• Future of Sports and Leisure Strategy</li> <li>• Work Programme 2023-24</li> </ul>

<b>10 January 2024</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Council's Policy on Procurement</li><li>• Mapping of community assets and asset-based community development approach;</li><li>• Work Programme 2023-24</li></ul>
<b>6 March 2024</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Parking Policy</li><li>• Approach to local commemorations, including benches, flags and statues</li></ul>

**Items yet to be scheduled for 2023-24**

Potential update on Voter ID arrangements.

