

20 January 2020

Report of	Assistant Director, Place and Client Services	Author	Karen Syrett ☎ 506477
Title	Next steps regarding options for Colchester High Street: agreeing objectives, gathering data and consulting stakeholders and the public		
Wards affected	Castle		

1. Executive Summary

1.1 In January 2019 the Panel considered a report and heard from stakeholders about proposals for pedestrianisation or traffic reduction in Colchester High Street. It was agreed to recommend to Cabinet that approval be given to the Panel to progress the next steps regarding options for Colchester High Street, including agreeing objectives, gathering baseline data and consultation with all stakeholders and the public.

1.2 Several work programmes and initiatives have emerged since this time which will include making strategic and long-term decisions relating to Colchester High Street. These are:

- **The Transport Strategy for Colchester** led by Essex County Council
- **The Rapid Transport System (RTS)** which will serve the Town Centre
- **The Town Deal:** the invitation by the government to develop a Town Investment Plan and bid for up to £25m from the Towns Fund
- Two of the Council's **New Strategic Priorities:** Town Centre Vision and Highways and Cycleways linked to the Town Deal

1.3 The 'next steps' for Colchester High St outlined in 1.1 above will be included as part of these wider programmes of work and their resulting opportunities. This includes aligning any emerging engagement and consultation exercises with options for Colchester High Street.

1.4 This report updates the Panel on progress made to date on the above work programmes, including the Town Deal and the next steps.

2. Action Required

2.1 To note the report and subsequent discussion.

2.2 To consider whether to recommend to Cabinet that, alongside consultation and engagement exercises linked to each of the above work programmes, Officers commission a study looking at the options for reducing traffic in the High Street.

3. Reason for Review

3.1 The report sets out progress following the Policy and Public Initiatives Panel meeting in January 2019.

4. Background Information

- 4.1 In January last year the Policy and Public Initiatives Panel (the Panel) recommended to Cabinet that they begin work looking at options for Colchester High Street.
- 4.2 The initial scoping work indicated that there were a number of initiatives already underway, that any High Street specific work would need to have reference to. This included the Transport Strategy for Colchester, Walking and Cycling initiatives and rapid transit.

Transport Strategy for Colchester

- 4.3 The Transport Strategy is being led by Essex County Council and to date has included two workshops with borough councillors and a workshop with stakeholders. Colchester officers have been involved in all these events. It is now expected that consultation will take place early in 2020.

Rapid Transit System

- 4.4 As part of the updated evidence base work for the Section 1 Local Plan, further work has taken place on proposals for a Rapid Transit System (RTS) which will serve the Town Centre.
- 4.5 Earlier this year, Essex County Council successfully bid for funding to help support planned housing growth across the county and in August 2019, it was announced that the A120/A133 Link Road and Rapid Transit System (RTS) had been successful in securing funding.
- 4.6 The County Council (ECC) undertook consultation on route options for both the Link Road and the Rapid Transit System in November/December. They held public information events over the six-week consultation period and the deadline for responses was 16th December.
- 4.7 The RTS will prioritise public transport on key routes in Colchester. It will enable housing growth and deliver modal shift, allowing new and existing residents to benefit from frequent, high-quality, reliable transport connecting to the places they want to go. The system will service Park and Ride and help to better connect the planned growth with the rest of the town, including the High Street.

The Town Deal

- 4.8 On 6 September 2019 the government invited 100 places to develop proposals for a Town Deal, as part of the £3.6 billion Towns Fund. Colchester was one of the places chosen.
- 4.9 Subsequently a Prospectus was published which set out the first stage of agreeing a Town Deal. This will operate as a two-stage process. Further guidance on Stage 2 will be published in due course.
- Stage 1: providing capacity support to places to put the structures and vision in place in order to move to the next stage of agreeing a deal
 - Stage 2: places to use their locally-owned Town Investment Plan to put together a business case to apply for funding for interventions.

- 4.10 The Towns Fund will provide the core public investment in Town Deals – additional funding may come from other sources or parts of government. The objective of the Fund is to drive the economic regeneration of towns to deliver long term economic and productivity growth through:
- **Urban regeneration, planning and land use:** ensuring towns are thriving places for people to live and work, including by: increasing density in town centres; strengthening local economic assets including local cultural assets; site acquisition, remediation, preparation, regeneration; and making full use of planning tools to bring strategic direction and change.
 - **Skills and enterprise infrastructure:** driving private sector investment and ensuring towns have the space to support skills and small business development.
 - **Connectivity:** developing local transport schemes that complement regional and national networks, as well as supporting the delivery of improved digital connectivity.
- 4.11 Although not only focussed on transportation the Prospectus does identify that high-quality and well-designed infrastructure is critical to supporting local economies and sustainably improving living standards. Whether through improving the speed and reliability of transport connectivity or ensuring internet speeds are fit for the needs of businesses, infrastructure investment will be key to spreading prosperity in towns.
- 4.12 It also recognises that, in many towns, there is a disconnection between where people live, and where jobs and leisure can be found. For towns close to larger urban areas, strengthening transport within the town to regional transport links (e.g. through a bus network) will open up new opportunities for people in the area. All road-based investments should now include provision for bus priority and cycling, unless this can be shown to be inappropriate. Active travel schemes such as new cycle and walking paths, for example, those prioritised in Local Authority’s Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs), could have the added benefit of supporting the health of the population, as well as contributing to the net zero greenhouse gas emissions target.
- 4.13 The prospectus sets out that a Town Deal partnership will be required to submit a Town Investment Plan no later than Summer 2020. To support this, a Town Deal partnership and work streams are being developed to facilitate the development of the Town Investment Plan. This will include developing a vision and strategy for the town and outline of the amount of investment needed to secure delivery of the plan from the Towns Fund, amongst other relevant factors.
- 4.14 Although the Town Deal and resulting Town Investment Plan cover a much wider area than just the town centre it would seem prudent to align all the various strategies and work programmes that are under development and that these should be used to inform any changes proposed to the High Street.

New Strategic Priorities

- 4.15 Two of the Council’s New Strategic Priorities (NSPs) also inform and are aligned to the objectives to develop options for Colchester High Street. These priorities are outlined below:

- **Highways and Cycling:** Prioritise plans for walking and cycling in Colchester and develop new projects to encourage sustainable modes of travel, improving health, well-being, community safety and air quality and providing a more attractive environment for people to cycle and walk around.
- **Town Centre Vision:** Create a vision for the Town Centre that incorporates the Town Deal, strengthens Colchester's position as a leading centre for heritage and culture and a place in which to work, visit, relocate and invest in. Work with partners to harness significant regeneration opportunities.

4.16 Work on the Town Centre Vision NSP will be aligned with the Town Deal and evolution of the Town Investment Plan. Both will involve a considerable amount of stakeholder and community engagement to ensure the sustained involvement of partners, local communities and visitors to the town in their development. The recruitment of an engagement officer for the Town Deal will facilitate this work.

4.17 Work is underway to prioritise walking and cycling in Colchester, including joining a number of policies and initiatives to optimise current, and develop new, routes. This includes work to develop the Colchester Orbital (a circular walk/cycle route around the periphery of the town, taking advantage of and connecting green spaces and off-road pathway networks). It also includes enhancing cycle security and parking in the Town Centre.

4.18 As outlined above, consultation and engagement will form a vital part of the strategy and vision for Colchester town which includes the High Street. Alongside these engagement exercises, it is suggested that officers commission a study looking at the options for reducing traffic in the High Street. The findings of this will help inform the final strategy and may also be useful in relation to the Town Investment Plan.

5. Standard References

5.1 This report does not give rise to any specific implications relating to Equality, Diversity and Human Rights, Risk Management, Health and Safety, Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications. As each individual project evolves it will be assessed against these considerations.

6. Strategic Plan References

6.1 Changes in the town centre relate to a number of priorities in the [Strategic Plan 2018-21](#).

7. Consultation

7.1 Consultation will be undertaken as necessary.

8. Publicity Considerations

8.1 There could be publicity resulting from future work.

9. Financial implications

9.1 None.

10. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

10.1 All actions arising from the report will need to consider the environmental and sustainability implications with particular reference to the definition of sustainable development set out in the National Planning Policy Framework, taking into account that the Council has declared a Climate Emergency and has committed to being carbon neutral by 2030.

11. Background Papers

Town Deal Prospectus:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/843843/20191031_Towns_Fund_prospectus.pdf