

Colchester Town Centre: Influencing the Vision

On Wednesday 26 February members of the Colchester Town Assembly met for the first time to influence the vision statements that were set out by the We Are Colchester Board and the Advisory Group, as well as start to outline some additional statements.

Influencing the Vision Statements

The Assembly had the opportunity to comment on each of the three groupings of statements (i.e.: aligned to How We Grow, Live and Connect). These comments were captured by table facilitators and the programme team; the comments have been collated and are summarised below for each of the three themes. Please note that as this is a collation of the notes taken, the exact wording captured at the event may not be reflected in the summary.

How We Grow				
Statement 1	Statement 2	Statement 3	Statement 4	Statement 5
Colchester is the engine for economic growth, personal prosperity and community wellbeing.	Colchester is the destination of choice for those looking to do business.	Colchester is a national centre of excellence for construction, manufacturing and environmental sustainability.	Colchester is a place where young people and adults can access new work-based learning opportunities.	Colchester is a centre of excellence for those skills and capabilities that are vital for economic success.
Comments				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategies need to be in place to support micro-and-small businesses to grow their skills base, attract new workers and free up employees' time to engage with lifelong learning. Colchester can certainly be the regional hub for growth and prosperity. Public realm and built environment can be used to enhance the visitor offer and create an experience that businesses can use to attract footfall. Prosperity is not just about personal wealth, but also happiness and quality of life (e.g.: work/life balance). Colchester could be better connected to ports and airports, and these connections could be used to leverage new business investment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can we create hubs / business parks that encourage certain sectors, such as science and data businesses, to grow in Colchester? Skills system needs to better align to support business needs now, and business needs of the future. Colchester could be the digital and data/AI hub for the East of England. What elements of the local economy could be of international significance, as well as national and regional? Local economic growth needs to help tackle local inequality, deprivation and socio-economic issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creative, digital and technology sectors could be key areas of growth for Colchester Town. There needs to be flexible, high quality and affordable business space in key locations (e.g.: town centre) that allow for businesses to grow/change as required. A diverse workforce already exists in Colchester, and this should be celebrated and used as a unique selling point for businesses and investment (e.g.: garrison families, ex-service personnel, international students). Colchester could be a hub for eco-friendly and sustainable businesses, conferences and events. Tourism offer could be improved to help grow the local economy, create additional jobs and leverage further investment. 		

How We Live				
<p>Statement 6 Colchester is a place which people are proud to call home.</p>	<p>Statement 7 Colchester is one of the most socially mobile places in the United Kingdom.</p>	<p>Statement 8 Colchester is recognised as a national leader in equality and inclusiveness.</p>	<p>Statement 9 Colchester is a historic town that offers a unique and welcoming experience.</p>	<p>Statement 10 Colchester celebrates the heritage of the town, creating unforgettable experiences that make Colchester a top destination to live, work, study and visit.</p>
Comments				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved publicity of events that take place in Colchester, with a single media brand for the town. There must be a greater emphasis on supporting young people in the town, for example: improved club provision for 13-18 year olds. Green infrastructure could be used to create natural corridors, walking and cycling routes and meeting places that provide benefits of nature in an urban environment. Colchester has a strong small and independent local offer, and this could be used to create a unique sense of place that makes it stand out when compared to other destinations. Heritage of the place needs to be balanced with a modern, attractive destination offer. Places don't need to be historic to be popular, and history of a place shouldn't restrict adapting for the future. How can Colchester be branded and marketed in relation to its' proximity to London? Is it a unique destination for London residents, or does it try to attract people to leave London and move to the area? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A clear role needs to be created for existing organisations, community groups and other networks (e.g.: parish councils) on how they can help collectively steer and deliver the vision. The town centre needs to offer a unique experience to visitors, workers and residents, with buildings bought into use to support this experience. Town needs to be made safer, particularly at night, and design should be a key part in supporting this aim. Public realm needs further investment, and needs to be designed in a way that compliments the areas' heritage and sustainable travel / visitor experience ambitions. A stewardship model is required to ensure that the town is regularly maintained, it needs to be 'polished' in order to be a destination and a place people are proud to call home. Colchester should have a more recognisable cultural offer, similar to other destinations such as York and Bath. The creative arts – music, drama, art – should play a prominent role in the identity of the town. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural environment and green landscapes should be used to enhance the built environment, rather than be replaced by paving and buildings. How could the River Colne be used to create unique spaces and destinations throughout the town? Heritage and history needs to be on better display throughout the town centre. Children and young people aspire to meet their full potential, with education and the community helping them be inspired. Young and old should feel welcomed and happy in the town centre, regardless of the time of day. Could Colchester be recreated digitally to help promote the area and what it has looked like throughout the ages? There are a number of hidden gems (e.g.: Roman Circus) that could be used to make Colchester better. 		

How We Connect		
<p>Statement 11 Colchester is a town where people, goods and services can move freely.</p>	<p>Statement 12 Colchester is a place where people feel connected to each other.</p>	
Comments		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The climate crisis could be used as an impetus to improve urban connectivity throughout the town and encourage green transport solutions. • What is the role of local businesses, particularly smaller enterprises, in encouraging sustainable travel? Could there be incentivisation schemes put in place? • There is potential for a hopper bus style service to connect the different hubs across the town (e.g.: Northern Gateway, Tollgate, town centre). • Improved shared spaces that allow for private and public transport (i.e.: cars and buses), as well as walking and cycling. • Key locations need to be identified and better connected, e.g.: the University of Essex, town centre, Northern Gateway. • Can transport systems be flexible throughout the year? For example, to better accommodate peak tourism seasons and weekend travellers into the town centre? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on modal shift within a 3-5 mile radius of the town centre to reduce congestion. • Improved road signage to highlight local heritage and environmental assets. • Transport network must compliment an enhanced built environment with improved landscapes. • A balance should be sought on big ticket infrastructure items and smaller transport / travel schemes. • Greenery, trees and flowers should play a more prominent part of the highway and streetscape. • Local versus regional infrastructure need, i.e.: how do people move within the town as opposed to moving in/out of the town? • Public transport should be affordable and accessible to all people, as well as be reliable, clean and safe. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the role of pedestrianisation in the town centre? Can it create a sense of place for local people? • If pedestrianisation happens the wider transport network will need to be reworked, with new opportunities for different people made available to ensure access onto the high street and the town centre. • An online community could compliment face-to-face interactions and physical spaces to improve social networks. • There is a major role to play for schools and other major commuting destinations in the town to improve travel behaviour. • Design, feel and experience of the town needs to be unique and use its' heritage and history accordingly – avoid becoming yet another 'clone town' in the South East.