

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Report of Deputy Chief Executive (Place)

To

Cabinet

On

25th June 2019

**Agenda
Item No.**

Report prepared by: Emma Cooney, Director of Regeneration
and Business Development

In-Depth Scrutiny Report – ‘Re-Imagining the Town Centre, in the Context of the Vision for Southend 2050’

Relevant Scrutiny Committee(s): Place Scrutiny and Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committees

Cabinet Member: Councillor K Robinson

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To present the report of the joint scrutiny project – ‘Reimagining the Town Centre in the context of the vision for Southend 2050’. The project report was agreed by Place and Policy and Resources Scrutiny committees in April 2019.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 **That the recommendations from the in depth scrutiny project, detailed at section 1 of the report, be agreed;**
- 2.2 **That a multi-organisation task and finish group be established in line with the principles set out in paragraphs 3.11-3.14 and that the Director of Regeneration and Business Development be authorised, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Business, Tourism and Culture to agree membership of the group.**

3. Background

- 3.1 The Place Scrutiny Committee at its meeting held on 9th July 2018 and the Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee at its meeting held on 12th July 2018, approved the suggestion for a joint in-depth study should be undertaken focussing on various aspects of the Town Centre, in the context of the vision for Southend 2050. (Minutes 112 and 146 refer respectively).
- 3.2 In the context of the Southend 2050 ambition, the main focus of the project was to:
- (i) Reimagine and explore what the future of the town centre might be. This will consider the purpose/function of the town centre, who it serves/could serve and its future in regards to:
- Potential implications of the use of the town centre changing over time on its use, physical layout and environment;

- It's look and feel - how people experience it; and
- It's role in achieving shared outcomes in relation to community, skills, culture, health, housing:
 - (ii) Consider the role of the Council (specifically) and partners (generally) in leading change as well as responding to it;
 - (iii) Identify the aspects of the town centre of the future that the Council can directly influence and those which partners have greater influence over (for example the future role of retail) so as to deliver the reimagined space and activity, and prioritising subsequent interventions;
 - (iv) Establish a framework to support the town centre's evolution ensuring a vibrant and attractive town centre at all stages of change;
 - (v) Establish perceptions and truths about the town centre and consider its future promotion to visitors, residents and investors;
 - (vi) Consider the resilience of the town centre through different scenarios and potential changes.

- 3.3 The town centre is a microcosm of the whole Borough and, as such, a broad range of issues could have been considered in relation to this project. In order to avoid divergence and keep the project to timetable a variety of matters were excluded from the outset as these were being dealt with via the specified processes which were already underway. These included:
- Transport and Parking;
 - Homelessness;
 - Community Safety;
 - Better Queensway;
 - Air Quality;
 - Street Cleansing;
 - Impact of current planning applications.
- 3.4 The Project Team comprised the following Members – Councillors: K Robinson (Chair), B Ayling, K Buck, N Folkard, J Garston, I Gilbert, D McGlone and D Nelson. Councillor C Mulroney also attended meetings of the project team.
- 3.5 Officer support was primarily provided by Emma Cooney (Director of Regeneration and Business Development) and Tim Row (Principal Democratic Service Officer) and additional support was provided from a range of services across the organisation and drew on additional expertise as required.
- 3.6 A "Reference Group" was also established to draw on the expertise, experience and ideas of a diverse group of people connected with town centres. The Reference Group was involved as the scope of the project was set, a mid-way review, and at the end before the report was finalised. The group's role was to sense check proposals, provide expert/sectoral advice, feedback and challenge.

- 3.7 The 2050 Ambition has five themes so evidence roundtables were held for each of these themes with a mix of external specialists and experts alongside Council officers from different disciplines.
- 3.8 An overview of all the evidence sessions held and attended can be found in **Appendix 1** of the final report.
- 3.9 During the course of the study, the Project Team had regard to a variety of publications including the Grimsey Review II, further town centre studies and publications such as the Timpson Review and Centre for Cities: City Centres Past, Present and Future February 2019. The Government also published its plan to support town centres in the autumn of 2018 including the £675m Future High Streets.
- 3.10 The conclusions and recommendations from the review are set out in Section 1 of the final project report. This was agreed on 8th and 10th of April 2019 by Place Scrutiny and Policy Resources Scrutiny Committees respectively (minutes 841 and 864 refer).
- 3.11 The need for a strategic, multi-organisation group to act as an ‘engine-room’ in planning for the long term of the town centre and acting as a catalyst for delivery has been identified through this work. In focussing on the medium-long term strategy and implementation such a group would complement, rather than duplicate, those already established which focus on the operation of the town.
- 3.12 It is proposed that the group be time limited with its priority being building on the findings of the project to establish a strategic approach and implementation plan for a reimagined town centre. This will be presented to the Council for consideration/adoption. In order to develop a plan which sets a new trajectory for the town centre the membership should include representatives of organisations which can bring new and different perspectives and well as key stakeholders and influencers.
- 3.13 The Council has submitted an Expression of Interest to the Future High Streets Fund in relation to the town centre. Should it be progressed to the next stage of assessment the group will have a key role in developing the business case for the final application. The announcement on the outcome of the expression of interest stage is due summer 2019 so preparation in anticipation of that should also be an early consideration of the group.
- 3.14 The size and make-up of the group should ensure that thought leaders, influencers, property and investment interests and users are represented without becoming unwieldy. It should be independently Chaired in recognition that it is a group for the town and that implementation will depend on relationship and collaboration across sectors and organisations.

4. Other Options

- 4.1 To note the report but not progress any of the recommendations. As the town centre features in the Southend 2050 ambition and outcomes this would be

detrimental to progressing delivery of that specific outcome and other related outcomes.

- 4.2 To reprioritise the recommendations in the report using different timescales or indicators.

5. Reasons for Recommendation

- 5.1. To support delivery of the Southend 2050 ambition and outcome that *“we have a fast evolving, reimagined and thriving town centre, with an inviting mix of shops, homes, culture and leisure opportunities.”*
- 5.2. The report is the result of an in-depth, robust project which has drawn on a range of different sources to understand best practice and specialist, expert insight and apply this to Southend. It has been supported and agreed by both Place and Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committees.

6. Corporate Implications

6.1. Contribution to the Southend 2050 Road Map

The project sought to reimagine the town centre in the context of Southend 2050 and has drawn on the feedback and focus given to the town centre in establishing the ambition and roadmap. It directly contributes to the outcome that *“we have a fast evolving, reimagined and thriving town centre, with an inviting mix of shops, homes, culture and leisure opportunities.”* It also contributes to a number of other related outcomes:

- *The variety and quality of our outstanding cultural and leisure offer has increased and we have become the first choice English coastal destination for visitors –* through the recognition of the opportunity for a greater cultural offer in the town centre and how that can shape and enhance experiences and reasons to visit.
- *Our streets and public spaces are clean and inviting –* through recommendations regarding enhancing the street scene, creating a space that residents and visitors want to spend time and which enables other events and activities which invite people into the town centre to take place.
- *People in all parts of the borough feel safe and secure at all times –* through the consideration of secure by design principles and Purple Flag criteria to ensure that new spaces are created to design out crime.
- *We are well on our way to ensuring that everyone has a home that meets their needs –* through the recognition that the town centre offers capacity for additional housing in a sustainable location which offers benefits to the residents and the wider town centre community.
- *We act as a Green City with outstanding examples of energy efficient and carbon neutral buildings, streets, transport and recycling –* through the recommendation that sustainable travel is further integrated into the town centre and greening the space is built into future design and investment.

- *The benefits of community connection are evident as more people come together to help, support and spend time with each other* – through the recognition that the town centre is increasingly a space for communities to meet and should be further developed on that basis.
- *A range of initiatives help communities come together to enhance their neighbourhood and environment* – through the recommendations that opportunities for volunteering, events and other activities are brought forward to bring communities together to enhance the town centre.
- *More people have active lifestyles and there are significantly fewer people who do not engage in any physical activity* – through the identification of the town centre as a space for play and improving people’s health and wellbeing.
- *Southend is a place that is renowned for its creative industries, where new businesses thrive and where established employers and others invest for the long term* – through the understanding of the role the creative sector can play in enlivening the town centre as well as growth in commercial space creating additional reasons for people to use the area.
- *Southend is a leading digital city with world class infrastructure* – through seeing how digital can be embraced to not only support retail but art, wayfinding and promotion.

6.2 Financial Implications

The total value of implementation of the recommendations has not been costed. Some could be delivered within existing resources as part of work underway to deliver the Southend 2050 ambition while others could be achieved through reprioritisation of existing resources. There are some actions which must involve partners and their resources. Some of the large, significant interventions would likely require additional funding through borrowing and/or grant funding. To that end an expression of interest has been submitted to the Government’s Future High Street Fund for the town centre. Notification as to whether it will be progressed to the second stage is timetabled for summer 2019.

Any proposals for additional investment and/or disinvestment will need to be considered as relevant as parts of outcome delivery plans and our outcome based budgeting approach, as part of Council budget setting and in year financial management.

6.3 Legal Implications

None at this time. In delivering individual recommendations the legal implications of each action would be considered.

6.4 People Implications

It is likely that delivery of the recommendations would require refocussing of officer time.

6.5 Property Implications

None at this time. Some of the recommendations do have property implications and the usual process would be followed at the appropriate time.

6.6 Consultation

The project drew on views and input from a number of different people, listed in **Appendix 1** of the project report including an external reference group. It also considered the Southend 2050 conversation feedback and views of the Youth Council.

6.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications

An Equalities Assessment has not been undertaken on the totality of the project report and individual assessments would need to be undertaken for the various projects and policy changes as part of their development.

6.8 Risk Assessment

A risk assessment has not been undertaken on the project report as, where appropriate, risk assessments would be undertaken in relation into the various interventions.

6.9 Community Safety Implications

The project excluded consideration of immediate community safety concerns but did explore how the longer term development of the town centre could reduce crime through its design and activation.

6.11 Environmental Impact

The project report includes recommendations regarding the environment such as greening of the town centre and supporting sustainable travel.

7. Background Papers

None.

8. Appendices

Project Report "Reimagining the Town Centre".