

Forward Plan reference number: Not applicable

Report title: Draw down of Funding from the Ambition Reserve to Support the Delivery of the Colchester City Centre Masterplan	
Report to: Councillor Christopher Whitbread – Chancellor for Essex and Cabinet Member with responsibility for Finance	
Report author: Steve Evison - Director of Sustainable Growth	
Date: 15 November 2023	For: Decision
Enquiries to: Rob Willis, Economic Growth Delivery Manager (robert.willis2@essex.gov.uk)	
County Divisions affected: Abbey, Drury, Parsons Heath & East Gates Mile End & Highwoods and Wivenhoe St. Andrew County Electoral Divisions in Colchester	

1. Everyone's Essex

- 1.1. Colchester City Council (CCC) and Essex County Council (ECC) co-commissioned consultants, We Made That, to produce a masterplan for Colchester city centre in early 2022.
- 1.2. The ambitions of the Colchester Masterplan align well with the commitments in Everyone's Essex, ECC's ambitious four-year plan, particularly under the commitment of strong, inclusive and sustainable economy. The aspirations in the plan, if realised, would create a city centre that is safe, accessible with a diverse economy and rich heritage. This would help drive up job density, increase footfall to support local businesses and encourage further private investment into the city.
- 1.3. Additionally, the plan actively supports ECC's net-zero carbon agenda, through ambitions to improve sustainable public transport and walking and cycling links into the city centre. Any developments will also be required to meet certain net zero requirements.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. Agree to drawdown £200,000 from the Ambition Reserve for the purposes of starting to implement the Colchester City Centre Masterplan and developing the mechanism for longer-term sustainable partnership delivery. The drawdown will require £100,000 in the current financial year and £100,000 in 2024/25.

3. Background and Proposal

- 3.1. Colchester City Council (CCC) and Essex County Council (ECC) co-commissioned consultants, We Made That, to produce a masterplan for Colchester city centre in early 2022. The document was informed by substantial engagement with the public, key partners, special interest groups and community representatives etc. The final version then went out for 6-week public consultation that ended 31 July 2023 with a full consultation report now being put together, ahead of the City Centre Masterplan being considered by Colchester City Council's Local Plan Committee in December 2023. To deliver this plan, it was agreed by the Team Colchester Regeneration Board that the two councils would work in partnership to realise the visions of the plan. Therefore £200,000 of match funding is being requested from the Ambition Reserve to help to start to deliver the plan and to develop proposals for long-term sustainable delivery. Over the past year or so, CCC has successfully secured a large amount of government funding through the Town Deal, Levelling Up Fund, Active Travel Fund and others. This investment has sparked plans for major projects across the city and with the success of 'city status' the masterplan will be used as the strategic document that links all these interventions together to plan a city that is fit for the future.
- 3.2. To oversee this work CCC and ECC created the Team Colchester Regeneration Board (TCRB). It is a partnership Board with Leaders, relevant Cabinet Member Portfolio Holders and officers from both councils, whose objective is to successfully deliver the ambitions for Colchester City Centre as set out in the Masterplan. They currently meet once a month, to help provide strategic direction and check and challenge for the Masterplan and associated city centre project work. Both councils hold land and building assets in the city centre and the plan ensures that they are used in the best way possible that provides value for residents and is consistent with the rest of the plan for the city.
- 3.3. Engagement events were held across summer 2022 and an initial draft Masterplan was completed in December 2022. The consultation draft of the Masterplan was taken to CCC Planning Committee in April, and it was agreed that it would go out to public consultation in June 2023.
- 3.4. To deliver the ambitions of the Masterplan, a long-term partnership approach to delivery must be agreed. Some elements of the wider plan are already going ahead. The regeneration of St Botolph's Circus, and enablement works for mixed-use development schemes at Vineyard Street and Britannia Yard are being funded through the Levelling Up Fund. Progress on delivering these is now underway with an agreement between CCC, ECC and London Continental Railways (LCR) signed to support the Britannia Yard scheme that has links to the Town Centre Railway Station.
- 3.5. To ensure all these elements of the city centre fit together and can be delivered over the long-term, a £200,000 contribution from each council has been agreed. This funding will help recruit extra resource where required, to commission feasibility and viability studies and acquire consultants with expertise in legal and finance to help create a long-term sustainable model for delivery. Use of this £400,000 budget will have oversight from Team

Colchester Regeneration Board and the Memorandum of Understanding between the two councils (Appendix A) proposes how this budget will be spent to develop and deliver city centre work. The use of the ECC half of the fund will be approved and managed by the Director of Sustainable Growth.

3.6. The funding required will allow for the development and delivery of a key strategic document that looks to revitalise the city centre. This will support the growing economy through the delivery of new homes, businesses, skills and training space creating new jobs available to more residents.

3.7. It will also help ensure that all the transport interventions including St Botolph's Roundabout, Rapid Transit System (RTS), Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) routes and Park and Ride etc. work together coherently so that residents and visitors to Colchester can move easily around the city in a safer, greener and healthier way with access to more travel choices.

4. Links to our Strategic Ambitions

4.1. This report links to the following aims in the Essex Vision:

- Enjoy life into old age
- Provide an equal foundation for every child
- Strengthen communities through participation
- Develop our County sustainably
- Connect us to each other and the world
- Share prosperity with everyone

4.2. Approving the recommendations in this report will have the following impact on the Council's ambition to be net carbon neutral by 2030:

- Help reduce reliance on the car
- Increase safe use of public transport
- Increase active travel, for example walking and cycling

4.3. This report links to the following strategic priorities in the emerging Organisational Strategy 'Everyone's Essex':

- A strong, inclusive and sustainable economy
- A high-quality environment
- Health wellbeing and independence for all ages
- A good place for children and families to grow

5. Options

5.1. Option 1: Agree to the drawdown of £200,000 from the Ambition Reserve for the purposes of starting to implement the Colchester City Centre

Masterplan and developing the mechanism for longer-term sustainable partnership delivery. (Recommended)

5.1.1. The recommended option will support further delivery of the aspirations in the Colchester City Centre masterplan and support a longer-term partnership delivery model that will help leverage further funding, support and knowledge sharing. The outcomes of these projects within the masterplan will help ECC meet its objectives around Levelling Up in some of its priority places through enabling better access to skills, learning and employment opportunities, improving sustainable travel options helping to mitigate climate change impacts and providing high-quality public space and homes that contribute positively to the health and wellbeing of residents.

5.1.2. There is a risk that the costs set out for this project could increase. However, both councils will look to prioritise work that needs to be delivered within the project budget. Should additional funding be required, this will be subject to a further decision.

5.2. Option 2: Do not agree to the drawdown of £200,000 from the Ambition Reserve. (Not recommended)

5.2.1. There is the option for the Council not to support the release of this Reserve funding for the project. However, this could potentially put at risk further funding and joint working on elements of Colchester City Centre that are under ECC ownership or projects that they are leading on that support the delivery of some of the objectives as set out in the ECC's Levelling Up White Paper, risking further decline in one of the county's key economic centres.

6. Issues for consideration

6.1. Financial implications

6.1.1. ECC will provide £200,000 of funding drawn down from the Ambition Reserve as the ECC 50% contribution towards the cost of implementing the Colchester City Centre Masterplan and developing the mechanism for longer term sustainable partnership delivery. ECC's financial contribution will be matched by £200,000 of funding from Colchester City Council to give a total budget of £400,000 for this activity.

6.1.2. Each party will retain and pay for its own elements, with a final reconciliation payment to ensure each party has paid only a 50% share overall.

6.1.3. The funding will be allocated and spent per the table below:

Activity	ECC 50% Share			Total Cost
	2023/24 £000s	2024/25 £000s	Total £000s	Total £000s
City centre PR & marketing mgr	£15	£25	£40	£80
Communications resource	£25		£25	£50
Legal & Commercial advice	£60	£15	£75	£150
Further consultant work on Masterplan delivery		£60	£60	£120
Total	£100	£100	£200	£400

6.1.4. Of the costs above, the PR and marketing manager will be commissioned by Colchester City Council and Essex Legal Services will be commissioned for the legal work, with their costs recharged to the project accordingly.

6.1.5. The commercial work will be contracted by ECC from consultants to review sites, potential delivery vehicles, appraisals/modelling and assistance in business case preparation. Such commercial work will require the due diligence review of the ECC s151 Officer.

6.1.6. The further work on the Masterplan will be working with consultants contracted by Colchester City Council to update the plan post consultation and supporting feasibility work.

6.1.7. The Director of Sustainable Growth will be the budget holder for the ECC contribution.

6.1.8. All related project expenditure must be contained within the approved budget. Any request for additional funding would be the subject of a separate decision paper at the appropriate time.

6.1.9. Drawdowns from the Ambition Reserve will be made to match the actual spend profile in each financial year.

6.2. Legal implications

6.2.1. The Council's financial regulations state that all drawdowns from reserves must be approved by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Finance.

6.2.2. Drawing down of money from reserves does not authorise any expenditure that is a key decision or any significant changes to ECC services or funding which must be authorised by the relevant Cabinet Member.

7. Equality and Diversity Considerations

7.1. The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:

- (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc. on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful
- (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- (c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

7.2. The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).

7.3. The Equalities Comprehensive Impact Assessment (Appendix B) indicates that the proposals in this report will not have a disproportionately adverse impact on any people with a particular characteristic. The proposed projects are likely to benefit those with protected characteristics in several ways, including directly supporting ECC's Priority places, as set out in the ECC Levelling Up Fund White Paper. These places experience high deprivation and are socially and geographically isolated and the proposed initiatives identified will help bring opportunity around skills and health and wellbeing closer to people of all ages particularly those furthest from employment. Additionally, proposals put forward will look to enhance active travel, minimise pollution and build and renovate buildings to be low carbon, helping to tackle contributors to climate change.

8. List of Appendices

8.1. Appendix A – Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between CCC and ECC

8.2. Appendix B – Equalities Comprehensive Impact Assessment (ECIA)

9. List of Background papers

Colchester City Centre Masterplan

I approve the above recommendations set out above for the reasons set out in the report.	Date
Councillor Christopher Whitbread, Chancellor for Essex and Cabinet Member with responsibility for Finance	24.11.23

In consultation with:

Role	Date
Executive Director, Corporate Services (S151 Officer)	14.11.2023
Stephanie Mitchener, Director Finance, on behalf of Nicole Wood	
Director, Legal and Assurance (Monitoring Officer)	25.10.23
Katie Bray on behalf of Paul Turner	