


NEWS

Colchester Borough Council and the University of Essex tackle climate change together

Date

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Colchester Borough Council and the University of Essex are working together on two new projects to spearhead action on climate change.

One project will look to reduce the harm from single-use plastics and the other will combat coastal erosion by re-using waste oyster shells generated by the catering industry.

The projects were developed following a successful Challenge Lab event, which the University of Essex organises to bring regional organisations together with researchers to discuss solutions to challenges they face.

Professor John Preston, Faculty Dean of Research in the Faculty of Social Sciences and the academic lead for the Impact Acceleration Account at Essex, said: “Climate and environmental change is an important issue for communities in Colchester. I am delighted that this

The strong partnership links between the two organisations led to the Challenge Lab earlier this year, which focused on what the Council can do to tackle climate and environment change in the local region.

Project one: Improving sustainability in Colchester with reduced single-use plastics

This project aims to drive down plastic waste in Colchester. By working with local businesses, and learning from other Councils, Colchester Borough Council and the University of Essex will reduce the use of single-use plastics in the area.

[Dr Debashree De](#), [Professor Ramakrishnan Ramanathan](#), and [Dr Patrick Lown](#), from Essex Business School, and [Sam Good](#), Business Improvement District Manager for Our Colchester, will join up with Colchester Borough Council to raise awareness of plastic pollution and to create new ways of working for local businesses.

The team will develop activities that raise awareness of plastic waste and the benefits of sustainable packaging, including a local “plastic holiday” where the University and businesses go without single-use plastics and show the benefits of sustainable packaging.

The project will also focus on what we can gain from new technologies being used elsewhere in the country. The team will investigate the production of more sustainable and compostable packaging materials in Colchester area, helping businesses with a cost-effective and environment-friendly alternative to single-use plastics.

Dr Debashree De, the project’s lead academic, said: “Plastics pollution affects our everyday life in multiple ways. Reducing the use of plastics will help improve our quality of life significantly. We are excited to work with Colchester businesses in this project and help improve sustainability.”

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jobs.

[Dr Boroka Bo](#), Department of Sociology, [Dr Maged Ali](#), Essex Business School, and [Dr Michael Steinke](#), School of Life Sciences, will work with Colchester Borough Council to identify and develop “microhabitats” for oyster fishing in the region.

Collecting waste shells from restaurants, this shell will be repurposed as a building material to improve coastal defences in the local region. This work will help both the oyster fishers and the local environment.

Central to the project is the use of local skills to make positive changes for the future. This collaboration between the University of Essex and Colchester Borough Council will build the foundations of a local circular economy that uses oyster shell recycling to help fight climate change.

Dr Boroka Bo, the University’s lead academic on the project, said: “While many of us knew that our coast is home to the UK’s largest protected area for native oysters, with oyster farming sustaining our communities since the Roman times, what most oyster consumers don’t realize is that oysters also protect our community from coastal erosion and floods. In addition to being ecosystem engineers by creating natural storm barriers, an adult oyster can filter almost 190 litres of water per day! By doing this, oysters remove pollutants from our water and protect us from harmful algal blooms. We are very much looking forward to working together with Colchester Borough Council as we lay the groundwork for a community-driven oyster restoration initiative. Together, we can mitigate coastal erosion, improve the economic lives of our residents, while also employing nature-based solutions to adapt to climate change.”

The University of Essex Challenge Labs create an environment where business, public, and third sector organisations can identify their “business problems” and then work with University of Essex researchers to develop solutions. The University provides funding to make those solutions happen.

The projects are funded with £15,000 each from the University of Essex Impact Acceleration Account (IAA). This Account is a grant

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