

8 November 2017		ITEM: 10 (Decision 0110442)
Cabinet		
Grays Town Centre: Civic Offices Project		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Councillor Mark Coxshall, Portfolio Holder for Regeneration		
Accountable Assistant Director: Gary Staples, Strategic Lead Transformation		
Accountable Director: Steve Cox, Corporate Director of Environment and Place		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

The Grays Town Centre report, presented elsewhere on this agenda, sets out an exciting vision for Grays and four themes around which that vision will be delivered. Central to that are the Council's own plans for the Civic Offices.

This report sets out options for the refurbishment and development of the Civic Offices in Grays. It proposes the building of an extension to CO2 to provide space for a new council chamber, democratic functions and reception area as well as providing the flexibility to consider relocating other council services such as the library and registrars. The extension will free up the CO1 site which will act as an enabler for further options to be developed including residential uses.

The Civic Offices Project will deliver and contribute towards the following objectives:

- Residents channel shift towards self-service
- Taking 'digital by design' to the very core of its building design
- Maintaining and enhancing the Council's civic presence in Grays
- Embedding modern and adaptable ways of working for staff
- Supporting the aims of the Grays Masterplan
- Obtaining best value for money and making revenue savings

1. Recommendations that Cabinet are requested to:

- 1.1 Authorise officers to proceed to the detailed design stage of an extension to CO2 and the refurbishment of the ground floor of CO2**
- 1.2 Authorise officers to prepare detailed plans for the redevelopment of CO1 and consider delivery options.**

1.3 Note the high level costings in paragraph 4.2 and that a detailed business plan for the CO2 extension and redevelopment of CO1 will be prepared as part of the detailed design stage.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The way our residents are accessing council services is changing in scope and nature. This change requires a modern centre of operations which supports and enhances residents channel shifting towards a digital interaction as well as embedding modern and adaptable ways of working for staff within its infrastructure. At the same time regeneration of the Grays area will require the Council to use its assets efficiently and effectively in order to play its part in shaping Grays into a high quality place in which to live and work.
- 2.2 The existing vision for Grays aims to build on the strengths of the town centre as a chartered market town and as a centre for cultural and civic services. This is reflected in a masterplan for the town. A key element of the strategy is to replace the level crossing of the rail line with a pedestrian rail crossing linking the High Street to the south side of the town. Funding for the pedestrian rail crossing, including £10.8m from Government, has been secured which means it can now progress forward.
- 2.3 The Civic Office plans will support the delivery of the Grays Masterplan and the pedestrian rail crossing scheme, together creating a high quality public realm along Grays High Street and gateway into the town from the station.
- 2.4 Lambert Smith Hampton (LSH), working with Tony Fretton Architects, were commissioned in January 2017 to develop options for the ground floor of CO2 and the whole of CO1. The siting of the council chamber was identified as the keystone to any potential development due to its spatial requirements.
- 2.5 LSH were asked to explore options around building an extension to CO2 which has the following benefits;
- A purpose built location can be provided for democratic functions and a new reception area keeping these functions securely in the heart of Grays
 - There are strong links to the Masterplan objective of continuing the High Street to the south side of the railway
 - The CO1 site can be vacated and freed up for further development options
 - The extension space can be built as large or as small as necessary providing the flexibility to consider relocating other council services such as the library and/or the registrars to the new building.
- 2.6 In considering possible uses for the CO1 site, LSH carried out appraisals that considered various land use options (e.g. office, hotel, recreation/leisure).

Preliminary studies suggest a residential option may be viable, but further investigation is required.

- 2.7 Using the CO1 site for a new theatre was also considered as the Council is separately considering options around the Thameside Complex which might have been supported by the availability of the CO1 site. However this option has been discounted on a number of grounds including problematical access for large vehicles on New Road/Derby Road Bridge junction and the high costs of building a new theatre on that site. (Note: this does not prevent other Thameside uses being accommodated in a CO2 extension building as described above.)

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 Consultants have worked with officers to develop options which will maximise the utilisation of Council assets in the Grays area to support a number of Council ambitions including;

- Residents channel shift towards self-service
- Taking 'digital by design' to the very core of its building design
- Maintaining and enhancing the Council's civic presence in Grays
- Embedding modern and adaptable ways of working for staff
- Supporting the aims of the Grays Masterplan
- Obtaining best value for money and making revenue savings

- 3.2 The options developed by LSH are shown in the summary table with indicative costings.

CO2 extension, CO2 & CO1	(Affordable Element)	Cost	Net Income	Existing Budget	Additional capital required
New build - public facing		£6.84m			
Refurbished - civic		£1.14m			
New build residential	Policy Compliant		(£2.8m)		
Existing Civic Offices refurbishment budget				(£4.8m)	
Total					£0.38m

- 3.3 Including planned capital works, a budget of £4.8m is still in place for original refurbishment works of the ground floor of CO2 and the whole of CO1. Therefore, the total new capital required for the extension of CO2 is £380k

assuming a large size extension and a policy compliant affordable housing scheme on CO1.

- 3.4 Land assembly costs are not included in the above calculations as they have previously been allowed for in the Grays Pedestrian Rail Crossing scheme.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 Along with the new pedestrian rail crossing, a new Civic extension and the freeing up of the CO1 site are key enabling elements to the regeneration of Grays Town Centre and demonstrates to the private sector and other public sector partners that the Council is willing to invest in the Town's future.
- 4.2 As detailed earlier in this report a number of Council objectives are achieved and/or supported by the proposed development.

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

- 5.1 Staff and Senior Management have been made aware of the project through presentations at the Corporate Workforce Group, Staff Forums and DMT meetings. Feedback around specific requirements and service needs have been noted and will be taken into account during the design stage of the project.

Progression of the chosen option will include further stakeholder engagement.

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

- 6.1 This project will deliver/contribute to the delivery of the objectives of:
- Agree the future of the Civic Offices
 - Deliver channel shift to support council digital and customer services strategies
 - Housing New Build (if deemed the highest and best value of the options being considered)

Depending on the services accommodated in the new CO2 extension it will also support the following;

- Review of options to replace Thameside functions

- 6.2 Other partners have expressed an interest in co-locating with the council in order to provide a multi-agency facility for the public from a single location. These partners include Essex Police, Citizens Advice Bureau, DWP/Job Centre+ and NELFT. Existing partners in CO1 and Thameside have also indicated a desire to remain co-located with the council subject to space availability.

6.3 Whilst the main purpose of reconfiguring the Civic Offices is to optimise the use of council owned assets in the Grays area and is therefore focused on rationalising council usage of those assets, existing partners might potentially be accommodated in CO2 which would have obvious benefits including the sharing of running costs. This can further explored in line with the chosen option.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Laura Last/Mark Terry**
Management Account/Senior Financial Accountant

The immediate financial commitment of this project is the capital cost of building an extension for CO2, £7.98m, less £4.8m of funds previously allocated for the completion of the refurbishment of the Civic offices and a return of £2.8m on housing development
 $£7.98m - (£4.8m + £2.8m) = \mathbf{£0.380m}$

High Level cost estimates have been provided for each of the options outlined in this report. Once a preferred option is chosen further detailed costings will be carried out on which additional financial comments will be given.

7.2 Legal

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

Further detailed legal comments can only be provided once a preferred option for the rest of the scheme has been identified. As the project progresses further specific legal advice will be sought to ensure that the Council meets its obligations and acts lawfully in accordance with the Constitutional and relevant statutory provisions.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

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

The Grays Town Centre: Civic Offices project is currently at high-level concept stage and is looking at building 'footprints' on existing sites rather than the specifics of design. However, all new build and interior design will meet or exceed current access and use standards. Diversity and Equalities issues will need to be addressed through a Community & Equality Impact Assessment

informed and developed by appropriate stakeholder engagement during the design stage.

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):

- None

9. **Appendices to the report**

- None

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