

Extraordinary Sheppey Area Committee
08 February 2022, 6.30pm – 8.00pm, Sheerness East Working Men’s Club and
via MS Teams

Levelling-Up Fund – Introduction and Consultation

1. Purpose of this Report

- 1.1. Meeting attendees are invited to comment on the developing Levelling-Up Fund proposals as set in this report and the appended Consultation Pack. Specific areas of focus for comment are suggested in section 4.4.

2. Background – Levelling-Up Fund

- 2.1. The Levelling-Up Fund is a UK-wide £4.8bn infrastructure fund.
- 2.2. Local Authorities are categorised into three bands according to need for:
- economic recovery and growth
 - improved transport connectivity
 - regeneration

Swale has the highest priority status. This means Swale Borough Council has been allocated £125,000 capacity funding to develop a bid. These funds were received in October 2021.

- 2.3. Bids can be for up to £20m LUF investment, and match funding of at least 10% of the project value is strongly encouraged.
- 2.4. Delivery of LUF projects must conclude by March 2025.
- 2.5. Government has yet to confirm the submission and assessment deadlines for round 2 beyond announcing that the round will open in the spring. For the purposes of project planning, officers are assuming the fund will be launched on 1 March with bids expected by 15 April 2022.

3. Background – Swale project development

- 3.1. Swale’s Levelling-Up Fund bid has been discussed on a number of occasions with a range of ideas proposed for consideration. Officers and members reviewed the potential project ideas with a view to compatibility with the Levelling-Up Fund’s priority themes and delivery parameters.
- 3.2. The “Sheerness Revival” scheme (working title) is considered to offer the optimum fit with local need and the fund’s priorities. It has a particular advantage that Swale Borough Council own and control the majority of land which will undergo change and has strong relationships with stakeholders – so the project can be delivered at pace.

3.3. The project is targeting a wide range of outcomes, including improvements in health and wellbeing, education and skills, employment opportunities, community benefits, environmental enhancements and connectivity. The project has an overarching theme of placemaking, and three built elements:

- **Placemaking.** An overarching objective is connectivity between the sites targeted for investment, the High Street / town centre and the waterfront, bringing wider benefits for Sheppey, and delivering on its economic, skills, leisure and visitor economy potential. This could include environmental and landscape improvements which could also help address anti-social behaviour.

- **Beachfields.** This project centres on the opportunity presented by the possible demolition of the ageing indoor swimming pool complex and its relocation adjacent to the dry side leisure centre. The pool is nearing the end of its economic lifespan, and there are financial and environmental advantages to having both facilities co-located. The relocation will be accompanied by the introduction of additional leisure and commercial opportunities, which may include - subject to feasibility studies and consultation responses – attractions such as adventure golf, a bowling alley, outdoor five-a-side football pitches, and the conversion of the paddling pool to a splash pad. The opportunity to offer additional health facilities within the new footprint is being progressed. This could be a key feature of the new building and its community offer.

- **Sheppey College Expansion.** The Council-owned car park adjacent to Sheppey College is under-utilised and presents an opportunity for the College to expand and extend vocational provision, improving skills and education across Sheppey. The land value of the car park would represent a match funding contribution from Swale Borough Council.

- **Master's House.** The conversion of the workshop area to the rear of Master's House to studio workspace would complete the Master's House restoration scheme and secure a role for the House at the heart of the town centre and its employment offer, offering jobs and training opportunities. The Council's investment in Master's House in 22/23 will represent match funding.

3.3. The inclusion of each of these elements is subject to consultation, overall budget, and - where appropriate – formal endorsement of external partners.

4. Consultation

4.1. Consultation is a very important part of project development and bid success and Swale Borough Council are keen to hear from all interested members of the community.

4.2. Online consultation opened on 4 February and will be live until 25 February.

4.3. Consultation has been supported by press releases, direct invitations and a short social media campaign.

- 4.4.** Consultation questions focus on areas that will help the bid develop. We are seeking views in response to the following four questions:
- What would you like to see inside the new swimming pool building / refurbished leisure centre?
 - What would you like to see in the wider Beachfields footprint?
 - The proposed extension of Sheppey College could create new courses in engineering and creative industries, and a Junior College for 14-16 year olds to study technical and vocational subjects. Are there any other industry sectors and types of courses that could be considered?
 - How can the projects benefit the town centre, waterfront and beyond?

5. Appendices

- 5.1. Sheerness Revival – Consultation Pack February 2022.