

CABINET

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MEDWAY 2037 - REGENERATION STRATEGY REFRESH

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Councillor Jane Chitty, Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation

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Summary

This report asks the Cabinet to note and approve publication of the updated set of Regeneration Strategy documentation; Medway 2037, Town Centre Strategy, Innovation Strategy and Skills and Employability Plan.

1. Budget and policy framework

- 1.1. The refreshed Regeneration Strategy documentation presents the overarching vision for Regeneration and sits under the Council Plan. It supports all three established Council priorities:
 - People: supporting Medway's residents to realise their potential
 - Place: Medway – a place to be proud of
 - Growth: Maximising regeneration and economic growth for all.
- 1.2. The refreshed set of strategies respond to key societal, socio-economic, and political agendas which are now highly material to Medway's growth agenda including Climate Change, Levelling Up and technological challenges and opportunities, whilst also ensuring the Council is positioned to capitalise on both existing and emerging funding opportunities for the economic regeneration of Medway and delivering growth for all.
- 1.3. The strategic documents embed Medway Council's ethos to eliminate unlawful discrimination, actively promote equality of opportunity, growth for all, and foster good relations between different sections of the community through improving the quality of life and opportunities for everyone.

2. Background

- 2.1. The Regeneration Strategy documentation was considered by Cabinet and previously published as part of the local plan evidence base in 2018. These are now standalone documentation, which have since been updated to reflect significant changes in the economy, such as the impacts of Covid19, and the Levelling Up Agenda.
- 2.2. The updated Regeneration Strategy documentation also responds to the inherent opportunities for Medway, including securing £170m of HIF funding which provides the opportunities to facilitate major growth on the Hoo Peninsula, and forms an important part of the Council's growth and economic development agenda.
- 2.3. A comprehensive review and analysis of existing strategies was undertaken. Medway 2035, Skills and Employability Plan 2035 and the accompanying action plans were previously considered by Cabinet, and these strategies have been updated, as opposed to rewritten. The Innovation Strategy, which was adopted by the Council in 2014, has been substantively rewritten. There has never been a finalised Town Centres Strategy before, only a draft prepared in 2018, and the use of town centres has also evolved considerably during the pandemic, so this has involved a considerable rewrite. Development of a River Strategy is still ongoing, with a view to complete by the end of the financial year. It requires an extensive inventory of existing river infrastructure and a robust assessment of the local and regional appetite for both commercial and leisure markets.
- 2.4. The Strategic documents have been developed to be public facing however, the accompanying delivery plans will be kept in-house. The versions appended are word documents. If approved for publication, appropriate accessible desktop published versions will be worked up by the end of the calendar year for full public access.
- 2.5. Medway 2037
 - 2.5.1. Medway 2035 is the Council's current core economic and regeneration strategy which was considered by Cabinet in 2018, as part of the local plan evidence base. The document is well considered and conveys a robust vision and strategy that clearly articulates Medway's economic development and regeneration priorities. As such, the scope of work required a refresh and update rather than a full-scale re-write and has now developed into Medway 2037, Appendix 1.
 - 2.5.2. The structure of the Medway 2037 vision document is comprised of six key priorities; Destination and Place-making, Inward Investment, Town Centres, Business Accommodation and Digital Connectivity, Sector Growth, and Improving Employability. Alongside the key priorities sit three cross cutting themes; Climate Change and Net-Zero, Creativity and Innovation, and Growth for All.

2.5.3. Key agendas also incorporated into Medway 2037 include Levelling Up, Post Covid Impacts and Perception with the aspiration of raising Medway's profile. Throughout stakeholder engagement, other key themes highlighted include, Creativity, Culture, Health and Wellbeing, Child Friendly City and Leisure and Tourism, and have been incorporated.

2.5.4. Under the draft Medway 2037 over-arching Regeneration vision document, sits the rest of the strategy documentation (Town Centres Strategy, Skills and Employability Plan, Innovation Strategy, River Strategy) which includes explicit alignment and interlinkages between the component strategies with a single, consolidated action and delivery plan that is focused and streamlined, with an emphasis on deliverability.

2.5.5. The refreshed Regeneration Strategy documentation is aligned with other relevant strategies and picks up on relevant interlinkages to ensure growth for all. It embeds the principles of the Climate Change Action Plan 2021 throughout the strategies, and connects the Medway Cultural Strategy, Child-Friendly Medway initiative, emerging Medway Tourism Strategy, emerging Sport Strategy and emerging Local Plan.

2.6. Town Centres Strategy

2.6.1. A draft Town Centres Strategy was prepared in 2018 which included a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threat (SWOT) analysis of each of Medway's principal town centres and the identification of priority objectives and actions to support the strength, growth, and resilience of each town centre. This strategy was never formally considered, although has been used as a reference point by the Economic Development team.

2.6.2. To update the strategy SQW (the external consultant) undertook a review of regional and national strategic context, high level evidence reviews of town centres' performance, looked into current trends and challenges facing town centres nationally, had over 30 consultations with town centre stakeholders and businesses, and undertaken a SWOT analysis of each of Medway's town centres. The Action Plan focuses in particular on the revitalisation and appropriate re-use of empty / derelict properties and the cross-over with Local Plan objectives (e.g., change of use, and town centre master plans).

2.6.3. SQW has captured each of Medway's five unique town centres' identity and defined their role. Overarching priorities were identified and informed the delivery plan. The Town Centres Strategy can be seen at Appendix 2.

2.6.4. The vision for Medway's town centres is: To create a prosperous, attractive, vibrant and sustainable waterfront city centre for Chatham and the town centres of Rochester, Strood, Gillingham and Rainham in a way which embraces their distinctiveness; enables growth for all with no one left behind; provides diverse and high-quality shopping, leisure, living and working environments and experiences for residents and visitors; enables businesses

to flourish, create and innovate; Medway's economy to grow and the quality of life to improve.

2.7. Innovation Strategy

2.7.1. The Council adopted an Innovation Strategy in 2014 which principally focused on the way the Council's innovation assets could proactively deliver innovation outcomes and support SMEs. The Innovation Strategy required a substantial re-write.

2.7.2. Innovation is recognised in the Medway 2037 core Regeneration Strategy, as a key theme cutting across all six of Medway Council's identified priorities. Through stakeholder consultation, the link between creativity and innovation was emphasised, and the cross-cutting theme has been adapted to Creativity and Innovation.

2.7.3. The updated Innovation Strategy includes sections dedicated to defining innovation, a review of the wider context including the Government's recently published Levelling Up white paper, Innovation Strategy, and plan to 'build back better', Medway's economic baseline, Medway's innovation ecosystem, and barriers to innovation in Medway.

2.7.4. The proposed vision for innovation in Medway is: To establish Medway as a prominent centre of business innovation and high value employment, connecting, maximising and growing the assets we have and sharing the benefits of innovation with all businesses, communities and places. We will support innovation and growth in our key and potential future growth sectors including advanced manufacturing and engineering, construction, the creative industries, food-tech and hydrogen, identify and nurture emerging opportunities associated with the twin drivers of the transition to the net zero carbon economy and increasing technological advances.

2.7.5. The proposed priorities for innovation in Medway are identified as: supporting our businesses to innovate, start up, grow, relocate, providing and supporting others to deliver the right spaces for innovation, and pursuing and supporting emerging opportunities. The Delivery Plan proposes deliverables which are grouped according to the three proposed priorities. The Innovation Strategy can be seen at Appendix 3.

2.8. Skills and Employability Plan

2.8.1. The Skills and Employability Plan 2035 was adopted by the Council in 2018 and required a refresh to ensure it remains fit for purpose and aligns with the wider economic development and Regeneration Strategy documentation.

2.8.2. The 2035 vision that local people of all ages will have the skills and experience to take up job opportunities generated through growth and inward investment, informed the refresh. The refresh also considered progress made in delivering on the priorities and objectives defined in the Skills and Employability Plan for Medway 2035, economic opportunities,

transformational themes, labour market insight, policy change and stakeholder consultation feedback.

2.8.3. The Skills and Employability vision is: Raising aspirations, realising potential, supporting sustainable growth. The proposed vision is supported by five key priorities; Raising and responding to employer demand, Developing progression routes for young people, Building an adaptable and resilient workforce, Ensuring employment, education and training opportunities for everyone, and Leading by example as a major employer. The Skills and Employability Plan can be seen at Appendix 4.

2.9. River Strategy

2.9.1. The Council did not have a River Strategy, so this was commissioned in its entirety. SQW worked on an outline of the proposed scope, including the evidence base which is currently ongoing. The proposed River Strategy will be predicated on a robust and objective evidence base, which has been commissioned by the Council to underpin both the River Strategy and the draft Local Plan. The evidence base has been commissioned separately and is being prepared by a specialist consultancy.

2.9.2. 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 Medway 2037 vision document, regarding the opportunity for the River Medway, and indeed the River Thames, to play a more significant but viable role in supporting economic growth and contributing to the life and experience of the Medway communities.

2.9.3. Work has commenced on the River Strategy relating to areas outside of the scope of the separately commissioned evidence base, such as a review of other relevant policy and strategic agendas including, environment, ecology, leisure, tourism, and planning. 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 work is underway, with a view to complete by the end of this financial year.

3. Options

3.1. Options for the updates to and publication of the Regeneration Strategy documentation are:

1. To note the updates to, and approve publication of, Medway 2037, Town Centre Strategy, Innovation Strategy and Skills and Employability Plan.
2. To delay publication of, Medway 2037, Town Centre Strategy, Innovation Strategy and Skills and Employability Plan.
3. To reject the updates and publication of Medway 2037, Town Centre Strategy, Innovation Strategy and Skills and Employability Plan.

4. Advice and analysis

- 4.1. Approval of publication of the updated Regeneration Strategy documentation will provide a clear direction for the Service, upon which strategic decisions can be made going forward.
- 4.2. If the publication of the Regeneration Strategy documentation is further delayed, or not approved, this would have negative implications on the Regeneration division, the Council, and Medway more widely. The updated Strategy documentation and accompanying action plans, provide the strategic direction and basis for which funding applications are made, and investment is attracted to Medway. Without a detailed strategic case for investment, Medway will be unable to build strong funding proposals and continue to attract investment.

5. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Strategies do not align with future Government proposals.	The current economic climate is uncertain, and the Levelling Up agenda is still emerging.	The Levelling Up Agenda as it currently stands has been captured throughout the documentation. In addition, there is flexibility within the documentation to still adapt and align with future policies	D3
If the Strategies are not approved for publication, this will negatively impact future funding proposals for Regeneration within Medway.	Funding proposals require highly detailed strategic cases, in order to be considered. The Council also needs to be strategic around which funding it focuses on, as funding application are resource intensive.	Publication of the Regeneration Strategy documentation will provide a concrete basis upon which to build funding proposals.	D2
The Strategies may quickly become out of date once they are published.	Once published, any significant changes in the economic climate or proposals announced by Government, will not have been considered.	The Regeneration Strategy documentation should be regularly updated to take account of any significant changes, as a minimum within the next five years. In addition the strategies are written to show strategic direction but also	C3

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
		allow flexibility to adapt to future emerging priorities.	

6. Consultation

- 6.1. Since the outset of SQW undertaking the refresh of Regeneration Strategies, there has been extensive consultation with internal and external stakeholders, that have fed in throughout development. Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee were presented to twice, with summaries of each of the strategies for comment, Corporate Management Team, Departmental Management Team and Service Managers were engaged, and all comments have been considered and incorporated where possible.

7. Climate change implications

- 7.1. In April 2019, Medway Council declared a climate change emergency. The council is committed to making Medway carbon neutral by 2050 and has developed an action plan to facilitate making a 'clean and green environment'. The aim is to ensure that climate change is incorporated and embedded into all relevant policies, strategies, plans and contracts.
- 7.2. The programme of regeneration strategy refresh and development undertaken, responded to Medway Council's adopted Climate Change Action Plan, specifically Key Priority Action 2 (Public Sector Decision Making) which includes a sub-action to embed climate change in all relevant Council plans and strategies.
- 7.3. Within Medway 2037, Climate Change and Net-Zero is identified as a cross cutting theme, which sits across all six priorities within the document.

8. Financial implications

- 8.1. The Council secured funding from the Additional Restrictions Grant Fund (ARG) to aid with the refresh of Medway 2035 and accompanying strategies. SQW were successful in the tendering process in Autumn 2021 and have led on the stakeholder consultancy for Medway 2037 on behalf of the Council, overseen by the Assistant Director Regeneration.
- 8.2. The strategies have been designed as web-based documentation. Costs would be incurred for any printed copies required, and this would need to be funded from within the existing Regeneration revenue budget.

9. Legal implications

- 9.1. The adoption of the refreshed Medway 2037 strategy supports and number of statutory duties across the Council including the duty to track and support NEETS as such the adoption of any such strategy is a matter for cabinet to consider.

10. Recommendations

- 10.1. The Cabinet is recommended to approve the publication of Medway 2037, the Town Centre Strategy, the Innovation Strategy and the Skills and Employability Plan.
- 10.2. The Cabinet is recommended to delegate authority to the Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive to, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Inward Investment, Strategic Regeneration and Partnerships and the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, finalise the presentation of Medway 2037 and associated Plans and Strategies and to finalise wording of the Medway 2037 Foreword.

11. Suggested reasons for decisions

- 11.1. Approval of the publication of the refreshed Regeneration Strategy documents will provide solidified strategic direction for Regeneration within Medway. The clear direction of these strategies and accompanying action plans, will also form the basis for future funding applications, and will be used to attract investment in Medway.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Medway 2037
Appendix 2 Town Centre Strategy
Appendix 3 Innovation Strategy
Appendix 4 Skills and Employability Plan

Background papers

December 2018 Cabinet Paper
<https://democracy.medway.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=115&MId=4112&Ver=4>

Medway 2035
https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200177/regeneration/455/medway_regeneration/2

Skills and Employability Plan 2035

[https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200341/medway for business/941/skills and employment](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200341/medway_for_business/941/skills_and_employment)

Medway Innovation Strategy 2014 – 2019

<https://innovationcentremedway.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/strategy.pdf>

Cultural Strategy 2020 – 2030 <http://medwayculturalstrategy.co.uk/the-strategy/#:~:text=Medway%E2%80%99s%20Cultural%20Strategy%20runs%20from%202020%20to%202030,them.%20It%20is%20based%20on%20two%20core%20beliefs%3A>

Local Plan -

[https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200149/planning_policy/519/new medway local plan](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200149/planning_policy/519/new_medway_local_plan)

Chatham Town Centre masterplan (November 2019) –

[https://www.medway.gov.uk/downloads/file/4524/chatham town centre masterplan](https://www.medway.gov.uk/downloads/file/4524/chatham_town_centre_masterplan)

Gillingham Town Centre masterplan (November 2019) –

[https://www.medway.gov.uk/downloads/file/4525/gillingham town centre masterplan](https://www.medway.gov.uk/downloads/file/4525/gillingham_town_centre_masterplan)

Strood Town Centre masterplan (December 2019) -

[https://www.medway.gov.uk/downloads/file/4523/strood town centre masterplan](https://www.medway.gov.uk/downloads/file/4523/strood_town_centre_masterplan)