

## RIVER COLNE VISION

### PROJECT BRIEF TO DEVELOP A VISION FOR SUSTAINABLE ACCESS AND TOURISM OF THE RIVER COLNE FOR COLCHESTER BOROUGH COUNCIL

#### SUMMARY

Colchester Borough Council (the “Council”) wishes to engage a specialist consultant (the “Consultant”) to create a vision for the River Colne in Colchester that celebrates its cultural heritage, protects its environmental importance, sustains appropriate economic benefits and stimulates partnership working to deliver this vision. The outputs will include:

- An overarching vision for the river that is supported by local partners and stakeholders
- Key priorities for the three-character zones
- Engagement with local partners
- A spatial representation of the vision that captures its ambition in a visual way
- Identification of the next steps and actions needed to deliver the vision
- A summary report of findings.

#### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The river Colne rises at Steeple Bumpstead in Braintree district and flows south east through Halstead and Wakes Colne to Colchester, where it becomes tidal before joining the Blackwater Estuary. The headwaters of the catchment, north-west of Colchester town are predominantly rural in nature, giving way to a more urban environment downstream at the town itself.<sup>1</sup>The river has three distinctive character zones (see plan attached at Appendix 1).

1.2 **Upper Colne (Rural River):** In this stretch the river flows through a rural landscape from west of Wakes Colne for about 9km until it reaches the A12 and the outskirts of urban Colchester. This countryside is important for its natural and historic environment, as well as providing the attractive landscape setting for both local villages and rural communities, such as Ford Street and Chappel and Colchester town itself. It also provides important agricultural, tourism and recreational opportunities. Popular with cyclists and walkers the area includes a section of the Essex Way and the impressive Chappel railway viaduct, popular pubs and visitor attractions such as the East Anglian Railway Museum (which also hosts highly popular events such as the Chappel Beer Festival and Thomas the Tank Engine Days) that create local employment and help support local economies and communities<sup>2</sup>.

1.3 **Urban River (Mid-Colne):** In Colchester town itself, the rich historic environment and river landscapes provide the basis for visitor attractions and experiences for visitors, such as the multi-award-winning Colchester Castle Museum, Castle Park, as well as enhancing the quality of life for local residents. Through the town, the river forms a natural corridor and amenity. There are riverside walking and cycle routes which could be extended giving traffic free routes for both commuting and leisure trips, and with links to the Town Centre, Wivenhoe, and the Rowhedge Trail. The Colchester Orbital, a circular trail around town, crosses the river in Cymbeline Meadows to the west of the town as well as near the University of Essex in The Hythe<sup>3</sup>. The Borough’s historic town centre is the focal point for visitor attractions, such as Colchester Castle as well as leisure and cultural attractions facilities such as the Mercury Theatre, Colchester Arts Centre and Firstsite visual art gallery. In addition, as a regional centre Colchester town is a

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<sup>1</sup> <https://environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning/OperationalCatchment/3098/Summary>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.colchester.gov.uk/info/cbc-article/?catid=emerging-local-plan&id=KA-02211>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.colchester.gov.uk/info/cbc-article/?catid=emerging-local-plan&id=KA-02196>

hub for shopping and entertainment and has a thriving social economy with three cinemas, pubs, cafes and restaurants. The town centre is also the key focus for development opportunities and challenges, including on the riverside. The Hythe area, to the east of the town, is a former commercial harbour which includes some rundown and underused industrial land in East Colchester. In the past few years, the eastern area of Colchester has experienced a period of significant change and growth. The area provides good access to Hythe Station but much of the Hythe area is in flood zone 3 and the river can form a barrier to movement.

1.4 **Colne Estuary (Lower Colne):** The open character of the Colne estuary is largely an undeveloped and rural landscape with a rich, diverse and irreplaceable natural asset in terms of its natural and cultural heritage. The ecological importance of the Colne Estuary is reflected by the variety of international and European designations covering them i.e. Ramsar sites, Special Protection Areas (SPA) and the Essex Estuaries Special Area of Conservation (SAC) designated under the Habitats Directive. The Colne Estuary is also protected as part of the larger Colne, Blackwater, Roach and Crouch Marine Conservation Zone. There are also a number of Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Local Wildlife Sites designated around the estuary.<sup>4</sup> The River's estuary is home to a number of sizeable communities and visitor destinations in Rowhedge and Wivenhoe, extending round to coastal communities such as West Mersea, which is world-famous for its oyster cultivation (Colchester Natives and Rock Oysters which could have potential for Protected Geographical Indication status). There are a number of diverse considerations and land uses which all need to be managed in an integrated way within this zone. These include internationally important habitats, land and water-based recreation, fishing, birding and archaeological and heritage assets. Obligations to protect the natural and heritage assets must be balanced against the need to satisfy the wider socio-economic aspirations of both residents and visitor communities. Climate change, including sea level rise presents increasing pressure on the management of estuary habitats and coastal communities along the Colne estuary fringe. A new coastal path is currently being planned by Natural England around the whole of England's coastline which includes the edge of the Colne estuary.

## 2.0 PLANNING CONTEXT

2.1 **Local Plan Policy:** The Adopted Local Plan identifies a spatial vision that focusses development and regeneration in Colchester Town Centre and four gateway regeneration areas close to the town's centre, and to a lesser extent in district centres. Tourism is seen as central to the borough's regeneration whilst protecting the historic and natural character at the coast and in the countryside and enhancing key greenspaces and links. Core policies include:

- SD1 Sustainable Development Locations
- CE2a Town Centre: This includes that *'The Council will also encourage developments that create safe and attractive public spaces and a more balanced night-time economy.'*
- UR1 Regeneration Areas: includes East Colchester where development needs to *'... enhance the public realm, improve accessibility and address social deprivation'*.
- UR2 Built Design and Character: This emphasises that *'...Buildings, Conservation Areas, archaeological sites, parklands, views, the river and other features that contribute positively to the character of the built environment shall be protected from demolition or inappropriate development'*.
- TA2 Walking and Cycling: *'The Council will work with partners to promote walking and cycling as an integral and highly sustainable means of transport'*.
- ENV1 Environment: *'The Borough Council will conserve and enhance Colchester's natural and historic environment, countryside and coastline'. 'Within the Coastal Protection Belt development will not be permitted that would adversely affect the open and rural character*

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.colchester.gov.uk/info/cbc-article/?catid=emerging-local-plan&id=KA-02211>

*of the undeveloped coastline, and its historic features, sites of nature conservation importance and wildlife habitats.'*

**2.2 National Planning Policy:** The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) recognises that planning policies and decisions should:

- contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment (paragraph 170)
- take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure (paragraph 171)
- Recognise the importance of green infrastructure in relation to climate change adaptation and mitigation, and wellbeing benefits in terms of quality of life.<sup>5</sup> And that:
- Heritage assets should be conserved and enjoyed for their contribution to quality of life (paragraph 184) and for their wider social, cultural and economic benefits (paragraph 185).

2.3 At the same time the NPPF recognises:

- The importance of economic growth along with barriers such as poor services and adverse environments (paragraph 81)
- That there is a role for sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside (paragraph 83).
- That access to a network of high-quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is recognised as important for the health and well-being of communities
- Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land are vital (paragraph 97).
- That new or enhanced activity can contribute to healthy, inclusive and safe places (paragraph 91)
- That patterns of movement and parking are integral to the design of schemes
- The environmental impacts of traffic and infrastructure need to be considered (paragraph 102).
- Tranquil areas and the effects of noise or light pollution are a potential issue (paragraph 180).

### 3.0 SCOPE OF THE WORK

**3.1 Objective:** To create a vision for the River Colne in Colchester that celebrates its cultural heritage, enhances its environmental character and sustains appropriate economic benefits and opportunities whilst stimulating partnership working to deliver against this vision. The vision should generate a sense of continuity for the river which respects its contribution to Colchester and the surrounding area and celebrates its story in a variety of engaging ways whilst promoting initiatives to help residents live healthier lives. The consultant will be expected to facilitate a workshop event or events with local stakeholders to understand the issues and opportunities and develop a vision that all organisations can sign up to and support. A key part of this should be to explore ways of working that can enhance added value to existing partner activity through extended partnership working and a vision of active leisure that promotes community engagement and knowledge of the river as a functioning natural system.

**3.2 Outputs:** The consultant will be expected to deliver:

- An overarching vision for the river's conservation, use and value that is supported by engagement with key local stakeholders
- Separate priorities for the three main zones of the river
- Engagement with local partners through a workshop event or events
- A spatial representation of the vision that captures its ambition in a visual way
- Identification of the next steps and pathways to follow to deliver the vision and priorities

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<sup>5</sup> National Planning Policy Framework (2019) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

- A summary report of findings
- Presentation of findings to the stakeholder groups

**3.3 Existing Initiatives and Plans:** In undertaking this work, the significance of relevant current or emerging strategies and plans and activities should be taken into account. This includes, but is not limited to:

- England Coast Path<sup>6</sup> – This is a new National Trail around all of England’s coast being delivered by Natural England. In places it delivers new rights to enjoy the coast within the coastal margin as well as infrastructure such as signs and gates.
- Essex Wildlife Trust (EWT) – River Catchment projects<sup>7</sup>, including the Essex Water Vole Recovery Project and RIVERSEARCH training volunteer surveyors; Fingringhoe Wick Nature Reserve<sup>8</sup>, EWT’s first wildlife reserve and visitor centre overlooking the Colne Estuary; Living Seas project<sup>9</sup> including coastal clean-ups and shore search surveys;
- Visit Essex<sup>10</sup> The official marketing and tourism promotion agency for Essex aiming to encourage short breaks, challenge negative perceptions of the county, raise the profile of Essex as a visitor destination and create a ‘sense of place’
- Colchester Green Infrastructure Strategy (2011)<sup>11</sup> – This is a borough-wide strategy that focusses on opportunities for green infrastructure improvements within Colchester borough, including the river, and introduces the Colchester Orbital, a circular recreational route around Colchester.
- Colchester Economic Strategy (2015-2021) – which aims to create a place which is vibrant, prosperous, thriving and welcoming for residents, businesses and visitors alike. Tourism is a core sector for the Borough’s economy: creating new jobs, raising and retaining skills, creating, supporting and retaining businesses.
- The Cambridge Model to estimate the Economic Impact of Tourism in Colchester Borough 2018 - this model estimates the volume of visitor trips and visitor spend in the Borough bearing in mind that there are significant visitor attractions and destinations in all four corners of the Borough as well as the town centre.
- ‘We Are Colchester’ - an emerging partnership between Colchester Council, Essex County Council, businesses and other groups, that will draw up a plan to make the best use of the borough’s historic, cultural and other assets and bid for up to £25 million from the government’s Town Deal scheme.
- The Adopted Local Plan (Focussed review 2014)<sup>12</sup> – sets the vision, objectives and spatial strategy, as well as policy, up until 2021, including major regeneration areas through which the River Colne runs.
- The Emerging Local Plan (2017-2033)<sup>13</sup> – currently at the examination stage, sets out the vision, strategy, objectives and policy for planning and delivery across the borough through to 2033. The emerging allocated sites are identified in the proposals plan.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/england-coast-path-improving-public-access-to-the-coast>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.essexwt.org.uk/protecting-wildlife/landscape-conservation/river-catchments>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.essexwt.org.uk/nature-reserves/fingringhoe>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.essexwt.org.uk/protecting-wildlife/landscape-conservation/living-seas>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.visitessex.com/colchester.aspx>

<sup>11</sup> <https://cbccrmdata.blob.core.windows.net/noteattachment/Green%20Infrastructure%20Final%20Report%20Executive%20Summary.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.colchester.gov.uk/info/cbc-article/?catid=adopted-local-plan&id=KA-01124#adopted-neighbourhood-plans>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.colchester.gov.uk/info/cbc-article/?catid=emerging-local-plan&id=KA-02196>

- Wivenhoe Neighbourhood Plan<sup>14</sup> – this plan was approved at referendum in May 2019 and includes key policies relevant to the River Colne. The plan area incorporates a section of the north bank of the Lower Colne within Colchester Borough.
- Eight Ash Green Neighbourhood Plan – ‘Made’ by Colchester Borough Council in December 2019<sup>15</sup>
- West Bergholt Neighbourhood Plan – Plan ‘made’ by Colchester Borough Council in October 2019

**3.4 Stakeholders:** The Consultant shall engage with key local stakeholders to develop the vision and priorities. Key stakeholders are anticipated as follows:

- Officers from the Council and Essex County Council including planning, public and environmental health, transport, leisure, tourism, licensing and estates;
- Relevant Members; and
- External stakeholders such as Natural England, Environment Agency, Sport England, Braintree and Tendring Councils, Rural Community Council of Essex, Essex Wildlife Trust, Essex and Suffolk Rivers Trust, National Farmers Union, Country Landowners Association and the Brightlingsea Harbour Authority
- Community based organisations such as Colne Watch (an organisation which monitors speeding and other antisocial behaviours along the River) parish or community councils within the river corridor, and relevant water-based clubs and societies.
- Local businesses such as accommodation providers, visitor attractions, tourism bodies, business representatives and major riverside landowners.

Allowance should be made in pricing within the budget range for up to 40 stakeholder contacts to be engaged in one or more workshop sessions (venue(s) to be provided by Colchester Borough Council) but consultants should also provide a day rate for carrying out additional workshops or consultation events, to include all additional preparation, collation, reporting and expenses in case required. The Council is aware that different stakeholders of interest and place may need to be engaged using a variety of approaches and is open to proposals on varied approaches to achieve this.

**3.5 Budget:** The budget range for this project is £10-20,000 (excluding VAT but inclusive of expenses).

**3.6 Indicative timetable:**

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|---|----------------|
| • Inception                                 | 23.03.2020     |
| • Data-gathering and baseline research      | w/c 23.03.2020 |
| • Stakeholder Workshop (s)                  | w/c 20.04.2020 |
| • Draft Report                              | w/c 11.05.2020 |
| • Final Report and Stakeholder presentation | End June 2020  |

**4.0 REPORTING**

4.1 The Consultant shall work closely with the Council to ensure that agreed services are being executed and delivered to the highest standards according to critical timings and best practice. The Council will be able to supply OS base maps.

4.2 The Project Manager at the Council will be **Catherine Bailey, Planning Policy Officer**. You should nominate one person from your company to manage the brief through to completion and act as

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<sup>14</sup> <http://wivenhoeneighbourhoodplan.org.uk/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.colchester.gov.uk/info/cbc-article/?catid=neighbourhood-planning&id=KA-02895>

the primary contact. The project will be administered by email and telephone wherever practicable.

4.3 A Project Board of key officers and Members within the Council has been established and the Consultant shall allow for two meetings with the Project Manager and/or the Project Board, plus one or more initial stakeholder workshop(s) and final presentation (subject to 3.5 above), during the course of the project, with project meetings held at the Council offices provisionally at inception and draft report stages.

## **5.0 PRESENTATION OF OUTPUTS**

5.1 The Consultant shall present the outcomes of the work in the form of an A4 written technical report, along with details of the workshop findings and appendices as appropriate. Stakeholder presentations shall be in an appropriate format to be agreed with the Project Manager.

5.2 The Consultant shall make digital versions of all documents available in a format to be agreed with the Council.

## **6.0 COPYRIGHT**

6.1 The copyright of the final report and any appendices will belong to the Council which will reserve the right to distribute and publish the material in part or in whole.

## **7.0 EXPERTISE REQUIRED**

7.1 Submissions are invited from consultants who can demonstrate expertise and understanding in stakeholder engagement, recreation and tourism planning and management, development and environmental issues.

## **8.0 HOW TO RESPOND**

**8.1 Submission requirements and assessment:** In response to this brief, consultants are required to provide:

- Details of proposed approach and how they propose to comply with the project brief within the defined timescale;
- Indicative work programme, including timings for key deliverables and identified milestones;
- A fixed price quotation for undertaking the work outlined in the submission, broken down by key stages, including number of days for each named personnel (time and expenses);
- Examples of similar commissions creating environmental enhancement plans, tourism management and development, stakeholder consultation and engagement which has delivered appropriate economic benefits
- CVs of named personnel and their role in the project including details of relevant experience;
- Details of professional liability insurance;
- Contact details of two referees.

**8.2 Evaluation:** The appointment will be based on an evaluation of both quality and price (where relevant). The quality evaluation criteria will be based on:

- Experience of the team in this type of project
- Ability to facilitate and empathise with stakeholders
- Presentation skills of the team
- Enthusiasm, commitment and creativity
- Knowledge and understanding of Colchester as a borough and as a place.
- Understanding of the brief and its context
- Approach and methodology

8.3 Please confirm within your submission if there are any conflicts of interest which should be considered in relation to other current or future work being undertaken by your company.

8.4 **Submission timeline:** The indicative timetable for the award of the contract is as follows:

- Issue of quotation 21.02.2020
- Return of Quotation 06.03.2020 (by12pm)
- Appointment of consultants 13.03.2020

8.5 Shortlisted consultants will be called for interview in the week-commencing 09.03.2020. Please indicate in your submission if there are any days in that week that you are unavailable.

## 9.0 CONTACT DETAILS

9.1 Please send your email submissions to: [Catherine.bailey@colchester.gov.uk](mailto:Catherine.bailey@colchester.gov.uk)

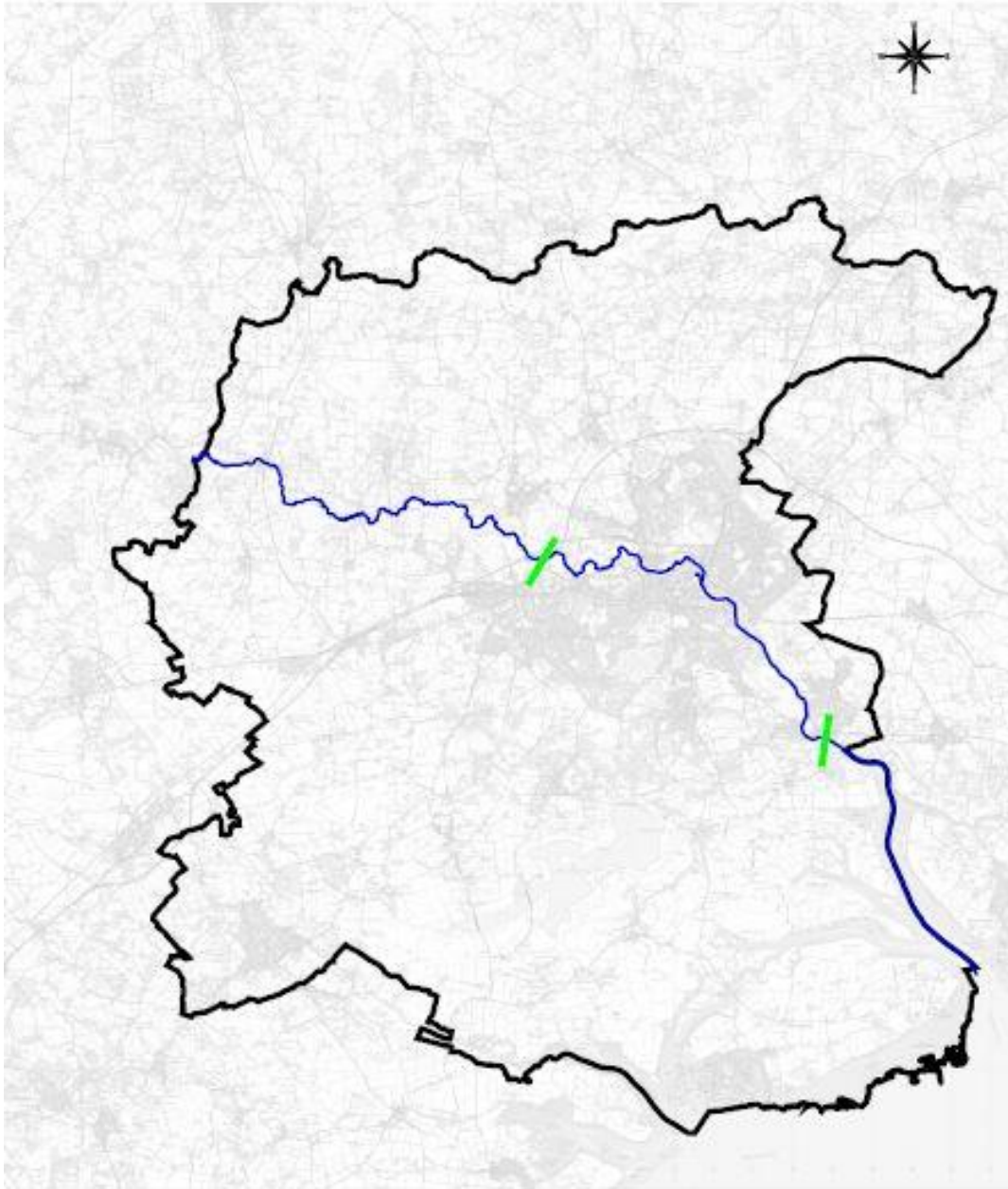
9.2 Address for information:

Catherine Bailey  
Planning Policy Officer  
Rowan House  
33 Sheepen Road  
Colchester Essex CO33WG

9.3 Further information from **Catherine Bailey, Planning Policy Officer** Tel: 01206 282530. Please note that, for reasons of fairness, we will send copies of any questions received during the quotation period and their responses to all consultants invited to submit a proposal.

## Appendix: Map of River Colne





Date: 20/02/2020 Scale: 1:20000