

8 December 2020		ITEM: 9
Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Grays Town Investment Plan		
Wards and communities affected: Grays Riverside	Key Decision: N/A	
Report of: Rebecca Ellsmore, Projects and Programmes Manager, Place Delivery		
Accountable Assistant Director: David Moore, Interim Assistant Director, Place Delivery		
Accountable Director: Andy Millard, Director of Place		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

In November 2019 Government published its prospectus for The Towns Fund, a £3.6 billion fund to provide investment in 101 towns to drive economic regeneration in those towns. The aim is to deliver long term economic and productive growth through urban regeneration, planning and land use, skills and enterprise, and transport and digital connectivity. Towns have to develop and submit a Town Investment Plan (TIP) in order to apply for the funding.

Grays was selected as one of the areas to benefit and to be given the opportunity to secure up to £25million from the fund. Grays town centre is the focus for the Grays TIP and will complement other regeneration activity in the Town Centre including the Grays Underpass and Civic Offices extension, as well as the Council's recent £25m submission for Future High Street Funding.

The prospectus emphasised that growth should be driven by local communities through a Town Board with a private sector chair and representation from stakeholders. The Grays Town Board was established in January 2020 is chaired by Justin Thomas from New River REIT (owners of Grays Shopping centre). The Town Board is responsible for preparing the Town Investment Plan for Grays Town Centre, which will be submitted to secure funding from the Towns Fund.

1. Recommendation(s)

Members of Planning, Transport, and Regeneration Committee are asked to:-

- 1.1 note the work of the Town Board in progressing the Town Investment Plan.**
- 1.2 note the intention to submit a Town Investment Plan, based on the ongoing stakeholder engagement and indicative projects described in this report.**
- 1.3 note that further reports will be submitted at a later date with details of projects prior to completion of a Town Deal with Government.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 In November 2019, Government published its prospectus for the Towns Fund, a £3.6 billion fund to drive economic growth in 101 selected towns. Grays was one of the towns selected, and the Grays Towns Board has decided to focus on the town centre area, including links down to the Riverside, as this will complement other regeneration activity that is funded by the Local Growth Fund (c£ 10.8m) and from a submission to the Future High Street Fund (up to £25 m).
- 2.2 The selected towns are required to establish a Town Board with a business sector chair and representation from local stakeholders to enable the community to be the driving force behind the transformative economic change required under the prospectus. The Grays Town Board held its first meeting in January 2020. It appointed Justin Thomas (New River REIT) as its chair and agreed Terms of Reference and Terms of Governance and started preparations for the Grays Town Investment Plan (TIP). The Grays Town Board received an initial grant of £162,019 from MHCLG to support the establishment of the Board and preparation of the TIP.
- 2.3 The full membership of the board is identified in the Appendix and reflects the requirements set out in the prospectus. Also in the Appendix is the membership of an advisory group established by the Board to support its activities and broaden the representation of local stakeholders.
- 2.4 In June 2020, Government published further guidance on the fund and the preparation of TIPs. In summary;
 - a. The Town Board are to lead the production of an evidence based TIP.
 - b. The TIP needs to demonstrate Stakeholder engagement, and that local communities have driven the TIP.
 - c. The TIP is to provide a plan for transformative economic change focussing on seven investment themes (Local transport, urban

regeneration planning and land use, arts culture and heritage, skills, Enterprise, or 'other').

- d. The funding mix is expected to be 95% capital: 5% revenue.
- e. The principles behind the TIP should include securing long term sustainable economic growth, analysis of the area, clean growth, and alignment with other funding.

2.5 The Grays Town Board has agreed to submit a bid in Cohort 3, which means the TIP has to be submitted by 29th January 2021. Following approval of the TIP, the Town Board will be invited to submit Full Business Cases for each approved project. The Town Board and the Council will then be expected to sign a Town Deal with Government for funding and delivery based on all successful business cases.

2.6 Grays has already received a grant of £750,000 through the Towns Fund Accelerated Fund, to support initial projects that can be delivered by the end of March 2021. The Town Board has agreed that this will funding will be focused on projects for Grays Beach Park and riverfront, upgrades and increased capacity at the bus terminus, wayfinding and signage, establishing a hub for information and consultation by the Town Board, and installation of green furniture.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

Stakeholder engagement

3.1 Regeneration plans for Grays have been the subject of several consultations over recent years including;

- a. 2013: Vision and key interventions
- b. 2016: Grays Town Centre Framework
- c. 2018-2019: Your Place Your Voice Community Planning events
- d. 2020: Grays Underpass, design guide and project bank
- e. 2020: NewRiver REIT's consultation on proposals for Grays Shopping centre and its relationship to the wider town centre.

3.2 Each of these consultations has raised similar issues and suggestions for improvement include:-

- do more with the riverside park including leisure and open space facilities and places to eat and drink
- a river bus service
- improve the bus terminus
- connectivity in the town centre
- provide a wider range of activities in the town centre
- improving the town centre "offer" (currently seen as limited and low value retail)
- improve the social and leisure facilities
- develop a stronger evening economy.

- 3.3 The consultations have also raised “operational” issues including anti-social behaviours and crime, insufficient policing, poor and untidy public places, poor lighting, traffic congestion and parking issues, and vacant buildings.
- 3.4 Further detailed consultation is also taking place with members of the Grays Advisory Group to support the work of the Towns Fund Board. The Group includes local businesses and representative groups from the local community, and currently includes 33 resident, business and community groups and stakeholders. The Group has been involved in two visioning sessions to date, although these were held online as Teams meetings, due to the constraints of the COVID pandemic.
- 3.5 The #MyTowns web site was set up by the Government to help engagement with local residents over the Towns Fund programme and it provides a facility for people to submit their views on what needs to be done to improve Grays. At the time of writing there have been 25 suggestions and 36 further comments relating to Grays, all of which are consistent with the comments from the consultation events described above.
- 3.6 The Town Board has formed a Communications Group, with membership from the Board, supported by the Council’s Regeneration and Communications teams. Details of the Town Board are provided on the Council’s web site including links to the #MyTowns web site. The Town Board Communications Group is establishing its own web site including an on-going survey and ‘comments’ facility to enable comments, opinions and suggestions to be provided directly to the Board and feed into the on-going development of projects..
- 3.7 The Town Board Communications Group is preparing an engagement strategy to support development of the TIP and to provide ongoing support for project development. The TIP will include a commitment to continually engage with local communities on the Town Boards developing plans and individual projects, and the website will be a key vehicle in maintaining dialogue with local residents.

TIP Projects

- 3.8 The Board has identified a number of areas for focus that:
- a. complement schemes that are underway (e.g. Civic Offices Extension), schemes that are ‘in process’ (e.g. Grays Underpass and development plots), potential future schemes (e.g. Redevelopment of Grays Shopping Centre) and other funding (e.g. Future High Street Fund),
 - b. Reflect issues raised in public engagement; and
 - c. Require capital funding, recognising that this is the main form of funding available under the Towns Fund.
- 3.9 The Board has therefore identified the following priorities for the TIP:

- a. Grays Beach Park, Kilverts Field and riverfront: Enhancing the open space and leisure facilities, providing eating and drinking venues and other 'destination attractors', improving the relationship of the park with the river, and securing an approach for long term management and maintenance. This will impact on the Council's land.
- b. Jetty and River bus service. This may require land assembly depending the location and scope of facilities required.
- c. Enhancing the links between the riverfront and the town centre
- d. Improving the quality and capacity of the bus terminus and its connectivity with the wider town centre. Further enhancements of the capacity is likely to require land assembly.
- e. Improving the public spaces and including enhanced digital connectivity, smart signage, and facilities to support a range of cultural events and activities.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The Town Board and the Town Investment Plan provide an exciting opportunity to secure much needed funds to address long standing issues and opportunities impacting the future success of Grays Town Centre and will support a range of the Council's priorities outlined in section 6 below.

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

- 5.1 Stakeholder workshops and feedback from the #MyTowns web site are summarised elsewhere in this report. The Stakeholder engagement plan will include provision for ongoing engagement through the Town Board Web site and bespoke engagement on projects as they are developed. The Board has also received a grant as part of the award of Accelerated Funds to establish an information and engagement hub in the town centre.

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

- 6.1 The Thurrock Local Plan and Economic Growth Strategy identify Grays as a Growth Hub where economic regeneration and housing growth are to be focussed. The emerging priorities and schemes in the TIP are consistent with the Council's strategies and priorities, provide a means for close community engagement, and importantly provide a vehicle for securing funds to support delivery.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Mark Terry**
Senior Financial Accountant

The TIP submission will, if successful, provide up to £25 million of funding for projects in Grays Town Centre. Financial implications for the Council cannot be fully assessed until projects have been more fully developed. Costs will be incurred including staff support, which it is assumed will be absorbed in to departmental budgets.

Land assembly will be required. While it is assumed that the costs associated with this will be funded from the Towns Fund, the Council will need to hold acquired sites which, depending on the site, may create a management cost and/or an income for the Council. This will need to be clarified as projects progress at the Full Business Case stage. Similarly, maintenance costs will also fall to the Council and this too will need to be addressed at the Full Business Case stage.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Ian Hunt**
Assistant Director of Law and Governance & Monitoring Officer

The Town Investment Plan is a necessary stage in securing a Town Deal with Government and up to £25million. The Council would be the accountable body holding funds received on behalf of the Town Board. The TIP is 'owned' by the Town Board and the Government prospectus identifies the Board as an advisory group to the Council. Currently the Board has no direct formal legal status and the Council will be the accountable body for funding. During the next stages of producing Full Business Cases and ultimately signing a Town Deal, the Council will need to ensure that its governance processes have been complied with and that it accepts obligations for funding and support, land holdings, and maintenance implications of projects to be funded, there will also need to be a full understanding of risk and the arrangements which will be needed to deliver the business case. This process will need to be subject to separate decision making at the appropriate time.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Smith**
Strategic Lead, Community Development and Equalities

The Town Board and its Advisory Group include a full range of representation of stakeholders. The Advisory Group is open to others to join. Stakeholder engagement has built on regular engagement exercises carried out in Grays over recent years and the Town Board has committed to ongoing engagement through the process for submission and project development.

The TIP will include different projects, each of which will require a community equality impact assessment. The TIP engagement plan will seek to ensure that proposals understand and, where possible, improve equality and diversity.

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):

- HM Government's Town Deal Prospectus and guidance
 - https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/924503/20191031_Towns_Fund_prospectus.pdf
 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/towns-fund-further-guidance>

9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1 - List of Board and Advisory Group membership

Report Author:

Rebecca Ellsmore

Projects and Programmes Manager

APPENDIX 1

Board Members and Advisory Group Members

1.1 Grays Towns Fund Board

New River – Justin Thomas; CHAIR
 Local MP – Jackie Doyle Price; VICE-CHAIR
 SELEP – Adam Bryan
 South Essex College – Angela O'Donoghue
 CVS - Kristina Jackson
 Tilbury On Thames Trust - Lucy Harris
 River Side Community – Teresa O'Keeffe

1.2 Grays Advisory Group

Ensign Bus Company Ltd	Ensign, Ross Newman First, Tony Gardiner
Job Centre Plus	Lindsey Moore
Thameside Theatre	Dianna Ferry
Riverside Community Big Local	Andrew Blakey
Grays Community Forum(s); Orchards & Thameside	Tina
Thames Clipper	Geoff Symonds
Public Health	Sue Bradish
Environment Agency	Phillip Spearman
Sikh Gudwara	Inderpal Singh
St Peter and St Pauls Church	Reverend Darren Barlow
Grays Riverside Ward Councillor	Councillor Tony Fish
Grays Thurrock Ward Councillor	Councillor John Kent
Grays Thurrock Ward Councillor	Councillor Lynn Worrall
Grays Riverside Ward Councillor	Councillor Jane Potheary
C2C	Ben Martin
Local Police - Secure by Design	Michael Armstrong
Nepalese Community	Sundar Limbu
Active Thurrock	Lee Monk
Taxi licensing	Paula Parrott
Yacht Club	Tim Baker
Adult Community College	Jacqueline Bradley
Smart Thurrock	Andy Best
Thurrock Lifestyle Solutions	Neil Woodbridge
Designing out Crime Officer	Alan Twine