

REGENERATION, COMMUNITY AND CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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A MASTERPLAN FOR CENTRAL STROOD

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Summary

This report introduces preliminary work undertaken to prepare a masterplan for Central Strood and will be supplemented by a presentation to be made at the meeting.

It follows on from an earlier report to the Committee and proposes public consultation programme on the draft proposals.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 It is intended that, after a period of public consultation, a masterplan for Central Strood will inform the Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy. At an appropriate stage this will become part of the Policy Framework.
- 1.2 The cost of producing the masterplan is being met from approved budgets. Its subsequent implementation will be largely down to the private sector, alongside previously committed Communities and Local Government (CLG) funding, supplemented by any investment the Council is able to make in transport and public realm improvements.
- 1.3 The report does not directly relate to any Local Area Agreement (LAA) target but its eventual implementation could contribute to a number of such targets relating to economic development and housing delivery.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Committee will recall considering a preliminary report on this matter at its meeting on 13 January 2009. The report discussed the importance of giving planning 'weight' to any masterplan and that this would need to be done as an inset or supporting diagram in the forthcoming LDF Core Strategy.

2.2 The Committee:

- “(a) endorsed the early preparation of a Strood Central Area Masterplan as part of the emerging Core Strategy for Medway;
- (b) requested that a draft plan for central Strood is submitted to the first meeting of the committee in the next municipal year.”

2.3 Following this decision a specialist urban design consultancy, AZ Urban Studio was commissioned to undertake the work. The company is very familiar with Strood and has considerable experience of this type of work.

2.4 Having completed initial scoping work, preliminary proposals have been drawn up and these will be presented at the meeting. The intention is then to carry out a public consultation exercise in Strood before final proposals are drawn up.

3. Options

3.1 The work carried out to date suggests a phased approach to development as opposed to distinct options. This is due to the number of committed schemes in and around the town centre together with an analysis that indicates a clear way forward.

3.2 As indicated in the report to the January meeting, there are considerable advantages in agreeing a spatial planning approach for Strood. The area would benefit from substantial upgrading and this can most effectively be achieved through a positive planning framework that invites investment and provides the basis for future planning decisions. These, in turn, need to be founded in the local development framework if they are to carry sufficient weight.

4. Advice and analysis

4.1 As will be explained during the presentation, the draft masterplan is underpinned by a number of specific objectives. In summary these include:

- Preserving all major areas currently in employment use but seeking re-investment in them that will substantially improve the street scene and legibility of the centre
- Ensuring improved connectivity to and through the centre from Strood Riverside and Temple Waterfront
- Creating a river walk between Medway Valley Park and the Civic Centre site
- Improving the setting and approaches to Temple Manor in a way that will also complement the links to Temple Waterfront
- Radically improving the street scene along Knight Road by a combination of public realm works and redevelopment of existing poor quality buildings
- Promoting a major reconfiguration of the existing Tesco Store in Cuxton Road by turning it around to face Commercial Road, creating a new public space and developing associated uses to anchor the northern end of the High Street

- Promoting redevelopment on a number of corner sites in and close to the High Street. This would radically improve the street scene and bring life and vitality to the High Street. Although this element would involve the relocation of existing commercial uses this could be achieved in conjunction with other elements of the draft masterplan
- Public realm improvements in and around the High Street.

4.2 The proposals build successfully on previous work. While they could not be described as 'radical' it is nevertheless considered that they could result in very substantial improvements to the centre, provide a realistic basis for investment decisions and markedly improve the cohesion and legibility of the centre.

4.3 This in turn should significantly improve the sustainability of the centre, improve local identity and pride of place and underpin the many functions of an important district centre. This is important in the context of the three major development sites at Strood Riverside, Temple Waterfront, and Strood Civic Centre.

4.4 A diversity Impact Assessment has not been compiled at this stage but this will be done in association with the LDF Core Strategy.

5. Risk Management

5.1 There are considered to be limited risks associated with this work. It will be subject to public consultation and, in due course, independent examination as part of the LDF. The main risks are considered to be associated with a failure to progress the work as indicated below.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk
Failure to progress and integrate in emerging local development framework	Would lead to a planning policy vacuum in the centre with associated implications in terms of uncertainty in development decisions and a failure to attract much needed investment	Strong support from the Council and the local community will provide investor confidence and act as a catalyst for future capital funding

6. Consultation

6.1 As already indicated it is intended that the draft masterplan should be the subject of a short public consultation/engagement exercise. This is considered critical in ensuring that the final proposals have broad community support and local people are aware of the long term strategy for the centre.

6.2 It is intended that the results of this consultation exercise will be reported back to the Committee before the Cabinet is requested to endorse a final masterplan.

7. Financial and legal implications

- 7.1 As indicated above, the masterplan will only be given full weight in planning decisions if it forms part of the local development framework or is an adopted supplementary planning document. It is proposed that the masterplan ultimately form part of or inform the LDF Core Strategy. Government advice in PPS12 stresses the importance of proportionate public consultation during the preparation stage of the core strategy.
- 7.2 The costs of preparing the masterplan and conducting the programme of public engagement can be met from the approved budget. The resulting proposals would be implemented over a 10 – 15 year time frame and be dependant on available capital resources, grant funding and private investment decisions.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 The Committee is asked to recommend that Cabinet endorses the draft masterplan proposals for the purposes of public consultation within the local area, with the results being reported back to the Committee at an early date.

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Background papers

None