

## **Canterbury City Council’s Consultation on the Corporate Plan 2021-24: Canterbury Business Improvement District’s Response**

Canterbury Business Improvement District (BID) has a keen interest in Canterbury City Council’s Corporate Plan because the Corporate Plan is a key strategic document that not only sets the agenda and priorities for the Council’s activity but also has the potential to enable investment and activity led by other organisations and groups. This is because, in order for other organisations to leverage in additional funding, key local authority strategies need to be in place.

The Corporate Plan is:

*“one of the council’s key strategic documents and is developed so councillors can set the agenda and priorities for the council. It is used by council officers to help them focus their energies and increasingly-limited resources, implement agreed priorities and formulate future policy. It also helps them shape the way services are delivered.”*

**We would like to understand the council’s vision for the city and how the Corporate Plan can facilitate that vision. We believe this Corporate Plan needs to be bolder in its vision and scope, and this is why:**

Canterbury has many assets and strengths and these need to be supported through recovery, but also new opportunities and significant challenges for which we need to be prepared.

### **Strengths and assets:**

Canterbury is a world-famous Cathedral city with strong historic, cultural and commercial appeal and a premium retail offer with an enviable mix of independents and national brands. Canterbury is recognised as a ‘speciality town/city’, i.e. a city where heritage, culture or proximity to the countryside are the main attractions and people will come to visit for the ‘experience’ and shopping (Source: Institute of Place Management, 2015). This remains the case despite the Covid crisis. We are a UNESCO World Heritage Site with the Great Stour river flowing through the city centre and beautiful parks and gardens all around – the perfect cosmopolitan city with a countryside feel.

In addition, we have a successful higher education sector that has made substantial investments over the last few years and a growing cultural and creative industries sector sitting alongside our beautiful green open spaces in the Garden of England. Retail is in transition – it needs less space but not no space – and this presents an opportunity for expanding the city centre’s offer.

### **New opportunities:**

Canterbury is a successful city but needs co-ordinated investment to make the most of its strengths and its potential. Towns and city centres are going through their biggest transition since the industrial revolution and we need to be ready to meet that challenge. Cities will always be a place where people gather to live, work and socialise. As we head towards a new Local Plan, we need a strong Corporate Plan in place so that the Council can

not only fund its vision for Canterbury, but enable others to fund it, too. With increasing housing coming to the city centre and the district, we want to see a holistic and comprehensive vision that incorporates business and innovation needs, housing, employment opportunities, green space and other uses, using concepts like “garden communities” and “15-minute cities”.

In addition, Canterbury City Council has declared a Climate Emergency and has set a goal of achieving net zero by 2030. Now is the moment to work in partnership and maximise the potential of the city and the district’s strengths and assets to build back better.

The Council has other strategies in place that could be referenced in support of the Corporate Plan, including:

- Canterbury’s Destination Management Plan (the city’s tourism strategy), co-commissioned by CCC and Canterbury BID, sets out to make Canterbury “a first class cultural heritage destination”. This vision helps to enable the work of Visit Canterbury, Canterbury BID and Visit Kent, which in turns supports Canterbury’s visitor economy. We note that Canterbury is a tourism driven destination with no funding from the Council for this activity (with the exception of one person’s salary).
- Heritage Strategy
- Open Spaces Strategy
- Green Infrastructure Strategy

There are also strategies that are being developed or need to be developed or revised in light of the Covid crisis, budget constraints and other transformations taking place (for example, with retail and, crucially, climate change):

- Climate Change Action Plan – in progress
- Biodiversity / Pollinator Action Plan – in progress
- Cultural Strategy. Thames Estuary / Creative Industries corridor – how can we access that funding without a cultural strategy?
- Inward Investment Strategy – Choose Canterbury exists but we need a robust strategy to support this work. There are also new concepts being developed to enable investors / property owners to work with local authorities, businesses and community groups on a shared vision in a place where ownership is fragmented. We would like to help facilitate this work.

Similarly, other organisations in the area have made significant investments and contributions to Canterbury’s economic, social and physical well-being, including, but not limited to:

- Canterbury BID’s investment of £500,000 annually. Our mission statement is to help make Canterbury a vibrant, exciting, well connected and successful business community, and an attractive, clean, green, safe, enjoyable destination for everyone.
- Community-led groups such as Canterbury Society, Canterbury Climate Action Partnership, Friends groups and numerous resident groups.
- The Kent and Medway Medical School

- The Daphne Oram Creative Arts Building and The Verena Holmes Building at CCCU, facilitating education in the creative and performing arts, science, technology, health, engineering and medicine courses.
- Institute of Cultural and Creative Industries at the University of Kent
- The Marlowe Theatre and Marlowe KIT – where Council investment led to a sustainable performing arts centre.
- City centre developments including The Hampton by Hilton, the Guildhall Quarter and Biggleston Yard.
- Kent-wide investment and support through Visit Kent, Produced in Kent, Locate in Kent and the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce.

### **Challenges**

Canterbury faces a series of pressures that threaten its health and vitality and could undermine its ability to effectively evolve and adapt in order to exploit new opportunities. It is a small, historic city which, constrained by its infrastructure limitations, has to manage and respond to a range of needs and impacts arising out of its multiple roles.

The Council has recently carried out a new retail and leisure study for the city and has worked closely with Canterbury BID to carry out qualitative business/customer research. There are significant challenges for the city centre relating to:

- a. Climate change and biodiversity
- b. Housing needs and related infrastructure and services
- c. The changing profile of retail and the profile of ground floor units;
- d. Access and accessibility; and
- e. Digital connectivity and “smart” services.

Covid has led to a fundamental change in the way we live and work – and presents us with an opportunity to build back better. Successful towns and cities rely on strong partnership working amongst the local authorities, businesses and community groups. These groups rely on strategies that can support their activities and ambitions. We want to see a Corporate Plan that:

- Has climate change at the heart of building back better;
- Supports businesses and employment, including start-ups, social enterprise and community-led initiatives and entrepreneurship. We will also urge the Council to protect ground floor space in the city centre for public use through the Local Plan consultation, whether that is retail, work space, health, leisure, well-being, community (for example, libraries, job centres, council); and
- Sets out a bold vision for the infrastructure we need even if the delivery of that infrastructure isn’t in its direct control – transport (including roads, public transport, walking and cycling), digital, and all aspects of public realm and green open spaces.

## CCC CORPORATE PLAN

### Priorities

The draft Corporate Plan sets out four proposed priorities for the council over the next three years. To what extent do you feel each priority reflects your needs and ambitions for the Canterbury district?

**1. To support the district's economy to recover then grow**

We will create a pro-business district that supports enterprise and innovation in order to drive economic development through our policies, by the use of our extensive assets and the use of technology alongside our commitment to sustainability and the environment.

*We need to support our retail, hospitality and tourism sectors, which are assets to the city that drive footfall and spend, and alongside that we need to develop a much stronger inward investment strategy that is joined up with the strategic investment of our universities (medical school, engineering and science hub, creative industries) in order to create higher paying job opportunities for a growing population.*

**2. To deliver a better social housing service for our tenants**

We will create a Housing service that is as well funded as possible so that we can provide the services tenants need, when they need them. We will also use every way we can to buy, build and maintain a stock of quality homes.

*We would like to see this Corporate Plan address overall housing needs, not just those provided by the Council. The Council's planning department has the authority to approve housing developments which in turn impact the overall needs of the city centre and the surrounding area. How is the Council going to support the overall need, perhaps using concepts like "garden communities" and the "15-minute city".*

**3. To deliver better waste collection services for all residents**

Poor performance in this area has been an issue for years. Now is the time to deliver refuse collection and environmental services worthy of our residents. We aim to deliver a significant improvement in service over 2020/21 levels by the end of the 2019-2023 Council.

*What is meant by "significant improvements", ie, what are these and how will they be measured? Is it feasible to introduce smart bin technology and public recycling bins? We also need to join up the Council's plans for waste collection with the need for a more efficient and effective trade waste and recycling service. What is the vision for an improved service for the whole community (businesses included)? How will this work support net zero emissions, also bearing in mind the increasing amount of housing coming to the city and the surrounding area.*

**4. Using our enforcement powers to protect the district**

We will redouble our efforts to use our enforcement powers to take action against those who break the rules and affect the quality of life enjoyed by everyone else. The rule breakers should be the ones

expected to pay for this work wherever possible.

*We would like to see a more holistic vision in this area of work, including strategies for preventing and designing out anti-social behaviour alongside the need for enforcement and also more joined-up working with Kent Police. Could we revisit the idea of co-locating the Community Safety Unit because this could transform the way we work in partnership across the city, including across different service areas of the Council and also with Kent Police, Canterbury BID and others.*

*We suggest a strong focus on “designing out” anti-social behaviour – again, working in partnership. In particular, there is a need to provide and/or enable leisure services for young people. For example, a skate park and also indoor entertainment so that young people have somewhere safe and worthwhile to go.*

*Enforcement is only part of the answer. On this point, we would like to see more proactive involvement from the Council regarding shop fronts. The Council has recently produced Shop Front Guidelines, but in order for the guidelines to be successful, we need a joined up approach that combines education, support and enforcement.*

*Points 2-4 are part of the Council’s statutory responsibility. What is the vision for these service areas?*

**The draft plan also sets out two principles to help the council deliver its priorities. To what extent do you feel each of these principles reflects your expectations of the council?**

- 1. We believe we should continue to work towards becoming financially self-sufficient by ensuring:**
  - a. We generate income to reduce our reliance on Council Tax and government funding
  - b. We run services that are fully digital and allow our customers to serve themselves wherever possible. This frees up resources and reduces the need to stop providing other services or lower their standards
  - c. Where we have control over fees and charges, the user of the service will pay the whole cost of the service they receive

*What does this mean and to what activities / services will it apply? We are also entering a delicate phase of recovery from Covid where very few businesses (certainly not hospitality, retail and tourism businesses) have made any money. We need to focus on supporting and enabling recovery and activities that help drive footfall and spend – not prevent them from happening.*

**2. Providing leadership and fighting for the district**

We are an ambitious and environmentally-aware council. By showing leadership and fighting for the district, we will deliver economic growth not only across this Council term but also lay the foundations for success for the next 20 years.

*We would like to see a collaborative approach that focuses on new opportunities and new ways of working.*

- a. We will develop, lead and support the district's recovery as we move to a post-Covid and EU transition world, ensuring our economy and communities can adapt to and benefit from the new normal.

*How? What strategies will support this?*

- b. We want our new Local Plan to focus on prosperity, wealth creation and sustainability. Infrastructure is vital, as is the quality of homes delivered. We want the people living in those homes to feel part of our community.

*We would like the Local Plan to protect ground floor units in the city centre for public access as mentioned above, with climate change front of mind, using principles from concepts like "Garden Communities and "15-minute cities"*

*As the UK recovers from COVID-19 there has been a shift in how people view their homes, workplaces and the spaces around them. The garden communities concept will play a big role in creating the housing still greatly needed but also now have the opportunity to create the communities suitable for the 'new world' we find ourselves in with a focus on community inclusion and walkable, sociable, vibrant neighbourhoods. Similarly, the 15-minute city concept is an approach to urban design that aims to improve quality of life by creating cities where everything a resident needs can be reached within 15 minutes by foot, bike or public transit.*

- c. We are committed to the council achieving its carbon-neutral ambitions by 2030 by working to deliver our Climate Change Action Plan, but we cannot ignore the global, national and local opportunities and threats that have emerged over the past nine months. That means our efforts must be economically viable and timed to get best value for our residents.

*We understand the financial and Covid constraints but would like to see Climate change goals take a higher priority so that we can all do the work that needs to be done to achieve net zero. A strong Corporate Plan and Local Plan will enable everyone to play their part.*

*What efforts will take priority?*

- d. We recognise preserving and enhancing our heritage assets is important but in order to do so they must where possible be actively participating in the district's economy. We should embrace the private and third sectors to find new and innovative ways to use these assets. When it comes to the private sector, One Pound Lane is an excellent example, while the third sector is playing a positive role in relation to the Whitstable West Quay, Herne Bay Pier and the Marlowe Kit.

*The private sector and other organisations will rely on a strong vision in the Corporate Plan and Local Plan in order to play their part. This seems a limited list given Canterbury's cultural and heritage assets. Canterbury BID funded a Heritage Scoping Document in 2016-17, which, although a snapshot in time, contains a more comprehensive list and vision for the city's heritage.*

- e. We recognise new housing developments need real open space that is close by to protect the health and wellbeing of residents. The Council should - within our powers - protect these spaces and work in partnership to enhance and maintain them.

*Housing developments require a holistic vision for how people will live, work and socialise as referenced above.*

- f. We will work hard to keep our influence over transport matters in our district, even though responsibility lies elsewhere, so that we can implement our plans wherever possible.

*What is CCC's vision for transport in the district, even if they aren't responsible for delivering all of it?*