

This document details our engagement work thus far and our plans to develop this work going forward. It evaluates our successes and the challenges that we have faced. It highlights how engagement insight has been key in shaping the projects that have been included in our TIP (Town Investment Plan). It evaluates this work and outlines our plans to broaden and deepen our engagement work as We Are Colchester develops.

Introduction

Colchester's Town Investment Plan sets out an ambitious set of projects, which provide a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to develop our historic town. From the beginning, the We Are Colchester Board has recognised the vital role engagement must play in the development and delivery of our prioritised plans. Our Town Investment Plan has been developed, based on the outcomes our engagement activity plus pre-existing insight. From our engagement activities the following key priorities have emerged:

- Making Colchester more attractive
- Cycling, Traffic and Public transport / buses
- Infrastructure
- Schools
- Engagement with young people
- More to do (particularly for children and young people)
- The "green" agenda
- Jobs
- Culture/ tourism.

This engagement plan covers the period from Colchester being chosen as one of the 101 towns through to the successful delivery of our Town Deal projects. It is a living document, which will be regularly reviewed and adapted. The Board fully recognises that engagement with stakeholders and the wider community must continue, broaden and deepen, so that everyone who wants to, can help shape Colchester's future.

Both the research carried out for We Are Colchester and existing insight, show a shared vision both pre and post covid-19 for Colchester in the future. This vision is from both our partners and the wider community. We have a strong commitment from a range of stakeholders to support the work of Colchester Borough Council & Essex County Council to successfully deliver this vision.

Town Deal research:

[February 2020 Survey Report](#)

Face-to-Face Engagement Report

[Online Surveys Report \(August 2020\)](#)

Pre-existing insight that has been referred to in our TIP:

[Essex County Council- Safer, Greener Healthier Strategy](#)

[Local Delivery Partnership](#)

[Our Colchester \(BID\) Business Plan 2018-2023](#)

[Colchester Borough Council Strategic Plan 2018-2021](#)

[Colchester Economic Growth Strategy 2015- 2021](#)

[North Essex Economic Growth Strategy 2015-2021](#)

[Essex County Council Economic Recovery Plan for Essex 2014](#)

[University of Essex Strategy 2019-2025](#)

North Essex Health and Wellbeing Partnership Strategy

[North Essex Economic Strategy 2019](#)

[Local Industrial Strategy 2019](#) (on hold)

[South Essex Local Enterprise Partnership Strategy- Smarter, Faster, Together](#)

[Government Industrial Strategy 2017](#)

Our approach

People, communities, and stakeholders are at the heart of our project design and delivery. Projects have been developed *with* the people, and not just done *to* the people. This co-production ensures that through the Town Deal, Colchester will be an even better place to live, work and visit. This approach has become even more important when considering Covid-19 recovery.

Involvement

As soon as Colchester was chosen as one of the 101 towns, potential members of the Board and Advisory Group were identified.

Strategic Board: Membership

Cllr Cory Vice-Chair (CBC)	Simon Blaxill Chair	Cllr Ball Vice-Chair (ECC)
Adrian Pritchard Local Authority Lead (CBC)	Shona Johnstone Homes England	Mark Carroll Local Authority Lead (ECC)
Adam Bryan SE LEP	Mark Jarman-Howe NE Essex Alliance	Tracy Rudling Community 360
Lucy Johnson University of Essex	Chris Rhodes Hiscox	Ashleigh Seymour-Rutherford COLBEA

Our Board includes representatives from the public, private and voluntary sectors and was instrumental in developing the initial 'We Are Colchester' vision & governance.

- Independent Chair: a prominent local businessperson who is also the Chair of Colchester's Business Improvement District founded in 2018.
- Business Representation reflecting the make-up of Colchester's businesses, via a representative for Colchester's extensive micro and small business community, and one large business.
- Local Government Representation from both partner authorities at cabinet member level and senior officer level.
- Community and Voluntary Sector Representation recognising the significance of this sector locally and the importance of deep community engagement.
- Further & Higher Education – recognising the significance of the University of Essex as leading local organisation and major employer, and catalyst to business, enterprise and investment
- A representative from the Health Sector recognising the strong links between improving place and tackling known health and public health.
- Wider representation including local MP, SE LEP (managing director) and Homes England.

Once Board membership, structures and responsibilities were agreed, the Board moved onto project development.

The We Are Colchester Board is supported by an Advisory Group who have the responsibility to provide expert advice and guidance to the Board and contribute to the development of our Town Deal.

Advisory Group: Membership

Steve Evison ECC	Cllr King (CBC) Chair	Ed Garrett NE Essex CCG	Edward James Historic England
Ian Vipond CBC	Paul Coffey Creative Colchester	Iain McNabb Cities & Local Growth Unit (BEIS)	Alison Andreas Colchester Institute
Jo Blyth Citizens Advice	Sally Shaw FirstSite	Cllr Young ECC & CBC	Simon Prestney Age Concern
Paul Smith Colchester Amphora	Laura Taylor-Green Public Health (ECC)	John Burton Colchester Civic Society	Dawn Redpath ECC
Stephen Clark Churchmanor	Daniel Smart Oxford Innovation	Alistair Southgate ECC	Pam Donnelly CBC
Jane Gardner Office of Police/Fire/Crime Commissioners			

Engagement with representatives of the wider community was initially provided by our Assembly. Pre Covid lockdown, members of this group were invited to a ½ day event to discuss themes that should be investigated further. These were planned as regular sessions but unfortunately Covid-19 made this impossible.

Assembly: Example members

Business and Enterprise	Colchester Ambassadors, Essex Chamber of Commerce Colchester Town BID, Colchester Credit Union, South Lanes Project
Wider Public Sector	Colchester Garrison, Colchester General Hospital, Academy Trusts Dementia Friendly Town, Anglian Community Enterprises, Provide
Community & Residents	Friends of Castle Park, Parish/ Community Councils, High Steward Religious & ethnic representatives, Residents associations,
Culture & Heritage	Arts Council, Mercury Theatre, Colchester & Ipswich Museums FirstSite, Colchester Archaeological Trust, Civic Society
Political	Borough Cllrs, County Cllrs, Local MP's, Colchester Independent Group, Colchester Green Party

Mapping was completed early on of other interested parties and how existing partnerships/ organisations could be used to support the development of We Are Colchester e.g. Colchester Business Improvement District, One Colchester, Community 360, University of

Essex, schools & colleges. An [initial consultation was launched in February](#), to gain the views and perceptions of the wider community at this early stage.

Throughout the planning and delivery of the We Are Colchester engagement work; we were mindful of the principles of engagement. We strove to be:

- Open and honest
- Respectful
- Clear and concise
- Proactive
- Inclusive

By doing this we have done all we can to ensure that stakeholders and the wider community have ownership of the projects that have been included in this TIP.

Impact of Covid-19

Covid-19 restrictions have made meaningful engagement more challenging. Many of the usual (and more creative) engagement channels have not been fully open to us.

Lockdown/ social distancing has resulted in the bulk of our engagement being digital, 567 people completed our online surveys - [Survey February 2020](#); [Survey August 2020](#) A specialist market research company was employed to conduct face-to-face interviews. They were able to work within current restrictions, [400 people were engaged](#) through this. We have also, in a limited way, made use of the telephone, to work with those not able to participate online and who were missed in our face-to-face work. Three Covid related questions were included in our online summer surveys. Through this we have a picture of peoples' perception of the crisis and its impact going forward.

People completing our (August) online questionnaire were asked to identify any opportunities that we can build on post Covid. These were the most common responses:



As can be seen, community emerged as a very strong theme. Although, this was not an answer given in our February (pre-lockdown) survey, overall themes were very similar. In our February (pre-covid) questionnaire, people were asked what would make Colchester better:



Young people and minority groups

Young people should be a focus of Town Deal engagement. Traditional problems in engaging with them were exacerbated by the closure of schools and youth provisions through the summer term and then the 6-week summer holiday. To ensure the views of young people were included in our engagement work, a stipulation of the face-to-face work was that all age demographics had to be represented. Partners at Essex University and Essex Youth

We are aware that some demographics have been underrepresented in our engagement work. These are groups who are often seen as hard to reach. We have relied on members of the Board, Advisory Group and other partners, to disseminate engagement opportunities to disability and minority ethnic groups, but we are aware of this shortcoming and will work to redress this in the future.

Both Colchester Borough Council and Essex County Council, together with other organisations have undertaken substantial engagement and research which is included along with this engagement plan.

This is a summary of the most popular themes from all our engagement work when asked:

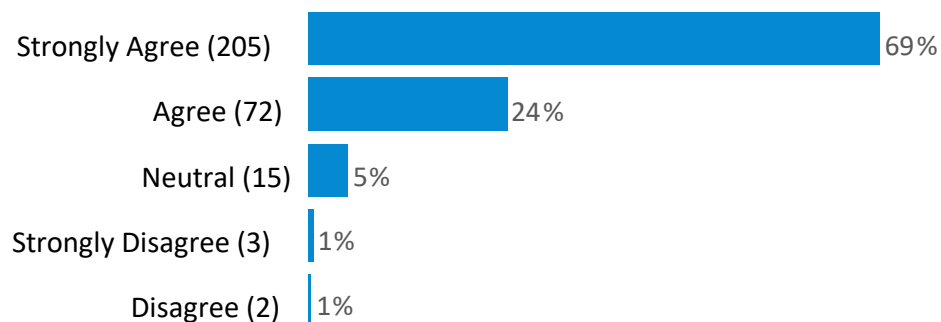
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We were also able to gain quantitative data from our summer research. Questions were asked about the Town Centre, included:

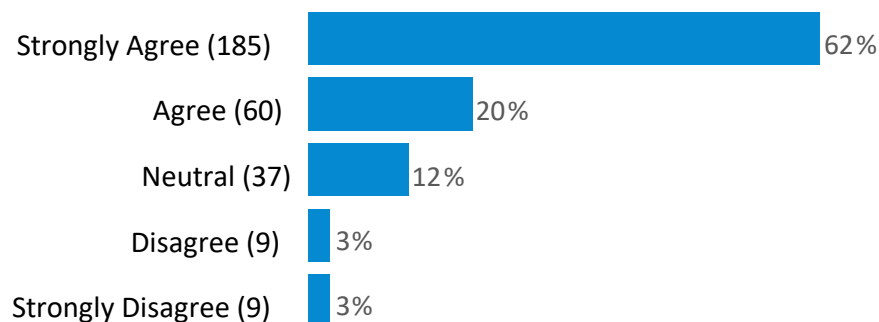
Do you think Colchester Town Centre, should be “Greener”?



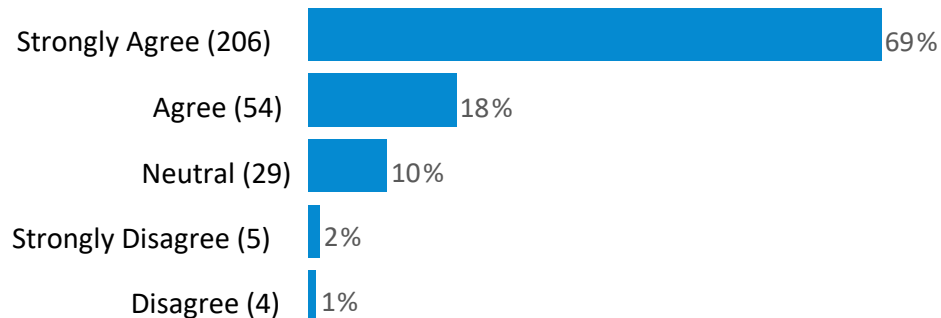
Should more plants be added to Colchester Town Centre?



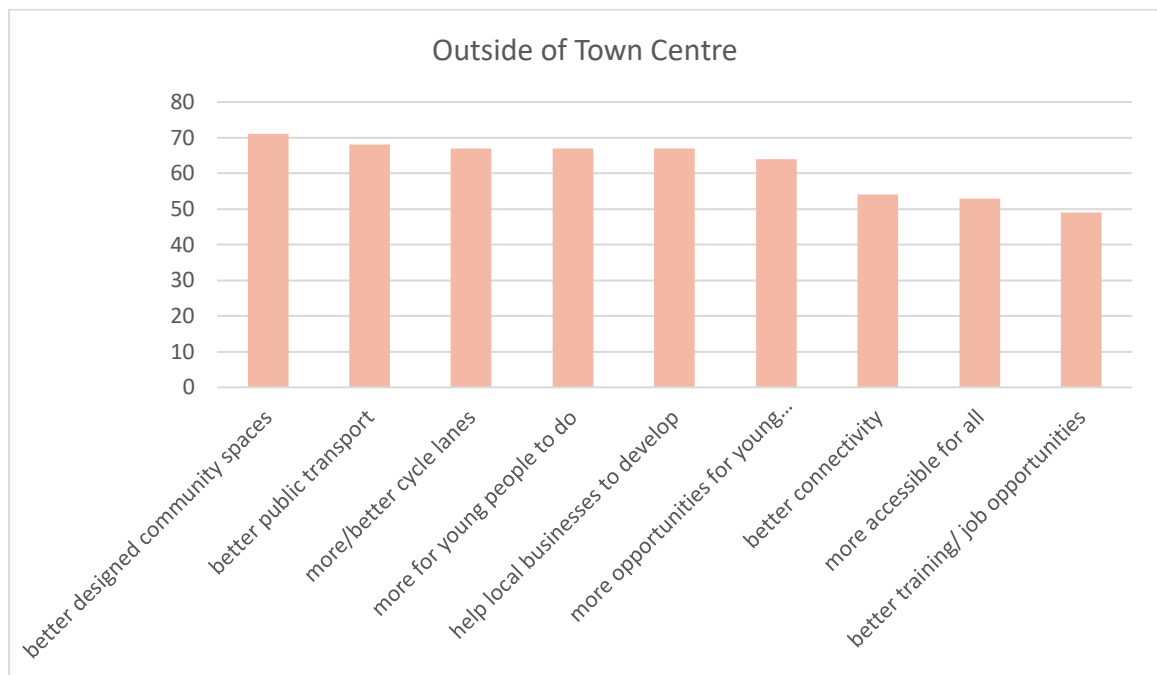
Should there be better cycle lanes?



Would reducing the amount of traffic encourage people into the town centre?



Respondents were also asked to think about Colchester outside of the Town Centre and what would have the biggest positive impact:



The results of all our research both pre and post Covid have informed projects that were developed for We Are Colchester and the shorter list of projects that have been included in our TIP.

Dissemination of information

A regular newsletter has been produced and will continue, updating interested parties about developments with We Are Colchester. 127 members of the public, who filled in the online questionnaire expressed an interest in being more involved/ kept up to date with We Are Colchester developments and they have been added to our mailing list (along with all existing partners). We are very hopeful that our mailing list will be expand as our engagement expands.

Engagement results and analysis have been and will continue to be shared with the Board, Advisory Group and Assembly (plus community volunteers) and will steer the development of projects. All Board and Advisory Group actions are posted on the Colchester Borough Council website, together with all governance information, newsletters and links to live engagement opportunities. Engagement opportunities have been and will continue to be advertised through print and social media.

Partnership working

Throughout our time setting up We Are Colchester and developing our TIP, a strong working partnership has existed between officers and members of Colchester Borough Council and Essex County Council. We Are Colchester really has been and will continue to be a joint programme of work between the two councils.

As part of work leading up to TIP submission, we have worked effectively with external partners who have helped us to engage with a wider cross section of the community. Examples of this work are:

- We are worked closely with the CEO of Community 360, an umbrella organisation for local community groups and charities, to design our online questionnaire.
- Membership of Board (& Advisory/ Assembly) was devised to ensure all sectors including voluntary, community and public sector organisations were adequately represented.
- Members of these groups have been asked to have been asked to disseminate the surveys and newsletters to their networks of contacts.
- To directly engagement with young people, we have consulted with the Colchester members of The Young Essex Assembly, which is our elected youth council.
- Going forward we have already arranged to work with Age Concern/ Essex Youth Service/ KAT marketing/ BID/ Essex Chamber of Commerce/ Colbea/ Essex University/ Essex School Councils.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Engagement is at the heart of We Are Colchester and we have worked hard to get the views of as many people as possible at the point of TIP submission. We have had to work flexibly due to the Covid-19 pandemic and it would be fair to say that without Covid, our engagement activities would have been very different. We would have used a wider variety of engagement methods and sought the views of a greater and more diverse group of people. However, within the constraints we have faced, we have developed and delivered engagement to a high standard. The views of 1026 members of the community were analysed (from the We Are Colchester questionnaires, plus the feedback from #MyTown).

Together with views of the Assembly, Youth Council, Advisory Group and Board these were used in the development of the themes and then the specific projects which have been submitted in this TIP. Although we have engaged with young people, this has not been in large numbers. After TIP submission we will start to work with children and young people in far greater numbers and from a wider cross section of society. We have been able to draw together a great deal of high quality, pre-existing insight which has provided valuable project specific evidence. Going forward we will ensure that the use of additional sources of insight is fully utilised in addition to our own engagement work.

Whilst we have gained very valuable insight, we will develop a broader range of engagement opportunities and involve a greater number of stakeholders and the wider community. We will ensure that minority groups, who may not have engaged with us thus far, are given that opportunity going forward. Covid is still having a massive impact, and no one knows how long restrictions will last or indeed what form they will take. Our approach in the future will be flexible and delivered as well as it possibly can be. Our approach will be diverse, creative and well-advertised. We will be using both traditional and digital delivery techniques. All work will be evaluated and adapted, as necessary. Engagement work will focus on the details of the individual projects, as well as for the whole of We Are Colchester.

To keep stakeholders and the wider public informed about progress of We Are Colchester, we will continue to publish regular newsletters, which together with an overview of the project, plus Board and Advisory Group action points are published on the Colchester Borough Council website. We have purchased the domain name weare-colchester.com and will be creating a high-quality website as soon as possible. Once it is launched all information will be contained there. We will work with the community on how best to advertise the website.

We are very fortunate that in the next couple of months, the University of Essex will be conducting a piece of research that will help to inform our town centre projects after TIP. It is entitled: What is the role of the town centre in a post-COVID world? - Understanding behavioural and perception changes post-COVID of people in Colchester town centre.

The aim of the research is to find out how different groups of people feel about their emotional bonds to place/urban spaces and how/whether that has changed because of Covid. The results of this research will be incredibly valuable in the development of our detailed business plans.

We have started to plan our next engagement projects, we already know that in the short term face-to-face work will not be possible but we have plans in place to work with groups of older people and children in the next few months. In addition, based on suggestions from the youth council, we will be launching a multi-media/ creative arts/ written word competition for children and young people, asking them to demonstrate how they would like our We Are Colchester projects to be developed. We know that children and young people are a very important group in the development and delivery of our projects, and we are considering how best to involve them at a more strategic level. We will also be reaching out to minority and hard to reach groups to design a programme of engagement that best suits them. We are investigating the creation of a citizens' panel. Ideally this would be run face-to-face but could also be done online if necessary.

Meaningful engagement will continue to be a core function through to We Are Colchester's project(s) completion. We will deliver an enhanced, multifaceted programme of engagement opportunities for everyone and advertise these widely, with our new website being the first port of call. We will continue to monitor all engagement, to ensure it delivers the best possible results. Only by doing this will we ensure the success of We Are Colchester in achieving its goal – an amazing history and a brighter future.

Risk Assessment

To ensure that the engagement process runs smoothly and securely, we have developed a project-specific risk register:

Risk and potential impact	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation	Owner	Date
Loss of key staff	L	M	Regular team meetings, other staff to cover	Sandra Scott	ongoing
Lockdown	M	H	Change approach to mostly online. Surveys, rather than meetings with wider community. Use stakeholder networks. Will expand and deepen as soon as restrictions allow. If they go on into 2021 will develop a more creative <i>remote</i> engagement plan.	Clare Ratcliffe/ We Are Colchester team	ongoing
Low number of responses	M	H	Accept that lockdown would lead to lower numbers plan to increase engagement work once restrictions are lessened. Ensure all engagement opportunities are well advertised	Clare Ratcliffe/ CBC Communications Team	8/20 & ongoing
Lack of buy-in from wider community and stakeholders	L	M	Regular two-way communication, to stress the importance of their voice in developing the Town Deal.	Simon Thorp/ Clare Ratcliffe/ Matthew Brown	ongoing
Inappropriate text responses (language)	M	L	These will be filtered out of analysis		8/20
Negative views of process	L	M	Positive messages sent out via traditional and social media. Work in a clear and transparent way. Meet regularly with stakeholders	Clare Ratcliffe/ CBC Communications team	ongoing

Lack of engagement with "hard to reach groups	H	M	This will be very hard to alleviate. Work with Tracy Rudling (community 360) to disseminate to her network. This will have to be strengthened post TIP	Clare Ratcliffe	ongoing
Stakeholder list becomes out of date	H	L	Manage mailing list, to keep up to date. People can be added/ removed as necessary.	Clare Ratcliffe/ Simon Thorp	ongoing