

ASELA ANCHOR PROGRAMMES

POSITION AS AT JUNE 2021

- **Superfast Digital** – the principal objective of this programme is to provide gigabit connectivity to every household and premises by 2025. The Local Full Fibre Network project which is funded by DCMS delivers fibre to public sector facilities (including fire, GPs and health care) remains on track and on budget to achieve delivery to over 150 sites by the end of the month. Plans are now being developed to join all the fibre together to create a single public service network. This activity is attracting significant private sector investment and up to £100m has now been committed to South Essex by Openreach, Virgin and CityFibre collectively. The next phase of this programme will be to establish a private sector led board and start to develop the digital solutions that will be at the heart of the Thames Freeport, the Technical University and the South Essex Estuary Park;
- **Thames Freeport** – the Government announced in the Chancellor's March Budget, that the Thames Freeport was one of eight successful bids. The Freeport is private sector led (DP World, Forth Ports, and Ford) and covers the geography of the local authorities of Thurrock, LB Havering LB Barking and Dagenham. Thurrock Council are the lead local authority and the accountable body for public sector investment. Since March the Government have agreed the interim governance arrangements and approved initial capacity funding of £300k. Work on an Outline Business Case is now underway and the target is to submit to Government by 31st July. Simultaneously work is in train to establish Tax and Custom sites within the Freeport area. These bring significant financial incentives to the private sector partners and the potential for business rate retention for the designated areas. The initial feasibility study identified substantial economic benefits including over 25,000 new jobs and over £5bn of inward investment. In addition, the priority policy objective is to use the Freeport as a catalyst for regeneration and levelling up deprived communities. These benefits and policy areas will be tested and expanded as part of the business case development over the following weeks;
- **Technical University** – in March Leaders approved the feasibility study for a technical university. The intention is to create degree apprenticeships with local employers, providing opportunities for local people, leading to high skill local jobs. This is a business led venture, with a number of the leading businesses in the area identifying requirements for both young people and reskilling of existing employees. A Partnership Board has now been established, which includes senior representation from DP World, Leonardos, Olympus, Nat West Bank, Ford, and Southend Airport. Higher Education providers are also represented through Anglian Ruskin University, University of Essex and the University of East Anglia. The programme will reach into the school system to encourage students from communities that wouldn't historically have considered higher skills as attainable. The next steps that are now underway include the procurement of a Higher Education provider for the first tranche of degree apprenticeship courses, starting

in September 2023, and the development of the full business case by November 2021.

- **South Essex Estuary Park (SEE Park)** – This flagship programme aims to provide an extraordinary parkland setting that encompasses all of South Essex, bringing environmental, social, and economic value to the region. It will cover 1/3 of South Essex at 23,000ha (in line with government's aim of protecting 30% of England's countryside by 2030) and will comprise five large-scale landscapes, selected because of their capacity to perform multiple functions, while offering many benefits. ASELA leaders gave support for pressing ahead with building the case for investment in the SEE Park and for working up more detailed proposals to deliver a pathfinder implementation project across the Central Thames Marshlands. Since then work has been underway to design an implementation approach around creating early successes; building momentum and confidence with local residents and investors alike. Initial activity over the next 12-24 months will be focussed around four workstreams:
 - Launching the SEEPark - with a distinctive branding, establishing a marketing & comms plan with web/social media presence; and creating options for a future operating model;
 - Development of a Landscape framework plan - and design guide to ensure future development work across the 5 constituent landscapes reflects the GBI Strategy and objectives;
 - Delivery of the Central Thames Pathfinder - as a 'demonstrator' project with a series of wave1 implementation deliverables within an initial 18-month period;
 - Creating a Green Finance Strategy – looking to access Government grant / capacity funding in the short-term and to build a long-term green investment model to attract private sector infrastructure funding.

A case for investment has been developed and it describes the work and resource envelope (c.£7.5m) that will be needed to get the SEE Park up and running and to deliver the Central Thames Marshlands pathfinder. The majority of funding for this will need to be sourced from outside of direct investments from ASELA Local Authorities; through a combination of, related strategic programmes such as Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) and Thames Free Port (TFP), Government capacity funding and private sector green financing models. This is the main area of focus over the coming months;

- **Infrastructure and Housing** – the focus of this programme is the provision of infrastructure and homes that are needed to support the economy and meet existing housing needs. Over the last 12 months a detailed pipeline of housing schemes has been developed with a specific focus on schemes that are stalled because of issues of viability. By working together across all South Essex Local Authorities, the area has been able to create a compelling case for a trail blazing strategic place based partnership with Homes England. Now agreed in principle, by the Homes England Executive Board, it will be just one of two such partnerships in the country. A Memorandum of Understanding is being prepared for Leaders consideration, along with a joint Business Plan. The intention is that these will be agreed by Leaders before the 31st July and formally launched in September 2021. Homes England remain committed to provide capacity funding

for this programme for 2021/22 and the outputs of the joint work on the Business Plan will also feed into the Spending Review in the Autumn. In addition to this activity, progress is also being made through joint working with regional housing associations, through a new initiative to create greater opportunities for small and medium sized builders.