

23 November 2022		ITEM: 6
Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Grays Regeneration Update		
Wards and communities affected: Grays Riverside, Grays Thurrock	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Brian Priestley, Regeneration Programme Manager		
Accountable Assistant Director: Kevin Munnely, Assistant Director for Regeneration and Place Delivery		
Accountable Director: Mark Bradbury, Director of Place		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

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

A vision for Grays town centre was adopted by the Council's Cabinet in July 2013 and in November 2017 Cabinet adopted a refreshed Development Framework to provide the spatial context for implementing the Council's ongoing regeneration programme.

Projects in that programme have been or are being implemented. Current projects include improvements in the connectivity between the town centre and its riverfront and to the riverside park spaces at Grays Beach Park/Kilverts Field. A planning application has been submitted for the underpass the Council recently entered in to contract with Network Rail for the next stages of design.

As part of the Thurrock Council's draft Improvement and Recovery Plan 2022, this project along with others that make up the Council Capital Programme will be subject to a Gateway review as part of the objective to achieve long term financial sustainability. In parallel with the detailed engineering design work, this Gateway review will examine the current project costings, funding and the selected procurement and project management option. This review will provide the Council will an accurate position on the current debt borrowing requirements. The results of which will form a report to Cabinet and this Overview Committee.

The Grays Town Board and the Council submitted the Grays Town Investment Plan (TIP) and have signed Heads of Terms with DLUHC for £19.9million of funding for projects detailed in the Plan. Detailed submissions have been made to Government

to secure the funding for three projects in the TIP, a response is expected before Christmas.

The strategy in the 2017 Framework is now dated. A new strategy for the town will now be prepared as part of the new local plan. The strategy will inform local plan policy and form part of the local plan consultations planned for 2023.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to comment on the proposed approach to updating the existing Masterplan for Grays set out in this report.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Grays was identified in the Council's adopted Local Plan as one of five (now six) growth hubs— areas where regeneration investment and growth activity were to be concentrated. In July 2013 the Council's Cabinet agreed schemes that would contribute to the regeneration of the town centre. In November 2017 the Grays Town Centre Framework Refresh was agreed by Cabinet to express the context for delivery.

2.2 Many projects have been delivered e.g. South Essex College, the Old Courthouse business centre, changes to the road network, and housing schemes at Seabrooke Rise and Argent Street. Council funds together with the Towns Fund Accelerated Fund have enabled refurbishment of the bus station and new leisure and play facilities at Grays Beach Park, completed in 2021/2022.

2.3 Schemes currently in progress include potential housing schemes in Darnley Road/Crown Road and the Council's CO1 site. Other schemes are progressing to improve the connectivity of the town centre with its riverfront.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

Grays Town Centre Strategy

3.1 The framework agreed by Cabinet 2017 is now dated. Circumstances facing town centres are now very different. Members will be aware of the emerging local plan and the work of the Local Development Plan Task Force and the briefing note on the local plan that was provided for the Committees' meeting in October 2022.

3.2 Preparations for the new local plan include a new strategy for Grays town centre that reflects the current pressures facing the town centre and expectations for its future regeneration. The new strategy will also provide an opportunity to review the continued relevance of remaining schemes from the

2017 framework. The strategy will inform local plan policy and form part of the local plan consultations planned for 2023.

Grays Town Investment Plan

- 3.3 In October 2022 Cabinet supported the submission of business case summaries to DLUHC for three projects to benefit from a total of £19.9million of funding from the Governments Towns Fund. All the selected projects were located at Grays Beach Park and Kilverts Field, these are;
- a. beach, multi-use structures for events, pedestrian paths set in enhanced public spaces attracting 30,000 arts, culture and events-based visitors each year
 - b. physical events space and infrastructure, small multi-use structures, space for community-led public arts projects, and the reconfiguration of the Lightship Café to provide a multi-use food and beverage offer.
 - c. activities centre to establish a strong sense of place with links to Grays' maritime identity, history and culture.
- 3.4 The Business case summaries were submitted as required in October 2022 and a response from DLUHC is expected before Christmas. Assuming grant funding is approved delivery milestones are;
- Submission of Planning application March/April 2023
 - Commence construction March 2024
 - Completion March 2026.
- 3.5 Reports to Cabinet in July 2021 and October 2022 provided details of the projects, cost and risk issues. Risk management process is in place. Recognising inflationary pressures on development costs the projects will be closely monitored to ensure all capital costs are kept within the grant funding provided and further reports will be provided as required to the committee and Cabinet as the projects progress.

Grays Underpass

- 3.6 In July 2021 Cabinet agreed the Council's capital programme including a budget of £37.3 million for this project, the next steps to delivery, and the approach to land assembly. As part of the Thurrock Council's draft Improvement and Recovery Plan 2022, this project along with others that make up the Council Capital Programme will be subject to a Gateway review as part of the objective to achieve long term financial sustainability. In parallel with the detailed engineering design work, this Gateway review will examine the current project costings, funding and the selected procurement and project management option. This review will provide the Council will an accurate position on the current debt borrowing requirements and provide an updated costed risk register, which will take into account future inflationary uncertainty and the current stakeholder funding balance.

Key milestones reached following these decisions;

- Planning applications submitted May 2022
- Design contract with Network Rail October 2022

3.7 The delivery programme is subject to the time required for matters outside the control of the Council; necessary decision processes of the Council's delivery partner, Network Rail, and land assembly.

3.8 Use of the Council's powers of Compulsory Purchase will only be required if ongoing efforts to secure negotiated acquisitions are unsuccessful. It is anticipated that these powers will be required. The time for securing all land will depend on the time required for a public inquiry and the decision of the inspector but this could take up to 18 months. Furthermore, all construction projects are experiencing significant inflationary pressures on costs and supply shortages. There will be ongoing review of costs against budgets. Project risk management is in place and further reports will be provided to the committee and Cabinet as the project progresses. The main current delivery milestones are;

- Planning decision Jan/Feb 2023
- Detailed design August 2023
- Land assembly (assuming CPO) July 2024
- Construction Underpass July 2025
- Construction public realm areas July 2026

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 The Council's strategies have identified Grays as one of the Borough's Growth Hubs where housing and employment growth are to be concentrated. Grays Town Centre faces significant challenges.

4.2 Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated approach to ensure that benefits are maximised. The current Masterplan has provided a framework which has secured significant improvements. But now challenges have arisen and need to be reflected in a new baseline which also takes into account the changed economic climate. The new strategy will provide a current context for the council's planning and regeneration activities with the added benefits of being a material consideration in planning decisions.

4.3 The projects currently in progress support the council's current priorities for regeneration in the town centre as detailed in the Cabinet reports referenced in this report.

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

5.1 The local plan includes a comprehensive framework for stakeholder engagement and statutory consultation.

5.2 The Cabinet reports referenced elsewhere in this report detail previous and proposed stakeholder engagement and consultation for each of the projects.

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

6.1 The adopted Thurrock Local Plan identifies Grays as a Growth Hub where economic regeneration and housing growth are to be focussed. The Grays Town Centre Framework Refresh was approved by Cabinet in November 2017 and out a vision for Grays town centre along with objectives aimed at regenerating the town centre economy. The new local will be one of the Council's key strategy documents and the new town centre strategy will be an integral part of this strategy.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**
Strategic Lead Corporate Finance

In July 2021 Cabinet approved the budget for the underpass, the next steps to implementation, and land assembly by negotiation and agreement with landowners and use compulsory purchase powers if required. Cabinet in July 2021 agreed a budget based on an estimated cost of 37.3million.

As part of the Thurrock Council's draft Improvement and Recovery Plan 2022, this project along with others that make up the Council Capital Programme will be subject to a Gateway review as part of the objective to achieve long term financial sustainability. In parallel with the detailed engineering design work, this Gateway review will examine the current project costings, funding and the selected procurement and project management option. This review will provide the Council will an accurate position on the current debt borrowing requirements and provide an updated costed risk register, which will take into account future inflationary uncertainty and the current stakeholder funding balance. It is noted that due to the current economic situation the ability of the Council to undertake additional capital borrowing will be severely restricted and this will need to be taken into account as part of the Gateway review.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Helen Graydon**
Principal Property Lawyer

The Cabinet decisions referenced above included consideration of legal issues arising.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement & Project
Monitoring Officer

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 existing engagement exercises carried out in Grays over recent years. As part of the process of developing the TIP, the Council and the Town Board have carried out extensive community engagement. 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.

The Cabinet decisions referenced above included consideration of diversity and equality issues arising, including the need to undertake stakeholder engagement and Community Equality Impact Assessments.

All information regarding Community Equality Impact Assessments can be found here: <https://intranet.thurrock.gov.uk/services/diversity-and-equality/ceia/>

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children

- 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

Report Author:

Brian Priestley

Regeneration Programme Manager