

## **REGENERATION, COMMUNITY AND CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**21 OCTOBER 2008**

### **CORPORATION STREET DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK**

Report from: Robin Cooper – Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture

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#### **Summary**

This report outlines the issues arising from public consultation on the draft Development Framework for the Corporation Street area. It asks for the views of the committee on these before taking a report to Cabinet to seek adoption of a revised development brief.

#### **1. Budget and Policy Framework**

- 1.1 The Corporation Street Development Framework, Rochester is compliant with the adopted Rochester Riverside Development Brief 2004 (which covers part of the Corporation Street area) and with the saved policies of the Medway Local Plan (2003). It's adoption is therefore a matter for Cabinet.
- 1.2 The costs of preparing the brief have been met from existing budgets in accordance with budget framework.

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1 The draft Corporation Street Development Framework lays down principles for development of the Corporation Street area to ensure that it reaches its full potential as a key gateway site between historic Rochester and the new neighbourhood of Rochester Riverside. The framework was released for public consultation at Medway Council's Cabinet meeting on 15 July 2008. The consultation period ended on the 12 September 2008.
- 2.2 The principles outlined in the framework are summarised in its introduction:  
*'An elegant tree lined street backed by fine new architecture. It will form an efficient route between key areas of Medway... and will be an attractive place to live and work... New development, together with public realm improvements, will bolster the economy of historic Rochester and link Rochester to the new community of Rochester Riverside.'*

2.3 The framework splits Corporation Street into three sub-areas as follows:

- a) The **Boulevard Quarter** - between Corporation Street and the railway line. Developer and landowner aspirations mean that a major portion of this quarter could be subject to redevelopment. The term 'boulevard' indicates the aspiration to turn this area into a tree-lined street.
- b) The **City Wall Quarter** is partially defined by surviving Roman and Medieval city walls. It lies immediately to the west of Corporation Street and constitutes the 'backlands' of historic Rochester High Street. Redevelopment opportunities are limited although significant public realm improvements are desirable as a means of linking historic Rochester with Rochester Riverside.
- c) The framework also includes the area around Rochester Railway Station- the **Station Quarter**. It is used mainly for car sales and servicing and could be the subject of comprehensive redevelopment proposals. Officers hoped that the draft Development Framework would prompt Network Rail to come forward with its options for Rochester railway station.

2.4 Maintaining the function of Corporation Street as a through route whilst overcoming its intimidating traffic ridden nature is a key objective as is the improvement of pedestrian links to Rochester Riverside. The framework therefore contains a chapter on Access, Movement and the Public Realm.

### 3. Consultation

3.1 Extensive consultation was carried out on the draft framework. Almost 1,000 letters and E-mails were sent out to range of individuals, landowners, developers and stakeholders. 2,000 flyers were circulated and 11 press briefings distributed. 123 people attended the six week exhibition and briefings were arranged for a number of organisations.

3.2 A total of 48 responses were received. The overall concept - of a tree-lined boulevard backed by development - was strongly supported. Further comments made by the respondents can be divided into four main topics- connections and transport, open space, design, and land use.

#### 3.3 Connections and transport and parking

There was a mixed response on the introduction of bus priority measures with equal numbers of people for and against the proposals. There was support for the improvement of pedestrian routes to Rochester Riverside and for the rerouting of National Cycle Route 1 along the street. However, there were concerns that the flow of traffic must be maintained.

Traders saw the replacement and additional parking provided by a multi storey car park on the former market site as essential to the retail economy of Rochester. However, at briefings, concern was expressed over the extended timetable (possibly 10 years+) for delivering this facility. Concerns about the design of the car park were also expressed- it should be sensitively designed to fit in with the area.

At one public meeting it was suggested that improvements to the access and egress to the Market car park could be made now, ahead of the construction of a multi-storey car park on this site. Similarly, it would be possible to establish street trees ahead of construction. It was also suggested that the parking rates for the market car park could be reduced, thereby encouraging traders and locals to park there whilst leaving the more attractive and accessible Blue Boar car park available for visitors.

Network Rail, in partnership with Medway Council is assessing options for improvements to Rochester and Strood stations in order to meet predicted passenger growth and allow for fast 'Javelin' services to London. This study is at an early stage and preferred options will not be available until February 2009. Network Rail has not responded formally to the draft Framework.

### 3.4 Open space

The Development Framework proposes that a new civic square is created on the present Blue Boar car park. The new square could be used for a range of uses- market, events, an element of car parking and the retention of the coach drop of point. The proposal was strongly supported provided that replacement parking is in place prior to the creation of the space. Many comments supported additional greenery whilst some respondents were keen enough to put forward their own concepts. Additional points were raised with regard to designing out crime and maintaining the new square.

The framework suggests that minor development along the High Street and Corporation Street frontages of the car park would reinstate historic building lines and provide funds for a comprehensive landscaping scheme. Those that did comment were primarily concerned about the loss of the open aspect to Rochester High Street. On the other hand English Heritage thought that the principle of new buildings in this location was worth exploring.

### 3.5 Design

The general concept of a wall of buildings along the west side of Corporation Street was supported as part of the 'boulevard' concept. Respondents generally agreed with the restriction in building heights imposed by the development framework. However, some thought that the framework should be more restrictive and that heights should be reduced from four storeys with five at corners to a maximum of three storeys.

A few respondents wanted to see 'architecture in keeping with the architecture of historic Rochester- particularly near the High Street.' However, another respondent stated that 'development needs to be 21<sup>st</sup> century and not mock 'pseudo'.

### 3.6 Land use

A mix of land uses, especially residential, was supported, although concern was also expressed that 'active' ground floor uses (retail, restaurant etc.) could compete with shops on the High Street. Some respondents questioned the viability of uses other than residential whilst others emphasised that office use must be promoted in order to retain a working population in the area.

### 3.7 Other comments

Rochester Cathedral, the Bridge Wardens and the statutory consultees of English Heritage, the Environment Agency and the Highways Agency have made a range of comments. Details are contained in Appendix 2. Most of the comments can be taken on board by minor changes to the text.

Rochester Cathedral, along with other respondents, raised concerns about residents who might be displaced as a result of the development of Corporation Street. The Cathedral also suggested that retail on the High Street could be depressed pending the construction of the development encouraged by the framework and suggested that 'transitional anxieties' should be acknowledged.

English Heritage thought that the distinction between the City Wall and Boulevard Quarters was artificial and that the Station Quarter should be dealt with by a standalone document. The failure to organise the document in this way accounts for a lack of coherent approach to the overall area.

Few responses have been received from landowners other than to say they broadly support the framework.

## **4. Advice and Analysis**

4.1 Officers' analysis and advice with regard to the consultation are arranged in the same four topics:- connections and transport, open space, design and land use.

### 4.2 Connections, transport and parking

Increasing public transport use and encouraging cycling are key objectives of the Council's Local Transport Plan. This framework outlines principles aimed at improving public transport journey times. The works will be designed such that there will not be an adverse affect on overall flows through the area. Members will be consulted on the detail of road changes to Corporation Street in due course.

The delivery of the multi-storey car park is at present dependant upon the Council receiving sufficient capital receipts from land disposals at Rochester Riverside. Officers are investigating ways of bringing forward the car park (including possible interim improvements) independently of Rochester Riverside but this cannot be guaranteed. Minor changes to the

framework are proposed in order to emphasise the importance of safety and design.

Parking charges are beyond the remit of the Development Framework.

Officers will endeavour to discuss the Development Framework with Network Rail officials before the final document goes to Cabinet.

#### 4.3 Open space

The majority of comments on the creation of a multifunctional Blue Boar square can be considered at the detailed design stage. No major change is proposed to the Development Framework, although a sentence on additional public consultation on the detailed scheme will be added.

#### 4.4 Design

Officers have carefully considered the scale of development along Corporation Street. Buildings of four-five storeys in height are necessary to ensure schemes that are financially viable, and to provide an appropriately scaled frontage to the wide Corporation Street. Buildings of this height do not impinge on long distance strategic views towards the castle and cathedral.

The framework lays down principles to ensure appropriate design. Within the historic City Wall Quarter it restricts building scale, and states the new buildings should not be unduly prominent. Further sentences will be added on the area's historic context and importance of its heritage.

#### 4.5 Land use

The Development Framework promotes a variety of showroom, retail, leisure and office uses for Corporation Street. These are complementary to the core retail offer of historic Rochester. The desirability of office uses will be further emphasised in the Development Framework.

#### 4.6 Other comments

The potential re-housing of Corporation Street residents is a matter for the principal landowner, MHS Homes. Maintaining trade in the historic High Street will best be achieved by ensuring that adequate parking is maintained during construction. The framework will be altered to require consideration of this at the detailed planning stage.

Officers do not agree with English Heritage's comments on the layout of the framework. Each quarter is a distinct entity and different guidance is appropriate for each. The chapter on Access, Movement and the Public Realm lays down principles that will ensure that the area can act as a coherent whole.

## **5. Summary of Proposed Revisions**

5.1 Overall the results of the consultation endorse the development principles laid down by Development Framework. Minor revisions are proposed with regard to:

- The design of the multi-storey car park;
- Emphasis on the desirability of offices along Corporation Street;
- Consideration to be given to the maintenance of parking provision whilst construction is underway;
- Additional principles to ensure sensitive design within the City Wall Quarter;
- Further public and member consultation will be undertaken on the details of the Corporation Street road scheme and the development of Blue Boar civic space at the appropriate stage.

## **6 Financial and legal implications**

6.1 The adoption of the Corporation Street Development Framework as a supplementary planning document means that it will have a formal status and will constitute a 'material consideration' to be taken into account when determining planning applications.

6.2 The Corporation Street Supplementary Planning Document has been prepared in accordance with the provisions of the Planning and Compensation Act 2004 and the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004.

6.3 Further publicity will be required once the document is adopted to bring it to the attention of the public and all other interested parties.

6.4 The costs of producing documents, leaflets and exhibition material have been met from the approved Communities and Local Government budget. Post adoption costs can also be met from existing budgets.

## **7. Recommendation**

7.1 That Members endorse minor changes to the draft Corporation Street Development Framework as described in the report and recommend that Cabinet adopts the revised framework.

### **Background papers**

Corporation Street Development Framework - Supplementary Planning Document

### **Appendices**

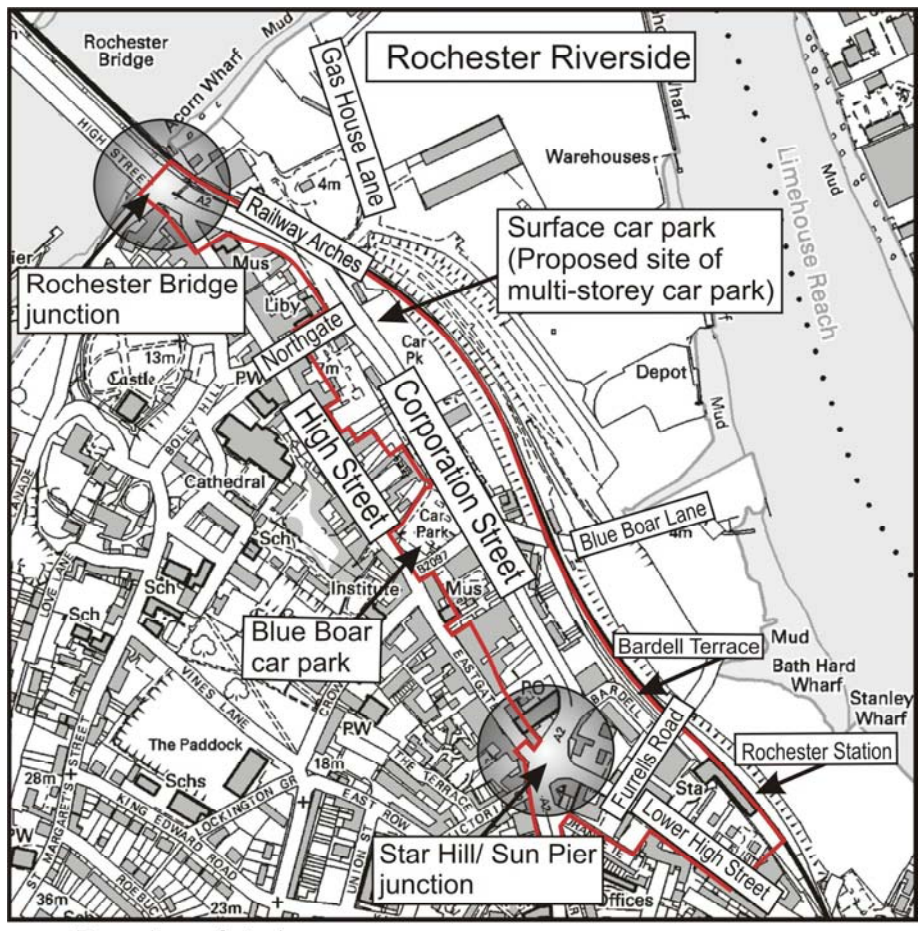
Appendix 1 - Maps of Corporation Street area, Appendix 2 - Consultation Statement and Appendix 3 - Consultation Analysis Report

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**Appendix 1- maps of the Corporation Street area.**



— Boundary of study area

