

4 June 2013		ITEM: 6
<b>Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>Grays Town Centre Regeneration Vision</b>		
Report of: Assistant Chief Executive		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> Grays Thurrock and Grays Riverside	<b>Key Decision:</b> Key	
<b>Accountable Head of Service:</b> Head of Regeneration		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Assistant Chief Executive		
<b>This report is</b> Public		
<b>Purpose of Report:</b> To report progress on developing a regeneration vision for Grays Town Centre		

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Community Regeneration Strategy and Local Development Framework Core Strategy identify Grays as a growth hub where regeneration activity is to be focussed. In February 2013 Cabinet considered a report that set out current projects in Grays and the need to develop a vision to provide the framework for regeneration activity in Grays.

A range of surveys and workshops have taken place from February to mid May. This public engagement activity combined with current adopted strategy set out in this report provide a clear context for the regeneration vision based on developing a role for the town centre that build on its strengths, that meets the needs of Thurrock communities, that is complimentary to Lakeside and not in competition with it, and that recognises wider social and technological changes that are changing the way in which town centres function.

#### **1. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 1.1 That the Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee provide views and comments on the scope of a regeneration vision for Grays arising from the public surveys and workshops as set out at paragraphs 3.1 to 3.5 of this report**
- 1.2 That the Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee provide views and comments on the process for developing the regeneration vision for Grays set out at paragraph 3.6 of this report.**

## 2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:

- 2.1 The Community Regeneration Strategy (adopted February 2012) sets out the Council's approach to regeneration in the Borough over the next 10 years. The Strategy identifies Grays as one of five Growth Hubs (alongside Purfleet, Lakeside, Tilbury and London Gateway) which should be included within the regeneration programme with a focus on its role as Thurrock's administrative centre. Recognising the impact of Lakeside on the retail offer in Grays, the Strategy and the Council's Local Development Framework, propose that the Council and its partners seek to build upon the existing presence of civic functions and cultural services to support Grays' development as the cultural, business and civic/administrative centre of the Borough, together with a convenience retail offer which supports a growing residential population.
- 2.2 The Council adopted an Implementation Plan to support the Regeneration Strategy in December 2012. The Implementation Plan sets out the Council's regeneration ambitions for the next three years (2013-2015) and recognises that the priority in Grays should be to continue to develop the existing major capital projects (South Essex College's Thurrock Campus) whilst engaging with local businesses, communities and stakeholders to develop a single shared vision for the town centre.
- 2.3 In February 2013 Cabinet considered a report that provided an update on projects that were underway in Grays including the development of a shared vision for Grays. The vision would provide the basis for developing a regeneration strategy.
- 2.4 The Local Development Framework Sites DPD Issues and Options consultation (January 2013) contained the following draft vision for the future of Grays:
- Grays will continue to be the main district town centre serving the whole of Thurrock. It will build on its strengths as an established and accessible market town at the centre of Thurrock.
  - Grays will develop its complimentary role to Lakeside to meet the needs of Thurrock's communities and the students attending Thurrock Learning Campus.
  - Grays will enhance its role as a place for successful businesses to grow and for communities to meet and socialise; as a centre for convenience retail, culture, administrative and civic functions and as a centre for business and business support services.
  - The development of the Thurrock Learning Campus will provide a catalyst for major redevelopment of the southern end of the High Street linking the town centre back to the River Thames.
  - Development sites and Council land holdings surrounding the town centre provide opportunities for high density residential development to support the growth of the town
- 2.5 During February and March 2013 the Council carried out a range of public opinion surveys about the future of Grays town centre. These included;

- a) Telephone surveys of residents in the 5 wards of Grays and 2 wards of Chafford Hundred. These were selected as a reasonable local geographic catchment area for the town centre and because this approach enabled a representative sample by age, gender and ethnicity.
  - b) Interviews with rail passengers passing through Grays rail station. A large number of people pass through the station and therefore the town centre in any one year. It was therefore important to understand their opinions. This also enabled a further representative sample to be achieved by age, gender and ethnicity.
  - c) An online survey provided opinions from people not included in the other surveys.
  - d) The Grays School Arts Media College ran the survey with their students which provided views from younger people than involved in the other surveys. Also this survey showed that 80% of respondents see Grays town centre as their main town centre.
  - e) Surveys were distributed to 270 businesses and other organisations based in and around the town centre.
- 2.6 Over 1500 responses were received. Summary extracts from the reports of findings are attached at appendix A. Respondents to the surveys were invited to state whether they were interested in participating in workshops to discuss the survey findings in more detail.
- 2.7 During April and May a series of workshops and meetings have been held to discuss the survey findings and what they say about the future of Grays, as follows;
- a) A workshop with the Grays town Partnership attended by people from businesses based in the town centre, community and voluntary organisations, representatives of community forums, police and others interested in Grays town centre.
  - b) Four workshops with respondents to the resident and rail users surveys
  - c) Grays School Arts Media College
  - d) Two workshops with students of South Essex College
  - e) Youth Cabinet
  - f) Seabrooke Rise Residents Association
  - g) Thurrock Over Fifties Forum
  - h) Ward Members: A meeting has been arranged to discuss the implications of the survey findings with members on the 29<sup>th</sup> May.
- 2.8 The final report of findings from the workshops will be received on the 7<sup>th</sup> June. The report will also incorporate, with the consent of the Big Local Representative, the output from the Grays Riverside Big Local Community Event held on the 29<sup>th</sup> April 2013.
- 2.9 The report findings will be used to draft a vision for the future of Grays which will be distributed for consultation to everyone that attended the workshops prior to a report to Cabinet in July 2013. However clear themes have emerged that are discussed in section 3.

### 3. ISSUES, OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS:

- 3.1 The policy context for the vision is set out in the Community Regeneration Strategy and the Local Development Framework Core Strategy. The vision for Grays will need to acknowledge external pressures and changes including;
- a) The Community Regeneration Strategy and Local Development Framework Core Strategy recognise the importance of Lakeside to the local economy and provide for substantial expansion of retail, leisure and business activity in the Lakeside Basin. Grays will not be able to compete with Lakeside and so regeneration of Grays must be based on developing a role for the town centre that is either different or complimentary to Lakeside.
  - b) Town Centres throughout the country have seen widespread closures of well known High Street based businesses as a consequence of economic change and recession. This trend has also been affected by social and technological changes, reflected in the choices people make to travel to large out of town centres and in the growth of online and mobile shopping.
  - c) The Mary Portas review of the High Street point and the Governments response to this report point to the need to focus on developing a unique town centre offer that responds to local needs and that recognises that town centres have always been multi functional places where people live, work, meet, socialise, shop, use services etc. These reports emphasis the need to 're-imagine' the role of High Streets to respond to wider economic, social and technological change.
- 3.2 The LDF Core Strategy provides for significant development for housing and employment in the Grays Urban Area. The core strategy also provides for substantial growth in retail floorspace in Grays town centre, which is currently under review. The sites DPD issues and options consultation identified potential development sites south of the rail line and to the north of the town centre for residential and mixed commercial development which would support regeneration in and around the town centre.
- 3.3 The Councils Strategic Transportation Department is carrying out a review of access and transportation issues for Grays Town Centre which will provide an options study with projects.
- 3.4 The vision must recognise that the future of Grays depends on partnership working. The Council has an important role not least as a land owner, service provider, and in the way it applies regulatory functions. A wide range of other stakeholders also have important roles including businesses and landowners, community and voluntary groups, residents, and other agencies.
- 3.5 The surveys and workshops identify a range of detailed issues and suggestions that are appropriate for consideration when developing a strategy/action plan for the town centre. A number of key themes can also be identified as the basis for developing a vision for the future of the town centre including:

- To maintain and enhance the role of Grays as the main town centre for the Borough based on a mix of uses, a place to live/work/shop etc.
- Key projects need to be supported as a basis for regeneration: Respond positively to the opening of the SEC Grays Campus, regeneration opportunities around the rail station area including improvements to the pedestrian crossing of the rail line, and development of Council land to act as a catalyst for physical regeneration.
- Developing culture/entertainment/night life/leisure. Nationally the night time economy contributes 27% on average to the economy of town centres. Currently Gray has a limited offer and there is support for developing a good quality night economy.
- Developing arts and events: Events can generate footfall and thereby support local businesses. Events can also involve and support communities in the town centre and encourage footfall and activity in the town centre.
- Food and drink/cafe culture: To provide attractive places for people to eat and drink during the day and in the evening.
- Better quality retail: Develop a retail offer based around convenience retail and specialist retail that would not locate at Lakeside.
- Make more of Grays market: Substantial support for providing more frequent markets and a variety of specialist markets. Markets can encourage footfall and activity in the town centre
- Make more of The River Thames: The River has the potential to be a major asset for the town and Council assets may be used to enhance the connection between the town centre and the river.
- Improving access in to and around the town centre
- Enhance the appearance/environment of the town centre to create an inviting place for people to spend time.
- Addressing issues of safety and crime and the perceptions of crime levels: Crime and the perception of crime will influence people's decisions about whether to use town centre facilities.
- Small businesses/new businesses.
- Recognise different needs of different groups of people
- Community uses/activities (Pop up uses)
- Involving and inform people and businesses

3.6 The emerging vision will need to address these themes and will be developed further once the final report of findings from the workshops has been received on the 7<sup>th</sup> June. A consultation draft vision will be circulated to participants in the workshops during June. A proposed vision based on this consultation will be reported to Cabinet in July 2013.

#### **4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:**

4.1 The vision will provide the context for developing a regeneration strategy for Grays that sets out how the Council will work in partnership with stakeholders to develop the Grays Growth Hub and deliver the regeneration aspirations of the Council and its partners.

**5. CONSULTATION (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

5.1 None

**6. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES, PRIORITIES, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT**

6.1 The Councils Adopted Community Regeneration Strategy and LDF Core Strategy identify Grays as one of five Growth Hubs in the Borough where regeneration activity is to be focussed. A regeneration vision will provide the context for a strategy/action plan for delivering regeneration in Grays

**7. IMPLICATIONS**

**7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Michael Jones (To be confirmed)**  
 Telephone and email: **01375 652772**  
[mxjones@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:mxjones@thurrock.gov.uk)

None. The financial implications would arise in the development and implementation of strategy and individual projects.

**7.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **Alison Stuart- Principal Solicitor**  
 Telephone and email: **01375 652 040**  
[alison.stuart@bdtlegal.org.uk](mailto:alison.stuart@bdtlegal.org.uk)

None. The legal implications would arise in the development and implementation of strategy and individual projects.

**7.3 Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Samson DeAlyn (To be confirmed)**  
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[sdealyn@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:sdealyn@thurrock.gov.uk)

The surveys that provide the background for this report provided a statistically significant representative sample by age, gender and ethnicity. Issues identified have been developed through a series of workshops, and everyone who indicated an interest has been invited to attend a workshop.

**7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Section 17, Risk Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Sustainability, IT, Environmental**

None

**BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):**

- Grays Town Centre Public Consultation report of findings March 2013
- Grays Town Centre Consultation with businesses and organisations based in Grays Report of Findings March 2013

These reports can be viewed on the Councils web site at;

<https://consult.thurrock.gov.uk/file/2481079> and

<https://consult.thurrock.gov.uk/file/2481082>

**APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:**

- Extracts from survey reports: Summary of main findings

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