

River Strategy

Summary Paper for Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Introduction

SQW has been commissioned by Medway Council to develop a River Strategy alongside a suite of other economic development and regeneration strategies, including Medway 2037 – an update to Medway 2035, the Council’s core economic development and regeneration strategy – a new Town Centres Strategy, a new Innovation Strategy and a refreshed Skills and Employability Plan.

SQW presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2022 to present the approach being taken to developing this strategy suite and to seek feedback from Members to inform the drafting process.

Since this time significant progress has been made regarding consultations and in preparing a first working draft of the strategy suite, with a first working draft issued for Medway Council officer review on 11 February 2022. The one exception to this is the River Strategy which is following a different programme to reflect the dependency on the preparation of an evidence base to support both the River Strategy and Medway Council’s Local Plan.

The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the proposed scope for the River Strategy, including the evidence base currently under preparation,

Feedback from members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is welcomed at this stage to feed into the early stages of developing the River Strategy.

Approach

It is recognised that the River Medway is at the heart of the area’s identity but is arguably an under-used or appreciated asset. Accordingly, greater prominence is afforded in the draft *Medway 2037* regarding the opportunity for the River Medway, and indeed the River Thames, to play a more significant role in supporting economic growth and contributing to the life and experience of the Medway communities.

The proposed additional section of *Medway 2037* relating to the River Medway – part of Priority 1: Destination and Placemaking – makes explicit reference to the importance of the River Medway and the proposed River Strategy which will articulate the nature of this opportunity. The proposed

draft new section for the River Medway in *Medway 2037* is extracted below. Importantly, whilst the importance of the River Medway has been emphasised, the proposed text does not predetermine the content or direction of the River Strategy ahead of the preparation of an evidence base.

Medway 2037 proposed content: Celebrating the River Medway

The River Medway: the heart of our identity

The River Medway is fundamental to Medway. The history of the River is synonymous with that of the evolution of our places and communities. The way in which we use the River has changed significantly over the generations: the closure of the Naval dockyard in 1984 was the end of an era and marked the beginning of the transformation of the Medway which has gathered momentum ever since.

A diverse range of groups and stakeholders currently use and engage with the River Medway and its waterfront: recreational and leisure users, tour operators, hobbyists, environmental groups, heritage enthusiasts, tourists, walkers, commercial operators and an increasing number of residents.

The River is a source of pleasure, opportunity and identity. It is something that is used and experienced; it is more than just the stunning backdrop to our rejuvenated waterfront regeneration sites, increasingly home to vibrant mixed-use communities.

Recognising both the challenges and opportunities presented by the River Medway, and indeed the River Thames, we have committed to develop an evidence-backed River Strategy which will set out a proposed vision, strategy, and associated Delivery Plan, for the future use of, and engagement with, the River including identifying key investment priorities.

This proposed River Strategy will creatively embed the key themes of *Medway 2037* at its heart: innovation, zero carbon and growth for all.

Importantly, the proposed River Strategy will be predicated on a robust and objective evidence base. This evidence base has been commissioned by the Council to underpin both the River Strategy and the draft Local Plan. This evidence base has been commissioned separately to SQW's commission and is being prepared by a specialist consultancy.

The programme for the preparation of this evidence base is running behind that of the principal *Medway 2037* strategy suite. The evidence is being prepared across a c.5-month period, to be concluded by June 2022.

Following the completion of the evidence base preparation, SQW will apply the conclusions of the evidence base to developing the River Strategy, with the target for finalising the strategy being July 2022.

Evidence base scope

The independently commissioned evidence base will focus on mapping and economic appraisal of existing uses and infrastructure and considering future options, with the scope summarised as:

- Detailed baseline review and GIS mapping of existing land uses, businesses and infrastructure on the River Medway, including stakeholder consultations
- An economic assessment of uses and infrastructure across the River Medway. This will be supplemented by stakeholder consultation.
- A survey will be undertaken to gather information on the current condition of infrastructure and employment land along the River Medway, where investment is needed and what this could comprise, and views on future use – again, supplemented by supporting stakeholder consultations.
- Consideration of potential options for future uses and infrastructure across the River Medway

River Strategy Scope

SQW will lead the development of the River Strategy using the independently commissioned evidence base as the platform for developing a vision, priorities, objectives and delivery plan. SQW supported Medway Council in defining the scope of work for the evidence base to ensure it provides the requisite evidence to support the development of the River Strategy

Work has already commenced on the River Strategy relating to areas outside of the scope of the separately commissioned evidence base – i.e. review of other relevant policy and strategic agendas (environment, ecology, leisure, tourism, planning etc), however the majority of the strategy work will be delivered in parallel to, and following the completion of, the evidence base described above.

The River Strategy will be concluded in July 2022. The detailed scope of work for SQW in delivering the River Strategy is outlined below:

Table 1: SQW River Strategy scope

T1	Agree the format for the River Strategy
T2	Agree the evidence base to support the Strategy
T3	Decide on the scope and means of delivering a detailed analysis of industrial / commercial uses, viability of current uses, future market for existing and other commercial uses (5-10 years) and supporting infrastructure required
T4	Detailed review of international designations and national strategic context
T5	Review of local and regional designations, initiatives, existing and emerging policy/guidance
T6	Based on T4 and T5, and initial discussions, compile a summary of overarching issues – focus on flood risk, flood protection, access, ecology, environment, leisure, tourism
T7	SWOT based on what is known to date (exclude industrial and commercial uses)

Y8	External consultations to reflect on SWOT, to confirm key challenges / barriers, explore views on a future vision and what needs to happen to deliver this – workshops with key user groups
T9	Discussions with key landowners and developers
T10	Liaise with consultant developing evidence base regarding conclusions from Phase 1 (Chatham Docks)
T11	Distil evidence from research and consultation exercises into an initial framework and storyboard for the River Strategy
T12	Workshop with Medway Council to review
T13	Liaise with consultant developing evidence base regarding conclusions from Phase 2 (River Frontage)
T14	Distil evidence from evidence base and overlay with initial framework document
T15	Review of funding opportunities
T16	Draft outline River Strategy & Initial Action Plan
T17	Review, feedback and discussion
T18	Final River Strategy and Action Plan

Source: SQW