

Local Plan Panel Meeting	
Meeting Date	15 December 2021
Report Title	Sittingbourne Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)
Cabinet Member	Cllr Mike Baldock, Cabinet Member for Planning
SMT Lead	James Freeman
Head of Service	James Freeman
Lead Officer	Alison Peters
Key Decision	No
Classification	Open
Recommendations	Members are invited to comment on the Draft Sittingbourne Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) prior to the Cabinet Member for Planning authorising the document to be published for public consultation in January 2022.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report introduces the Sittingbourne Town Centre SPD draft for consultation that, once adopted will provide a suite of complementary policies to support its vitality and viability and secure appropriate development, supporting the local economy and providing opportunities to maximise the use of land and buildings that are currently underutilised. This includes a costed proposal for public realm enhancements and identified opportunities for further improvements.
- 1.2 The SPD will form part of the planning policy for the borough pursuant to the adopted local plan, Bearing Fruits (and the Local Plan Review as appropriate).

2 Background

- 2.1 Swale's adopted Local Plan 'Bearing Fruits' sets out the role and purpose of Sittingbourne Town Centre in the settlement strategy. Policy Regen 1 Central Sittingbourne: Regeneration Area aims to support the consolidation and expansion of Sittingbourne's position as the main retail, business, cultural, community and civic centre for the Borough. Policies for maintaining and enhancing the vitality and viability of Swale's town centres are set out in Policy DM 2 Proposals for main town centre uses, which also identifies the town centre boundary and primary retail frontage for Sittingbourne.
- 2.2 The Council's Local Plan Review has identified Sittingbourne town centre as the location for a major programme of regeneration that would see the delivery of approximately 850 additional dwellings in the town centre and fringes.

- 2.3 The Council declared a climate and ecological emergency in 2019. A primary aim is to encourage active and public travel therefore the pedestrian and cycling environment must be safe and attractive to users. The key objectives which are particularly relevant to this SPD are:
- 1 Pursue the Swale Strategic Air Quality Action Plan,
 - 2 Spatial and transport planning to make fewer journeys necessary,
 - 3 Improve public transport,
 - 4 Encourage active transport,
 - 5 Develop the infrastructure for electric vehicles, and
 - 6 Make space for nature.
- 2.4 The SPD provides more design quality detail than the local plan by setting out detailed objectives for retail, food and beverage (F&B), culture, leisure, community infrastructure, public space, heritage, the physical environment with regards movement, the economy including the creative economy and town centre living: identifying the physical responses and possible layouts; and the expected design standards.
- 2.5 A visioning workshop for Members was held in Spring 2020, facilitated by a consultant, and the findings form the basis for the Vision for the SPD
- 2.6 The SPD will guide regeneration in a way that:
- respects the heritage and culture of Sittingbourne;
 - Introduces a wider range of land uses and activity;
 - enables walking, cycling and inclusive access throughout the area;
 - strengthens local communities;
 - responds positively to the challenges of climate change;
 - within an integrated landscape strategy, introduces green spaces and trees; and
 - creates opportunities for private and public sector investment
- 2.7 A screening to determine whether a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is required was found unnecessary. The screening report has been issued to Historic England, Environment Agency and Natural England for approval.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 Much as the wider context of Sittingbourne Town Centre is important the SPD is focussed on areas with opportunities for change within the core town centre. The study boundary is illustrated on page 6 of the SPD in Appendix I.
- 3.2 The overarching Spatial Strategy for the SPD allows a consistent approach to deliver change over the long term and is crucial to shaping a successful place. Land uses, gateways, activity hubs and connections are integrated and complementary and are illustrated below on page 25 of the SPD in Appendix I.
- 3.3 The key physical moves are as follows:

- 1 The focus on the High street will be on improvements to existing heritage and public realm which are already underway, augmented with new trees within the high street and new green open spaces in close proximity, supported by new town centre living above and behind existing shops.
 - 2 St Michael's Road, as the key vehicular gateway of the town centre and currently lined with low density non-town centre uses, will be the setting for new mixed-use development to increase footfall to the high street.
 - 3 Central Avenue is already the community hub and this can be further clarified and expanded, encompassing existing and new facilities on available KCC and Swale Council land supported by new town centre living.
 - 4 With public realm improvements and new interpretation facilities, the Avenues of Remembrance can become visitor attractions in their own right.
 - 5 Lastly, in the long term, better connectivity to the town by bus, cycle and foot from Eurolink and Milton Creek, as well as from the southern residential district, will assist the liveliness of the town centre with increased footfall.
- 3.4 Delivery of the physical proposals over a timeframe of 10-15 years will ensure the realisation of the regeneration of Sittingbourne with the following opportunities:
1. To make an ambitious plan and find funding later, underpinned with clear branding provided by strong leadership.
 2. To bring the community together and along with the vision for the town with a particular focus on community involvement from the business and retail sector as well as the voluntary sector.
 3. The importance of public realm and to have shovel-ready projects with a mix of uses, for example identifying a location for the KCC S106 Sittingbourne Hub funding, plus the Bus Hub, with specific government funding, with a northern focus around Bourne Place and the Forum which should provide a catalyst for further development.

4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 It is being posited that covid has devastated high streets. Without a strategy to address the challenges faced by Sittingbourne, the Town Centre will not be able to satisfactorily serve its local community. The SPD provides the required plan of action providing certainty to communities and developers.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 Informal discussion with landowners, including KCC, have taken place but without any firm commitments given by either parties.
- 5.2 Formal consultation of the SEA Screening is taking place with Historic England, Environment Agency and Natural England.
- 5.3 The programme for developing the SPD has included:
- Initial discussion with Town Centre Members Group 19th May 2021 on initial draft document;
 - Further to a consultant based review on outstanding issues regarding changes to the Use Class Order the report taken to the Local Plan Panel in December 2021.
- 5.4 Community consultation has been programmed to take place in early 2022.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	The SPD has been prepared with the aim of delivering the spatial aims and objectives of the Corporate Plan. In particular it supports the Council's corporate priorities of: Building the right homes in the right places and supporting quality jobs for all (Priority 1) Investing in our environment and responding positively to global challenges (Priority 2) Tackling deprivation and creating equal opportunities for everyone (Priority 3)
Financial, Resource and Property	The SPD is being progressed through existing service plan commitments and costs are met through existing service plan budgets related to Local Plan preparation.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	The preparation of SPDs is prepared within a legal, regulatory and national policy framework.
Crime and Disorder	The SPD includes policies relating to design that aim to reduce crime and disorder.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	The SPD seeks to deliver sustainable development.
Health and Wellbeing	The SPD includes policies and proposals that seek to improve the health and wellbeing of our communities. This includes policies on matters such as increasing and improving open space, encouraging walking and cycling to the town centre etc.
Safeguarding of Children, Young	None identified at this stage.

People and Vulnerable Adults	
Risk Management and Health and Safety	Risk management of the process has been undertaken as part of the Council's wider risk register and risk management policies, procedures and practices.
Equality and Diversity	The need to address equality and diversity in the SPD has been a consideration throughout its development.
Privacy and Data Protection	SPD preparation has complied with privacy and data protection laws and regulations as required.

7 Appendices

- 7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:
- Appendix I: Sittingbourne Town Centre SPD: Pre-submission consultation draft.