

## REGENERATION, COMMUNITY AND CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

11 APRIL 2013

### ATTENDANCE OF THE LEADER

Report from: Rodney Chambers OBE  
Leader of the Council

#### **Summary**

This report sets out activities and progress on work areas within the Leader's Portfolio which fall within the remit of this Committee. This information is provided in relation to the Leader being held to account.

#### **1. Background**

1.1 The areas within the terms of reference of this Overview and Scrutiny Committee and covered by the Leader are:

- Inward investment and strategic tourism promotion
- Regeneration

#### **2. Achievements for 2012-13**

##### **Inward investment and strategic tourism promotion**

2.1 Chatham World Heritage and Great Lines Heritage Park

- In April 2012, Chatham applied to be the UK's 2013 World Heritage Site nomination. Government subsequently allocated the next two nomination slots to the Forth Bridge (Scotland) and Gorham's Cave Complex (Gibraltar). Government invited Chatham to reapply for a nomination date in October 2013.
- The assessment panel considered our management and community engagement to be particularly strong, and suggested that we:
  - Include a more detailed comparison of Chatham with the existing World Heritage Sites of Karlskrona (Sweden) and Kronstadt (Russia)

and

- Assimilate the range of planning policies and guidance which protect the site into a single Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

Both pieces of work are underway, with Cabinet approval to consult on the SPD to be requested in September.

- General Sir Peter Wall formally opened the RSME Bicentenary Bridge, funded by the European Union's Interreg IVA fund, in September 2012.
- A partnership application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the next phase of work at the Great Lines Heritage Park (at the Inner Lines and Fort Amherst) is anticipated in late 2013.

## 2.2 Strategic Tourism

### 2.2.1 Summary for 2012:

- The main Medway visitor attractions welcomed **744,000** visitors (an increase of 3% on 2011 and our best ever result).
- Medway received **2,055** coaches at Rochester Coach park (34% were overseas and 66% were from the UK).
- The Visitor Information Centre received **260,000** visitors
- The Medway Tourism Team won the Visit Kent Chairman's Award.

2.2.2 Tourism in Medway has recently been estimated as being worth £292 million to the local economy each year. Medway attracts 4 million visitors per year (of which 3.4 million are day visitors and 600,000 are staying trips). Employment in tourism related businesses stands at 6,100 and is approximately 7% of local employment. (Cambridge Economic Impact Study 2011).

2.2.3 In 2012 Medway attractions jointly welcomed 744,000 visitors, which is the highest number of visitors to Medway attractions on record.

2.2.4 The tourism sector is clearly very important for the local economy and the Council is developing a Destination Management Plan (tourism strategy) in conjunction with Visit Kent and key tourism partners. This plan will be finalised later in 2013.

2.2.5 There are a number of key activities and developments planned over 2013:

- During the summer we will be launching a new Medway Tourism Bus, which will operate during the summer months between Rochester and Chatham, linking our key attractions.
- The continued success of our festivals and events will include our very successful River Festival into its second year and an emerging Music festival during the summer months.
- These will be promoted through a new Medway Tourism and Events Website and via continued regional and national campaigns and

travel trade marketing. Our 2013 Visitor Guide has been published and very well received within the industry.

- There have also recently been a number of funding successes. Eastgate House has been awarded £1.3 million by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), Rochester Cathedral has also been successful in a £3.3 million HLF bid to improve access and usage of the cathedral crypt and the Historic Dockyard Chatham has plans for 'Command of the Oceans,' an orientation centre for the Dockyard and its wider defences. The Royal Engineers Museum and Fort Amherst are also both pursuing further Heritage Lottery Funding bids.

## 2.3 Regeneration

- 2.3.1 Rochester Riverside – The first phase of housing has been successfully delivered on 'Phase 1' of the site and the formal opening took place on 15 March 2013. Hyde Housing have constructed 73 homes – a mix of 41 one and two bedroom extra care apartments, 24 one, two bedroom Shared Ownership apartments, 8 affordable rent apartments and a commercial unit.
- 2.3.2 Substantial infrastructure works have taken place on Phase 1, including an extension of the Doust Way spine road and the creation of the 'Southern Gateway Square', a new public square providing access to the site via Bath Hard Lane.
- 2.3.3 Funding of £4.410 million through the Growing Places Fund has been granted for additional infrastructure works, including an extension of the spine road and substantial utility upgrades across the site. The funding is in the form of an interest free loan, which will be paid back in instalments over a 7-year period.
- 2.3.4 The continued investment in infrastructure has ensured that the rest of Phase 1 is 'development ready' and the intention is to release the next phase to the market later in the year.
- 2.3.5 Rochester Station is to be moved 500 metres onto part of the Corporation Street car park. The move will enable longer 12-car trains to stop at the station and allow for a projected 30% growth in passenger numbers. The relocation of the station will also support the regeneration of Rochester Riverside by providing a new pedestrian subway and public car park at a key gateway to the site. The site accommodation for the construction of the new station will be located on Rochester Riverside. The investment is £26 million.
- 2.3.6 Chatham – Planning consent has been granted to Golding Homes for 32 x 2 bed and 7 x 1 bed flats at 37-43 High Street next to Anchorage House. We have been awarded £2.99 million from Growing Places Funding (an interest free loan) to upgrade infrastructure at Chatham Waterfront. This will include the refurbishment of Sun Pier this Summer.

2.3.7 Strood – In a further boost for Strood, we will be opening a new Community Hub on the High Street, bringing an empty property back into use and providing easy and convenient access to Council services.

2.3.8 Our Community Hubs programme is all about ensuring our Libraries are fit for the future by increasing the range of services available to residents under one roof. This additional investment in Strood means that not only will the Library be even more convenient for all our customers there is also a potential benefit to local retailers with increased footfall in the town centre.

2.3.9 Proposals for Strood Community Hub are at an early stage of development, but this initiative will be a significant improvement in the availability of face to face Council services for Strood town centre. We are appointing an adviser to review how we can improve the pedestrian environment around Darnley Arches.

2.3.10 Strood Railway Station – Apart from the new Rochester Station, we have a commitment from Network Rail to deliver a new platform to provide improved services from Rainham and to lengthen the platforms at Strood Station, to take 12-car trains.

2.3.11 Highways – We have applied to the Department for Transport for Pinch Point funding to replace pedestrian crossings along the A2 with crossing lights that are only activated if pedestrians are present in the vicinity of the crossing, thus improving traffic flows through fewer red lights from Rainham to Chatham on the A2.

2.3.12 Third Thames Crossing – We attend meetings with the Department for Transport, who intend to consult on 3 possible crossings for a 3<sup>rd</sup> Thames Crossing in May 2013 (after the County Council elections) with a final decision on a location being announced, we are told, in October 2013.

2.3.13 Airports – We continue our objection to any of the ideas for a Thames Estuary Airport. We continue to work with adjacent authorities and also have the support of the LEP in our opposition. Our solution is not to be NIMBY's, but to support regional airports such as Kent International at Manston. Twice daily flights to Schipol International started on 2 April. We believe better utilisation should be made of the almost 60 million spare passenger slots at existing airports with better use of high speed rail to connect airports such as Birmingham with HS2 and Stansted via Crossrail. We have involved the Government appointed Davies Commission to Medway and Kent to take evidence locally and to show them the insanity of a Thames Estuary Airport.

2.3.14 Chatham Waters – The £650 million Chatham Waters plan has received the go-ahead. A huge development bringing hundreds of homes, a hotel, a supermarket and a conference and events centre to the banks of the River Medway, with 3,500 jobs, has been shown the green light.

2.3.15 The ambitious Chatham Waters project at Chatham Docks in Gillingham was approved by Council and then the Secretary of State in September 2012. The 10.5 hectare site will have mixed use development, transforming 177,000 sq m in all. Offices, education facilities, an EventCity conference centre and hotel will be built alongside 950 apartments, townhouses and a supermarket. There will also be a civic square lined by large sweeping parkland boulevards.

2.3.16 Rochester Airport – The Council's proposals to secure the long-term profitable future of Rochester Airport and provide up to 1,000 local jobs was announced in December 2012.

2.3.17 Rochester Airport, established in 1933, is owned by the Council and has been operated by Rochester Airport limited on five-year leases for the past 12 years. But many of the buildings and facilities are very old and are reaching the end of their useful life.

2.3.18 The Council has organised a tender for a new operator to operate an airport on a 25-year lease with improved facilities. The winning bidder will take forward plans to close two current grass runways on site and replace them with a new grass and a parallel paved runway.

2.3.19 The grass runway will allow the Medway Aircraft Preservation Society (MAPS) to continue to use the site for heritage aircraft and open days. It will not lead to the site becoming a full-scale commercial passenger-carrying airport. A new operator would also be expected to work with the private sector and the Council to invest in the site to improve its facilities, public access and the heritage offer available. The Council is making up to £5 million available to invest in the area.

2.3.20 The Council is working with BAE Systems, a leading business in the area, in progressing plans for the site. Consultants have been appointed to draw up options for the site, assessing how new employment land can be located on land not needed for the airport operations. The consultants will be producing options in April, and exhibitions are planned at the end of the month to seek the views of local people and other stakeholders in the options proposed. The masterplan will be completed for summer 2013, and will be used to support planning policy for the area, and attract developer interest.

2.3.21 TIGER - £20 million boost for Thames Gateway businesses. Businesses in the Thames Gateway Kent and Medway will receive a £20 million funding boost to support new investment and jobs. Ministers announced in October that TIGER – Thames Gateway Innovation, Growth and Enterprise – is one of 130 schemes nationally to benefit from the Government's £2.4 billion Regional Growth Fund. TIGER will offer interest-free loans to businesses investing in new products and services, with the aim of unlocking additional private sector finance.

2.3.22 The scheme was secured following a bid to the fund by the Thames Gateway Kent Partnership which was supported by local businesses.

This clearly shows we continue to be a place where businesses are welcome and can grow with confidence.

2.3.23 We look forward to helping as many local businesses as possible benefit from this funding so that it can create more local jobs in the shortest possible period of time. The TIGER scheme is up and running from April 2013.

2.3.24 Apprentices - A £1 million investment pot to bring jobs and apprenticeship opportunities for people in Medway has been created by Medway Council. The money will be invested over the next three years in helping long term unemployed people hold down jobs in Medway and also to help their new employers develop their workforce.

2.3.25 The IMPRESS Project, funded by the European Union, will include workforce development, HR guidance, access to networks of like-minded businesses and a gateway to Medway Council's business development services.

2.3.26 Cutting Red Tape – Medway companies received a boost after Medway Council cut “unnecessary” red tape to offer contracts to dozens of small local firms. The move comes after the Council asked the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) to point out what prevents small and medium local firms applying for contracts with them.

2.3.27 The business group said red tape and serial form filling were barriers to many. Now, 20 contracts worth £10.1 million from the Council's Adult Social Care Department have been awarded to local firms. Roger House, Regional Chairman for FSB in Kent and Medway said, “Local businesses are not just part of the community, they are the local community, providing goods and services; generating jobs, opportunity and prosperity”.

2.3.28 Victory Pier, Gillingham – Berkeley is celebrating the success of its Victory Pier development in the 2012 Medway Culture and Design Awards. The waterside development in Gillingham received a highly commended award in the competitive New Build category.

2.3.29 Victory Pier received glowing praise from the judges, who said: “This scheme is of iconic importance to Medway and has attracted a great deal of recognition. It occupies a strategically important site showing really high quality design and finish throughout”.

2.3.30 The award-winning development has been hugely influential in regenerating the eight hectare site overlooking the River Medway into a vibrant waterside community. When complete the waterfront village will include 775 new homes, a variety of shops and restaurants, a 100 bed hotel, well over 1,000 student flats and new marina-style moorings.

2.3.31 Kingsnorth – This 46 hectare £170 million logistics park south of the Hoo Peninsula, is now ready to receive 180,000 sq m of industrial or distribution business, with the capacity for a single 108,000 sq m unit –

the only one in the South East. A planning application has been submitted.

2.3.32 The site is close to the M2, with easy access to the M25 and within a tier 3 'grant for business' assisted area. The developer, Goodman, has spent £20 million on infrastructure, on and off site, to improve access and make plots ready for development, as well as completing wildlife areas.

2.3.33 Goodman owns, develops and manages industrial property around the world and has developed more than 929,030 sq m of industrial space in the UK and Europe.

**Lead Officer**

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**Background papers**

None