

9 March 2016		ITEM: 24 (Decision 01104368)
Cabinet		
Grays Development Framework		
Wards and communities affected: Grays Riverside and Grays Thurrock	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Councillor Richard Speight, Portfolio Holder for Regeneration		
Accountable Head of Service: Matthew Essex, Head of Regeneration and Assets		
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 the development of 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 has improved the profile of the town centre and national brands are now taking an interest and investing. Wetherspoons have acquired The State Cinema 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 opportunities have been identified to bring forward development of Council owned sites to deliver elements of the vision and provide the funds to enable delivery of key projects such as a new theatre complex, the creation of a new underpass and improvements to the public realm and the highways and transportation network.

These projects have been encapsulated in a development framework which will provide a coordinated context for their delivery. 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 started on the 21 January and ran through to the 9 February 2016.

The consultation began by asking respondents to the consultation in 2013 whether the vision was still relevant. Then the framework was presented to the Planning, Transportation and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January. The consultation has been published on the Council's consultation portal with a questionnaire. A roving exhibition has been located in the library, the Grays Shopping Centre, Civic Offices and South Essex College and has been staffed on 5 days. The responses received show a broad level of support for the proposals in the framework.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 Cabinet note the consultation process and outcomes detailed in this report, in particular the strong levels of support for proposals contained in the Framework.**
- 1.2 Cabinet approve the Framework as a basis for the Council's regeneration activities in Grays and delegate authority to the Assistant Chief Executive, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, to make appropriate minor amendments to the Framework to address issues raised during the consultation and summarised in paragraphs 3.7 and 3.8.**
- 1.3 Cabinet note that the Framework will inform the emerging Local Plan and that it will be subject to further statutory consultation required by the planning acts.**
- 1.4 Cabinet note that, based upon the strong public support, land acquisition in support of the provision of an underpass to replace the rail level crossing in High Street will commence under the delegated authority provided by Cabinet in July 2015.**
- 1.5 Cabinet approve the implementation of immediate priorities set out in paragraph 3.11;**
 - a) Design and viability testing of proposals for a residential led, mixed-use development at Hogg Lane which could conceivably come forward as a Gloriana scheme;**
 - b) Design, viability testing and financial modelling of proposals for a new theatre building; and**

c) Appointment of consultants to advise the Council on the phasing, design, viability, appropriate delivery models and financial modelling of development sites identified in the Framework.

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 adopted 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 subsequently seen a number of projects delivered, resulting in a range of positive outcomes. These include capital projects including the opening of South Essex College and the Magistrates Court as a business centre but have also seen the return of dedicated town centre management which is provided through a partnership arrangement with Southend Borough Council. There are signs of growing confidence in the town centre with Wetherspoons buying the State Cinema, Costa Coffee moving in to the Grays Shopping Centre, investment in extensive improvement works to the shopping centre, together with the success of the Village Beach Festival and the Christmas Light switch on event that attracted large numbers of people in to the town centre.

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. The town centre is also facing new challenges; Mecca Bingo and HSBC have both closed their facilities recently and following changes within the health service, the walk in health centre will also be closing.

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 commissioned Urban Initiative Studios to establish a clear Development Framework to provide a common context to guide the Council's own work, inform planning decisions and to coordinate the approach to design and layout of developments.

2.5 Consultation process

2.6 As a first step in the consultation process about 300 respondents to the 2013 consultation on the Grays vision were contacted to check whether the principles and the adopted vision for Grays remained 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 view that there is a need to address car parking, safety, cleanliness, the need to clean up and make better use of the riverfront including provision of moorings and providing access to the proposed Paramount Studios site in Kent. These points were all part of the thinking around the vision which remains relevant and provides a current context for the Development Framework. The draft framework has been deposited in the member's reading room and a copy of the exhibition boards and online information is attached at Appendix One.

2.7 The consultation started on the 21st January and has been publicised through press releases, on-line through the internet and social media and emails to participants in the 2013 consultation and to members of the Grays Town Partnership. The consultation has included:

- a) Online information and questionnaire using the Council's consultation portal, which has some 8,000 registered users;
- b) A roving exhibition that has been located at Grays Library, Civic Offices, Grays Shopping Centre and South Essex College throughout the consultation period and staff have been available at each venue to provide details and answer questions;
- c) Discussion with the Grays Town Partnership, Grays Programme Board, Network Rail, C2C and South Essex College; and
- d) A workshop with a range of key stakeholders.

2.8 The Framework is intended to provide context for the Council's regeneration activities. For the time being it would carry little weight in planning decisions however in due course it will be included in the consultation for the new Local Plan to provide an inset in the Local Plan.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 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 land uses to promote the day time and evening use of the town centre. It identifies improvements to movement in to and around the town and for parking. New

public open spaces are proposed along with improvements to the wider public realm. The strategy also identifies the importance of complimentary strategies such as Town Centre Management. A more detailed summary is attached at Appendix Two.

3.2 Response to the consultation

3.3 The responses show a very high level of support for the approach set out in the draft Framework, for key projects and for the use of Council owned land to facilitate delivery.

3.4 In total 69% of responses received stated that they either 'support' or 'strongly support' the overall approach set out in the Framework. There was support for the proposed approach to each of the five main areas as well: the approach to the town centre and station (85%), Orsett Road (80%); Grays Riverside (83%); London Road/Hogg Lane (72%); and Clarence Road (75%).

3.5 Respondents were asked about their level of support for key projects proposed in the Framework. Support was again strong:

- a) Underpass: 72% support or strongly support the proposals;
- b) Removal of the one way system: 69% support or strongly support this;
- c) Re-provision of the theatre at the riverfront: 65% support or strongly support the proposal; and
- d) Aspirations for a pier: 75% support or strongly support the proposal.

3.6 Respondents were also asked for their views about using Council owned land to support delivery of regeneration projects, 70% of respondents support or strongly support the use of the Council's land for this purpose.

3.7 Responses to the survey show strong support for the overall approach set out in the framework. This was also reflected in the feedback received at the stakeholder workshop. A number of points were raised which can be summarised as:

- a) Design of the riverside needs to properly reflect the needs of the yacht club for car parking, land area, access for crane to move large boats. A pier could reduce the number of moorings available to the club. These are detailed issues that will need to be fully addressed as the ideas for the riverside area are developed in more detail;
- b) Need to improve the bus station and the link between the bus station and the rail station. This is the intention of the framework;
- c) Need to ensure sufficient accessible parking;
- d) Need to improve accessibility and include accessible spaces in new development. There are too many changes in levels, poor surfaces, and obstacles particularly for people with less mobility;
- e) Getting the basics right-dealing with litter, vermin, pot holes etc.;
- f) Doubt that changes to the road network will reduce congestion; and

- g) Doubt that there would be sufficient demand for new retail units. The Council will need to address this issue. However there are positive indicators with companies such as Wetherspoons and Costa Coffee proposing to open outlets in the town centre and an increase in inward investment enquiries.
- h) Building heights do not make sense when higher buildings have been built.

3.8 Further responses received were;

- a) Anglian Water: Should be consulted to ensure sufficient capacity to support new development and that existing services are not disrupted.
Comment: This will be addressed in later detailed planning stages including incorporation of the framework in to the local plan and consideration of individual planning applications.
- b) Essex Chambers of Commerce: Impressed with the proposals and believe they form an excellent basis for transforming Grays for the future
- c) Grays Yacht Club: Provided more detail about the needs of the club.
Comment: This is intended as a high level framework rather than definitive designs. Therefore these issues can be addressed as proposals for Grays Beach are developed in detail.
- d) Industrial Chemicals Group: As owners of the Pier Lodge and Titan Works site, they object to the framework on the grounds that there was insufficient time given for consultation and the framework does not properly reflect the extant planning permission for the Pier Lodge site and the company's aspirations for redevelopment of the Titan Works site. The Framework does not meet the regulatory requirement for planning policy to be based on clear evidence.
Comment: The Framework is intended to provide high level context for regeneration activity. At this stage it is not a planning document. It will form part of the Local Plan process which will then need to address these issues. The land uses identified in the Framework are consistent with the company's aspirations. As a high level framework it is not intended to identify detailed approaches to site development therefore the Framework does not preclude design and access options for the Titan Works site.
- e) Northfleet Harbour Restoration Trust: The building of a Pier is a visionary idea and is much needed to bring the Thames back to life, every effort should be made to ensure the pier is truly multifunctional so that all types of vessels can visit.

Next Steps

- 3.9 With the level of support for the Framework it is recommended that Cabinet adopt the draft, with appropriate minor amendments to address issues raised during the consultation and summarised in paragraphs 3.7 and 3.8, to provide context for the Council's regeneration activities. The longer term aim is to include the Framework as an inset plan in to the new Local Plan, there will

therefore be further consultation on the Framework as part of the wider local plan consultation process.

- 3.10 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 subsidise larger projects including the underpass and theatre.
- 3.11 Immediate priorities will include;
- a) Design and viability testing of the proposals to bring forward a residential led, mixed-use scheme on the Hogg Lane South site, potentially including the existing roundabout;
 - b) Design, viability testing and financial modelling for proposals for the new theatre building;
 - c) Appointment of consultants to advise the Council on the phasing, design, viability and financial modelling of the Council owned potential development sites identified in the Framework; and
 - d) Implementation of the land acquisition strategy in support of the underpass previously agreed by Cabinet in July 2015.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The delivery of the Council's Vision and the programme for regeneration in Grays Town Centre includes a number of significant development projects. The Framework provides an essential context for coordinating the approach to delivering these projects and to the way the Council's land is used to support delivery. The Framework was commissioned by the Council's Strategic Planning Department and will inform the emerging Local Plan to provide coordination of the Council's regeneration activities and planning policy.

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. The Framework was considered by Planning, Transportation and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2016 who expressed support for the approach set out in the document and the approach to this latest stage of consultation.

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: **Laura Last**
Senior Finance Officer

Development of the Framework has been funded from existing budgets. The consultation has also been funded from current departmental budgets. The funding of 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 to the Local Plan and will therefore need to be included in processes required under planning legislation before it can have significant weight in planning decisions

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Becky Price**
Community Development Officer

The delivery of the Council's Vision and the programme for regeneration in Grays Town Centre includes a number of development projects with the ability to deliver a significant level of change to Grays, with the introduction of employment opportunities together with community facilities which will provide substantial growth to the area.

Consultation with a wide cross section of the community, using a variety of methods has ensured that all individuals and groups have had a fair opportunity to feedback on the proposals outlined in the development framework.

The improvements proposed should benefit all protected groups with upgrades to the environment, cultural offer, functionality of the town and shopping facilities in Grays Town Centre for all local residents who currently use the town centre, whilst also encouraging visitors from further afield.

Impact analysis to mitigate negative outcomes for protected groups will be considered before each phase of the development framework is implemented. Projects identified in the framework will be subject to further consultation as they progress

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 deposited in Members rooms

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1: Public Consultation Boards
- Appendix 2: Summary of Draft Framework

Report Author:

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