



Revolving Investment Fund Committee

Item

8

17 March 2021

Report of	Assistant Director Place & Client Services	Author	Andrew Tyrrell
Title	Update on Revolving Investment Fund (RIF) Projects		
Wards affected	All wards		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides a focussed update on some of the Revolving Investment Fund (RIF) funded schemes. It shows that continuing progress is being made in delivering the RIF programme since the last update.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 To note the contents of this report and the progress made to date.

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 To monitor this important element of the Council's capital programme.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 Not applicable.

5. Background Information

5.1 The RIF was set up to recycle capital receipts into high performing investments for the Council in order to produce income. Updates on the current projects are set out below:

5.2 Northern Gateway Sports Park

5.2.1 The £28.8m Colchester Northern Gateway Sports Park project completed construction on site on 30 November and has been handed over to the Council. This facility is ready to open as soon as safely possible to do so under national lockdown rules. The opening is currently expected to be on 26 April subject to the expected timelines announced by the Government.

5.2.2 The Section 278 (highway improvement) works for walking, cycling and equestrian routes have been largely completed, and are working to agreed timetables with both ECC Highways and Highways England. Severalls lane and Boxted Road have new walking, cycling paths connecting the Sports Park to the wider network. Equestrian links are also in place. The new and improved routes will be added on cycle mapping along with others being delivered more widely around the Northern Gateway in future so that these are clear for users. The Council is also actively exploring better wayfinding signage around the whole town, but will specifically look at linking up to and through the Northern Gateway to/from the orbital route and to the town centre.

5.2.3 Finally, regarding signalisation and lighting at Junction 28 of the A12, whilst the crossing points are in place; the signalisation is yet to become operational although that is as per the original agreed timetables. The works were/are set to complete in a second window for highway works that was provided to the Council last year; and will be completed during April 2021 with cooperation from Highways England and Essex County Council. Under the planning approval, these works were to be completed within 12 months of opening the Sports Park.

5.3 Northern Gateway South

5.3.1 A hybrid planning application (meaning part “outline” and part “detailed”) has been submitted for the land south of Axial Way, comprising of a mixed-use development with 350 homes, a health campus, 45,100m² commercial floorspace and a village green open space. Prolonged highway negotiations have now reached agreed traffic modelling and road work solutions to improve flows nearby the site post-development. A sustainable transport strategy update is the last piece of this travel-related jigsaw, and that has been worked on by our consultant Systra. The updated Sustainable Transport Strategy sets out a comprehensive set of measures that encourage travel by alternative methods to private car journeys; including elements such as travel clubs, cycle links, secure cycle parking, and ways to maximise use of public transport by future residents and businesses who come to the site. The planning application should be taken to a Planning Committee meeting very soon.

5.3.2 Two elements of the application were previously separated out into their own planning application, and advanced earlier. These were the Northern Gateway Heat Network’s Energy Centre, as well as “The Walk”. The Energy Centre construction phase is currently being held to align with other elements of the overall scheme but design work is ready for a construction tender exercise.

5.3.3 The Walk is a tree-lined boulevard that provides car-free walking and cycling access routes across the Northern Gateway south side, linking Mill Road (and the existing communities) through to the Turnstone leisure complex, Sports Park and Community

Stadium. Work started on this development in July 2020 and Phase 1 completed in November 2021, as planned. Phase 2 will commence in April, as Colchester Rugby Club complete their move from Mill Road to the new Sports Park, allowing the southern end of The Walk to be completed this year.

- 5.3.4 The Walk contract also includes parts of the underground infrastructure works for some additional projects to be installed at the same time. This includes the Heat Network pipes, cables for the ongoing LFFN Ultrafast Broadband project, CCTV infrastructure, and future utility supplied to the housing, health and commercial developments.
- 5.3.5 The Turnstone development was considered at the Cabinet meeting last week, 10 March (so not repeated herein).

5.4 Digital Strategy

- 5.4.1 The £3.3m DCMS-funded digital deployment of ultrafast broadband is progressing across various areas. The Local Full Fibre Network (LFFN) programme is now well underway since it started in July 2020. It is due for completion by the end of June 2020.
- 5.4.2 The deployment of the “Metronet”, core broadband network around urban Colchester, is now enabling follow-on investment from the private sector (£10m initial investment secured) to improve connectivity across a wider area covering the whole of Colchester. Over 95km of broadband links to London was completed prior to the groundworks around Colchester.
- 5.4.3 Work is also nearing the completion stages on fully replacing Colchester’s existing CCTV system with a brand new, digital system to improve community safety and wellbeing. The new digital system has already benefitted a number of businesses and the improve picture quality and coverage has assisted in multiple arrests as it has become operational across town. The ongoing roll out will allow for expansion of the system to new areas, will significantly reduce high operational costs on maintenance and repair, and provide better storage of footage for use by the police when requested.

5.5 Town Centre

- 5.5.1 The “Grow On Space” project was awarded £3.77m of “Local Growth Fund” by the South East Local Economic Partnership (SELEP), plus £900k match funding from Colchester Borough Council. The scheme generates 86 new and accommodated jobs and 10-15 new businesses. The project will provide a new building in Queen Street (replacing the Old Bus Depot) for creative and digital businesses looking to “scale up”, and potential Digital Hub alongside ground floor café-bar provision. The scheme has now been through a successful consultation and engagement period, evolved through design stage, and gained planning permission this month. Demolition and archaeological works will be tendered for shortly while architects develop detailed design work for the scheme to enter construction phases. It is envisaged full construction will begin in the summer with completion a year later. As detailed technical design work is still taking place more accurate timescales are not yet available.
- 5.5.2 The work on St Nicholas Square is progressing well too. The scheme brings immediate and direct benefits to neighbouring businesses as they adapt to create safe and appealing environments for their customers in the context of the Covid-19 ‘new normal’. This space forms a key cultural gateway in the east of the Town Centre, adjacent to the main shopping area and close to the Castle and other key cultural attractions. The businesses on three sides of this square have recently committed to significant

investment to their buildings bringing inward investment from the project totalling over £7m and showing the confidence the Council is helping to inspire.

- 5.5.3 With the advance payment from the Town Deal providing funding assurance, a St Nicholas Square working group was formed, concept designs evolved, and public consultation and engagement has been taking place. A planning application for works on and around the graveyard area has been submitted. The architects are finalising the detailed designs and materials prior to going out to tender. Acquisition of the graveyard land has nearly concluded with the Diocese of Chelmsford and work is ongoing with ECC Highways and North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP) on the Section 278 Legal Agreement and Traffic Regulation Orders. Work should start on site in April with completion due late summer.
- 5.5.4 Similarly, the Balcerne Gate public realm is also funded through the advanced Town Deal monies of £1m (for this and the scheme immediately above. Adjacent to The Mercury Theatre, and “Jumbo”, these public realm improvements are also ongoing and will shortly develop further improvements in this area. The contract is currently being negotiated with Phelan Construction Ltd and works should start within the next month. The project should complete in the summer so this new public realm has an immediate impact on our town; driving local economic recovery in the light of Covid-19; including supporting our retail and hospitality sector, supporting the creative and cultural sector, and helping to protect other town centre jobs. It will help continue to secure the 100 jobs based at the Mercury Theatre, plus a further 53 jobs in the wider economy; in addition to several short-term construction jobs directly involved in the delivery of the site works.
- 5.5.5 This follows on from The Mercury Rising project, now in its final stages; where Phelan Construction are now concluding after delays caused by working within the applicable Covid-19 safety measures that have reduced the number of operatives on site. Final fire-related measures are being installed and the production block and workspace areas are now complete. The Mercury staff have started to move into their new spaces and operate from the premises ahead of re-opening to the public. Practical Completion is scheduled for mid-April
- 5.5.6 Vineyard Gate was considered at the Cabinet meeting last week, 10 March (so not repeated herein).

5.6 Microgrid

- 5.6.1 A second stage feasibility study has just been completed on a potential microgrid. This has concluded that it would be possible for the Council to build a new solar photovoltaic farm and future microgrid. A full business case is now being prepared and a precise proposal will be presented in June for a decision to proceed, including potential site location, financial information, and operating model.

6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

- 6.1 All RIF projects are subject to Council policy on Equality and Diversity and legislation, policy and good practice is considered in emerging project plans. As examples (but not exhaustive):
- The Northern Gateway Sports Park development has been designed to promote access for all, inclusive use and accessibility to all groups.
 - Ultrafast broadband services are being deployed to more deprived wards where there is a market failure to provide this level of service to those areas, and the areas would otherwise not receive such services for the foreseeable future.

7. Standard References

- 7.1 There are no particular references to the Strategic Plan; consultation or publicity considerations or financial; community safety; health and safety or risk management implications.

7. Strategic Plan References

- 7.1 The vision, themes and objectives of the [Strategic Plan 2020-23](#) are embedded in the RIF projects. All projects outlined contribute directly to the Council's Strategic Plan 2020-23 priority of 'Growing a better economy so everyone benefits' contributing to the ability, as outlined in the plan, to 'Enable Economic Recovery from Covid-19 ensuring all residents benefit from growth'.
- 7.2 This is specifically detailed in the in the goal to 'Transform the Northern Gateway as a hub for improved wellbeing, physical activity, jobs, housing and renewable energy', 'address the inequality of access to Gigabit Broadband in communities' through the Digital Strategy. In addition, the projects are a major contribution to the Council's Covid-19 recovery plan providing jobs through construction and enabling economic recovery.
- 7.3 The Northern Gateway is specifically identified as a theme in the Council's Strategic Plan 2020-2023 under the priority 'Develop the Northern Gateway as a sustainable place for people to live, work and visit'. This also underpins to the Council's strategic priority to create new communities and adopt a Local Plan that delivers jobs, homes and the infrastructure to meet the borough's future needs'.
- 7.4 This update illustrates the contribution these projects make to the Strategic Plan priority: 'Create an environment that attracts inward investment to Colchester and help businesses to flourish' and to 'Ensure a good supply of employment land and premises to attract new businesses and allow existing firms to expand and thrive'. The projects also contribute to the Strategic Plan priority of 'Creating safe, healthy and active communities' (also see Section 11 below).

8. Consultation

- 8.1 There are no particular consultation considerations necessary for this report. However, consultation (both statutory and non-statutory) is a major element of the individual project plans.

9. Publicity Considerations

- 9.1 There are no particular publicity considerations necessary for this report. However, each project has a communications and marketing plan, including targeted publicity and marketing to attract investment.

10. Financial implications

- 10.1 An update on the financial position of the RIF schemes is included on the Capital Expenditure Monitor Quarter 3 report which was presented to Cabinet on 10 March 2021.

11. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications

- 11.1 The development of the Sports Park and The Walk, CCTV and town centre public realm works all show examples of how RIF projects contributes directly to the Strategic Plan priority of 'Creating safe, healthy and active communities' and facilitates health and well-

being of borough residents in general. The provision of a major new sports facility for the borough with a diverse offer and access for all enables increased access to healthy lifestyles and inclusion in sports and leisure activities, is a particularly good example.

- 11.2 The Digital Strategy work includes the work to replace Colchester's existing CCTV system will improve community safety and wellbeing, enabling enhanced monitoring and improving public safety.

12. Health and Safety Implications

- 12.1 The report poses no specific health and safety issues; all health and safety implications on each capital project are managed through mechanisms appropriate to their individual circumstances.

13. Risk Management Implications

- 13.1 There are no specific risks related to this report; however, all capital projects have an individual risk register to manage issues.

14. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

- 14.1 The Council has declared a Climate Emergency and has committed to being carbon neutral by 2030. The RIF includes several projects that will help promote sustainable travel and renewable energy that will contribute towards the achievement of sustainable development as defined in the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 14.2 Achieving sustainable development means meeting three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways. These are economic, social and environmental objectives. Projects such as the Northern gateway Heat Network, the largest of its type in the UK, are pioneering examples of how this priority is being met. The Walk's emphasis on sustainable and active travel are another example of promoting sustainable transport and reducing carbon by encouraging the avoidance of car use.