

20 January 2016		ITEM: 7
Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Grays Development Framework Consultation		
Wards and communities affected: Grays Riverside Grays Thurrock	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Matthew Essex Head of Regeneration and Assets		
Accountable Head of Service: Matthew Essex Head of Regeneration		
Accountable Director: Steve Cox Assistant Chief Executive		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

Grays is one of six Growth Hubs identified by the council as the focus for regeneration and development for new homes and jobs. A vision for the regeneration of Grays was developed in July 2013 following an extensive public consultation exercise. Since the adoption of the vision Grays has seen a number of significant developments including the opening of the South Essex College campus in the town centre, new housing and a new community centre nearing completion on Seabrooke Rise, the refurbishment of the former magistrates court to create small business accommodation, a package of schemes to improve accessibility in to and around the town centre, dedicated town centre management and changes to licenses that allow more frequent and more varied markets.

The increasing number of visitors to the town has improved the profile of the town centre and national brands are now taking an interest and investing. Wetherspoons have acquired The State and propose to refurbish the building and open a venue within two years, while Costa Coffee now have the benefit of planning permission to open an outlet in the town centre. The recent Christmas event organised by the Grays Town Partnership with South Essex College, Grays Shopping Centre, and the Council was very successful and gives a flavour of the future of the town centre.

However this is only the start and much still needs to be done to secure the future of the town centre. A number of key projects have been identified which would use the Council's land holdings to enable delivery of key projects such as a new theatre complex and supporting the creation of a new underpass, would improve the public realm and the highways and transportation network need to be improved to address issues of congestion and accessibility.

These projects have been encapsulated in a development framework which will provide a coordinated context for projects. Developed for the Council by Urban Initiatives Studios, the framework can ultimately form part of the new Local Plan and, as such, will be subject to more detailed consultation in due course. In the meantime however consulting on the framework and agreeing a direction of travel will enable the Council and partners to focus on delivery and can provide some certainty for private and public investment in the town centre. The consultation will start on the 19th January and run through to the 9nd February 2016.

As part of the consultation programme, the framework will be presented to the committee and members are asked to provide views on the proposals and on the consultation process itself.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 The committee is requested to provide its views on the framework as a basis for leading the regeneration of Grays town centre.

1.2 The committee is asked to comment on the approach to the consultation set out in this report.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 In July 2013 Cabinet agreed a vision for Grays that was the product of extensive public engagement with over 1,500 respondents to surveys followed by 12 workshops and discussion groups. The vision is;

Building on its strengths as a Chartered Market Town, Grays will be an exciting, high quality destination for people to live, work, learn, shop and socialise. Reconnected to the River Thames, Grays will support growing resident, student and business communities throughout the day and entertain a diverse and vibrant population through the evening.

Cafés, bars, restaurants, shops and markets will combine with culture, entertainment and events in unique venues to provide a safe and attractive place for communities to meet and businesses to thrive.

The strategy will revitalise the town centre by:

- 1) Building a local economy based on retail and leisure, entertainment, residential and commercial development;*
- 2) Making it easier to travel in to and move around the town centre;*
- 3) Enhancing the quality of the public realm;*
- 4) Supporting Thurrock's communities;*

2.2 Grays town centre has seen a number of projects delivered resulting in a range of positive outcomes since the consultation and adoption of the vision:

- South Essex College has opened its new campus in Grays and currently has nearly 2,000 students enrolled on courses;
- The former magistrates court will soon open as a business centre with the potential to deliver 200 jobs;
- Positive discussions have continued with Network Rail to progress the underpass;
- The Council has built new flats and a new Community House in Seabrooke Rise;
- Construction has started on the new homes behind The Pullman;
- The State Cinema has now been acquired by Wetherspoons who are currently in discussion with the Council's planning department and Historic England with a view to opening their venue within two years.
- Costa Coffee is looking to open an outlet in the High Street and have recently been granted planning permission;
- The Council now has a dedicated town centre management resource through a partnership arrangement with Southend. In November of this year the town centre had a hugely successful Christmas light switch on event organised by the Grays Town Partnership supported by the Council, South Essex College, and Grays Shopping Centre;
- The market can now operate more frequently and measures are in place to improve the quality of market provision;
- Grays Beach hosted more than 6,000 people who attended the first Village Beach festival – a celebration of arts and culture in Thurrock; and
- There are signs of growing confidence with people investing in their own properties ranging from extensive works to the Grays Shopping Centre Malls and car park to shop front improvements such as Damar Carpets.

2.3 While a lot has happened there are still significant challenges that need to be addressed:

- Key projects such as the underpass and construction of a new theatre and cultural hub to replace the Thameside Complex need to be progressed;
- Mecca Bingo closed recently and HSBC has announced that it will be closing its branch in Grays – although this is due to changes in customer banking behaviour rather than anything to do with the town itself;

- Roads in to the town centre are congested and the road layout is still confusing to the first time visitor;
- The quality of the public realm needs to be improved; and
- Vacant sites need to be brought back in to productive use.

- 2.4 Securing delivery of the vision requires the coordinated development of land and buildings together with improvements to the public realm and the highways/public transport network. The Council has commissioned Urban Initiative Studios to help develop a number of projects that address the challenges to delivering the Grays vision into a development framework that provides the common context to guide the Council’s own work, inform planning decisions and to coordinate the approach to design and layout of developments. A draft framework has now been produced and is ready for public consultation.
- 2.5 The Planning Framework has been informed by discussions with the Grays Town Partnership, Grays Programme Board and discussions and workshops with key stakeholders including Network Rail, C2C, and South Essex College. The draft now requires wider public consultation to be undertaken to gauge levels of support for the proposals and, assuming a positive response, enable the detailed consideration of next steps in the delivery of the vision.
- 2.6 As a first step in the consultation process about 300 respondents to the 2013 consultation on the Grays vision and who provided contact details to the Council were contacted to check whether the principles and the adopted vision for Grays are still relevant. Whilst respondents confirmed that the broad principles remained valid and appropriate, they did take the opportunity to raise a number of specific issues including the continuing need to address car parking, safety, rubbish and cleanliness, the need to clean up and make better use of the riverfront including provision of moorings, landing stage for visiting boats, and, since the proposals for Paramount Studios have been announced, providing access across the Thames to the park site in Kent. These points reflected the thinking around the vision which therefore remains relevant and provides a current context for the development framework.
- 2.7 The schedule for the consultation is;

Event	Date
Re-test the principles and vision for Grays with stakeholders who participated in the vision making workshops in 2013	20 th November to 4 th December 2015
Directors Board	December 2015
Leader and Ward Members briefing	December 2015/January 2016
Opposition leaders and portfolio holder briefing	December 2015/January 2016
Public Consultation Opens	19 th January
Consideration at Planning, Transport and Regeneration O&S Committee	20 th January 2016

Public Consultation Closes	9 th February 2016
Consultation outcomes and consideration of Planning Framework at Cabinet	9 th March 2016

2.8 The consultation will follow similar lines to the recent consultation on proposals for the Civic Square in Tilbury, recognised as good practice by Cabinet in December. There will be around three weeks of intense activity engaging local stakeholders, businesses and residents to help inform the final proposals. The consultation will be promoted through invitations to stakeholders, local businesses and residents who participated in the 2013 consultation and provided contact details; press releases and through digital media. Consultation boards and a short questionnaire will be available in a central location in Grays town centre for the whole period and they will be staffed at advertised times to facilitate discussion. The consultation will also be available online and taken to particular meetings or events that take place during the consultation period such as the Business Board meeting to be held on 29th January at the refurbished magistrates court building.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 Officers will deliver a presentation on the draft framework at the committee meeting. The Framework builds on the vision and the principles which underpin it and the existing and planned projects being taken forward within Grays to set them in a common context and identify those further measures which should be targeted to secure the ultimate delivery of the vision. The Framework aims to attract people to use the town centre and to increase footfall. It promotes a holistic approach and provides a strategy for:

- a) Land Uses: The need to promote a range of community, cultural and leisure uses, offices, retail and services, and housing;
- b) Movement and Parking: Providing high levels of accessibility by improving the road network and removing barriers to movement by pedestrians and cyclists, and enhancing the transport interchange at the rail station, and improving the links between Grays south and the town centre;
- c) Public spaces and the public realm: Providing attractive active frontages, removing clutter, enhancing the appearance, and providing attractive active spaces that support a range of activities in the street (street cafes, events, markets); and
- d) Complimentary non-spatial strategies.

3.2 The Framework also provides clear context for specific elements of the delivering the vision including:

- a) Reconnection of the town with the River Thames;

- b) Development of Council and privately owned sites (potentially as facilitators of other investments) to increase residential density within and around the town;
- c) Active re-use of key buildings such as the former magistrates court and The State;
- d) The potential for a new theatre and cultural hub to replace the Thameside Complex, providing better accommodation in Grays;
- e) Replacement of the level crossing with an underpass and associated redevelopment of adjoining land around the rail station;
- f) Possible expansion of South Essex College;
- g) Enhancement of Grays Beach; and
- h) Implementation of transport and public realm improvements.

3.3 The framework also recommends a range of complimentary strategies including

- a) Town Centre Management and maintenance;
- b) Public realm and environmental improvements;
- c) Festivals, events and temporary community activities; and
- d) Branding and Promotion.

3.4 **Next Steps**

3.5 The consultation will enable the Council to continue working with partners to implement key projects aimed at regeneration in and around Grays town centre. The longer term aim is to include the framework as an inset in to the new local plan, there will therefore be further consultation on the framework as part of the wider local plan consultation process.

3.6 The Framework sets the principles for larger projects and future development and provides context for further project development and for coordination of projects including the use of Gloriana and other delivery models to generate income and potentially cross subsidy for larger projects including the underpass and theatre.

4. **Reasons for Recommendation**

4.1 The committee is requested to provide its views on the Framework as a basis for leading the regeneration of Grays town centre.

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

5.1 The development framework has been subject to stakeholder engagement throughout its development as detailed in this report. It is proposed to carry out a wider consultation before seeking a decision from Cabinet to adopt the framework.

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

- 6.1 The Council's Community Regeneration Strategy, the Thurrock Economic Development Strategy and the Local Development Framework identify Grays as one of the Borough's Growth Hubs where growth in housing and employment are to be focussed. In July 2013 Cabinet agreed a vision for Grays; the development framework will provide a coordinated context for delivery of the development, public realm and transportation improvements identified in the vision.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

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

Development of the Framework has been funded from existing budgets. The consultation will also be funded from current departmental budgets. Any subsequent project development and implementation will be subject to specific consideration as they progress.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Vivien Williams**
Planning and Regeneration Solicitor

The development framework will provide a policy context for the Council's activities in regenerating Grays town centre. The framework is intended to be included as an inset in to the Local Plan and will therefore need to be included in processes required under the planning acts before it can have significant weight in planning decisions.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
Community Development and Equalities Manager

The consultation process will need to ensure that all sections of the community have the opportunity to be involved. Future schemes will need to be subject to equality impact assessment to help take consideration of equality issues relating to new development.

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):

- Grays Town Centre Framework Draft Report.

9. Appendices to the report

- Extracts from the Grays Town Centre Framework Draft Report

Report Author:

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