



Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability

Item

1 July 2021

Report of	Assistant Director Place and Client	Author	Jane Thompson
Title	Colchester Active Travel Fund – ECC Consultation		
Wards affected	Castle, Lexden & Braiswick, Mile End, New Town & Christ Church		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Essex County Council is inviting the Borough Council to responses to their Colchester Active Travel consultation. Should the scheme go ahead it could mean around £5.3m investment in Colchester from a total pot of £7.8m, following a successful bid by ECC to Government, for five schemes within Essex.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To welcome the consultation and proposed investment in Colchester.
- 2.2 To respond positively to the consultation proposals as outlined in the letter of response attached as Appendix 1.

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 The proposals outlined in the consultation would help improve walking and cycling to the town centre and help deliver improved, sustainable, transport choice. The investment in Colchester should be welcomed as sustainable travel is a strategic Priority of the Council. In addition to helping travel behaviours, the public realm that this scheme will bring would also help improve the visitor experience and can be an opportunity to enhance our town centre environment.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 To not respond to the consultation. This could mean losing the opportunity to implement schemes which will take forward the Borough Council's sustainability and town centre policies and would not be consistent with the Council's policies and ambitions.
- 4.2 To not respond to the consultation or to respond negatively could mean the potential investment in Colchester being withdrawn and would not be constant with the Council's policies and ambitions.
- 4.3 To respond favourably only to specific elements and not others could mean the package of measures is diluted unsuccessfully or unpicked, meaning withdrawal of support for partners, and funding from Government.

5. Background Information

- 5.1 The proposals are led by Essex County Council (ECC) and this Council (CBC) is a consultee. CBC has worked with ECC in the evolution of proposals, alongside “Our Colchester” representatives, North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP), Colchester Cycle Campaign, Walk Colchester, a representative from blind and partially sighted groups and ECC Passenger Transport, in developing the proposals.
- 5.2 The consultation proposals put forward by ECC meet CBC’s objectives contained in the Strategic Plan and will take forward the Council’s Climate Emergency and Positive Parking Strategy objectives. The proposals also meet the objectives in the emerging ECC Colchester Future Transport Strategy and the Local Walking and Cycling Investment Plan (LCWIP), both of which were supported by CBC.
- 5.3 Should the ECC scheme go ahead, it should mean around £5.3m investment in Colchester. ECC has been awarded £7.8m for the County as a whole, following a successful bid to Government for five schemes (with Colchester receiving the highest level of investment).
- 5.4 The Active Travel proposals will join up with the Town Deal proposal to better link the town centre to Greenstead (Local Walking and Cycling Investment Plan (LCWIP) route 4 and 7 proposed as part of the Town Deal).
- 5.5 Following the consultation, ECC will work with DfT in how the plans for all five active travel fund proposals can be taken forward. The schemes that are supported by the local authorities, residents and stakeholders are more likely to get funding approval. This funding opportunity could therefore be a “once in a generation” chance to implement a collection of transformational schemes which will genuinely encourage major increases in walking and cycling, as well as benefitting the urban environment and air quality by reducing car use and improving the public realm. This transport choice is important to the recovery of the town centre post-Covid.
- 5.6 Several months of design work and stakeholder consultation have gone into preparing the ECC schemes and the measures proposed by them are a package that all work cumulatively. Some of the elements like reducing parking spaces in Crouch Street west will enhance the cycle route, with better wider footways and public realm improvements and designated disabled parking. These cannot be implemented if the current number of parking spaces remain, but this is an issue that has already been recognised and work is ongoing to ensure adequate provision is maintained in this area. There will be around nine (tbc) short stay parking spaces lost in Crouch Street west, however there will be a new designated space for disabled drivers, and a new loading bay will be provided. The revised layout also makes it clearer which bays are for blue badge holders, for loading, or for limited waiting more generally.
- 5.7 To help alleviate possible concerns around the reduction in parking in Crouch Street consideration could be given to offering promotions in the very nearby St Marys Car Park. NEPP have been working with the BID to launch a discounted parking scheme with businesses in the town centre. In addition, a review could be undertaken to consider a different arrangement for loading parking and possible shared use bays during the day/evening in Rawstorn Road area to see if any further allocation can be provided.
- 5.8 It should be noted that stakeholders have worked hard to help design the best possible scheme considering all the opportunities and constraints. There is a risk that stakeholders’ support could be withdrawn if the scheme is compromised with less impact

than envisaged. However, this pre-consultation engagement should result in overall positive responses from all parties who respond.

- 5.9 As well as being a consultee on these proposals, CBC is assisting with the objective of encouraging travel to and from the town centre by bike through several projects. One is through offering secure cycle parking. This project, in partnership with ECC and the local cycle community group, is planned to open in late summer. A second key project is the recently successful Defra bid. This will develop two eBike/Cargo bike community hubs in the town centre. These hubs will give the community access to a variety of eCargo bikes on a “pay as you go” basis that will enable more journeys usually undertaken by car due to lack of carrying capacity to be undertaken instead by bike. There is also funding for widespread training for adults to improve cycle skills. High quality infrastructure in/out and through the town centre is needed to support these projects and help make them a success. These projects would complement the ECC proposals within this consultation and vice versa.
- 5.10 Following the consultation, ECC plan to work on the scheme designs and Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) consultation later in the year, and start the scheme’s implementation in the new year, finalising the work in Spring 2022. Work on the ground is not expected to start before Christmas, an important consideration with regard to key trading periods in an economic recovery phase.
- 5.11 The Government requirements for Highway Authorities to access the (Emergency) Active Travel Funding can be summarised as –

‘Tranche 2 of the Emergency Active Travel Fund amounts to £180m in total. As with tranche 1, to receive any funding, authorities will need to satisfy the Department that they have swift and meaningful plans to reallocate road space to cyclists and pedestrians (both groups rather than one or the other), including on strategic corridors. Schemes that do not meaningfully alter the status quo on the road will not be funded. All cycling schemes, permanent or temporary, will need to include segregation or point closures to through traffic: advisory cycle lanes, and those marked only with white paint, will not be funded.’

This indicated that support for the scheme can be withdrawn if the right package of measures to meet the Government’s objectives are not proposed.

6. The detailed proposals

- 6.1 Two cycle routes from -
- North - South from Butt Road Car Park to North Station roundabout
 - East - West from Glenn Avenue along Lexden Road to East Hill
- Comprehensive 20mph reducing speeds to make cycling safer
 - School streets introduced in streets around Lexden Road schools and North School and Nursery on John Harper Street/Victoria Chase. This could involve timed vehicle restrictions to improve the walking and cycling environment. Further work with the schools involved and Sustrans, the sustainable transport charity, are proposed.

Lexden Road

Designated on road cycle lanes are proposed, improving the existing facility between Glen Avenue to Crouch Street.

Crouch Street

The project involves replacing some parking spaces in Crouch St west with

- contraflow cycle lanes (eastbound) and

increased space and improved public realm, meaning better environment for walking, browsing or café table space

- More/better planting and seating areas with improved public realm
- Reduced parking spaces from 23 to 14 (plus disabled space)
- New loading bay

The parking spaces are planned to be installed on the south side in a linear design, which is deemed safer and a better use of the space.

A new, single stage at grade crossing of Balcerne Hill is planned to make more space for walking and cycling, and this will help reduce the severance of the Crouch Streets that is currently the case with the narrow footway and zigzag route to cross the dual carriageway. This will mean filling in the subway to gain the space needed for the 'straight across' movement.

Pavement widening and public realm improvements are also planned.

In Crouch Street east the parking and loading will be moved to the south side, giving a better environment for shopping, walking and browsing. No changes to the bus stops are proposed.



Crouch Street West – existing and proposed



Crouch Street crossing – existing and proposed

St Johns St

Removal of the temporary contraflow and one way and return to the street's two way working. The cycle route will join the Vineyard Street car park at the current vehicular access, removing the link which currently runs between The Brewers Arms and the units to the north of the pub.

Vineyard Street and car park and Priory Street

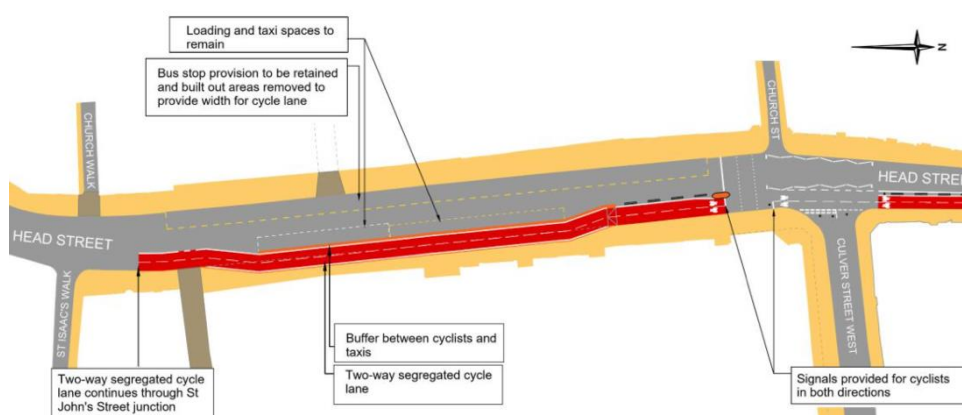
Designated cycle route through the car park and crossing into Priory Street to join East Hill (the start of Town Deal LCWIP route 4). Those travelling west will continue on east Hill/ High Street/ Queen Street due to Priory St being too narrow for contraflow cycling.

High Street

Also planned is formalising the no cars in the High Street, bus still allowing buses, bikes, motorcycle, taxis and disabled. However, the restrictions are proposed to limit this to 7am and 7pm, opening up the High Street for all vehicles can help with the night time economy (drop off and pick ups etc). It is likely that this will be camera controlled, with legislation expected later this year to allow camera enforcement.

Butt Road, Head Street and North Hill

Two way designated cycle lanes from Butt Road car park, crossing Southway and including Head Street are proposed. North Hill will not see any changes. These measures will mean some traffic management changes on Butt Rd/ Southway junction with an at grade crossing of Southway meaning make more space for walking and cycling. The right hand turn from Southway to Headgate is proposed to be removed. This improvement will see Butt Road car park, which is a designated park Active car park, better linked to the town centre, making this car park more attractive.



Head Street – no loss of loading, bus or taxi spaces

North Station Road

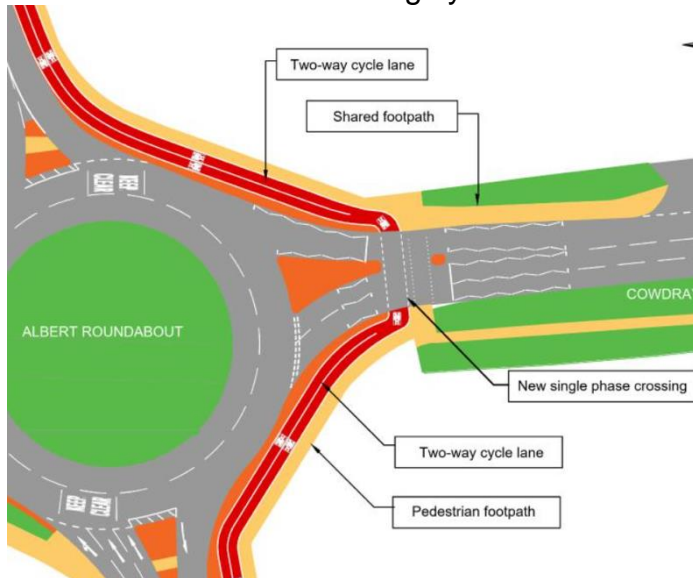
It is proposed to introduce a bus gate at North bridge, meaning all cars and deliveries etc will access North Station Road from the Albert roundabout and can exit the same way or via Middleborough south. I don't believe any reduction in parking spaces are planned, and cycling will be on road.



No loss of parking or loading, better public realm and wider footways, less through traffic.

The Albert and North Station roundabouts

The route will continue north with cyclists joining a dedicated route south of the Albert roundabout on the east side with an improved single stage crossing of the Cowdray Avenue at the Albert. A Dutch style roundabout is not proposed. At North Station Road north and at the roundabout the temporary route on the east side will be formalised with a dedicated two-way cycleway keeping cyclists away from traffic and pedestrians at roundabout. The routes will link into Colchester rail station with a new better located crossing point, and those wishing to travel north will link into the existing cycle network.



The Albert proposals, which are not a “Dutch Roundabout”.

7. Policy

7.1 The proposals align with the Council’s policies, listed as follows:

- Colchester’s emerging Local Plan
- The Council’s new Strategic Plan
- The Council’s Environment and Sustainability Strategy
- Colchester Positive Parking Strategy
- Air Quality Action Plan – Healthier Air 2016 – 21
- Climate Emergency Declaration (2019) and Climate Emergency Action Plan (2020)

The Background Policy Context

Government policy - ‘We want – and need – to see a step-change in cycling and walking in the coming years. The challenge is huge, but the ambition is clear. We have a unique opportunity to transform the role cycling and walking can play in our transport system, and get England moving differently.’ Prime Minister.

[Gear change: a bold vision for cycling and walking \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/news/government-launches-new-plan-to-get-england-moving-differently)

ECC policy

Colchester Future Transport Strategy (CFTS), Walking Strategy, Cycling Strategy all looks to promote walking and cycling within the town centre. The Local Walking and Cycling Investment Plan (LCWIP) looks to set out priorities for investment and the Active Travel proposals for part of this plan.

The CFTS vision is to ‘To transform Colchester into a place which prioritises active and safe. Sustainable, travel to bring about health, environmental and economic benefits.’ with the objective to achieve the vision and improve the health and wellbeing of people in Colchester, and the CFTS will be used to measure all potential future transport schemes against’.

[LCWIP](#) and [CBC response](#)

8. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications

- 8.1 Encouraging walking and cycling has benefits for peoples' health and wellbeing and providing quality cycle routes will enhance the safety of cyclists. Improved public realm is also important for good mental health. Safety audits of the schemes will be part of the ECC design process.

9. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

- 9.1 The CAT proposals aim to reduce carbon emissions from travel by encouraging more sustainable modes of travel. These actions also aim to tackle congestion and reduce air pollution from cars stuck in traffic, which are the main source of air pollution in Colchester. These aims align with the third theme of the Borough Council's [Climate Emergency Action Plan](#) (Planning, Development & Sustainable Travel).

10. Publicity Considerations

- 10.1 The proposals are led by ECC who are currently consulting the stakeholders and the public on the proposal. If the proposals are taken forward they will be subject to further consultation as part of the Traffic Regulation Order process.

11. Financial implications

- 11.1 The proposals are led by ECC and they have been allocated £7.8m from central Government for the five towns/city in Essex which are part of this project. ECC have also allocated around £1.5m contribution towards the Essex wide project. Colchester, as a town, is likely to receive around £5.3m of investment if the scheme progresses to delivery.

12. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

- 12.1 All aspects of equality, diversity and human rights will be considered by ECC as part of their design process; however, it is expected that the proposals will improve the current situation for those with accessibility issues by proposing wider footways, better crossing points and quality public realm. Better facilities for cyclists will encourage them to use the facilities and perhaps reduce use of the footways. Consultation has included various disability stakeholder groups in order to help inform the proposals.

13. Strategic Plan References

- 13.1 This project is particularly relevant to the Strategic Plan's priority on

Tackling the climate challenge and leading sustainability:

- Enable more opportunity for walking and cycling around Colchester. It also contributes to **Growing a fair economy so everyone benefits:**
- Create an environment that attracts inward investment to Colchester and help businesses to flourish.

Creating safe, healthy and active communities

Background Papers

[Colchester Active Travel Fund consultation document](#)

[Colchester Future Transport Strategy](#)

[Mi Permit Discount Parking Scheme](#)

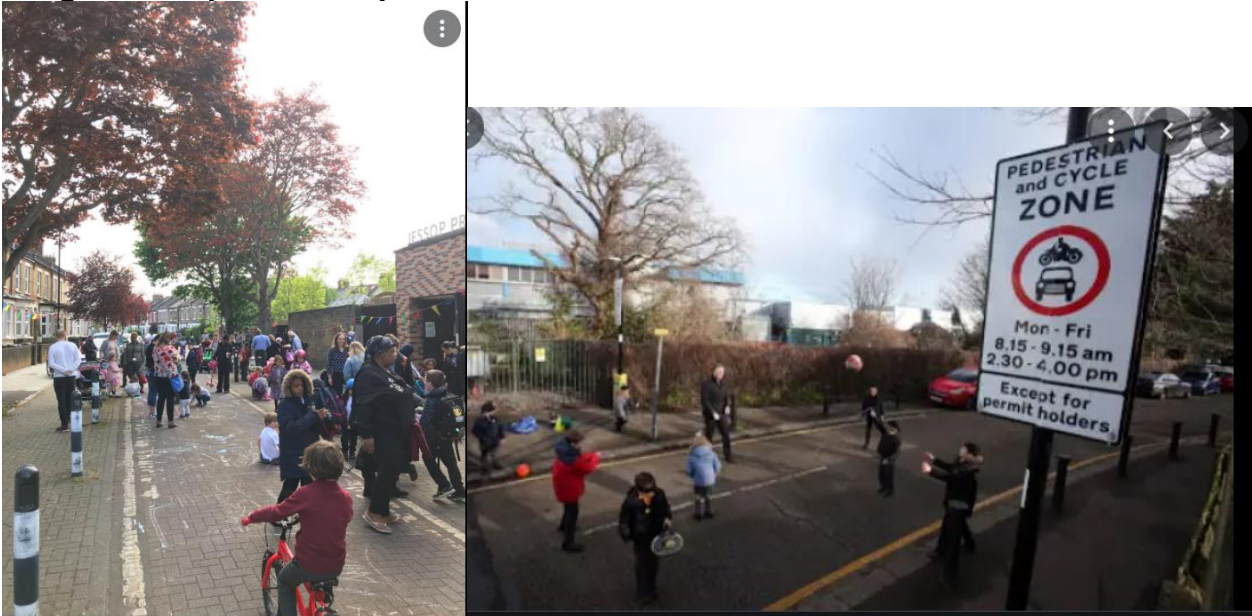
Appendix

Images to help illustrate possible public realm scheme



Crouch Street – popular public realm scheme completed a few years ago

Images to help illustrate possible school streets scheme



Courtesy of Mums for Lungs and Harrow Street Space