

Report of	Head of Strategic Policy & Regeneration	Author	Nigel Myers
Title	Colchester's Digital Strategy		☎ 282878
Wards affected	All		

This report concerns the current status of the Colchester Borough Council Digital Strategy and its role in enabling the delivery of improved broadband and mobile phone services throughout the Borough

1. Decision(s) Required

- 1.1 To permit commercial investment in the Town Centre CCTV network to provide higher speed broadband (typically 40 – 50 Mbps) and 4th Generation wireless (11 Mbps) to residents, businesses and visitors and to realise an alternative revenue stream for the Council.
- 1.2 To ratify the direction and actions being proposed by the Colchester Borough Council Digital Strategy to facilitate and enable private sector investment which will deliver improved fixed and mobile broadband services.

2. Reasons for Decision(s)

- 2.1 In order that Colchester Borough Council can obtain best value from its fixed assets and to provide a sustainable income stream for the Council.
- 2.2 To bring forward the delivery of higher speed broadband to the whole Borough in order to realise benefits such as:
 - To provide significantly higher speed broadband connectivity for residents, businesses and visitors
 - To help drive down the cost of broadband and digital services to the end user
 - To enable efficient and cost effective delivery of public and private sector services
 - To support the growth of emerging employment sectors such as creative industries
 - To address digital exclusion and the accompanying economic disadvantages
 - To leverage significant private sector investment into building the digital infrastructure in Colchester
 - To enable improved access to emerging technologies such as health telecare

3. Alternative Options

- 3.1 The alternative would be not to bring this asset to market creating a missed opportunity to obtain best value for its fixed assets and to realise the benefits outlined in 2.2

4. Supporting Information

- 4.1 A national survey conducted in October 2010 by the consumer site www.broadband-expert.co.uk found that the average download speed in the Borough was 4.2 Mbps, the eighth slowest in the UK. Evidence shows that broadband speeds are an increasingly significant factor in contributing to the economic prosperity of a place.
- 4.2 The Colchester Borough Council Digital Strategy, which includes the plans to commercialise the infrastructure of Colchester Town Centre's Close Circuit Television (CCTV) network, aims to redress the position outlined in 4.1 and significantly improve broadband speeds and connectivity.
- 4.3 Local stakeholder engagement is at the heart of this strategy. In this respect stakeholders have been consulted and positively engaged in supporting the digital strategy. These have included the Chamber of Commerce, Haven Gateway Partnership, Essex County Council, Culver Square and Lion Walk Shopping Centres, Colchester Retail Business Association (CORBA) and the University of Essex.
- 4.4 Considerable effort has also gone into promoting Colchester to the telecommunications industry to encourage private sector investment in the Borough. A Strategic Seminar under the banner 'Achieving Next Generation Access for Colchester Borough' was arranged jointly with the University of Essex on February 3rd. The seminar focused on the investment opportunities and the aspirations of Colchester for NGA. The seminar succeeded in attracting 40 local and national communication companies.
- 4.5 This event generated significant market interest from the telecommunications industry with sixteen companies declaring an 'expression of interest' in building the digital infrastructure to deliver services in urban and/or rural areas by either cable, fibre and/or wireless technologies.
- 4.6 The sixteen companies were then required to undergo a detailed commercial and technical evaluation which was conducted in line with the requisite procurement process. As a result a shortlist of companies has been drawn up for consideration by the Cabinet.

5. Proposals

- 5.1 There are three key opportunities which will enable the objectives the Digital Strategy to be achieved: Digital Wireless Town, High speed Urban and Business Broadband and Rural Broadband.
- 5.2 Digital Wireless Town – the building of a digital platform which gives high speed mobile access to web data and services. Colchester Borough Council (CBC) will provide access to its infrastructure (street furniture and rooftops) for the siting of micro aerials (200mm). The aerials are not subject to any planning or heritage building restrictions. In return for this provision CBC will receive an annual rental. The final value of this rental income is subject to commercial negotiation but it is estimated that it could be in the order of £20,000 per annum. The build time is estimated as being between 4-6 weeks.
- 5.3 High speed Urban and Business Broadband – a substantial investment in the design, build and operation of high speed broadband connectivity with significant increases in download and upload speeds. The build will include the use of the CCTV ducting for deploying new communications fibre. Elsewhere the solutions will be a combination of fibre, cable and wireless technologies. Subject to negotiation CBC would have the

opportunity to generate revenues from advertising and sponsorship via the web. Any projected revenue stream needs to be treated with a degree of caution. Based on current evidence an indicative figure of £100,000 per annum is cited. There may also be considerable scope within this arrangement to secure free web access for digital inclusion initiatives.

- 5.4 Rural Broadband – currently there are a number of poorly served rural areas with download speeds as low as 0.5Mbps. Local wireless solutions will be rolled out as part of a phased programme which will need to be finalised in conjunction with stakeholder engagement and consultation.
- 5.5 Following confirmation of the decisions outlined in 1.1 and 1.2 the next step would be to enter immediately into formal engagement with the shortlisted companies in order to finalise detailed contractual arrangements by the end of July.

6. Strategic Plan References

- 6.1 The proposal will directly contribute to five of the nine priorities: addressing older people's needs; addressing younger people's needs; enabling job creation; community safety; and congestion busting. Less directly, content applications possible over the network will support the remaining four priorities: community development; healthy living; homes for all; and reduce, re-use, recycle.

7. Consultation

- 7.1 In addition to the consultation outlined in 4.3 there is ongoing stakeholder engagement taking place with all the key business groups, shopping centres, Parish Clerks Forum and the University of Essex. The feedback received from stakeholders to this initiative and the Digital Strategy has been very positive and supportive.

8. Publicity Considerations

- 8.1 A decision to proceed with the initiative will be publicised through different channels following confirmation of this paper by the Cabinet. This will include the networks and partners listed in 7.1 as well as through the local media and CBC website. It is recognised that communications do need to be fully planned, coordinated and agreed by the CBC Communications and Marketing Team and the commercial partners.
- 8.2 It is recognised that the commercial partners will need to implement marketing campaigns to stimulate and promote interest and demand for their products and services.

9. Financial implications

- 9.1 There is no direct financial investment required of Colchester Borough Council to deliver the proposals outlined in 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4.
- 9.2 There is a requirement for Colchester Borough Council to provide access to assets (including street furniture, ducting and rooftops) in return for an agreed rental/revenue stream.
- 9.3 Any figures cited in this paper are indicative only and should be treated with a degree of caution.

10. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

- 10.1 The proposal is “equality neutral” and will improve access by low-income households who no longer have BT landlines but have switched to mobile phones on grounds of cost to have greater access to Internet-delivered services of all kinds.
- 10.2 All businesses, partner organisations, grant recipients and other customers are treated equally and fairly. An Equality Impact Assessment for the current strategy has been completed and is available on the Colchester Borough Council website (www.colchester.gov.uk) by following this link: http://www.colchester.gov.uk/Info_page_two_pic_2_det.asp?art_id=7999&sec_id=1988 (then click on Economic Development Strategy 2010 to 2015)
- 10.3 There are no specific human rights implications.

11. Community Safety Implications

- 11.1 The initiative will complement the range of community safety initiatives in place within the Town Centre. In particular, there will be opportunities for individuals to link with one another through video over the Internet, as well as to capture and send video streamed material of incidents to “blue light” services as well as the potential to enhance or supplant the Colchester Business Against Crime (COLBAC) retail security network, providing visual images of offenders to town centre businesses at low cost.

12. Health and Safety Implications

- 12.1 There are no Health and Safety implications. The output from each micro aerial is no more than the power of two mobile phones and each antenna will be pole-mounted at around 18 feet above the street level.

13. Risk Management Implications

- 13.1 There are some specific risk management implications which the procurement and contracting process will eliminate, namely:
- Provision of an “open access network”, allowing other carriers and content suppliers to access the network;
 - Operator/s track-record, financial robustness, capacity for innovation and partnership working
 - Timing, resilience, robustness, scalability and continuing evolution of the solution/s adopted
 - Opportunities for Council services to be delivered free of charge over the network and for potential income stream sharing from advertising.
 - Agreed contract length with review periods and call-off

Background Papers

Colchester Borough Council Digital Strategy v.2
Colchester Borough Council Economic Development Strategy & Delivery Plan 2010 to 2015
Appendix One: Commercial Evaluation & Engagement (Not for publication before July 13TH 2011)