

REGENERATION, COMMUNITY AND CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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PLANNING OF CENTRAL STROOD

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Summary

This report responds to the request made at the last meeting of the committee that officers report back with a timetable for producing a 'Strood Town Centre Action Plan'.

It proposes the preparation of a Strood Central Area Masterplan that would be incorporated into the emerging Local Development Framework Core Strategy.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 The way forward proposed in the report is consistent with the policy framework and associated costs would be met from existing budgets.

2. Background

- 2.1 Following discussion at the last meeting on 3 December 2008 the committee requested "*officers report back to the next meeting with a timetable for producing a Strood Town Centre Action Plan. The plan should include retail, transport and housing measures to be operational as soon as possible and adopted as part of the Local Development Framework.*"
- 2.2 The need for clear planning guidance in relation to central Strood has been recognised for some time but putting a framework in place is complicated by the need to achieve this through the development plans system.

- 2.3 In accordance with the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 the council adopted a Local Development Scheme in 2005 that proposed a suite of documents that would, eventually, make up the Local Development Framework (LDF) for Medway. These included an Area Action Plan (AAP) for central Strood but a programme for its preparation was not included as it was recognised it would need to follow adoption of a Core Strategy and other documents.
- 2.4 Following major problems with the new LDF system across the country substantial revisions were made to it earlier this year. In particular Government sought to cut down the number of documents that would make up an LDF and put a new emphasis on the early production of core strategies that can now include strategic site allocations.
- 2.5 In line with this new guidance a revised Local Development Scheme for Medway was submitted and subsequently approved by Government. This includes the following references:

“Strood Town Centre Area Action Plan. This is no longer being pursued. Instead it is intended to cover this issue in the revised core strategy”; and

“Medway Core Strategy. The Core Strategy will:

- *Cover the period to 2026 (corresponding to the South East Plan)*
- *Show strategic allocations, over agreed thresholds, for all major land uses*
- *Provide a basic infrastructure plan for Medway. A full infrastructure plan is to be prepared in parallel with the Core Strategy*
- *Give as much certainty as possible to development in central Strood, thereby removing the need for a subsequent Area Action Plan (AAP)*
- *Provide a robust framework for the early adoption of a Chattenden AAP. This should be able to be produced in one year from start to submission, recognising that the examination into the AAP will not start until the Inspector’s report into the Core Strategy has been received.”*

2.6 Proposals for Strood therefore need to be prepared and considered in a way that is compatible with the Local Development Scheme and the associated regulations and guidance governing the preparation of local development frameworks.

2.7 It will also be important to have regards to recent studies and other work carried out. This includes:

- Strood Riverside Development Brief – adopted September 2006. Sets out a comprehensive development framework for the area between Kingswear Gardens and Commissioners Road
- Temple Waterfront Development Brief – adopted October 2006. Sets out a comprehensive development framework for the area

between Roman Way and Knights Road (river side of railway line)

- A mixed use planning application on the alloy Wheels site, that was refused and a further planning application that has just been lodged with the Council
- Current appraisals by Network Rail into station options for Strood and Rochester stations that are due to be completed shortly.

2.8 The key point is that some substantive decisions have already been taken for some areas adjoining the centre and other work can inform the preparation of an overall plan for the central area.

3. Options

3.1 For any proposals for the central area to have planning weight it is important that they are aligned to and preferably embedded in the emerging Core Strategy as indicated above. Supplementary planning documents such as development briefs can only amplify already adopted policies, not introduce new or revised ones. Substantial change is required across the central area of Strood to radically improve the built environment, encourage investment and deal with traffic issues. As such a supplementary planning document is not appropriate.

3.2 An area action plan would require a revision to the only recently approved Local Development Scheme and could not be prepared until after adoption of the Core Strategy – expected in early 2011. It would also take a minimum of a year to prepare.

3.3 Accordingly the only practicable option and reflecting the committee's wishes is considered to be that described in the following section of the report.

4. Advice and analysis

4.1 Having regard to the above and prior to the matter being raised by the committee, it was intended to employ specialist urban design consultants to prepare a Masterplan for the Strood Central Area that could be embedded as an inset map into the Core Strategy and this remains the preferred approach.

4.2 The work would be undertaken during the first part of 2009 on the following basis:

- It would build on, rather than repeat, the various strands of work listed in paragraph 2.7 above
- It would focus on the production of a schematic plan or plans of the centre as opposed to a lengthy written report

- It would nevertheless include broad development appraisals for key sites and other supporting material to 'evidence' proposals set out in the masterplan itself
- It would be prepared with full stakeholder and community engagement, carried out alongside parallel activity associated with the Core Strategy
- This would then be followed by formal consultation as part of the emerging Core Strategy.

4.3 Although it could not be 'adopted' prior to the Core Strategy, if strong community endorsement could be demonstrated and the technical work was robust, it could count as a 'material consideration' in planning decisions prior to adoption, although without adoption it could only be given limited weight.

4.4 It is envisaged that in the Core Strategy itself there would be one or more over-arching policies covering the Strood central area supported by the 'masterplan' as an illustrative diagram or inset map.

5. Consultation

5.1 As indicated above, any masterplan would be subject to full consultation and engagement throughout the preparation process.

6. Financial and legal implications

6.1 Any 'action plan', development brief or other non-statutory device would be unlikely to carry the required planning 'weight' to justify future development control decisions and could, in certain circumstances, be legally challengeable. A supplementary planning document (SPD) can only be adopted by the Council if it accords with an existing "saved" policy in the development plan or with a development plan document (such as the Core Strategy) in the Local Development Framework. Councils are advised in Planning Policy Statement 12 not to produce planning guidance other than SPD where the guidance is intended to be used in decision-making or the coordination of development, as this could be construed as wishing to circumvent the provisions for consultation and sustainability appraisal which SPDs have.

6.2 The cost of employing specialist urban design consultants can be met from existing budgets.

7. Recommendations

7.1 For the reasons set out in the report, the Committee is recommended to endorse the early preparation of a Strood Central Area Masterplan as part of the emerging Core Strategy for Medway.

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Background papers

None

