

CABINET

30 MARCH 2010

BEST STREET/HIGH STREET MASTERPLAN CHATHAM

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Jane Chitty, Strategic Development and Economic Growth

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

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Summary

This report seeks approval to undertake consultation on a masterplan for the Best Street/High Street area of Chatham.

Please note that the Best Street/High Street Masterplan will be circulated separately to Cabinet Members, Ward Members, Group Rooms and will be available at the Council's main receptions and on the Council's website via <http://democracy.medway.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=115>

Further copies will also be available from the Cabinet Office. Please contact 01634 332509/332008 for further details.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 The costs of preparing the masterplan and the consultation can be met from the Medway Renaissance budget. The masterplan will be a supplementary planning document prepared in conformity with the provisions of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and saved Medway Local Plan policy, S5 (Chatham City Centre).
- 1.2 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.

2. Background

- 2.1 A crucial element of the Council's regeneration plans is the development of Chatham as a regional scale centre. The South East Plan supports this. Policy TC1 identifies Chatham's centre as one of 12 centres for significant change. These town centres are to be the focus for significant growth with provision made for major retail development

and other town centre uses of a large scale. It is also reflected in a number of Council plans and strategies including saved local plan policies, The Medway Waterfront Renaissance Strategy 2004 and the draft Sustainable Community Strategy.

- 2.2 A successful town centre needs a combination of features to thrive and to be successful. The most important is a good retail offer as this acts as the catalyst for other forms of investment, for example leisure, entertainment and employment uses.
- 2.3 A strong retail offer is considered crucial in establishing the overall image and confidence of a town. Chatham's ranking as a retail centre has declined in recent years. Maidstone, Canterbury and Tunbridge Wells have had new town centre retail developments in the last few years while Chatham has not.
- 2.4 Medway's retail spend as a consequence is leaking out to other shopping centres supporting their prosperity at the expense of Medway's. Without new substantial investment in Chatham's shopping offer it is considered the position can only worsen which could seriously undermine the Council's wider regeneration efforts.
- 2.5 A Retail Capacity Study was undertaken by Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners in 2009. Agents acting for Land Securities, Hempstead Valley Shopping Centre and others critically assessed its findings. It takes full account of the economic downturn and is considered robust.
- 2.6 Specifically the study recommends that Chatham
 - Should be developed as a major regional centre
 - In Medway terms it should be the focus for major retail developments, large scale leisure and other uses that attract large numbers of people
 - The retail strategy should focus on the re-occupation of vacant floorspace and the delivery of new development to provide at least 30,000 square metres of additional floorspace.
- 2.7 The additional floorspace should not preclude development in Medway's other centres but these should be geared to serving local catchment areas, while Chatham should serve the whole of Medway. The figure of 30,000 square meters is proposed, as it would have a critical mass to change perceptions of the town centre amongst retailers, investors and the local community.
- 2.8 Urban Practitioners were commissioned in September 2009 to produce a masterplan for the Best Street/High Street area of Chatham and they were asked to concentrate initially on the retail offer, as all other considerations should naturally flow from this. The masterplan has been prepared under the guidance of Council officers.

3. Options

- 3.1 The consultants were asked to have full regard to the proposed Pentagon extension of 15,000 square metres. This is half the identified critical mass that Chatham centre needs to realise its potential. They have also had regard to the importance of retaining Debenhams and Tesco's proposals for a replacement store in Chatham. The importance of retaining and/or replacing car parking was also stressed.
- 3.2 A detailed analysis of the centre was undertaken and the draft masterplan emerged from this. The key proposals are:
- Incorporates the Pentagon extension as previously proposed.
 - Proposes selective redevelopment of poorer quality buildings along the High Street. This has the benefit of better connecting an enlarged Pentagon with the High Street as well as strengthening the High Street itself.
 - Proposes the redevelopment of the Trafalgar Centre and areas around it plus improving the setting of Debenhams.
 - In turn this would open up a large area to the rear, up to and running along Best Street. In this area the proposal is for a substantial carpark together with larger floorplate stores such as furniture showrooms etc and potentially a large foodstore.

4. Advice and Analysis

- 4.1 The draft masterplan is underpinned by a number of specific principles. In summary these include:

Retail Provision

- A new retail heart for the town centre between Best Street and Richard Street with a major food retailer incorporated into new frontage on Richard Street, with upper level parking accessed from Best Street split over two storeys to support this.
- New retail development along the north west section of Best Street, accessed from Richard Street, with upper level parking accessed from Best Street.
- The expansion of Primark to the rear of the block with frontage to Richard Street as well as the High Street.
- Improvements to the High Street at sensitive, punctuated points to allow for the creation of a new retail quarter connecting the Pentagon extension to a rejuvenated High Street.
- New retail development on the site of the current indoor market, with potential for the provision of small units for high quality retailers to create an attractive boutique retail environment.
- Coordination with the proposed Pentagon extension, providing two levels of retail plus upper floor car parking.

Cultural/Leisure/Community Provision

- Expansion of the Central Theatre, with the addition of cafe facilities and improved backstage capacity.
- Accommodation of the proposed Primary Care Trust building, located in a central location with access from Richard Street and Best Street.
- Creation of a new community/civic cluster around Meeting House, with retail frontage onto the High Street.
- Proposed hotel development as a landmark feature at the eastern end of New Road - creating a key gateway into the town centre and benefiting from proximity to the High Street/Best Street and upgraded pedestrian crossings.
- Support for the evening economy with greater activity around the pumping station and access to the eastern end of the High Street.

Employment space

- A work space cluster at the eastern end of the High Street, fronting onto the new junction.
- New work space development between Best Street and New Road, creating an active and attractive frontage to Best St, whilst simultaneously allowing for rationalization of movement between these two streets.
- New work space provided onto the Brook, which also provides frontage onto this important route
- Potential for work space to be included in the landmark feature building at the eastern end of New Road.

Street scene improvements

- Remodelling of the Iceland building and neighbouring sites to create a new north-south route from the Brook to the High Street, allowing completion of the Brook frontage and ground level parking in the courtyard.
- Remodelling of Debenhams to wrap the block and create an active frontage Richard Street.
- Creation of a new square around the pumping station to the north of the High Street, with restaurants and cafés fronting this.
- Creation of a new square around the Clover Street church.
- Creation of a strong north-south pedestrian route linking the Brook and Best Street, through these two new squares.
- Creation of a clearly defined public space at the High Street/Railway Street junction
- A legible and attractive route for pedestrians at the Railway Street/Best Street junction.
- Potential creation of a new square around a refurbished St John's Church.
- Paving, lighting, planting and street furniture improvements throughout and to Best Street, the High Street and Richard Street in particular.

4.2 The proposals build successfully on the Chatham Town Centre and Waterfront Development Framework – Supplementary Planning Guidance 2004. Implementing the whole masterplan is likely to take a

number of years but it has the potential to be broken down into a number of phases some of which are capable of being brought forward in the short term.

- 4.3 The regeneration of Chatham as a major retail centre is a considerable challenge. It is considered there is however enormous potential and the draft masterplan reflects this.
- 4.4 At this stage the proposals are in draft and it is expected that they will be further developed as the result of public consultation. However they are considered to provide a sound basis for moving the regeneration of Chatham forward.
- 4.5 A Diversity Impact Assessment has not been compiled at this stage but will be undertaken in the light of public consultation responses.

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	Would lead to a planning policy vacuum in the centre of Chatham 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 and Programme

- 6.1 A full programme of consultation on the masterplan proposals will take place. The arrangements for consultation will follow the council's established practise now formalised in the Statement of Community Involvement.
- 6.2 The consultation programme is likely to involve;
- Briefings for ward members.
 - Meetings with representatives of key landowners and existing stores.
 - Distribution of consultation leaflets to town centre businesses and local residents.
 - Unstaffed exhibition in Chatham centre throughout the consultation period.
 - Staffed drop by sessions.
 - Engagement with Medway's Citizen Panel
 - Article in Medway Matters
 - Adverts in the local press and a legal press notice.
 - Copies of the masterplan in local libraries and Council offices.
 - Masterplan available on the council web-site.

- 6.3 To fit in with the publication of Medway Matters it is anticipated that consultation will commence at the beginning of June for a six-week period. Following the assessment of replies to the consultation, the intention is for the outcomes of the consultation to be reported to the Regeneration, Community and Culture and Overview Scrutiny Committee followed by Cabinet.

7. Financial and legal implications

- 7.1 The costs of preparing the masterplan and conducting the programme of public engagement can be met from the approved budget.
- 7.2. 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 is ultimately adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document that is also reflected in the Local Development Framework. Government advice in PPS12 stresses the importance of proportionate public consultation during the preparation stage of supplementary planning documents.
- 7.3 A supplementary planning document must relate to policies in development plan documents (or to saved policies in the Development Plan). The relevant saved policy in this case is S5 (Chatham City Centre) in the Medway Local Plan. Supplementary planning documents must be prepared and consulted upon in accordance with the Town & Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004 (as amended).

8. Recommendations

- 8.1. That the draft masterplan proposals, as set out in the draft masterplan document, are approved for the purposes of consultation, with the results being reported back to Cabinet along with final proposals at a later date.

9. Suggested reasons for decision

- 9.1 A masterplan Best Street/High Street Chatham, supported by the local community, will provide a basis for future planning decisions and help in regenerating the area.

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Background papers

Local Development Framework Statement of Community Involvement