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We Are Colchester Board Meeting

30 September 2025

MS Teams

Agenda

1. **Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest – Simon Blaxill**
2. **Progress Report, Engagement & Communications Update – Simon Thorp and Clare Ratcliffe**
3. **Project Spotlight – Heart of Greenstead**
4. **Urgent project consideration – 5G AR/VR and Holy Trinity Square**
5. **Project Spotlight – Walking and Cycling**
6. **Issues, Risks & Mitigations - 'You said, we did'**
7. **Levelling Up Programme Update**
8. **Decisions and points to note**
9. **Next meeting**



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Welcome, Apologies & Declarations of Interest

Simon Blaxill

Chair



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Progress Report, Engagement & Communications Update

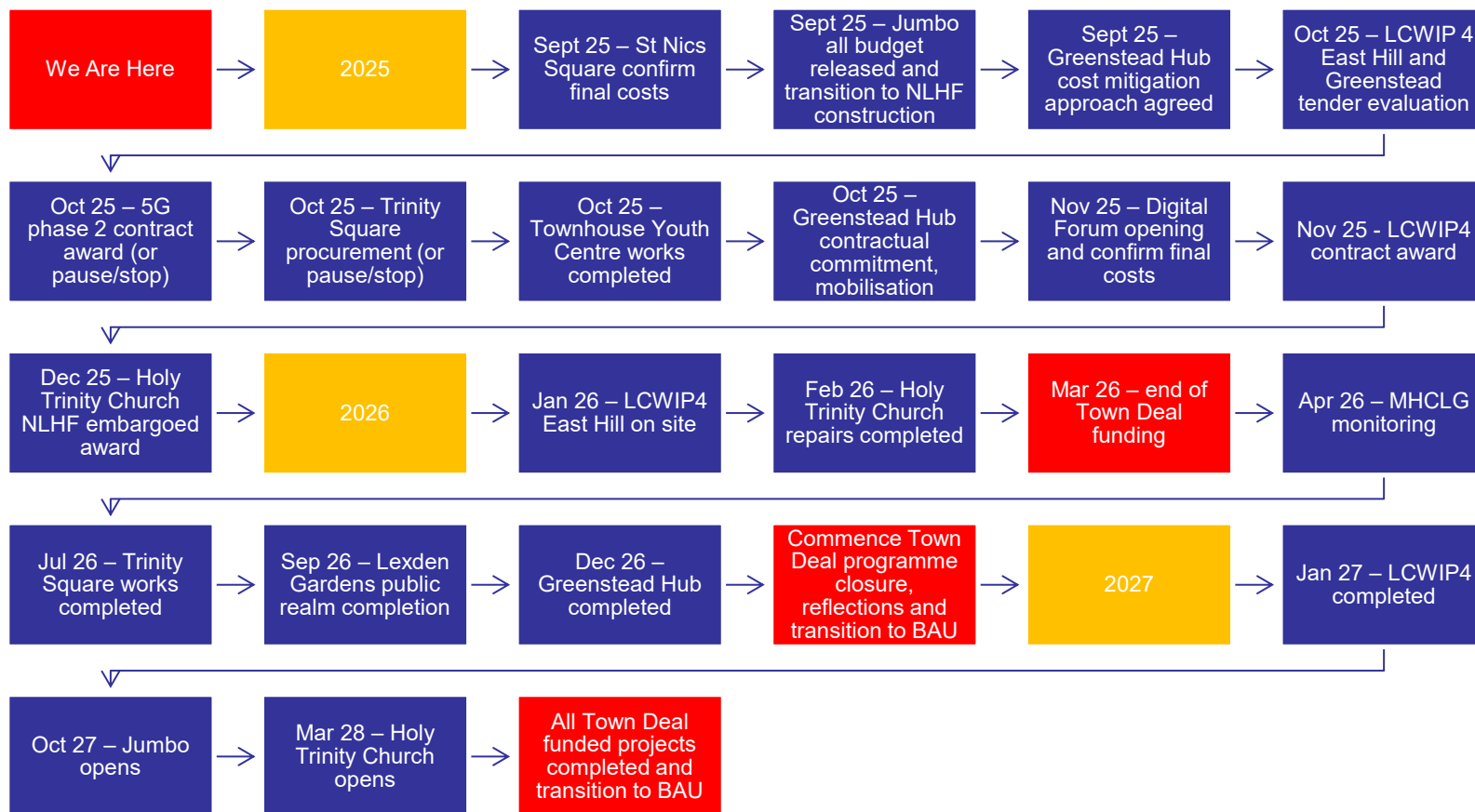
Simon Thorp
Programme Manager

Clare Ratcliffe
Engagement Specialist

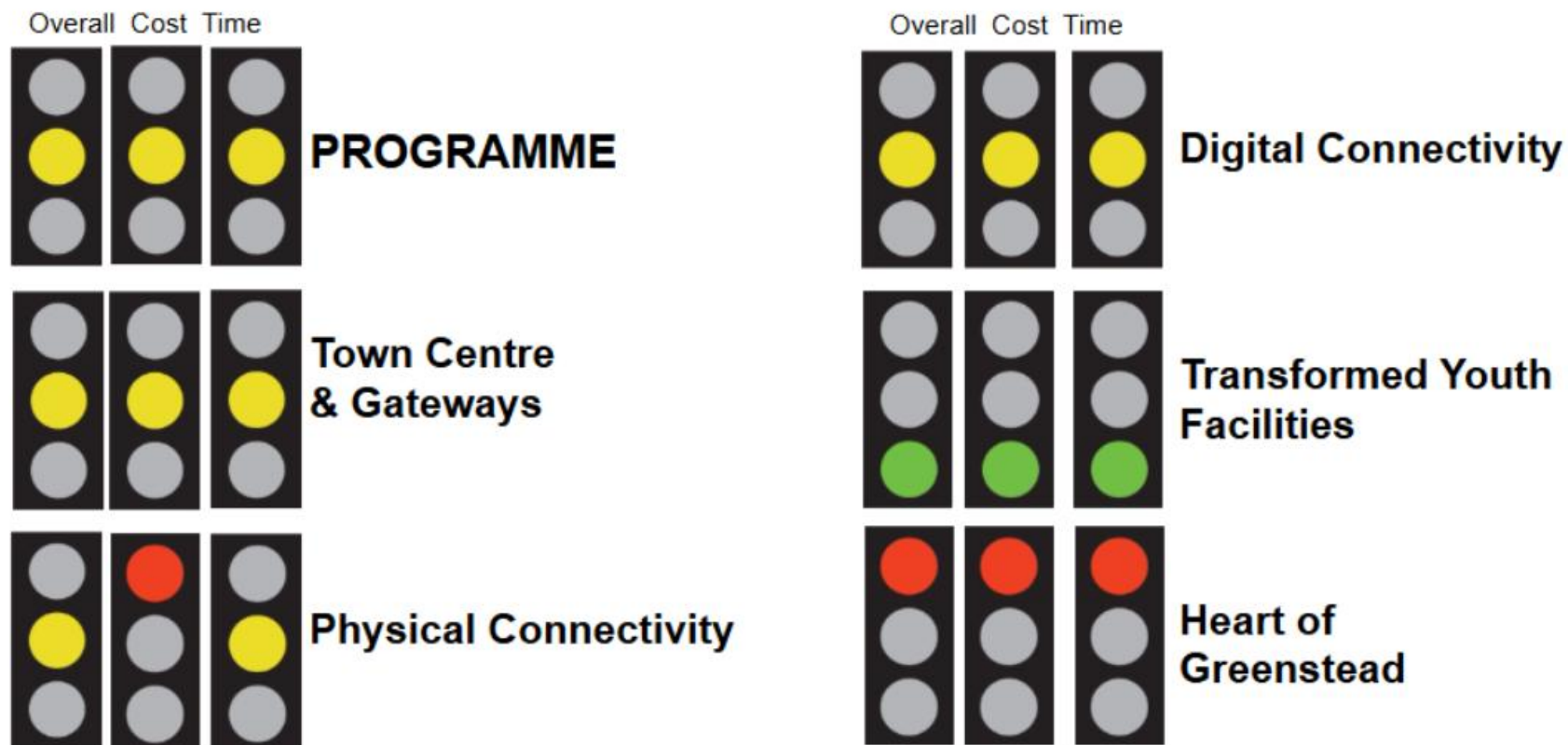
Project progress

1. Balcerne Gate public realm phase 1	2. Digital Skills Hub	3. Essex Pedal Power Greenstead	4. Liveable Neighbourhood School Street Greenstead
5. St Nicholas Square	6. Jumbo	7. Balcerne Gate public realm phase 2	8. Digital Forum Queen Street
9. Transformed Youth Facilities – Townhouse, Stanway, Highwoods	10. Lexden Gardens Essex County Hospital public realm	11. Holy Trinity Church	12. 5G AR/VR Tourism
13. Trinity Square	14. Walking and Cycling route – City Centre to Greenstead and University	15. Heart of Greenstead Hub	
Key			
Completed	Close to Town Deal funded completion	In progress – risks being managed	In progress – significant unmitigated risks

Key upcoming milestones



Dashboard - RAG status



(Based on August progress reports)

Red/Amber Time + Cost RAG together = project features will be affected unless mitigated.

Headlines & Key Risks

- **Heart of Greenstead Hub** – phase 1 planning application submitted, work on GP surgery completed and multi-agency office ongoing. Funding contributions from Estate Regeneration Fund, Integrated Care Board and City Council Housing Revenue Account. Tender issued for design/build contractor – scope change - potential £2.5m budget gap (part mitigated).
- **5G AR/VR Tourism and Trinity Square** – completion at risk due to need to mitigate Greenstead Hub cost risk.
- **Walking and Cycling Route** – Safer Streets PFCC £100k bid approved (£1m ECC match funding) for off road cctv and lighting. Colne Causeway completed. East Hill tender issued, contractor appointment planned by October – cost uncertainty remains until evaluation.
- **Holy Trinity Church** – repairs ongoing, Heritage Fund bid (£2.5m) submitted for construction phase. £3.8m total project cost (£1.3m gap) to be potentially funded by Historic England (£350k bid submitted), Architectural Heritage Fund (£350k bid submitted) and other sources (£200k from City Council) – all currently unsecured.

Other highlights

- **St Nicholas Square** – final costs awaited, expected to be covered by overall programme budget.
- **Digital Skills Hub** – benefits realisation ongoing.
- **Essex Pedal Power Greenstead** – benefits realisation ongoing.
- **Liveable Neighbourhood/School Street Greenstead** – benefits realisation ongoing.
- **Digital Forum Queen Street** – opening soon.
- **Townhouse Youth Centre** – refurbishment completion and handover soon.
- **Jumbo/Balkerne Gate phase 2** - moving towards RIBA 4 (detailed design), main contractor appointed, managing operator selection process ongoing. Peregrine nesting mitigation plan underway, Digital Forum to host staff/volunteers.
- **Greenstead Hub and Walking and Cycling** currently have potential unmitigated overspend – all other projects being delivered within programme budget.
- **MHCLHG performance monitoring** deferred to Spring 2026.

Benefits realisation objectives

Heart of Greenstead	• Improved community facilities delivered • 68 people supported into employment • Pedal Power - 700 bikes distributed • Liveable Neighbourhood – school street pilot delivered • 4 jobs created/protected
City Centre & Gateways	• 2 heritage buildings restored – Jumbo and Holy Trinity Church • 83 jobs created or protected • Public realm improved – St Nicholas Square, <u>Balkerne</u> Gate, Lexden Gardens
Digital Connectivity	• Digi Skills Hub – 210 people supported into employment, 5% increase in relevant qualifications issued • Digi Forum – 10 jobs created/protected • 5G – 36,000 VR users, 5 B2B users reporting improved experience (Digi Forum), 10 additional enterprises with 30mbps + broadband
Physical Connectivity	• 4.8km of new cycle way • 5% change in journey habits – modal shift from car to walking/cycling
Transformed Youth Facilities	• 3 Youth Centres refurbished • 250 Life skills sessions delivered, 450 Work life skills sessions delivered, 55 youth groups using centres, 500 Young people attending sessions in centres, 1,000 Skills and knowledge increased outcomes, 900 attendances / members, improved engagement and social mixing (qualitative) • improved variety of services and opportunities (qualitative) • increased footfall – Townhouse (1,000 attendances) • Permanent job created

Engagement and Comms

– Recent and upcoming activities

- Civic Society AGM & August update meeting
- St Edmunds House – GP refurbishment
- CCC Youth Panel workshop
- St Nic's launch
- Miranda Walk celebration (Liveable Neighbourhoods)
- Heart of Greenstead Community Fun Day
- Jumbo climbs resumed – Programme Manager now in post
- CCC Youth Panel Jumbo visit planned for September
- Lots of trade press re Digi Forum

St Nicholas Square launch

Coverage Summary

- Strong local media and social media presence.
- Overwhelmingly positive public response across posts from 5–6 July, praising the square’s new look and vibrant feel.
- Coverage captured the atmosphere, tone, and turnout effectively.
- “Café culture” and “European feel” were recurring themes.
- The event was hailed as a success, with a focus on social and economic impact.
- Minimal focus on delays.
- Businesses were ‘lightly coached’ by Scott and stayed on message, delivering supportive quotes – a practice we should continue. Compliments received from two local PR professionals on how well the businesses performed.
- The event was seen as a vibrant, community-led celebration.
- Widely recognised as a milestone and a symbol of Colchester’s regeneration.
- 168k trackable views through Team Colchester channels. 27k meaningful engagements.



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Project Spotlight: Heart of Greenstead Hub

Rory Doyle
Project Sponsor

Heart of Greenstead Governance Timeline – 2025.

Date (2025)	Meeting / Milestone	Notes
13 October	Procurement exercise end	Expected review time of one week.
20 October	Officer Progress Meeting	
23 October	Officer & Cllr Progress Meeting	Update from procurement exercise to Cllr's.
23 October	Leadership	Unlikely to send papers before the meeting
30 October	SLT & Estates Board	Unlikely to send papers before the meeting
Week of 3 November (TBC)	Cllr Briefing	
13 November (TBC)	Scrutiny Panel	
14 November	Draft Cabinet report to governance	
17 November	Cabinet Co-ordinating Meeting	
21 November	Final cabinet reported to be shared	
27 November	Planning Committee	6 th November committee not expected to be able to be achieved.
2 December	Cabinet Meeting for contract award	



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Urgent project consideration – 5G AR/VR and Holy Trinity Square

5G			
Total budget £977k	Town Deal budget element £977k	Spend to date £721k	Balance remaining £256k
Opportunities	• Proposal clearly uses the new 5G network so can be used as a showcase. • Peel is highly experienced and have delivered these kinds of experiences for other cities like Dublin. • What will be produced will be a solid, impressive and engaging experience for people already visiting Colchester and interested in its heritage. • The experience will increase dwell time in the city and encourage visits to more heritage sites than might otherwise be visited. • The experience may encourage repeat visits to the city. • The experience will likely prove popular with the media and visitors • The experience can easily be expanded upon to cover, for example, the Roman Circus Centre as well as Holy Trinity and Jumbo when their redevelopments are completed. • The proposal is sustainable. It had been feared that approaches using equipment or requiring staffing resource would leave an expensive legacy or be short lived. • Refresh of castle tablets useful (they are now in need of improvement) and might have a modest but positive revenue implication. However, tablet hire has largely waned in recent years due to the popularity of tours. • On current technology, physical tours will still be preferred by many visitors, particularly older tourists, but this would provide an accessible alternative for a greater number of people. • Cllrs often ask for new interpretation for various sites which can be expensive, time consuming and unsustainable. Those requests could be channelled towards modestly expanding the app instead.		
Weaknesses	• The proposal is not revolutionary and unlikely to immediately 'wow' tourists. • The experience will enhance existing tourist attractions but would likely have limited impact on attracting tourism in of itself. • The use of people's own tech is more sustainable but can be difficult to convince people to download making it questionable as to the extent to which it will be used. It has proven very difficult to get an accurate sense of how well these experiences are used in other cities but generally numbers in the low tens of thousands might be expected every year. • Some local people will question the level of spend on a 'nice to have' project. The proposal is sustainable and, like the previous digital outputs Peel have produced a decade ago for the castle tablets and 'Ancient Colchester' app they will still be in use for many years. However, it will unlikely be a significant draw in of itself and the number of annual downloads will unlikely exceed the visitor numbers already welcomed to the castle and other attractions.		

Holy Trinity Square			
Total budget £861,962	Town Deal budget element £861,962	Spend to date £87,039	Balance remaining £774,923
Opportunities	· Scheme improves and makes accessible an open space in the heart of the City Centre · Scheme complements the scheme for Holy Trinity Church · Scheme has been popular in public consultations		
Weaknesses	· The scheme has become complicated by the need to restore and remediate drainage from the Church · The price for the scheme may increase beyond the available budget once tenders are received · The scheme is opposed by the Civic Society		



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Walking and Cycling – City Centre to Greenstead and University

Ian Turner

Principal Transportation & Infrastructure Planner,
Essex County Council

East Hill (Section 1-3)- Progress

Scheme development

- Out to Tender in August 2025
- Returns due back October 2025
- Contract Award November 2025
- Main works commence January 2026
- 9 to 12 months construction duration
- Completion by January 2027

TRO

- TRO objections received (& upheld), but also letters of support - CMA is being drafted for Cabinet Member decision. We expect to see this concluded by the end of October 2025

The Moors Sections 4/5

Additional funding has been secured for The Moors through;

- £100k** from PFCC's 'Safer Streets' BID to cover personal security elements of the route such as lighting, CCTV and Wi-Fi hotspots to improve connectivity.

- ECC's **£1.1m** additional contribution for the Moors sections to continue with current scope and delivery timeline

Delivery is contingent on-

- the East Hill Tenders being within the current budget allocation for those sections of the route. If over budget, the funding allocations for LCWIP 4 will need to be reprofiled.

Progress

Continuing to progress with Highway adoption of the existing cycleway for Permitted Development, design progression and ecology input.

Works on the Moors are expected to commence by March 2026 for 6 months construction duration until September 2026.



Improving other sections of the LCWIP 4 Route

-Given funding pressures and previous 'We are Colchester' board agreements to VE/descope other sections to prioritise East Hill, under the current budget pressures, progress to sections 6 and 7 (Hythe Station Bridge - Greenstead Road) has been deferred.

Status

-Section 6- Hythe Station Bridge- Currently, cycle route is on-road and with existing signage and wayfinding. Original proposals were to use the bridge, but it is in poor and unsafe condition and requires significant funding to repair the bridge and to divert high pressure gas main that spans the structure. Further sections of the Hythe Station Rd section already benefits from an existing bus gated area around the railway station.

-Section 7- Greenstead Road- currently cycle route is on-road to the University. Further improvement would require significant alternations to bus stop infrastructure and utility diversions.

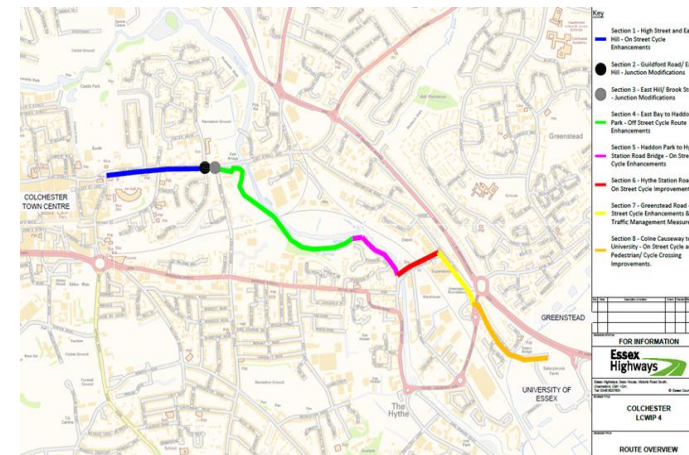
-Section 8- Colne Causeway- completed in October 2023 - **DONE**.

-Due to the level of investment now identified as being required to these sections, and a focus on the most beneficial sections, 6/7 has been postponed under the scheme programme at this time.

-Further enhancement on these sections for cyclists will be subject to future funding decisions. Opportunities include future Active Travel England funding bids and s106 funding (including Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community as a potential source).

Summary

- In delivering substantial improvements to East Hill, the Moors and Colne Causeway, this will deliver the objective to improve the route from the City Centre to the University, delivering improvements to **over 80% of the corridor**.
- PLUS; Additional benefits has been added to the project through sustainable cycle improvements connecting the LCWIP 4 route to the RTS Clingoe Hill works, improving the connection/crossing of the A133 to Avon Way/Greenstead and future TCBGC.



Top 5 Risks

Key Risk Items (September 25)

Programme- Risk that further delay extends timescales beyond funding period of March 2026 commitment.

Traffic Management to avoid impact on the highway network of construction

Tender returns could be over budget

Lack of Tender returns if bidders withdraw from the Tender process

Unforeseen utilities/archaeological presence during the construction works

- LCWIP 4 has a robust Risk Register to capture all risks to the project which is reviewed regularly, and mitigations are in place.



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Issues, Risks & Mitigations – ‘you said,
we did’

Decisions to be actioned from 22 May
2025 meeting

Heart of Greenstead Hub	Progress reports to CCC Leader continue. Timeline, milestones, cost plan, delivery model update, planning application status and procurement status provided. Budget shortfall options including potential Colchester City Council contribution actively being addressed. The Trust operating model is under review due to viability concerns. Site visit with MP completed.
Holy Trinity Church	Heritage Fund Bid submitted 5 August (£2.5m). Historic England bid submitted 27 August (£350k). Architectural Heritage Fund bid to follow (£350k). Delivery stage budget £3.8m. £400k remaining Town Deal repairs budget committed. Procurement for repairs completed. Delivery stage procurement is not scheduled until Heritage Fund permission to start (around February 2026). Re-opening per business plan - April 2028. Construction phase is completed by September 2027.
Trinity Square	Drainage attenuation issue resolved. Planning approved. Tender not yet issued – expected to be issued October 2025. On site works delayed due to church repairs – consequently, completion may be delayed to early summer 2026.
St Nicholas Square	Main elements completed and re-opened. Final costs and budget overrun to be confirmed (covered by programme budget. Lessons continue to be shared.
Lexden Gardens	Topping out ceremony booked. Further all-site visit being planned. Public realm on track for completion in line with wider housing development.
Jumbo and Balcerne Gate	Purchase order for balance of Town Deal funding issued. Main contractor appointed – Sir Robert McAlpine. Managing operator selection process ongoing. Working towards RIBA 4 detailed design. Discussions with Highways commenced. Fundraising and mitigation of peregrine nesting issues ongoing.

Walking and Cycling	Out to tender for East Hill. Traffic Regulation Order objections being managed. Pre-tender cost estimates exceeded budget but working towards contractor appointment. On site mobilisation now expected to be October-December 2025. All route sections not expected to be completed until at least Summer 2026. Route sections 4-7 paused pending outcome of East Hill (sections 1-3) tender. Safer Streets application to PFCC for cctv, lighting on Moors route sections for £100k successful, with £1m ECC match funding.
Digital Forum	Concession agreement between Colchester City Council and Colbea signed in July. Practical completion and fit out delayed – 17 October. Awaiting opening date, now likely to be late November. Hoarding off land to rear of site pending Painters' Yard development as either housing-led regeneration, or a transport interchange.
5G	The 'network build' has been completed by Colchester Fibre. Procurement for the visitor experience element of the project is underway but delayed. Contractual commitment by December 2025 with potential (but not guaranteed) completion of visitor experience.
Transformed Youth Facilities	On track to complete by October. Comms plan under review. Under review by ECC. Potential links between Essex Youth Service and Colchester Institute under review. VIP options for Townhouse reopening under review.

St Nicholas Square - completed



Townhouse



Lexden Gardens



SF Block 6 (1)



SF Block 6 (2)



Block 1 FF Hallway



Block 1 External (1)



SF Block 6 (3)



Block 6 External (1)



Block 1 External (2)



Block 5 External (1)



Block 6 External (2)



Block 1 GF



Block 5 External (2)



Block 5 Car Plot

Digital Forum - opening soon



Holy Trinity Church





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Levelling Up Programme Update

Matt Sterling

Head of Economic Growth



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Decisions & Next Meeting

Simon Blaxill

Decisions

Board are invited to make decisions on the following:

DECISIONS:

1. Heart of Greenstead Hub –

- a) Board directs Officers to review options to pare back or stop other Town Deal projects such as 5G or Holy Trinity Square using government freedoms and flexibilities and confirm the value of funds which would be made available and the consequences of so doing by 3 October 2025.
- b) Board recommends that the City/County Councils consider options to bridge any other current or emerging funding gap not covered by Town Deal budget.

2. Walking and Cycling Route LCWIP 4 –

- a) Board to confirm that it remains assured of the viability of the project or give direction on alternative options.

Decisions

Board are invited to note the following:

TO NOTE:

1. Programme-wide progress and planned activities.
2. Key risks including cost mitigations and contingencies.
3. Levelling Up programme progress update.
4. Current project timelines, milestones and risk management (including any specific 'you said, we did' actions arising from the last Board meeting).

Next meeting

26 November 2025

Future meetings

25 February 2026