

REGENERATION, COMMUNITY AND CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

2 DECEMBER 2009

PLANNING OF CENTRAL STROOD

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Summary

At its meeting on the 25 August, Cabinet gave approval to a four week programme of public consultation on preliminary proposals for a masterplan for central Strood. The consultation has now been completed and the results are the subject of this report. A copy of the draft masterplan is enclosed with the agenda for Members of the Committee but otherwise can be found at:

www.medway.gov.uk/index/environment/developmentplan/ldf/stroodtowncentre.htm

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 Following the consultation, a masterplan for Central Strood has been prepared. This will inform the Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy, which at an appropriate stage will become part of the Policy Framework.
- 1.2 The cost of producing the masterplan has been met from approved budgets. Its subsequent implementation will be largely down to the private sector supplemented by any investment the Council is able to make in transport and public realm improvements over the next 10 -15 years.
- 1.3 The report does not directly relate to any Local Area Agreement (LAA) target. The eventual implementation of the masterplan could however contribute to a number of such targets relating to economic development and housing delivery.

2. Background

2.1 At the meeting on 13 January 2009, the Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee asked for a plan for Central Strood to be brought forward. The Committee was informed that work was being commissioned to support the preparation of the Local Development Framework and the Committee endorsed this approach.

2.2 Subsequently a specialist urban design company AZ Urban Studio was appointed to carry out the work. The company is very familiar with Strood and has considerable experience of this type of work. The initial proposals were then presented to Committee at the meeting on 7 July 2009. The decision was as follows:

“The Committee recommended that Cabinet endorses the draft masterplan proposals for the purposes of public consultation within the local area, with the results reported back to the Committee at an early date.”

3. Options

3.1 The work carried out 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 There are considerable advantages in agreeing a spatial planning approach for Strood. The area would benefit from substantial upgrading and this can be most effectively 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 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 Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy.

5. Risk Management

5.1 There are considered to be limited risks associated with this work. 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 The consultation exercise complied with the Local Development Framework Statement of Community Involvement. The consultation involved:

- Exhibition in Strood library throughout the consultation period
- Consultation leaflets distributed to town centre businesses and local residents
- Posters advertising the consultation in local shops and businesses
- Information on the Council's internet site
- Briefing given to Strood town centre forum
- Advert in the Medway Messenger
- Staffed drop by sessions held in Strood on:
 - Tuesday 6 October at Strood market
 - Saturday 17 October at Strood market
 - Tuesday 20 October at Friary Place
 - Thursday 29 October at Friary Place
- Announcements and officer interviews on regional radio.

6.2 Consultees were specifically asked for their comments on five key proposals:

- Retain and enhance employment opportunities
 - support the redevelopment of existing employment sites for new business accommodation to meet a range of modern business needs. Use redevelopment to deliver improvements to the street environment, particularly in the Knight Road area
- Retail development at Commercial Road/High Street
 - redevelopment of the existing Tesco store and adjacent sites has the potential to create a new shopping area around the junction of Commercial Road and the High Street together with landscape improvements to the street environment
- Create a river walk between Medway Valley Park and Strood Riverside
 - providing improved access to the River Medway for all and connecting new development at Temple Waterfront with the Town Centre and railway station

- Improve the setting of Temple Manor
 - make Temple Manor more accessible to residents and visitors. Opening up the setting of Temple Manor as part of a wider scheme to improve the Knight Road area and the link between Strood town centre and Temple Waterfront
 - New development sites
 - a number of sites on prominent corners currently make a poor contribution to the street environment. Redevelopment of these sites to provide a range of uses could really change the image of Strood and help to create more activity in the town centre.
- 6.3 Comments received related to both strategic and detailed issues. Furthermore, many respondents commented on a variety of issues within their responses.
- 6.4 To ensure that the full content of each response was noted effectively each key comment within a response was logged individually, and then categorised using the following criteria:
- Support
 - Support in part
 - Neutral
 - Disagree in part
 - Disagree.
- 6.5 Respondents were generally supportive, with 25% of comments offering support for the objectives and / or proposals in the masterplan. A further 18% of comments offered support in part (generally supporting the objectives, but offering a modified proposal for achieving it), taking the total of general support to 43%.
- 6.6 A significant number of responses were categorised as neutral (41%). These were often general comments that were not obviously in support or disagreement with the draft masterplan. Some comments in this category were issues beyond the scope of the masterplan, and planning in general (e.g. council or police service performance).
- 6.7 Comments offered in disagreement in part (12%) or disagreement (4%) related to both objectives and proposals.
- 6.8 The comments received were also categorised by issue. Approximately one third of all responses related to transport and parking, with many indicating concern that public parking levels need to be increased and also that congestion on the roads needed to be reduced.
- 6.9 Officers will consider whether any further changes to the masterplan are needed in the report to cabinet on 5 January.

- 6.10 In terms of next steps, subject to cabinet approval, the Strood masterplan will progress through the LDF procedures. The Strood Regeneration Cabinet Advisory Group, which was established to enable a cross-party group of Members to maintain a regular overview of the regeneration of Strood will also have a role.

7. Financial and legal implications

- 7.1 The masterplan will be 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 forms part of or informs 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 have been 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 any changes to the masterplan for consideration by Cabinet.

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Background papers

Local Development Framework Statement of Community Involvement