


20 March 2019

Report of	Assistant Director Policy & Corporate	Author	Matthew Brown  01206 507348
Title	Future High Streets		
Wards affected	Castle Ward		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report provides a briefing on a forthcoming application to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) 'Future High Streets' programme.
- 1.2. All lower tier UK local authorities were invited to submit Expressions of Interest (EOI) to this programme by 22nd March 2019. If successful at this stage we will then be invited to prepare Business Cases in support of the themes and interventions identified within our EOI.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1. To note the contents of this report; in particular the proposed Vision and Strategy, the list of key issues and evidence identified to support the development of this Strategy (described at section 5.8), and the strong support it has received from key partner organisations and groups with an interest in our Town Centre.
- 2.2. To delegate authority for the finalisation and submission of an Expression of Interest to Government on 22nd March 2019 to the Assistant Director, Policy and Corporate, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Business and Culture.
- 2.3. To agree to the development of related Business Cases and further stakeholder development and consultation (which would be funded through revenue drawn down from MHCLG as part of this programme) in the event that Colchester is successful at the EOI stage.

3. Reasons for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 'Future High Streets' gives Colchester an opportunity to secure financial and non-financial support from Government to ensure our town centre is fit for future purpose. It builds on the Council's 'Better Town Centre Plan – Colchester Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document' (2012) and the 'Our Colchester' (Business Improvement District) Vision and Business Plan (2018) identifying key themes and interventions needed to enhance the important Town Centre area.
- 3.2 The Vision and Strategy has been endorsed by key stakeholders including 'Our Colchester' (BID), Policy and Public Initiatives Panel, Colchester Creative Board, Safer Colchester Partnership, key organisations representing History and Heritage, Business and Enterprise, ECC & SE LEP, and wider Community Groups and Organisations that have an interest in the Town Centre.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 It will be possible to apply to other Funding Opportunities from Government as they arise, however 'Future High Streets', represents a significant and timely opportunity to develop focussed interventions that together will improve the sustainability and resilience of our town centre in the face of current and significant challenges.

5. Supporting Information

- 5.1. In December 2018, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) launched the 'Future High Streets' programme;
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-high-streets-fund-call-forproposals>
- 5.2. The key attributes of this fund are as follows:
- The objective is to **renew and reshape town centres and high streets in a way that improves experience, drives growth and ensures future sustainability.**
 - £675m nationally is available to help town centres and high streets evolve and adapt to significant changes in how people live, shop, use services and spend their leisure time. Notionally this represents around £5m government investment to every large town in the UK and will be released via two competitive calls.
 - The prospectus identifies the following priority themes for investment:
 1. Investment in physical infrastructure,
 2. Acquisition and assembly of land including making improvements to the public realm,
 3. Improvements to transport access, traffic flow and circulation in the area,
 4. Supporting change of use (where appropriate) – housing delivery and densification
 5. Supporting adaptation of the high street in response to changing technology.
 - There is a further strand focusing on heritage high streets.
- 5.3. In response, CBC formed a small officer working group comprising key interests from Business, Community, Heritage, Creative and Cultural sectors as well as Transport to develop ideas that demonstrate a collective ambition for Colchester's Town Centre, as outlined in section 5.6 below.
- 5.4. The Vision prepared as the centrepiece of Colchester's EOI articulates how Colchester's distinctiveness, through its significant cultural and heritage assets can underpin and drive footfall to the town across all groups of visitors and users; including (but not limited to); retail, tourism, an attractive place to meet and socialise (including the night-time economy), a place to work and a place to learn.
- 5.5. Taking these themes, the 'Future High Streets' programme for Colchester identifies the broad types of intervention which will maintain and further boost the capacity, accessibility, diversity, attractiveness and long-term sustainability of the town centre as it responds to changes in consumer behaviours and needs; whilst also addressing the significant population growth in the Borough and wider catchment area to the town.
- 5.6. The Vision, Objective, Strategy and Illustrative Actions are expressed as follows:

Future High Streets - Colchester

AMBITION: Create a sustainable economic heart for a growing community

OBJECTIVE: Utilise the Town's key heritage assets and distinctiveness to unlock & enable;

STRATEGY:

1. Bringing key buildings and spaces back into use

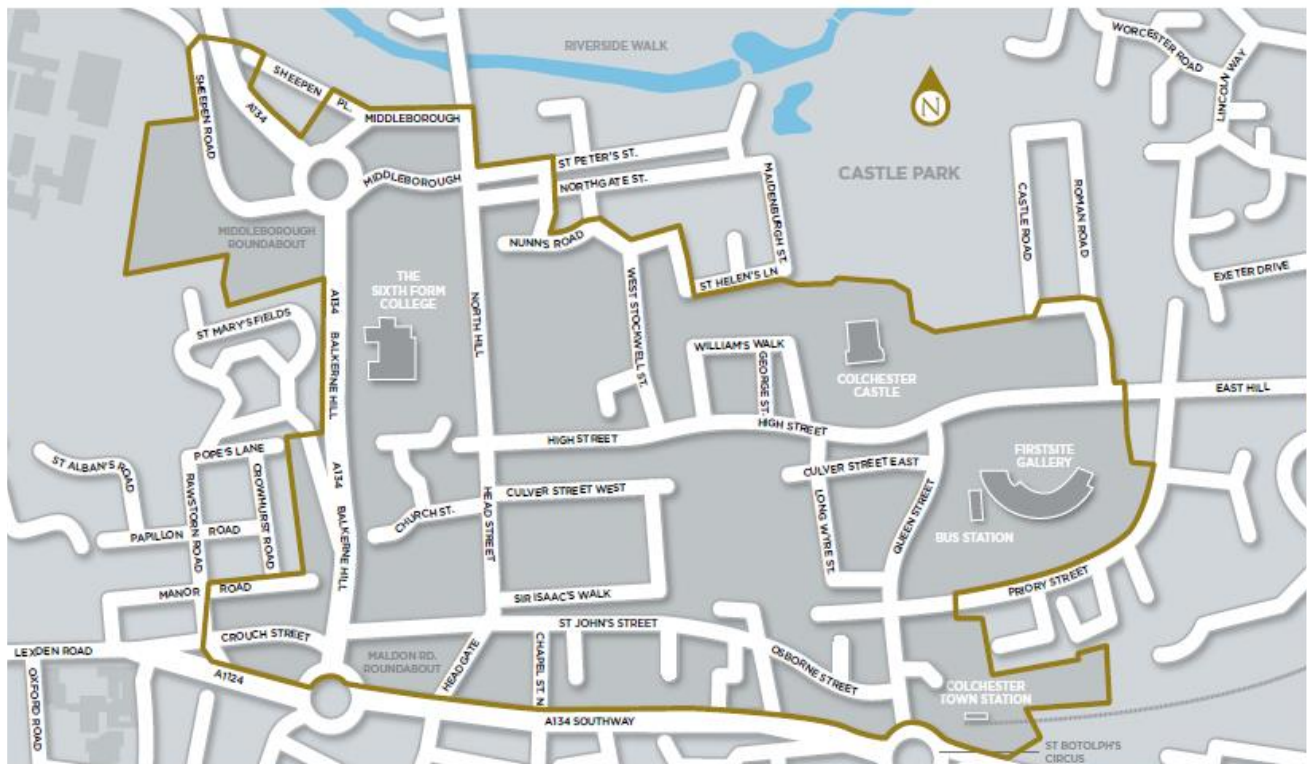
2. Enhancing accessibility and capacity; improving experience

3. Showcasing our rich cultural and heritage offer

ACTIONS:

Pop-up innovative meanwhile uses of empty retail units & other buildings that animate and engage	Improve travel experience including smart car parking and optimising active and sustainable travel	Develop more coherent signage, interpretation and prominence of heritage
Develop new and culturally enriching uses of buildings and assets in poor condition	Develop public realm to enhance perception, dwell time and safety	Maximise the footfall of existing cultural and heritage assets
Stimulate regeneration zones offering attractive, gigabit broadband enabled mixed uses including business and residential	Stimulate activities and events programmes to boost distinctiveness of Colchester's offer	Make heritage assets the centrepiece of vibrant, attractive regeneration schemes

5.7. For the purposes of this Expression of Interest, the geography is taken to be that of 'Our Colchester'; the Business Improvement District (BID) as follows:



- 5.8. Crucially, Colchester must present a strong evidence base of the challenges it faces which support the ambition and vision. For Colchester the positioning of key challenges and evidence will be based on halting the decline in several key areas, whilst ensuring the Town is able to fulfil its role supporting significant forecast population growth. Areas to focus on will include:
- Air quality, traffic congestion and journey time reliability
 - Crime and perception of crime in the Town Centre
 - Number of empty retail units in the Town Centre
 - Patterns and trends in the residential population in Castle Ward, and the Wards to the immediate South of the Town Centre
 - The demographic of visitors, employees and residents to help inform future requirements
 - Future retail trends and the implication for traditional town centres
 - Condition of certain heritage and historic assets, including buildings in the Town Centre which together could play a significant role in driving footfall, broadening the appeal and increasing the capacity of the Town Centre.
- 5.9. The themes outlined above and significant further analysis, research and consultation have been used to complete the full EOI, ensuring that it provides a compelling ambition for the Town Centre in line with the 'Future High Streets' programme prospectus.
- 5.10. Letters of support have been sought from key stakeholders in the Town Centre which will be appended with the Expression of Interest, including 'Our Colchester' (BID), Will Quince MP for Colchester, Colchester Ambassadors, CBC Leader and Deputy Leader and the three Ward Councillors representing Castle Ward, Creative Colchester Board, Colchester Archaeological Trust, Safer Colchester Partnership, key Community Groups including Residents Associations, University of Essex, SE LEP and ECC, Key Businesses in the Town Centre including the larger shopping centres and Fenwick, Colchester Business Enterprise Agency.

Next Steps

- 5.11. The Expression of Interest will be submitted to MHCLG on 22nd March 2019.
- 5.12. Following this, the estimated timescales for the following stages of the Programme are anticipated to be:
- Summer 2019: announcement on places moving to Phase 2 (business case development)
 - Late 2019: first round of final business cases for Phase 2 to be submitted by local authorities
 - Spring 2020: all remaining final business cases for Phase 2 to be submitted
 - Not before 2020: Second round of applications to the Future High Streets Fund opens

6. Strategic Plan References

- 6.1. Working with partners to create a shared vision for a vibrant town centre is identified as a priority in the CBC Strategic Plan.

7. Consultation and Publicity Considerations

- 7.1 Public and stakeholder consultation has taken place throughout this project and is ongoing. The next stages of this work (if EOI approved by Government) will include undertaking further consultation on the vision and strategy described in this report, and engaging partners notably 'Our Colchester' in developing business cases that will deliver interventions aligned to the proposed actions and themes set out in the Vision and Strategy and responding to challenges identified in the EOI.
- 7.2 If the Council progresses to subsequent stages of the programme a public and communication plan will be established to maximise publicity and awareness about the programme and to ensure optimum timely and effective engagement with communities and stakeholders.
- 7.3 Finally, where specific initiatives and interventions are developed, publicity and consultation will be considered for these projects as appropriate.
- 7.4 It is noted that Publicity will arise as a result of the report/consultation which may be positive in relation to taking a partnership approach to enhance the town centre but could be negative in relation to the 'challenges' being identified in the EOI. However it has been advised by MHCLG that there will be no formal requirement for EOI's to be published in full in the public domain.

8. Financial implications

- 8.1 There are no financial implications at this stage of the programme and the Expression of Interest is being developed within existing resources. If the CBC application progresses to subsequent stages of the programme (as outlined in section 5.12 above), business cases will be developed in line with Colchester Borough Council's established approaches, and funded through revenue drawn down from MHCLG as part of this programme.

9. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights, Community Safety and Health and Safety implications

- 9.1 Any schemes, initiatives and projects that may subsequently be developed if the bid is successful will require full consideration to be given to equality and diversity impacts. An Equality Impact Assessment will therefore be completed as part of any such projects, initially as part of the consultation phase.

10. Risk Management Implications

- 10.1 No implications are identified at this stage.

Appendices

None

Background Papers

Future High Streets Programme: (includes Supplementary Guidance on programme): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-highstreets->

fund-call-for-proposals

- Revitalising Town Centres (Local Government Association):
<https://www.local.gov.uk/revitalising-town-centres-handbook-councillership>
- Our Colchester (Business Improvement District) Vision:
<https://ourcolchester.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Our-Colchester-BIDBusiness-Plan-Web.pdf>
- 'The High Street Report' and 'High Street 2030 – Achieving Change':
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-high-street-report>
- Grimsey Review 2: <http://www.vanishinghighstreet.com/wpcontent/uploads/2018/07/GrimseyReview2.pdf>
- Colchester Town Centre Plan – Supplementary Planning Document:
<https://www.colchester.gov.uk/info/cbc-article/?catid=adoptedguidance&id=KA-022>