



We are Colchester



Colchester  
City Council

# We Are Colchester Board Meeting

27 February 2025

## Decisions & Actions

**Board Present:**

Simon Blaxill - Chair, Simon Mead – Colbea, Lucy Johnson – University of Essex, Mark Jarman-Howe – St Helena, Cllr David King – Colchester City Council (CCC), Cllr Lee Scott – Essex County Council (ECC), Andy Burgess – Essex County Council, Cristina Huddleston – Community360, Alison Andreas – Colchester Institute.

**Board Apologies:**

Pam Donnelly – CCC, Pam Cox MP (Adam Fox attended as observer), Alison Jennings – Homes England, Laura Eardley – Hiscox.

**Others Attending:**

Lindsay Barker – CCC, Matt Sterling – CCC, Simon Hall – North Essex Heritage, Michelle Tarbun – CCC, Richard Kendrew – CCC, Clare Ratcliffe – CCC, Matthew Brown – CCC, Ellen Clark-Romain – ECC, Rob Willis – ECC, Steve Eke – CCC, Julian Sanchez – ECC, Emma Taylor – MHCLG, Simon Thorp – CCC.

## 1. Apologies, Declarations of Interest

- a. Apologies were noted from Pam Donnelly, Pam Cox MP, Alison Jennings and Laura Eardley.
- b. There were no **declarations of interest**. The Register of Interests has recently been updated and published to the CCC website in line with government requirements.

## 2. Progress Report & Engagement Update

- a. Board **noted** a progress report and engagement update. This summarised programme headlines, project RAG statuses (overall, time and cost), risk register (particularly Heart of Greenstead and Walking and Cycling project risk management), progress highlights and forthcoming milestones, with several projects scheduled to be completed in the coming months. An overview of projects with unmitigated overspend was shared, along with a recap on the outcomes and benefits the projects aimed to achieve.
- b. Board also noted an update on recent and planned engagement activity was also summarised.
- c. No questions were raised.

### 3. Project Spotlight – Digital Forum Queen Street

- a. Board **noted** a presentation on progress towards completing the Digital Forum project. The Digital Forum will transform Colchester's former bus depot on Queen Street and include an on-site café, event space, rooftop boardroom and balcony, high speed digital connectivity and creative co-working hot desks. Prospective tenants and being carefully recruited. The look and feel of the building combines exposed brickwork, steel, industrial concrete and green plants. The Digital Forum will be managed by Colbea and owned by Colchester City Council.
- b. Delivery milestones. Board **noted** that handover of the forum to Colbea is expected by end July 2025, fit out completion August 2025 and opening with anchor tenants (software developers, media agencies etc) 1 September 2025.
- c. No questions were raised.

#### 4. Levelling Up Programme

- a. Board **noted** an update on Colchester's Levelling Up programme.
- b. No questions were raised.

## 5. Progress and Risk Management

Board **noted** a recap of decisions to be actioned from the last Board meeting on 28 November and detailed updates by project.

### 5.1 Heart of Greenstead Hub.

- a. The project is expected to be on budget and contractually committed within the funding envelope. Additional Integrated Care Board (Health) and Local Delivery Pilot funding is also expected to enable features over and above the original project scope. Community engagement led by The Active Well Being Society (TAWS) continues. Final agreement on use of space in St Edmunds House (to include relocating Colchester Borough Homes) has yet to be finalised.
- b. Key milestones: Procurement for a design and build contractor April 2025. Planning permission July 2025. On site works commence December 2025. Completion of works December 2026.
- c. Whilst generally content with progress, Board **directed** that because of the risks reported, detailed monthly updates should be provided on this project.
- d. Board also **agreed** that regular updates should be provided, including the position on financial contingencies, to Cllr King as Leader of the Council (the Accountable Body) and Portfolio Holder for Strategy.
- e. Board **noted** that due consideration would be given to opportunities for project de-prioritisation in favour of this project, recognising that the programme is moving into its final year of delivery and therefore options were limited.
- f. Board **agreed** that a site visit for Pam Cox MP should be arranged.

## 5.2 Holy Trinity Church

- a. Board **noted** that the Heritage Fund application has been pushed back to August 2025.
- b. Board **noted** that Town Deal remaining funding would be fully committed by September 2025.
- c. Board **noted** that if the Heritage Fund bid is successful then delivery of the refurbishment of the building will be completed between February 2026 and February 2028 with reopening projected for Spring 2028.

## 5.3 Trinity Square

- a. Board **noted** that work on the square is due to start in September 2025.
- b. Board **noted** that completion of the square is scheduled for December 2025/January 2026.

## 5.4 St Nicholas Square

- a. Board **noted** that further archaeological finds had delayed completion. Completion is now scheduled for April 2025.



### 5.5 Jumbo and Balkerne Gate

- a. Board **noted** that £8m has been awarded to North Essex Heritage to restore and reopen the tower to the public in Summer 2027.
- b. Board **noted** that CCC had granted planning and listed building consent alongside a mitigation strategy for the peregrine falcons.
- c. Board **noted** that Town Deal enabling funding would be fully committed by late summer 2025, following which Heritage Fund budget would enable completion of works.
- d. Board **noted** that budget for Balkerne Gate public realm (£500k) was now considered an element of the Jumbo project budget.

### 5.6 Walking and Cycling Route – City Centre/Greenstead/University

- a. Board **noted** that Essex County Council has approved redesign of elements of the East Hill route section following road safety audit concerns. This has also been signed off by Active Travel England. A commitment to high quality materials is also being maintained. Changes principally involve bus stop consolidation.
- b. Board **noted** that ECC are confident of delivering the project to time (March 2026) although one month behind and with re-procurement of contractors needed.
- c. Board **noted** key milestones. ECC governance sign off March 2025. Confirmation of any new TRO required March 2025. Tender April 2025. On site June/July 2025. Completion March 2026.
- d. Board **noted** that for off road sections (the Moors), a Safer Streets funding bid was being submitted (£500k) to enable CCTV, enhanced lighting and mobile wi fi. If unsuccessful, value engineering will be required.

## 5.7 Digital Forum

- a. Board **noted** that a concession agreement had been agreed with Colbea and licences for end tenants were being prepared.
- b. Board **noted** that Colbea had committed £25k for furnishing and fit out, matched by £20k CCC funding.
- c. Board **noted** key milestones. Handover of the forum to Colbea July 2025. Fit out completion August 2025. Opening with anchor tenants 1 September 2025.

## 5.8 5G

- a. Board **noted** infrastructure works were almost complete. A visual overview of ‘small cell’ infrastructure was shared along with comments about progress towards Colchester being a ‘smart city’.
- b. Board **noted** that the AR/VR tourism visitor experience creative focused on animating the Castle and Roman Walls is now being prioritised in conjunction with Colchester and Ipswich Museums Service.
- c. Board **noted** key milestones. Completion of infrastructure works April 2025. Completion of AR/VR creative use case December 2025.

### 5.9 Transformed Youth Facilities

- a. Board **noted** that Stanway and Highwoods youth centres have been completed and works are due to commence at the Townhouse.
- b. Board **noted** that all project features will be delivered including lighting, teaching kitchen, climbing wall and improved acoustics, games room, VR rooms, music recording studio and performance space.
- c. Board **noted** key milestones. Townhouse closed to groups 24 February. Contractors on site 10 March. Completion July 2025 (and closure of project).

### 5.10 Lexden Gardens

- a. Board **noted** that works on public realm funded by Town Deal were scheduled for late 2025/early 2026.
- b. Board **noted** that a site visit would be arranged for week commencing 17 March and **agreed** to let the programme office know availability to attend.

### 5.11 Other news

- a. Board **noted** an update from MHCLG regarding devolution and local government reorganisation, and resources available for further information.

## 6. Decisions and points noted

- a. **Heart of Greenstead Hub.** Board **directed** that detailed monthly updates should be provided to give assurance that the project will still be delivered to time, cost and quality objectives. Alongside this, recommendations as required on decisions which may be needed in relation to issues and emerging risks. Updates to also be provided to the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy.
- b. Board **noted** programme-wide progress and planned activities.
- c. Board **noted** detailed project level timelines, milestones, risks and planned mitigations.

## 7. Next meetings

22 May 2025 – project spotlight to be confirmed

21 August 2025 – project spotlight Jumbo Water Tower and Transformed Youth Facilities

26 November 2025 – project spotlight to be confirmed

25 February 2025 – project spotlight to be confirmed

## **7. Next meeting – 27 February 2025**

Future meetings:

22 May 2025

21 August 2025

26 November 2025

25 February 2026

Meetings will be held on Microsoft Teams unless otherwise agreed.