

Delivering a new Bus Station Interchange for Colchester



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What are we consulting on?

People have told us they want better public transport facilities in Colchester. We are now exploring how a new Colchester Bus Station Interchange at Painters Yard could help meet the city's future needs.

The consultation will run between 29 September and 9 November 2026

We would like your views on:

- The need for a new Colchester Bus Station Interchange and Painters Yard as the preferred location.
- Emerging layout concepts for the site.
- Facilities and services that could be included.
- Opportunities to improve public spaces, landscaping and the visitor experience.

Your feedback will help us understand what is most important to residents, businesses, visitors and transport users. We will use this consultation to help refine the proposals and develop a preferred design.

Images within this document are illustrative or concepts and should not be considered as the final designs. What will not change is our commitment to a high-quality facility which complements and enhances the local urban environment.



Artist's impression of what a new bus station interchange at Painters Yard could look like



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Introduction

For many years, Colchester's main bus station, depot and supporting infrastructure was located at Painters Yard, just off Queen Street. The bus station was well located for access to the city centre, but over time became dated and less well used. With the multi-storey car park long since demolished, the bus station had a number of structural issues and suffered from public safety concerns.

With bus services changing and a move to a more 'dispersed' model, i.e. stops located at various locations across the city centre, the site also offered the opportunity for cultural regeneration and development, with a section now home to Firstsite Art Gallery.

Following the closure of the former bus station in 2013, Osborne Street became the city's main public bus station interchange. Since then, bus services have evolved and grown, and travel patterns have changed. While Osborne Street continues to play an important role, increasing demand means the current facilities are under pressure and have limited capacity to accommodate future need.

Both passengers and bus operators have expressed dissatisfaction with the current provision.

Without improvements, pressure on existing bus infrastructure is expected to increase, affecting reliability, passenger experience and the ability of the network to support future growth. In 2024, a study was undertaken to assess the impact of planned growth on capacity.

Essex County Council and Colchester City Council are therefore exploring proposals for a new Colchester Bus Station Interchange.

Following an assessment of potential city centre locations, Painters Yard has been identified as the most viable site to take forward to consultation. It offers the right balance of location, space to meet operational needs and passenger infrastructure, while also providing links to the city centre and railway station.

Based on the initial concept layouts, creating a new bus station at Painters Yard would cost in the region of £20million to £25million.

You told us Colchester needs better bus station facilities. This consultation is your chance to help shape the future Colchester Bus Station Interchange at Painters Yard and influence how it develops.

Bus capacity within Colchester City Centre – Why change is needed

When passengers want to catch the bus, it is important that they can do so in the right place at the right time. If not, you lose confidence in the service, which makes it less viable to run financially.

To encourage high-quality public transport, it is critical to ensure there is enough capacity for buses to operate effectively.

We commissioned a study to look at the issue of capacity. There is currently a total of:

- Six stops on Osborne Street,

- Two stops along Stanwell Street,
- Two layover space stops (where drivers can take a break, or wait to keep to the timetable) along Osborne Street,
- One coach stop along Stanwell Street.

The study looked at current and future demand. This included the estimated number of buses to be added to the network to serve future planned development in and around Colchester.

Modelling indicates a need for up to 25 bus stops and five layover bays within the Interchange by 2041.



Osborne Street bus station



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Current facilities - Osborne Street



Following the closure of the previous bus station and depot, Osborne Street became the main location for buses, with a large number travelling through the site.

The stops are mainly on-street bus lanes/stands. These operational stands are located on the left-hand side of the street, with the layover stands on the right-hand side behind the taxi rank.

Vehicles access the facility one-way westbound and share it with private vehicles and taxis.

Since its introduction in 2013, Osborne Street has seen an increase in bus services accessing the site. While changes have been made to the layout to increase capacity, it is currently operating at over 200% capacity, i.e. it is being used by twice as many services than it is designed for.

By 2041, if demand increases in line with planned growth, it is estimated that Osborne Street will reach 400% capacity at peak times. This would mean there would be four times the number of buses it is designed for.

Given these capacity issues, bus operators have highlighted concerns about accessibility, while bus users have raised safety issues, a lack of welfare facilities and concern about anti-social behaviour.



Existing Colchester Bus station at Osborne Street

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Creating a new Bus Station Interchange – Developing a ‘mobility hub’

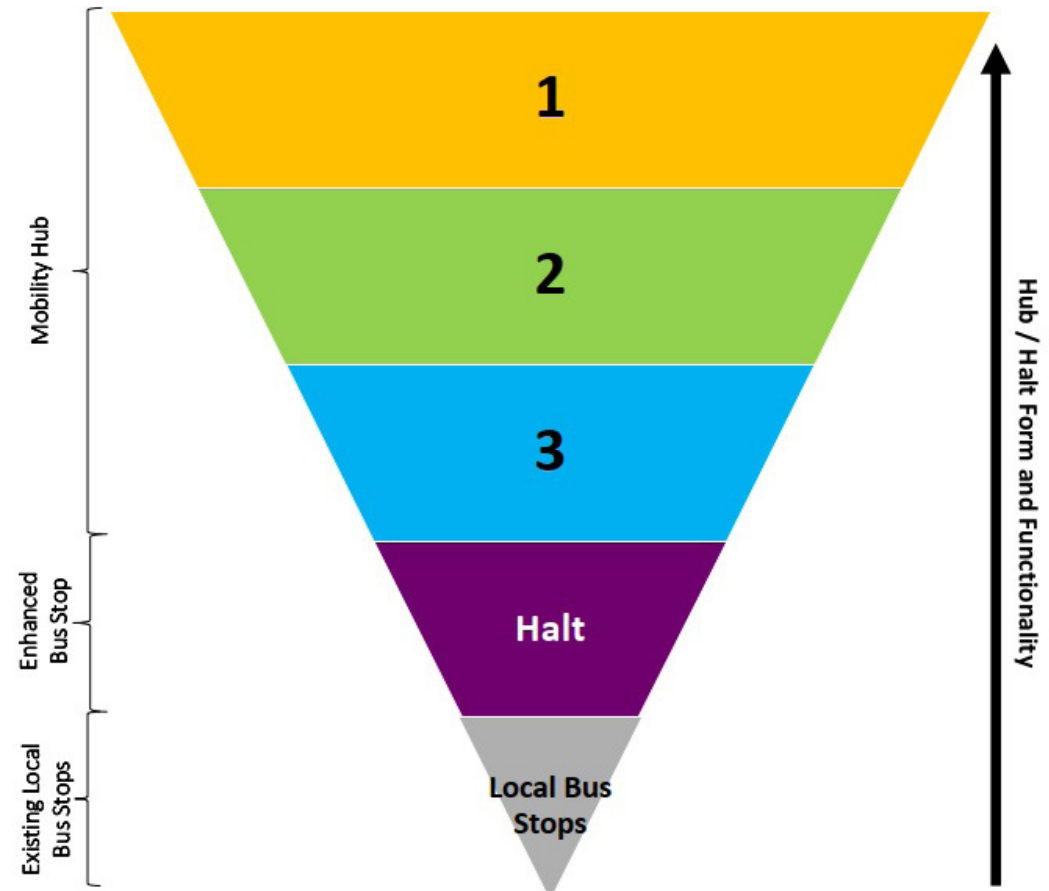
To provide the necessary capacity and ensure public transport can thrive in Colchester, Essex County Council is working closely with Colchester City Council to create a new bus station interchange.

This work is in line with the [Essex Design Guide](#), which sets out the requirements for different public transport infrastructure, ranging from creating a basic bus stop, through to a more complex facility.

For Colchester, we plan to create a Level 1 facility, recognising the need to support different types of transport, and ensure facilities and services are provided.

A new bus station interchange will need to provide not just bus services, but also facilities such as toilets, sheltered waiting areas with lighting and CCTV and real-time information screens.

Onward travel also need to be considered with provision for cycling, e-bikes and links into nearby taxi ranks.



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Creating a Level 1 mobility hub - Mobility Hubs are safe and connected places that facilitate convenient access to onward travel. Providing a range of practical and leisure services they are designed to be a destination in their own right.

Travel options – Getting to and from the new facility

An important consideration in creating an interchange that acts as a mobility hub is how people will travel to and from the new facility.

Travel patterns continue to evolve, and many journeys now involve more than one mode of transport. For example, you may walk or cycle to the bus station to catch a bus, or arrive by bus and then access taxi or rail services.

Colchester has also seen a large increase in e-bikes across the city, and a future interchange will cater for this growth.

It is therefore important that the location and facilities work for these different modes of transport.

Movement

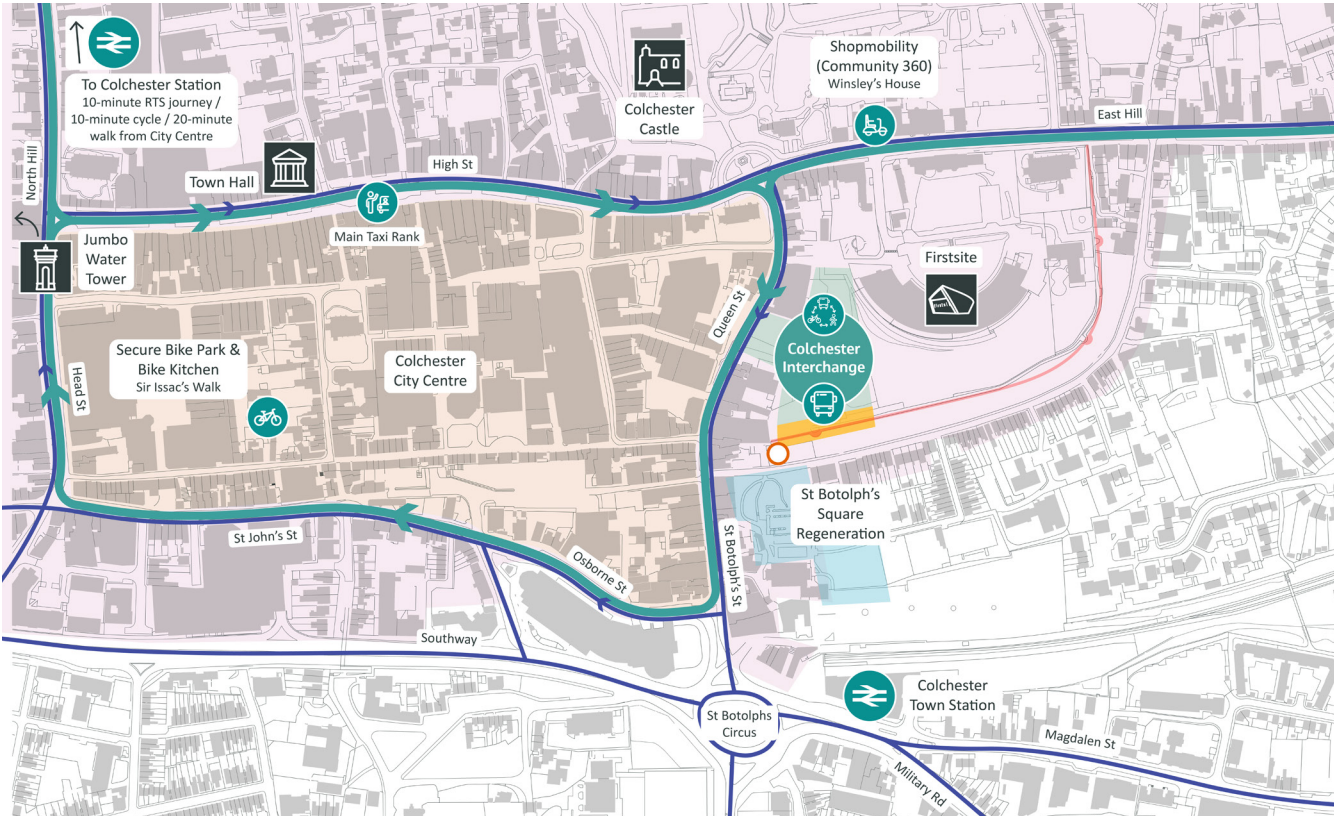
- Colchester Rapid Transit System Route
- Colchester Rapid Transit System One Way Loop
- Colchester Interchange
- Local Bus Network
- Local Bus Network One Way Section
- Railway Station
- Secure Bike Park & Bike Kitchen
- Main Taxi Rank
- Shopmobility

Landmarks

- Jumbo Water Tower
- Town Hall
- Colchester Castle
- Firstsite

Opportunities

- St Botolph's Square Regeneration
- Colchester City Council Initiated Priory Steps Development
- Colchester City Centre
- Conservation Area
- Colchester Interchange
- Proposed Public Realm Overlooking Priory
- City Wall & Bastions



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Travel options – Getting to and from the new facility

Movement

- North South Heritage Route
- North South Heritage Route:
Proposed Extension through
Colchester Interchange
- Key Pedestrian Desire Lines

Landmarks

- Jumbo Water Tower
- Town Hall
- Colchester Castle
- Firstsite

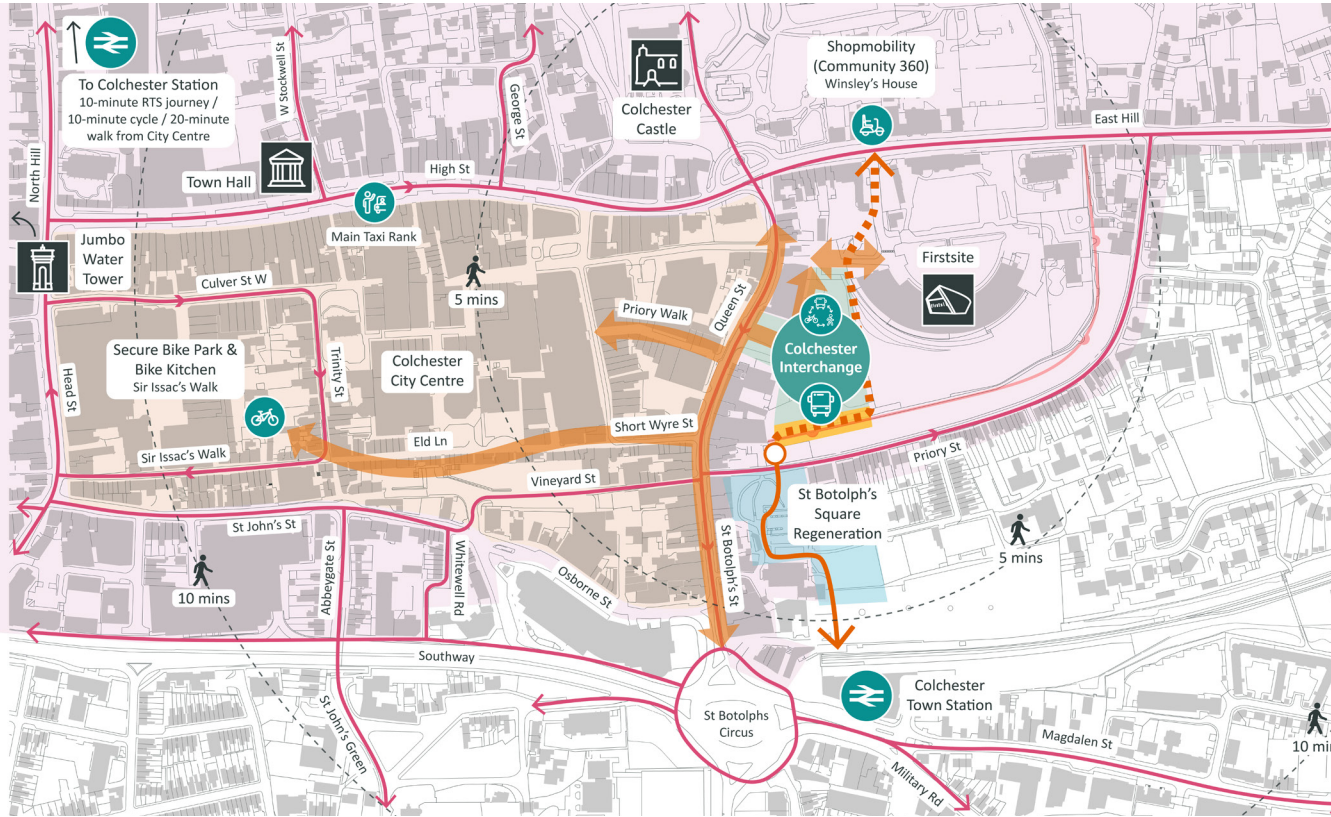
- Colchester Interchange
- Existing and Proposed Future
Local Cycling and Walking
Infrastructure Plan
- One-Way Cycling Route
- Railway Station

Opportunities

- St Botolph's Square
Regeneration
- Colchester City Council Initiated
Priory Steps Development
- Colchester City Centre
- Conservation Area

- Secure Bike Park & Bike Kitchen
- Main Taxi Rank
- Shopmobility
- Walking Times

- Colchester Interchange
- Proposed Public Realm
Overlooking Priory
- City Wall & Bastions



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Site shortlisting

To fully maximise the benefits of a new Bus Station Interchange, we have looked at different potential sites within the city centre area.

We have followed guidance set out by the Department for Transport, and our own processes and procedures for major schemes to identify and shortlist site options.

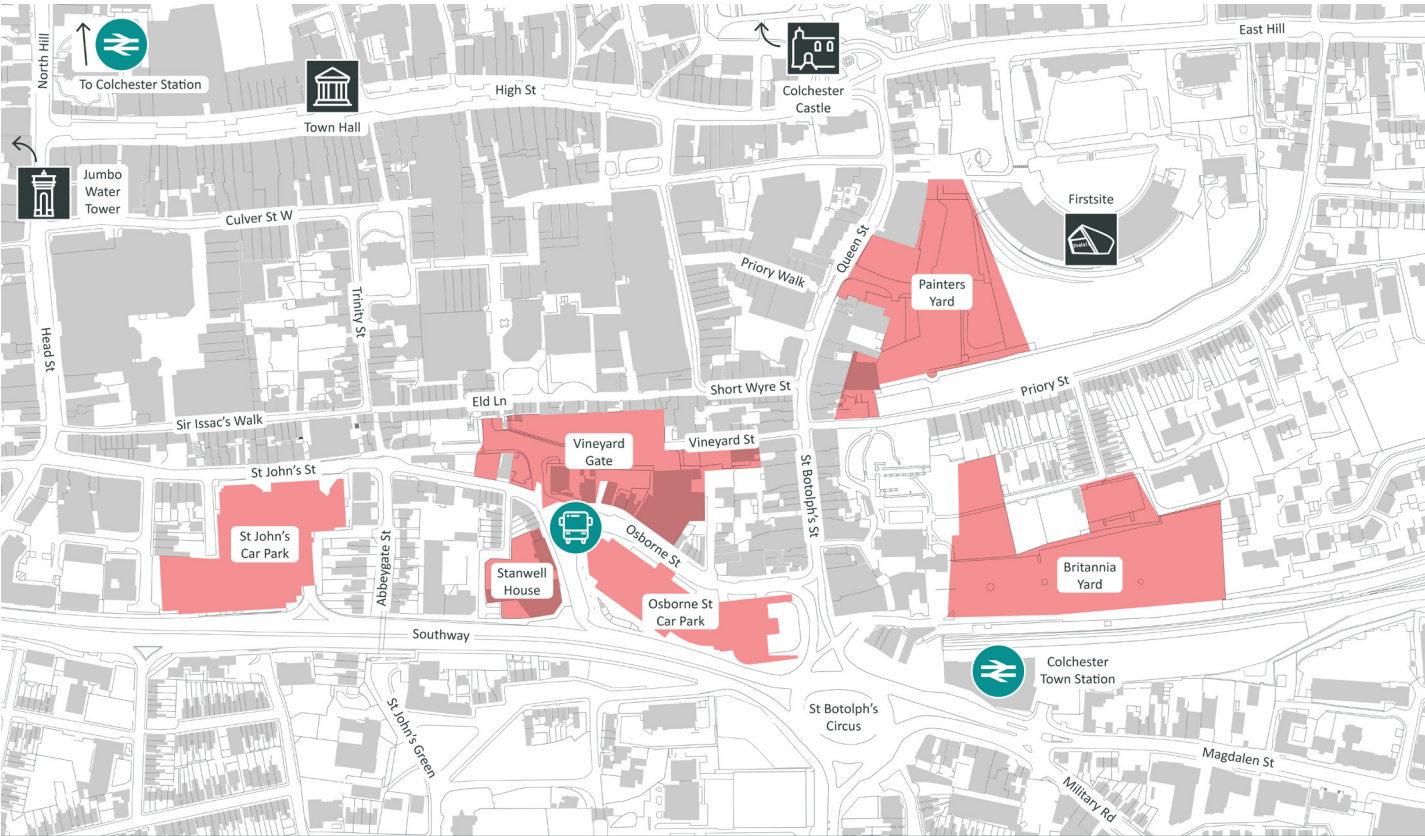
The first stage of shortlisting saw different site layout options identified, including: Osborne Street Car Park, Stanwell House, Painters Yard, St John's Car Park, Britannia Yard and Vineyard Gate.

Initially, we removed the sites that would not provide the space required to deliver the number of new bus stops needed.

We then looked in more detail at the other sites, in terms of how they would operate as an interchange, bus access, cost, connectivity into the city centre and environmental and heritage considerations.

Overall, Painters Yard was identified as the preferred site as it offers the best opportunity to accommodate future demand, and is the most cost effective and deliverable.

Providing good connections to the city centre and the surrounding transport network, Painters Yard will also, importantly, work effectively for bus operations.



Legend

- Shortlisted Site
- Colchester Bus Station
- Train Station

Landmarks

- Jumbo Water Tower
- Town Hall
- Colchester Castle
- Firstsite

Sites considered for a new Bus Station Interchange



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Painters Yard – preferred location



Painters Yard is located between Firstsite and St Botolph's Priory, on the eastern side of the city centre.

The site was previously home to Colchester's former bus station, bus depot, supporting infrastructure and a multi-storey car park. Closing in 2013, the bus station had a number of structural issues, and diminishing user numbers.

With bus services moving to a more 'dispersed' model, i.e. stops located at various locations across the city centre, the site offered opportunity for cultural regeneration and development, with a section of the site now the home of Firstsite Art Gallery.

Plans for housing on the remaining site have been considered, but proposals were not found to be in keeping with the conservation area. A community garden, the Meanwhile Garden, currently occupies part of the remaining site.

The surrounding area has changed significantly in recent years and now includes cultural, heritage and leisure destinations, creating an opportunity to develop a modern Bus Station Interchange in a highly accessible location.

Located close to the city centre, the site has direct access from Queen Street and benefits from existing and planned walking and cycling connections, including the proposed [Priory Steps scheme, linking the site with St Botolph's Quarter](#), which will improve the walking route to Colchester Town Station, as well as the area around St Botolph's Priory.

The nearby [St Botolph's Circus regeneration scheme](#) is already underway and will transform the area outside the Town Station. To the north of Painters Yard, the site will link with the new walking and cycling infrastructure being delivered on [East Hill](#), which forms part of a wider east-west walking and cycling route.

A Bus Station Interchange at Painters Yard will provide the additional transport capacity Colchester needs, while creating an attractive gateway for residents and visitors arriving in the city and link to existing schemes already underway.

Based on the initial concept layouts set out on the following pages, creating a new bus station at Painters Yard would cost in the region of £20million to £25million.



Painters Yard and FirstSite Art Gallery

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Emerging layout concepts

To help explore how a future Bus Station Interchange could work at Painters Yard, we have developed two layout concepts.

Both concepts would provide a significant increase in the number of stops, helping support future capacity needs. These are far from final designs. They are early ideas intended to illustrate different approaches to organising the site and to help us understand what is most important to residents, businesses, visitors and transport users. A more detailed design will evolve and refine the proposed layout.

For both concepts, access into the bus area of the interchange would be via a new junction on Queen Street, located slightly south of the existing access. This relocated access would allow for a row of bus stops between the access junction and cinema, but requires the demolition of the old ticket office on the south corner of the junction.

The existing access to the rear of buildings adjacent to the proposed site would remain.

Importantly, the design, facilities and infrastructure such as information displays will follow 'best practice' guidelines to ensure high standards and accessibility for different users.

Both concepts will require further design work and assessment before a preferred design is identified which may be along the lines of one of the designs, or a hybrid of both. Alongside your feedback, future work will consider:

- Bus operations and future needs.
- Passenger facilities and accessibility.
- Getting to and from the site – walking, cycling, rail connections and onward journey information.
- Signposting – improved real-time information, information boards, audio, signage, maps.
- Heritage and archaeology.
- Environmental impacts.
- Landscaping and public spaces.
- Safety and security.

Your feedback, alongside ongoing engagement with residents, businesses, community groups and bus operators, will help us understand what is most important to people and inform the development of a single preferred design option for the next stage of the project.



Initial visualisation based on concept design



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Layout Concept One: Public space focused



Layout Concept One places bus stops along the northern and southern edges of the site.

Splitting the stops, this approach creates additional space for landscaping, public areas and community use. Please note that the image is illustrative. It reflects an initial design that maximises public space, facilities and landscaping. It does not include the full number of bays that could be accommodated.

Operational elements:

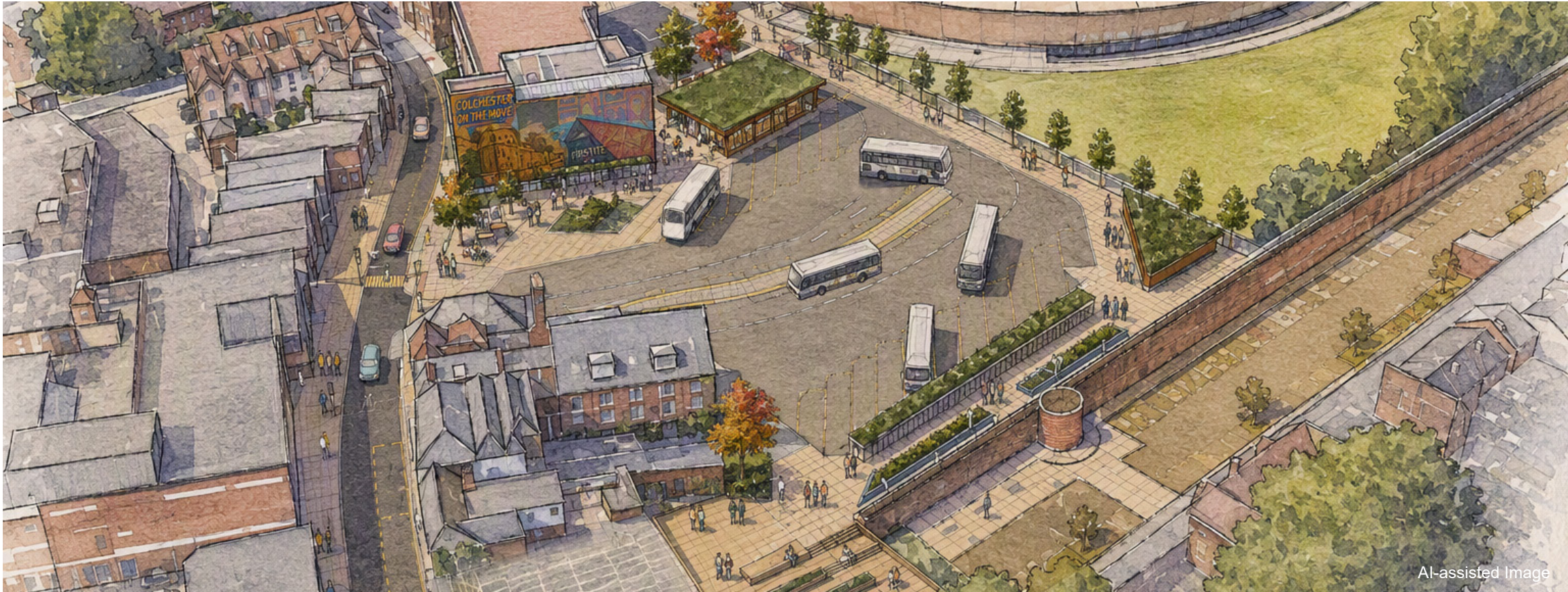
- The majority of bus stops would be located within the main interchange area, all of which would be 'Drive in – Reverse Out' bus stops.
- Stops would be split along the southern and northern edge and include a coach bay.
- A community transport bay would be provided.
- A further three on-street bus stops would be provided along Queen Street, with one stop unchanged to the north of the access, and two stops provided to the south of the access, replacing the one existing stop.
- In addition to maximising the number of bus stops, the on-street bus stops would also be used by any [rapid transit services](#) which call at the interchange, to minimise the journey time to pass through the interchange.
- Five layover bays (where drivers can take a break, or wait to keep to the timetable) would be provided within the main interchange area. These would consist of two rows of parallel layover bays opposite the two rows of stops. A narrow island through the centre of the interchange would provide an access route for the drivers using these layover bays.



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Concept Layout One showing bus stops to the north and south of the site.
Customer facilities are split.





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Potential benefits

- Larger public spaces and landscaping opportunities.
- More opportunities for seating, planting and community activities.
- Improved opportunities to showcase surrounding heritage assets.

Considerations

- Passengers would be spread across two waiting areas.
- Additional design work would be required to ensure good visibility and security throughout the site.
- Some buses would be located closer to heritage assets, such as the Roman wall.



Layout Concept Two: Central hub focused

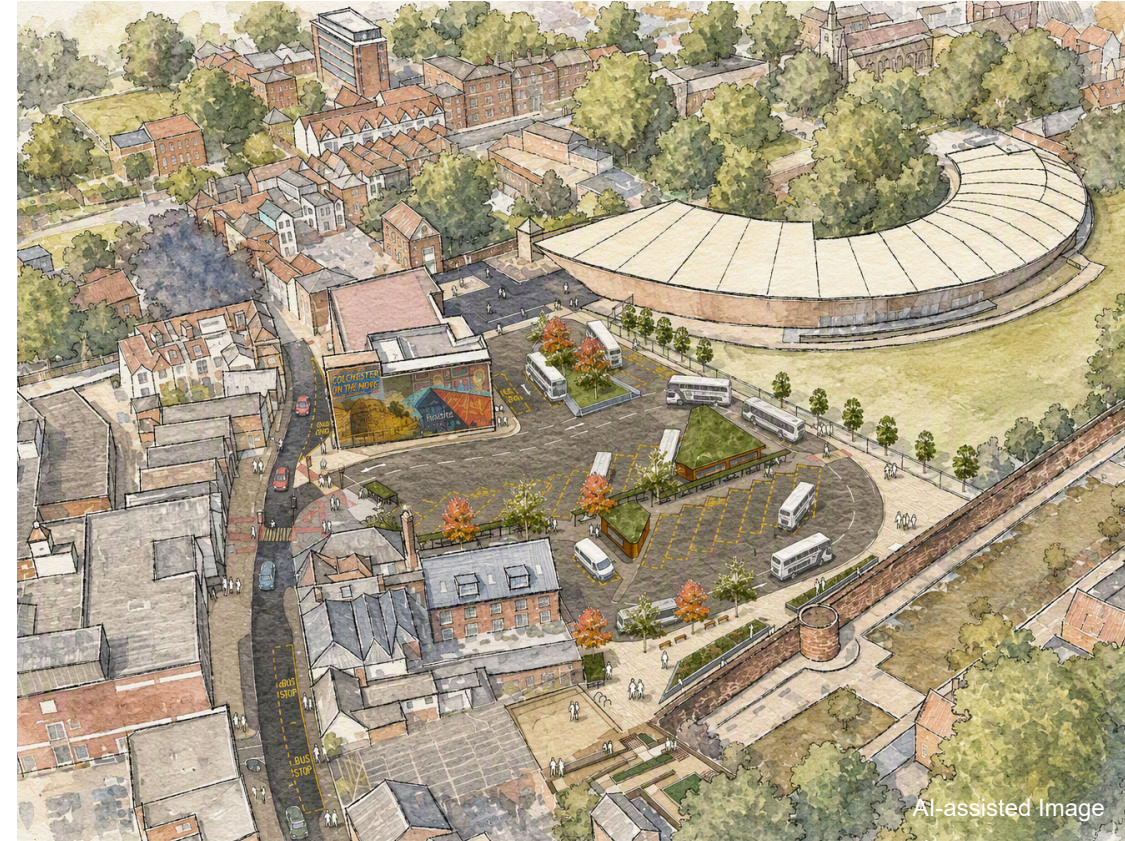


Layout Concept Two groups passenger facilities and bus stops around a central island.

This approach provides a more compact and concentrated Bus Station Interchange, with passengers and facilities located within a single central area. Please note that the image is illustrative. It reflects an initial design that maximises public space, facilities and landscaping. It does not include the full number of bays that could be accommodated.

Operational elements:

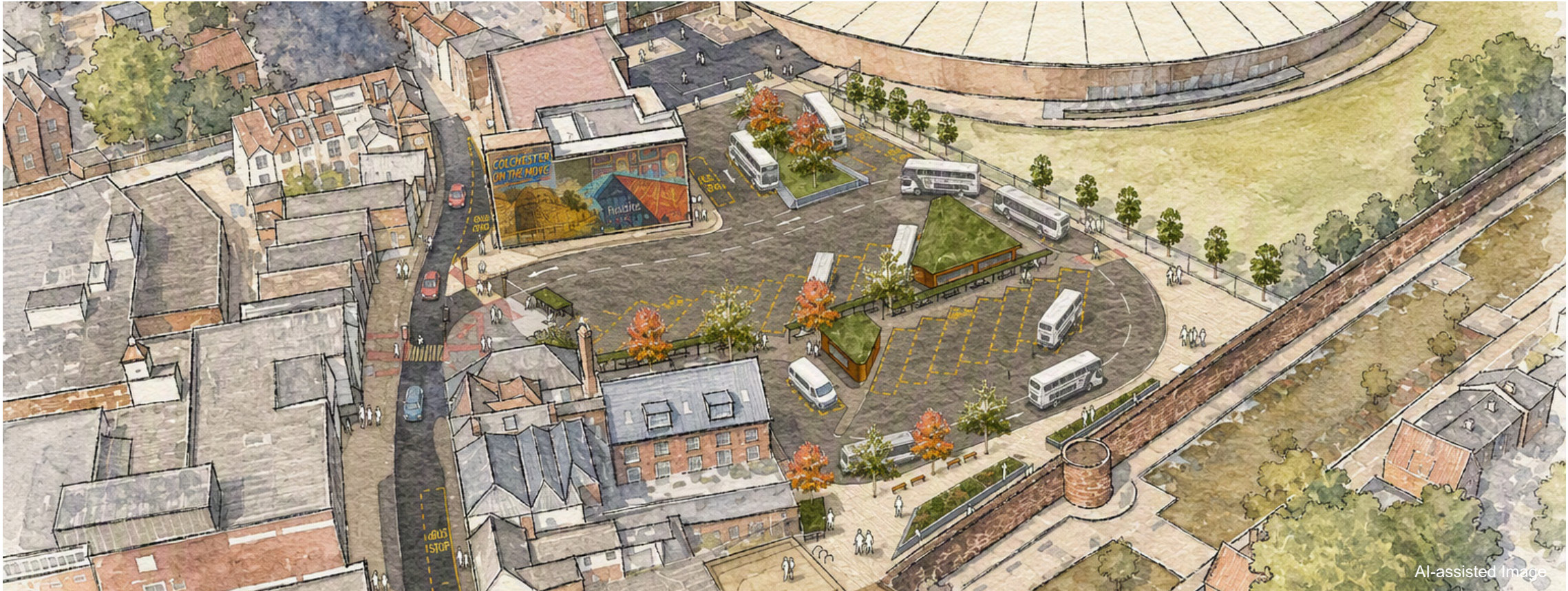
- The majority of bus stops would be located within the main interchange area, all of which would also be 'Drive in – Reverse Out' bus stops.
- Stops would be split along the edges of the central island, with stops provided for coach provision.
- A community transport bay would be provided.
- A further three on-street bus stops would be included along Queen Street, with one stop unchanged to the north of the access, and two stops provided to the south of the access, replacing the one existing stop.
- In addition to maximising the number of bus stops, the on-street bus stops would also be used by any [rapid transit services](#) which call at the interchange, to minimise the journey time needed to pass through the interchange.
- Five layover bays (where drivers can take a break, or wait to keep to the timetable) would be provided to the north of the main interchange area. These would consist of a parallel row of two layover bays and three standalone layover bays. An island in the centre of this area would provide an access route for the drivers using these layover bays.



Concept Layout Two showing bus stops and customer facilities focused around a central island.

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Potential benefits

- Passenger facilities concentrated in one location.
- A simpler passenger experience.
- Strong opportunities for supervision and natural surveillance.

Considerations

- Less space for public areas and landscaping.
- Will support future demand but offers slightly lower overall bus capacity.
- Some bus movements would be located closer to heritage assets such as the Roman wall.



Creating a new public space

A future bus station interchange should do more than provide transport facilities. It should create a welcoming and attractive place for people to spend time in and move through.

The site sits close to many of Colchester's most important cultural and heritage attractions, providing opportunities to create a distinctive gateway into the city.

Potential opportunities include:

- New public spaces and seating areas.
- Trees and landscaping.
- Public art celebrating Colchester's history.
- Improved lighting and safety.
- Better maps and wayfinding.
- Features that help guide visitors between the interchange and key destinations.
- Spaces for community activity and events.
- Attractive, accessible and inclusive design.

We would like to hear which of these opportunities are most important to you.



AI-assisted Image



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Heritage and the environment



Painters Yard is located alongside some of Colchester's most important historic assets, including the Roman Town Wall, St Botolph's Priory and the wider Conservation Area.

This creates important design considerations, but also provides an opportunity to improve access to, celebrate and enhance these significant heritage assets.

As the project develops, detailed environmental, archaeological and heritage assessments will be undertaken to understand potential impacts and identify opportunities for enhancement.

Key considerations include:

- Protecting the setting of heritage assets.
- Conserving archaeological remains.
- Biodiversity and habitat impacts.
- Flood risk and drainage.
- Land contamination.
- Air quality, noise and vibration.

Protecting and enhancing Colchester's heritage will remain a key design objective throughout the project.



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What happens next?

This consultation is your opportunity to help shape the future of public transport in Colchester.

We will carefully review all feedback received and use it to develop the proposals further. This will include refining the layouts, identifying preferred facilities and exploring opportunities to improve accessibility, public spaces, heritage integration and connections to surrounding destinations.

The consultation findings will help inform the development of a preferred design option and support future funding and planning activities. It is important to note that any proposed detailed design will undergo further consultation as part of a planning process should the decision be made to progress with the project.

To keep up to date with progress on the Colchester Bus Station Interchange project visit www.essexhighways.org/colchester-bus-station

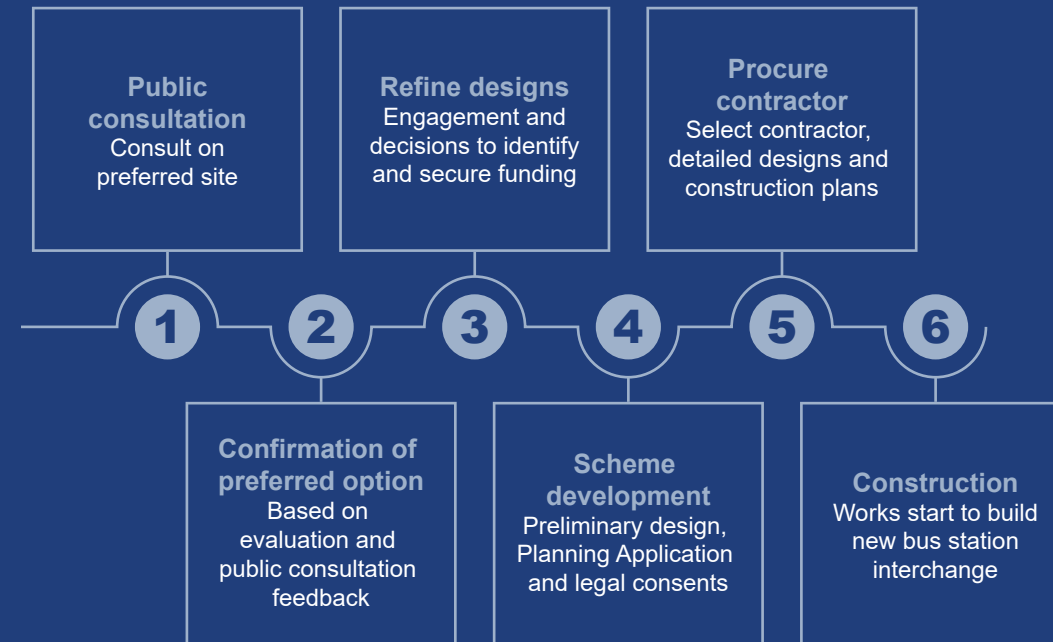
If you would like to get in touch with us please email:
colchesterinterchange@essexhighways.org.

You can also write to us at **FREEPOST, ESSEX HIGHWAYS
ENGAGEMENT TEAM**

→ Click here to complete the survey

Outline Next Steps

timeline over the next three to five years – subject to funding



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