

22 July 2020		ITEM: 12
		Decision: 110515
Cabinet		
Grays South Regeneration Area: Underpass and public realm option selection		
Wards and communities affected: Grays Riverside	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Councillor Mark Coxshall, Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Strategic Planning		
Accountable Assistant Director: David Moore, Interim Assistant Director, Place Delivery		
Accountable Director: Andy Millard, Director of Place		
This report is: Public		

Executive Summary

The Grays South Regeneration Area comprises a number of projects designed to support the vitality of Grays Town Centre including:

- The replacement of the existing level crossing with a pedestrian underpass.
- The development of the new Civic Centre building.
- The development of new town centre residential accommodation.
- The development of new commercial accommodation.
- Improvements to Grays Beach and the Riverfront.

Recently the Council has started to work closely with New River Reit, the owners of Grays Shopping Centre, to explore mutually beneficial ways of redeveloping the shopping centre site to bring improved commercial accommodation and new residential units to the town centre supporting viability and vibrancy.

Applications are being prepared for the Future High Street Fund and the Towns Fund to bring central government funding into the town, supporting deliverability of both the current regeneration aspirations and the new work with New River Reit.

This report is focussed on progress with the Underpass project. It describes three design options, outlines the current cost position and recommends a preferred option to be taken forward. The preferred option gives the project an opportunity to well integrate the scheme into the wider Grays regeneration plans.

The recommendation is informed by a public consultation exercise which was undertaken in February and March 2020. The report highlights the results of this consultation exercise and demonstrates the benefits of, and community support for, the preferred option.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 Cabinet are asked to:

- a) Approve Option C as the selected concept to be designed in more detail through the current Development Services Agreement contract with Network Rail**

2 Introduction and Background

- 2.1 In April 2017 Cabinet agreed a funding package, high level designs, a delivery approach and the next steps towards delivering the pedestrian underpass to replace the level crossing in Grays High Street. The Council then entered into a third party enhancement contract, namely the Development Services Agreement (DSA) with Network Rail (NR).
- 2.2 The DSA provides a clear way forward for the project and has led to the production of three design options, one of which will be further developed to produce a design Agreement in Principle (AiP), a refreshed GRIP 3 cost plan and a construction programme. The Council are contractually committed to complete the current DSA but are not committed to proceeding beyond this; the financial commitment is therefore limited to this DSA stage only.
- 2.3 At the end of the GRIP Stage 3 DSA, a new contract will be required to take the developed option through GRIP Stage 4 (Single Option Development). Before this contract is agreed and any further funds are committed, a further report will be presented to Cabinet outlining the updated budget and cost position and seeking authority to proceed on this basis.
- 2.4 Alongside the current DSA, the Council's urban realm consultants, have been advising both the Council and NR on the associated public square and interfacing elements of this scheme.
- 2.5 Over the past year, the design options for the Underpass project have been through a rigorous process of technical assessment and in May 2020 the Council received the final version of Network Rail's Grays Option Selection Report, which discusses these design concepts in detail.
- 2.6 In March 2020, a public consultation exercise, branded "Transforming Grays", was undertaken. The consultation had an online presence through late February until mid-March and a physical presence at various exhibitions

across Grays Town Centre. The consultation was advertised via leaflets, posters and social media platforms.

- 2.7 One of the key objectives of the consultation was to collate comments from the public on the three underpass design variations. A summary of consultation responses is included in section 3 below to assist in the decision making process.
- 2.8 The Underpass project now requires a decision to narrow the options down from three to one so the single option can be further developed through the remainder of this design stage. It is important to note that in approving an option, Cabinet will not be approving the final design but a design concept to be taken forward through the remainder of option selection and detailed design. It is expected that the option selection process will be concluded in the early part of 2021.

3 Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The three designs produced by the DSA are named “Option A: Crescent”, “Option B: Dynamic” and “Option C: The Plaza”. An extract from the Option Selection Report showing a plan view and high level description of each of these options is included at Appendix 1.
- 3.2 Each option has advantages and disadvantages. Chapter 4 of the Option Selection Report, attached at Appendix 2, objectively evaluates each option against pre-agreed criteria and weightings. These criteria are based on the stated objectives of the Council in pursuing this scheme, priorities identified as important by our residents and input from other key stakeholders such as Network Rail and c2c.
- 3.3 “Option C: The Plaza” scores highest against the spectrum of criteria and the Option Selection Report concludes Option C is the preferred design option.
- 3.4 The key advantages of Option C are summarised as follows:
- Good equality of access for people using ramps rather than steps, with the ramps offering similar distances to the stepped access and the number of ramp switchbacks being minimised.
 - Creation of useable hard and soft landscaping areas with an open ‘Plaza’ at the entrance to the underpass on the South side offering a range of activation opportunities (market stalls, coffee carts etc) and promoting good levels of passive security.
 - Creation of a development plot fronting onto the plaza providing further activation, increased security and economic opportunity.

- 3.5 The results of the public consultation exercise undertaken in February-March 2020 mirror the results of the option selection report. Of the responses received, 77% either agreed or strongly agreed with proposals for an underpass. Furthermore, 81% of respondents selected Option C as their preferred option. The full report on the consultation exercise is included at Appendix 3.
- 3.6 At this stage, the cost plans for all the design options could increase the cost of this project but it should be noted that these estimates are based on a very early stage design (mid GRIP Stage 3). A further iteration of the cost plan will be produced by Network Rail at the end of this contract stage (currently programmed for early 2021). This later version of the cost plan, which represents Network Rail's Approved Final Cost (AFC) will have the benefit of a greater level of design, further work on the construction programme and further engagement with statutory undertakers. These factors should all work to reduce the risk element of the cost plan, which currently stands at 37% of the construction and design fee cost, and bring the project cost down. In addition to this design development work a number of strategies are being employed to further reduce the cost and/or increase the budget from external sources. These strategies are detailed below:
- During the remainder of this design stage value engineering options will be identified and pursued and as referenced above it is expected that the risk allowance can be reduced as design becomes more certain.
 - The project team are challenging NR on the level of fee cost required by them to project manage this process. This challenge has already identified savings of between £300k-£650k. Further challenge is being put to NR regarding the allocation of some railway infrastructure costs to the project rather than being covered in their budgets.
 - The project team are examining the future contacting strategy to explore whether efficiencies can be achieved via an alternative tender route.
 - NR have committed to explore whether any further contribution can be made from their own internal funding sources, although no guarantee can be given that this will be successful.
 - Other external funding opportunities to increase the original budget.
- 3.7 The work required to pursue these mitigation options is covered in the current contract with Network Rail or uses internal council resources.

4 Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The removal of Grays pedestrian rail crossing, and replacement with a high quality underpass, has previously been identified as a priority by Cabinet. The crossing is recognised as being amongst the most dangerous crossings in the Eastern region and is the only pedestrian crossing that features in the top 10 most dangerous nationally. The underpass is a key project in support of the regeneration of Grays town centre and public consultation exercises demonstrate strong stakeholder support.
- 4.2 A significant amount of work has led to the production and evaluation of the three design options. Whilst the current cost estimates for the preferred option are not within budget further detailed work is required in order to establish a greater level of cost certainty. Whilst this work is already included in the current contractual commitment, the project has reached a decision point which requires a Cabinet decision on the design option that will be taken through the later phase of GRIP Stage 3.
- 4.3 The Option Selection Report produced by NR and the public consultation exercise both identify Option C as the preferred option.

5 **Consultation** (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 A public consultation exercise has been undertaken in February-March 2020. The results of this exercise have been discussed in this report and demonstrate support for the proposals.
- 5.2 This report is due to be considered at Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 6th July 2020. Feedback from this Committee will be given verbally at the Cabinet meeting.

6 **Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact**

- 6.1 The Council's Economic Growth Strategy and LDF Core Strategy identify Grays as one of the Growth Hubs where regeneration activity will be focussed.

7 **Implications**

7.1 **Financial**

Implications verified by: **Jonathan Wilson**
Assistant Director - Finance

As outlined in the report, whilst all the options are currently above the approved budget of £27.4m there is no financial commitment required beyond the current contractual commitment for this design stage.

However, the underpass cost plan endorsed by NR suggests a cost of between £22.2 and £25.2m for the infrastructure elements of the project. In addition to this, the Council needs to fund land assembly and the adjacent public realm bringing the total project cost to between £34.9 and £37.9m. Whilst no additional funding is currently requested there is clearly an identified risk to the deliverability of this project at the current point in time.

The report details mitigation options being pursued to reduce the cost of the project and/or to secure additional external funds to support the budget. The report also highlights that a further report will come forward in early 2021 when the AFC version of the cost plan is received and the success of the identified mitigation options is known. This report will allow Cabinet Members to fully assess the budget position before any further financial or contractual commitments are made.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Tim Hallam**
Deputy Head of Law and Deputy Monitoring Officer

The Council has completed a partnership agreement with Network Rail setting out joint working arrangements for the next stages of design. A further agreement will be required for the later stages including construction.

The delivery of the underpass will require land assembly and possibly a CPO. The Council has already resolved to use its CPO powers if required but further reports to Cabinet will be presented if the use of powers is progressed.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**
Team Manager - Community Development and Equalities

The project has been the subject of stakeholder engagement summarised in this report and previous reports to Cabinet. There will be further detailed stages of design and submission of applications for planning permission and other consents. Further engagement activity will take place as the designs are developed which will include an Equalities Impact Assessment. The design will comply with all relevant legislation and standards for accessibility.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

None

8 Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Cabinet Report: Grays Development Framework. Decision 01104368 March 2016.
- Grays Development Framework 2016
- Cabinet Report: Delivering the new Pedestrian Rail Crossing. Decision 01104419 April 2017.
- Cabinet Report. Grays Master Plan – Town Centre Framework. Decision 0110443 November 2017
- Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Grays South Regeneration Project: Delivering the Pedestrian Underpass. ITEM 5 January 2019.

9 Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1: Plan view and high level description for Options A, B and C.
- Appendix 2: Grays Underpass Single Option Selection Report, Chapter 4, April 2020.
- Appendix 3: Grays Public Consultation Summary

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Appendix 1 – Plan view and high level description of Options A, B and C.



GRIP 3: Option A, Crescent

Option A has retained the same footprint, underpass box position, 1:21 gradient slopes and amphitheatre-style curved design from the GRIP 2 stage.

A number of elements have been rationalised in the design including:

- Replacing the 'off-line' resting areas with intermediate landings on the slopes. These are 1.5m in length and provided every 500mm rise, to conform with British Standards.
- The total number of slopes has been reduced, which has enabled larger swathes of feature planting to be introduced - this creates a much softer visual impact, reducing the dominance of the slopes. It also improves constructability by removing the very steep sections of retaining features between slopes.



GRIP 3: Option B, Dynamic

Option B has retained the same footprint and 1:21 gradient slopes from the GRIP 2 stage. A new striking geometric design language has been introduced to create a contemporary layout.

Design developments during the GRIP 3 stage include:

- Moving the underpass box position by approximately 10 metres to the west.
- Curved slopes have been minimised for constructability.
- Replacing the 'off-line' resting areas with intermediate landings on the slopes. These are 1.5m in length and provided every 500mm rise, to conform with British Standards.
- Introduction of wide chunky seat edges along the slopes to replace retaining walls. These create a modern design feature that is both functional and aesthetically pleasing.



GRIP 3: Option C, Plaza (new option or GRIP 3 replacing)

Option C is a new arrangement introduced since the GRIP 2 phase. A new sunken town square / plaza connects the underpass entrance to the station. Generous stepped routes lead people in and out of the underpass.

This design was initially developed by Thurrock Borough Council's design consultant but will be taken forward by Atkins as agreed in the design workshop on 17/07/2019 (refer to meeting minutes in appendix)

'Off-line' resting areas have been retained at the north side of the underpass for comparison purposes with the other options.

Option C also involves moving the underpass box position by approximately 10 metres to the west from the GRIP 2 position