

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Report of Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director
(Growth and Housing)

To

Cabinet

On

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and Growth

Agenda
Item No.

Town Centre Update

Place Scrutiny Committee

Cabinet Member: Councillor Kevin Robinson

Part 1 (Public Agenda Item)

1. Purpose of Report

This report seeks to provide Cabinet with an update on activity supporting the evolution of the town centre.

2. Recommendations

That Members note the progress made towards delivery of the agreed actions of the joint scrutiny project (2018/19) set out in **Appendix 1**.

3. Background

3.1 The vibrancy and evolution of Southend town centre is a 2050 outcome under the Opportunity and Prosperity theme. In recognition of the focus on the town centres nationally and the local priority given to it through the 2050 conversations it has also been the subject of an in-depth scrutiny report.

3.2 There are a number of projects and investments underway in the town centre which seek to support its current and future vitality, these represent c£600m investment (including £500m Better Queensway, £20m Forum phase 2, £50m Seaway development, £8m LGF and £16.5m pier among others). Some of these are referenced later in the report while others are captured in the update on the scrutiny report found in **Appendix 1**.

3.3 The Place Scrutiny Committee at its meeting held on 9th July 2018 and the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee at its meeting held on 12th July 2018, agreed that 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).

- 3.4** The work undertaken by the project team, the reference group and contributors, was captured in a report which was received and agreed by Cabinet on 25th June 2019.
- 3.5** While agreeing the report and in the time since then good progress has been made on the actions included in the document with plans in place for further delivery over coming months.
- 3.6** The Cabinet report accompanying the scrutiny paper also sought agreement to establish a strategic town centre group. As a group independent of the Council a Chair has been appointed from among the stakeholder base and members of a core group ‘the engine room’ will convene for their first meeting on 17th December. A call for wider community and stakeholder involvement is then planned for early in 2020. This will include approaches to particular groups to ensure a diverse mix of residents, partners and stakeholders are involved.
- 3.7** It should also be noted that the purpose of the scrutiny project was to explore the longer term future, function and role of the town centre and as such a number of areas were excluded such as homelessness and community safety. These issues are included in an action plan which is monitored by the Community Action Group (CAG).
- 3.8** Further to the actions included in the scrutiny project there are a number of roadmap regeneration and investment projects which also directly contribute to the vibrancy and evolution of the town centre:
- Better Queensway
 - Seaways
 - Wheeled sports facility
 - Second phase of the Forum
 - Pier investment including improvements to the shore end entrance completed summer 2019, new activities and events and investment in the pavilion deck being considered.
- 3.9** The progress and delivery of these significant projects contributes to the town centre narrative and demonstrate the Council using its resources and assets to activate town centre through innovative partnership working.
- 3.10** Further, and as wider context, Southend’s town centre offer features as part of a significant piece of work across a partnership with the council and business community to develop a place marketing brand and refreshed website to present the town to various markets. Consumers, investors, students and developers will be market segments reached once the current place branding exercise is complete which should take place over the coming few months, refreshing the appeal and profile of destination Southend.
- 3.11** Other notable activity includes new partnership working between a social enterprise, the Council and the Victoria Shopping Centre in seeking to trial a Bouldering wall in the shopping centre. This seeks to generate footfall and offer a different model for physical activity in the town centre while delivering wider social value.

4. Scrutiny Report: Headline Achievements and Progress

4.1 **Appendix 1** provides an overview of all the progress made up-to and including the three months following Cabinet approval of the report. Within this there are a number of achievements which are of particular note because they enable and support multiple aspects of delivery.

4.2 Sunrise – contributes to scrutiny report recommendations 2.8, 3.1 and 3.6

4.3 The Sunrise Project is funded by Civitas, a Horizon 2020 strand of European funding. Working in seven locations across Europe, it aims to develop, implement, and facilitate co-learning about new, collaborative ways to address common urban mobility challenges at the urban district level. This is achieved through the development of ‘living labs’ – a co-creation approach integrating research and implementation processes.

4.4 This project is focussed on the area where London Road (from College Way) meets the High Street and into Victoria Circus.

4.5 An online consultation was undertaken during the summer and closes on 7th September. The results of which were shared with partners and stakeholders at the start of November and will inform the actions then implemented through the Southend Central Area Transport Scheme (S-CATS) funded by Local Growth Fund (below).

4.6 A small amount of money equating to €64k has also been secured to support implementation. This can be for anything from an event to a physical measure. How this will be spent is yet to be determined.

4.7 S-CATS – contributes to scrutiny report recommendations 2.8, 3.1 and 3.6

4.8 Southend Central Area Transport Scheme (S-CATS) is a £7m project is being fully funded by the Local Growth Fund through the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP).

4.9 Phase 1 has already been completed. Phase 2 is £2m public realm and streetscape improvement scheme along London Road (between Queensway and College Way) to make this an attractive gateway to Southend High Street.

4.10 The Sunrise project (above) has recently undertaken a borough-wide ‘vote’ as part of its co-production ethos. The result of this will shape what is finally delivered in the final phase of the project and is due to be fed back to Councillors and stakeholders at the start of November. Ongoing liaison with Hackney Carriages and local business partnerships is being undertaken to feed into these designs. The final options will be displayed at the end of November to gauge the popularity of the options through this engagement and an online survey. The results of this will help to decide what the final highway alignment will be before submission to the Traffic Regulation Working Party in January 2020.

- 4.11 Cool Towns – contributes to scrutiny report recommendations 2.8, 3.1, 3.4 and 5.6**
- 4.12** The Cool Towns project is funded through the Interreg 2 Seas Programme from Europe. In light of Brexit it is useful to confirm this funding is secure for the duration of the project. In 2018 a partnership, including the Council, was successful in securing £4.6m to explore how urban areas can build resilience to heat stress within their city or town. The project seeks to increase the capacity of small and medium-sized cities in the 2 Seas region to adapt to the heat-related effects of climate change through interventions in spatial development and urban design in public and private space.
- 4.13** Cool Towns is connected with the Town-Centre Redevelopment Improvement Project (TRIP – detailed below), which focuses on improving local access to the town centre, bus interchange and rail station. Together the projects will enhance the overall design and application by introducing additional green infrastructure that would help mitigate issues relating to heat stress in Southend, as well as offering a safe and more welcoming space for local residents to access.
- 4.14** A pilot site, where York Road joins the High Street, was selected and is intended to: provide a site with street furniture to mitigate the impact of heat stress on residents and visitors, easily accessible from any point of the High Street. Work on the pilot site is expected to start in Q1 2020.
- 4.15** A range of interventions which support the scrutiny project’s recommendations are proposed including:
- Additional trees planted in planters with seating at the base of them
 - Introduction of a herb garden in low rise planters which will be maintained by Project 49
 - Installation of Zero Mass Water’s SOURCE Hydropanels which are self-sufficient apparatus, producing clean and usable water with zero carbon footprint and will be used to water the herb garden planters
- 4.16 TRIP – contributes to scrutiny report recommendations 1.4, 1.8, 2.8 and 3.6**
- 4.17** Southend Town Centre Redevelopment and Improvement Project (TRIP) is funded by the Department for Transport’s National Productivity Investment Fund (NPIF).
- 4.18** £1.1m has been secured from SELEP and will be spent on public realm improvements on some of the side roads where they meet the High Street. There is a possibility that some could also be spent on the footways on Western Road, Clarence Street and Clarence Road.
- 4.19** All sites will receive urban realm improvements including additional provisions for loading, taxis and disabled parking, footway treatments, upgraded street furniture as well as sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS) measures to provide flood relief through SPONGE (also a European funded project).

4.20 Local Growth Fund Town Centre – contributes to scrutiny report recommendations 1.6, 2.3, 3.2 and 4.3

4.21 Local Growth Fund (LGF) is awarded through the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) as part of its Growth Deal with Government. As the end of the initial Growth Deal period (31 March 2021) approaches a pot of ‘recycled’ funding has been made available where projects have underspend or realised they won’t be able to spend within the required period. An initial submission was made in 2018 for some funding to support Southend town centre which has now reached the top of the list to be supported.

4.22 At the SELEP Accountability Board on 15th November the business case for this project was approved by board members following analysis by the independent technical evaluator which found it to offer high value for money supported by a strong strategic case. The total £1.5m is not yet available so the Council is to be awarded an initial LGF allocation of £867,708 and the remaining balance of £632,292 will be allocated to the project, in line with the agreed prioritised pipeline of LGF projects, as further LGF funding become available as a result of funding being returned to SELEP.

4.23 A number of interventions are proposed as part of this project to support the revitalisation of Southend town centre and delivery of some of the actions identified in the scrutiny report including:

- installation of footfall cameras which provide vital management information about the ‘busyness’ of the town centre which is information often asked for by potential investors and funders as well as informing local understanding of the town centre;
- a shop front grant scheme to assist improvements to facades; a 0% loan to improve properties and bring vacant space back in to use;
- improved wayfinding, particularly at the two train stations; and
- activating vacant units

Preliminary work for is now beginning with a view to undertaking stakeholder engagement in February, May 2020 seeing the procurement started alongside both the loan and grant scheme launched, and the project delivered by March 2021.

5. Corporate Implications

5.1 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 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.*
- *Key regeneration schemes, such as Queensway, seafront developments and the Airport Business Park are underway and bringing prosperity and job opportunities to the borough*

5.2 Financial Implications

The projects listed in section 4 are being delivered through external funding secured from European and UK funding sources.

The Council submitted an expression of interest to the Future High Streets Fund which was supported by a range of partners but was not successful in the recent funding round. Government has committed to establishing a Town Task Force, which will be delivered by the Institute of Place Management, and who will support towns in their applications to a future round of the funding. Southend's submission has already been shared with them in order to commence a conversation at an appropriate time.

Through the 2050 business case process for the period 2020-2024 submissions are being made which, if agreed, will also support the delivery of some of the actions.

There are some actions which must involve partners and their resources.

5.3 Legal Implications

There are no additional legal considerations at this time.

5.4 People Implications

Delivery of the actions to date has been undertaken within existing capacity

5.5 Property Implications

There are no additional property implications at this time.

5.6 Consultation

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

Individual projects have undertaken further consultation such as Sunrise which is predicated on community engagement and co-production.

5.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications

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

5.8 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.

5.9 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.

Individual actions also have community safety considerations such as new trees not blocking CCTV line of sight or creating space which attracts anti-social behaviour.

5.10 Environmental Impact

The project report includes recommendations regarding the environment such as greening of the town centre and supporting sustainable travel. Delivery of the actions noted in this report are intended to have a positive impact on the environment.

6. Background Papers

Joint Scrutiny Project – The Future of the Town Centre 2018/19 report

7. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Scrutiny Project: Summary table of actions and progress to date