

8 November 2017		ITEM: 11 (Decision 0110443)
Cabinet		
Grays Master Plan		
Wards and communities affected: Grays Riverside, Grays Thurrock	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Councillor Mark Coxshall Portfolio Holder for Regeneration		
Accountable Assistant Director: Andy Millard, Assistant Director for Planning and Growth		
Accountable Director: Steve Cox, Corporate Director of Environment and Place		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

Grays is identified in the Economic Growth Strategy and the Adopted Local Plan as one of the Growth Hubs in the Borough where regeneration and growth is to be concentrated.

A number of projects referenced in the existing vision and implementation plans for Grays have or are being implemented, including the opening of South Essex College and the Old Courthouse business centre in the former Magistrates Court. Work has also begun on the removal of the one-way system as part of the town centre transport improvement package. The Grays Town Partnership which continues to promote the town centre through the 'Love Grays' campaign. All these projects have helped diversify the local offer and attract additional footfall into the town. In addition growing market interest in Grays from the private sector continues to provide clear opportunities to further enhance the role of the town centre and its riverfront.

A key barrier to the regeneration of Grays remains the railway line which bisects the town and in particular the increasing frequency and duration of closures of the pedestrian level crossing. The Council has been working with Network Rail, C2C and other stakeholders for some time to develop proposals to close the existing level crossing and replace it with a new pedestrian rail crossing which will allow the free flow of pedestrians through an underpass regardless of railway operations. The announcement of over £10.8m funding from Government via the Local Growth Fund to secure the pedestrian crossing was reported to Cabinet in April 2017 and means that the Council is now progressing plans for the implementation of the scheme

which will further enhance the town centre and offer new opportunities for commercial development and for connection to the riverfront.

Given the progress made in recent years and the opportunities that will be presented by private sector investment, a new approach to Council service delivery and to asset management it is an appropriate time to refresh the Framework to guide the next stage of growth and regeneration in Grays. In July of this year Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the progress that has already been made in delivering the Council's Programme for Grays and the new opportunities which have prompted the need for a review of the Development Framework and agreed a two staged approach to undertaking this refresh. This report considers the first stage refresh.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 Cabinet are asked to approve the proposed Grays Town Centre Framework Refresh appended to this report.**
- 1.2 Cabinet are asked to recommend to planning committee that this Framework is integrated into the new Local Plan for Thurrock.**
- 1.3 Cabinet are asked to note that a strategy will be prepared to publicise progress on implementing the refreshed Grays Town Centre Framework.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 Grays is an important market town and the civic and administrative centre of Thurrock. The town has been identified in the Council's Economic Growth Strategy and in the Local Plan as one of six growth hubs in the borough – areas where regeneration investment and growth activity are to be concentrated. The Council, through an extensive public and stakeholder consultation exercise, has developed the following vision for Grays.

“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.”

- 2.2 The vision was distilled into four themes around which the regeneration programme was developed. The progress made against each theme is summarised in the following paragraphs;

2.3 *Theme a - Building the local economy which would be based on a diverse retail and leisure offer, supply of housing and of business accommodation:*

- South Essex College Grays Campus has been completed and opened in September 2014;
- The former Grays Magistrates Court has been converted into business units. The Old Court House – as it is now known - opened in January 2015. 78% of the 37 units available are currently occupied by a range of businesses;
- The Grays Town Partnership which draws together local retailers and other key stakeholders to promote and improve the town centre has been established and is driving the 'Love Grays' campaign;
- The Council has appointed a Town Centre Coordinator to work closely with the Grays Town Partnership and with other stakeholders to drive improvements in the town centre and promote Grays to local residents;
- The market has been recognised as an important asset in Grays Town Centre and improvements have been made to the offer which will be built on later this year with the introduction of more specialist markets and a greater range of products on offer;
- A development framework to guide regeneration of the town centre was agreed in March 2016;
- The Council has worked with the private sector to secure the acquisition of the State Cinema by JD Wetherspoon who propose to open a restaurant and public house;

2.4 *Theme b - Making it easier to travel in to and move around the town centre:*

- Work has started to remove the one way road system and improve access to and around the town centre, with phase 1a of the Grays Town Centre Traffic Management Scheme completed at the junction of Clarence Road and Stanley Road;
- In April 2017 Cabinet received a report outlining progress in developing proposals for the replacement of the level crossing of the railway line with a pedestrian crossing. The report highlighted the recent £10.8m award of funding from the Local Growth Fund which completes the funding package for the scheme;

2.5 *Theme c - Enhancing the quality of the public realm:*

- The South Essex College facility has made a significant enhancement to the public realm and urban design quality in the New Road area.
- Work on the replacement of the railway pedestrian crossing recognises the key role that this will have in improving the public realm in this area.
- The Councils own plans to extend its buildings to the high street will further enhance the public realm, completing the setting of the church, South Essex College and the new railway pedestrian crossing.

2.6 *Theme d - Supporting Thurrock's communities through opportunities for community activities:*

- The Grays Town Partnership has worked with the Council and South Essex College to host Christmas and other events which now form part of the 'Love Grays' campaign promoting the town centre.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 Positive progress has been made in revitalising Grays Town Centre. Whilst the regeneration programme as previously articulated is by no means complete new opportunities driven by Council service reviews and private sector interest are now being identified. There is a clear need for these new opportunities to be coordinated with the wider approach for the town centre and to ensure that they deliver the maximum benefit for Thurrock residents. Planning Transport & Regeneration Overview & Scrutiny Committee supported a two staged approach to the review;

- a. Refresh and update the Area Concept Plans within the current Development Framework to reflect the emerging opportunities discussed above and to provide a Framework that can guide the next phase of regeneration in Grays town centre.
- b. A more detailed review to follow as part of the process required for the new Local Plan and to ensure compliance with planning policy and regulations relating to the formulation of Local Plans including requirements for stakeholder engagement.

3.2 Planning Transport & Regeneration Overview & Scrutiny Committee further supported an approach that focussed on five key issues;

- a. Exploiting maximum benefit from private sector development
- b. Taking advantage of opportunities from revised Council Service delivery
- c. Making it easier to travel in to and to move around the Town Centre
- d. Enhancing the public realm
- e. New opportunities such as those identified in the Connected Thurrock Digital and ICT Strategy

3.3 The first stage refreshed Framework is appended. The vision and objectives remain the same as the original framework. The approaches to delivering the objectives set out on page 5 of the attached Framework have been updated to reflect the circumstances that have led to the refresh. The Plan retains the remaining proposals from the original Framework and addresses each of the five key points as follows;

Exploiting maximum benefit from private sector development

3.4 There are clear indications of increasing market interest in Grays town centre from nationally recognised brands such as Costa Coffee and J D

Weatherspoon. Further private sector proposals for residential development on sites close to the town centre are expected to come forward in the near future. The Framework identifies private sector sites where development would be supported by the strategy where that would support the Council's regeneration aspirations. The framework also supports development for a range of town centre commercial uses including retail, leisure and offices.

Taking advantage of opportunities from revised Council Service Delivery

- 3.5 The Council has a clear strategy to consolidate civic functions where possible and to provide customers with a modern and digital based offer. A review of Council assets including the Thameside Complex, Civic Offices, Mulberry Square and Grays Beach has the potential to transform Grays town centre. With this focus on using Council assets the revised Framework has included three options for locations for a theatre, including Grays Beach, the Civic Offices 1 site, or provision on the Thameside Complex site together with the adjacent car park. These options are broadly stated in the Framework and will be the subject of detailed review and separate reports to Cabinet. The Framework identifies the importance of the existing theatre remaining open while these options are considered.
- 3.6 The Framework includes a number of Council sites including Hogg Lane South and car parks in Darnley Road, Agent Street and Thames Road, and around the rail station as potential development sites. This supports the cabinets approval in April 2017 of the funding package for the underpass which included the use of returns from development of Council land.

Making it easier to travel in to and to move around the Town Centre

- 3.7 Proposals to replace the level crossing of the rail line will improve connectivity between north and south Grays and creates an opportunity to extend the town centre towards the riverfront. The refreshed Framework reflects the decision of Cabinet in April 2017 to proceed with the underpass project. The Framework also reflects the opportunity presented by this project to enhance the transport interchange provided by the rail station, bus stops, taxi ranks, and provision for cyclists in the town centre.
- 3.8 The refreshed framework supports the further phases of the Grays Town Centre Traffic management Scheme to replace the one way road system and to improve accessibility for cyclists and pedestrians.

Enhancing the public realm

- 3.9 A range of development opportunities in and around the town centre have been highlighted in the Framework. Whilst all the highlighted opportunities are positive for the Town Centre there is a risk of significant changes being brought forward in a piecemeal fashion. The Framework provides a clear context for a holistic approach to enhancing the public realm. A town centre design strategy that is being procured with the design for the underpass and

public squares will build on the Framework to provide design guidelines that can be applied to all projects affecting the public realm thereby securing a properly coordinated and higher quality approach.

Digital Thurrock

- 3.10 Building on the current initiatives which include town centre Wi-Fi provided by the new market operator and the social media presence of the Town Partnership, the scale of change proposed in the Framework presents opportunities to incorporate digital/ICT in to regeneration projects. The potential is identified in the Framework including the Council's approach to rationalising its services and opportunities for providing infrastructure in construction projects on land owned by the Council and projects funded by the Council.

Next Steps

- 3.11 A summary of the delivery programme of projects in the Grays programme is;
1. Underpass
 - a. Delivery structures, design, stakeholder engagement, and consents
Phases: by summer 2020.
 - b. Construction phases: by spring 2022.
 2. One way System
 - a. Phase 1a completion September 2017.
 - b. Phase 1b: Bridge Road priority working upgrades including traffic signal control and changes to New Road access-Winter 2017/18.
 - c. Phase 2: Stanley Road/Orsett Road junction: Spring 2018.
 - d. Consultation on change to two way operation: For inclusion in the 2018/19 Highways Capital Programme.
 3. Civic Offices: Programme to be included in a separate report to Cabinet.
 4. Thameside Complex: Programme to be included in a separate report to Cabinet.
 5. Public Realm Strategy:
 - a. Procure design team: Autumn 2017.
 - b. Consultation, production of guidance and adoption Summer/Autumn 2018.
 6. Feasibility appraisal and project development for other schemes in the Framework.
 7. Stage 2 review to integrate the Framework in to the new Local Plan.

3.12 It is also proposed that promotion and publicity is undertaken throughout the implementation of the Framework to inform the community and businesses about progress. Methods used will depend on the stage of implementation but could include one or more of the following;

- Public meetings and drop in sessions for residents to find out more.
- Leaflets and posters produced to explain the Grays Framework and what it means for residents and businesses.
- Use of council buildings in Grays and the wider area to promote the works.
- Branded hoardings around building sites and sites acquired by the Council for the programme.
- Use of council communication channels – social media, web, and press releases.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 The Council identifies Grays as one of the Borough's Growth Hubs where housing and employment growth are to be concentrated. Grays Town Centre faces significant pressures for development and growth and whilst opportunities exist there is a need to develop a coordinated approach to ensure that benefits are maximised. The current Framework has provided a framework which has secured significant improvements in Grays. These successes now need to be reflected in a new baseline which also takes into account the changed economic climate. The recommended action would provide a framework that builds on previous success, that can be incorporated in to the Local Plan and that provides clear and up to date context for the Council's ongoing planning and regeneration activities.

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

5.1 Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee in July 2017 supported a two staged approach to refreshing the development framework. The next stage will be as part of the Local Plan, the programme for the local plan will include a stakeholder engagement strategy.

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 a Growth Hub where regeneration activity will be focussed. The Council approved a vision for Grays town centre in 2013. The Framework will provide a current framework for the Council's regeneration activity in the area and will support the emerging Local Plan.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

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

The cost of producing the Refreshed Framework has been funded from existing departmental budgets and the second stage review as part of the Local Plan process will also be funded from departmental budgets.

The implementation of the Framework will be subject to further Cabinet reports and may be funded from several sources including the Council's Capital Programme, Grants, returns on development of Council land holdings, and S.106 funds.

7.2 Legal

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

None at this stage. The second stage Framework will need to adhere to the statutory provisions in the Town and Country Planning Act for Local Plans. Project implications will be reported to Cabinet in respect of each project

7.3 Diversity and Equality

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

Diversity and Equalities issues will need to be addressed through a Community & Equality Impact Assessment informed and developed by appropriate Stakeholder Engagement during the Local Plan stage of review. Each project will also require its own stakeholder engagement strategy

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: Delivering the new Pedestrian Rail Crossing. Decision 01104419 April 2017.
- Cabinet Report: Grays Development Framework. Decision 01104368 March 2016.
- Grays Development Framework 2016

9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1 - Grays Town Centre Framework Refresh 2017

Report Author:

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Regeneration