

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Report of Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director
Growth & Housing and the Executive Director Adults &
Communities

To

Cabinet

On

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Report prepared by: Emma Cooney, Director of Regeneration
& Growth and Scott Dolling, Director of Culture & Tourism

Agenda
Item No.

Culture-led Regeneration and the Town Centre

Relevant Scrutiny Committee(s) Place
Cabinet Members: Cllr Gilbert & Cllr Mulronev
Part 1 (Public Agenda Item)

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The report sets out the planned next steps towards a reimagined and thriving town centre and the transformational role of culture led regeneration in delivering this and other outcomes across the borough. Progress to date is also included by way of context and foundation for next steps.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the principles of the Culture Vision (Appendix 1) are adopted to shape and inform culture-led regeneration;
- 2.2 That progress of outcomes contributing towards a reimagined and thriving town centre are noted;
- 2.3 That the design plans for the LGF funded public realm external works at the Forum (Elmer Square) are agreed; and
- 2.4 That development of a visual 'masterplan lite' for the town centre is progressed with a culture-led regeneration focus and that £125,000 is set aside to support this work and is funded from the Covid Recovery Reserve.

3. Background

- 3.1 The future of town centres is a well debated subject nationally and has consistently been a priority in Southend in recent years. Supporting the continuing evolution of Southend town centre was highlighted through the 2050 conversations and is reflected in an outcome in the Opportunity and Prosperity theme. This led to the town centre being the focus of a joint scrutiny project in

2018-19 and a Town Centre summit in September 2018. As part of the central area it is also covered by the Southend Central Area Action Plan (SCAAP) which gives detailed consideration to how and where regeneration and growth can sustainably be accommodated.

- 3.2** The town centre is a microcosm of the borough with nearly all activities and elements of life that you find across Southend also found and required in the central area – places to live, work, play, learn and visit, alongside health provision, cultural assets and green spaces – in line with the principles of the walkable neighbourhood. Additionally, it is the borough’s primary retail area, and since it enjoys direct connection with the central seafront and is home to stations on both train lines is also one of the busiest areas during the visitor season. As such investment and intervention to improve and enhance the town centre can deliver new homes, skills, employment, increased year-round local spend, a sense of wellbeing, connection and local pride, and be a catalyst for attracting further investment. Some of these outcomes will be sought to be achieved through the proposed Levelling-Up Fund (LUF) bid set out in the accompanying LUF report (report number 21/010) and all of which will be principles for the masterplan lite proposed in this report.
- 3.3** When the Covid-19 pandemic hit in early 2020 the town centre was swiftly recognised by the Council as a priority area and featured as one of the Council’s 6 recovery priorities.
- 3.4** The pandemic has had a significant impact on the town centre with periods of closure and restriction. It has accelerated some existing trends, such as online retail which some experts suggest has leapt forward by ten years; introduced some new trends which are temporary and others which may become more permanent as people and businesses settle into a blend of time in the office and at home.
- 3.5** For a seaside destination like Southend, the role of a broader cultural offer supports a year round visitor economy and can boost footfall. The resulting opportunity for growth has even greater resonance with some of our most deprived wards in the same central area,
- 3.6** Southend’s Culture Vision (Appendix 1) is a key strategy that has also developed over the last year having consulted and collaborated extensively with our creative sector and residents. The vision has five overarching themes which are supported by a set of underpinning values. These themes and values have been co-developed and support the council’s wider social and economic outcomes outlined in the Southend 2050 ambition
- 3.7** In September 2020 the Council, with South Essex College, took the difficult decision to not progress with the Forum 2 build project in the town centre as a result of the pandemic on finances. However, the Council committed to developing an options appraisal to inform Southend’s approach to culture-led regeneration and deliver against the identified outcomes recognising the role and impact of culture and the creative sector. This work was led by Focal Point Gallery, the region’s only contemporary arts gallery and national portfolio organisation (NPO) for the Arts Council. The findings of this work are set out later

in the report. An extensive ASELA commissioned study into the regional opportunities for cultural regeneration undertaken by METAL, also an Arts Council NPO based in Southend, has further supported evidence into the options appraisal.

3.8 Southend's creative industries have capacity to grow and further support the economy. The sector does need investment in infrastructure to realise its potential however which has been evidenced in recent studies. Engagement with arts and culture is proven to benefit the lives of residents and encourage visitors to Southend. It is a powerful route to support community cohesion, wellbeing and mental health, and pride in a community.

3.9 The economic impact of culture is also well documented with recent reports highlighting headlines such as:

- For every £1 in turnover directly generated by the arts and culture industry, an additional £1.24 in output is supported in the wider economy.
- For every 1 job directly created by the arts and culture industry, an additional 1.65 jobs are supported in the wider economy.
- Across the UK the sector is set to grow to £15.2 billion by 2025;¹
- Creative industries are the fastest growing sector in the UK economy and have a clear role in economic recovery.
- Jobs in the creative sector are less likely to be automated than many other areas.
- Creative industries drive and unlock innovation, deliver significant social impact, and invest heavily in the regeneration of communities ²

3.10 Cultural and creative programmes also bring benefits and opportunities for residents and new visitors alike. DCMS investment of £4.3m from the Culture Development Fund has ensured that culture-led regeneration is underway across the Estuary with the Creative Estuary programme. The Creative Estuary programme aims to develop the Estuary as an internationally important hub for the Creative & Cultural Industries, with Southend as an important 'Creative Cluster' within the region, providing investment, jobs and training, creative programming, place making activities and branding, infrastructure improvements. As part of this, the Estuary 21 Festival has served to celebrate specific locations and histories that are often overlooked around the South Essex and North Kent coastline, which can lead to longer-term regeneration opportunities. This project leveraging in significant external investment is jointly presented by METAL, based in Southend and features many other Southend arts organisations including Focal Point Gallery. One of the sites for Estuary 21, Gunners Park in Shoeburyness, highlighting the unique heritage of this part of the Borough bringing new

¹ Centre for Economic and Business Research (CEBR) published September 2020 - reference for bullet points 1-3

² Research undertaken by the Creative Industries Federation - reference for bullet points 4-6

audiences to the area. There are developed plans to restore the former battery gun store as a Heritage Centre to become a permanent venue.

- 3.11** There is therefore a strong case for employing a culture-led regeneration approach to the town centre. The creative industries are a proven tool for stimulating local economic development and regeneration. This sector is people focused and applies to social and physical infrastructure. It has the potential to support a new mixed ecology for the town centre, sustaining retail alongside the delivery of new workspaces, homes and cultural leisure activities as well as developing a sense of pride and community cohesion, improving environmental, health and deprivation outcomes.
- 3.12** Southend already enjoys a rich and diverse creative sector with organisations and businesses of all sizes and disciplines, and so there is a strong foundation to cultivate and grow this important sector for the local economy. Within the town centre area there is significant opportunity to use culture in its broader regeneration context to support economic growth and underpin the community as it develops. Milton, Victoria and Kursaal wards are among our most deprived and will all benefit from the regeneration opportunities. The town centre footprint for the masterplan lite outlined in section 5, will be determined through that work drawing on consultation feedback.

4. Outcome delivery to date

- 4.1** Despite the restrictions and challenges the pandemic has brought, good progress has been made in progressing outcome delivery and preparing for the next phase, both by the Council and partners. This section of the report provides an update on work undertaken and the outcomes achieved and enabled.

Delivering Economic Growth

- 4.2** There is a wide variety of interventions enabling business adaptation and growth, employment opportunities, and supporting the evolution of the town centre. These include Better Queensway and Seaway Leisure as two major projects in the town centre which collectively represent over £600m investment in the borough including some £20m of Government funding. Their construction and activation are forecast to create c1,500 jobs, upto 1760 homes, c25,000sqm commercial, leisure and creative floorspace, and improved public realm and space to dwell north and south of the High Street. Both projects are set to significantly increase footfall in the town centre as more people make it their home and leisure destination.
- 4.3** The vibrancy of the town centre is being supported utilising funding from South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP). Vacant town centre premises, both at street level and above, can benefit from 0% loans³ to be brought back into use and the Council is also looking to activate an empty unit with culture led activities as a pilot working to find a sustainable business model. Grant funding has also been invested in data analytics to better understand how the town centre is being

³ <https://www.southend.gov.uk/business-1/town-centre-interventions-project/3?documentId=1055&categoryId=100002>

used and will provide a more robust and detailed data set than the proxies currently in place. This supports the Council's commitment to making data driven policy decisions and therefore signals better outcomes for such major investments made by the Council as well as data which can help to support wider investment decisions.

Victoria Shopping Centre

4.4 In December 2020 the Council took the decision to purchase the Victoria Shopping Centre recognising its future regeneration benefits and the strategic landholding it offered in helping to shape the future of the town centre. Feedback from the commercial market has indicated an increased confidence in Southend as a result with this, and other projects such as Better Queensway, Roots Hall and Fossetts Farm and Seaway Leisure being referenced as reasons to invest. In the short term the Council has set out to drive up footfall and occupancy in the Victoria Centre. The hospital blood testing service has taken a unit on the ground floor with 5 other new lets agreed. The Council is advancing discussions with potential occupiers which are at various stages. This presents new employment opportunities as well as business growth. The Council is actively looking at:

- required short-term capital investment needed;
- working with retailers (and all commercial tenants across the portfolio) as restrictions are released to ensure that opportunities to trade safely are optimised and financial commitments can be addressed.
- the physical relationship between the Victoria Centre and the first phase of Better Queensway including the bridge over Chichester Road;
- Options to improve the centre car park, to consider electric vehicle infrastructure and improve energy efficiency/reduce carbon impact;
- potential investments in the elevations and immediate public realm;
- to what extent a significant Council and wider public-sector occupancy within the centre could help to reposition the Victoria Centre, to help drive footfall both within the centre and into the wider town centre area and to what extent this could unlock further opportunities in other locations to support the Council in meeting a wide range of Southend 2050 outcome

4.5 The acquisition of the Centre provides the opportunity for the Council to review town centre parking provision and its previous commitment in relation to developing a multi-storey carpark at Tylers Avenue. It is intended that this review will be included as part of the masterplan lite set out in this paper.

Making more of Culture

4.6 Southend's Culture Vision (appended) underlines our 2050 ambitions as well as providing a framework for key strategic plans outlined in this report. Several key themes have emerged from the wide engagement that inform the aspirations for culture led regeneration.

4.7 Recognising the pride it brings to Southend and the significant social, economic, and wellbeing benefits it offers, cultural themes have played a significant role in the place branding project which was recently completed. The purpose of a new

place brand is to reflect a more confident, contemporary and creative place, and to 'position' the entire place as one 'city' with many diverse and distinct offers – and to 'sell' it to not just potential visitors, but to those who live, study and work here both now and in the future. It has also established a set of core values and behaviours that have been developed to inspire and influence strategy, policy, marketing and decision making.

4.8 The Cultural Vision engagement also highlights the importance of heritage and supports recent investment decisions around Southend Pier and underpins the need for ongoing investment in our key cultural spaces in the town centre such as the Beecroft and Central Museum.

4.9 A significant piece of work assessing the need and opportunity for the creative sector and culture-led regeneration has been undertaken in the 6 months leading up to April 2021. This options appraisal paves the way for the next phases of investment, partnership and to shape culture-led regeneration. It has been informed by extensive consultations, surveys and desk-top research. It has re-established the requirements of local residents and the creative industries in South Essex in support of the 2050 outcomes to maximise the potential of cultural and creative facilities in Southend and its leading role in the wider South Essex region.

4.10 Specific outcomes identified through the options appraisal are to develop the central section of Southend High Street as a cohesive arts and education 'quarter'. Building on the success of the Forum partnership model with academic and public uses it could capitalise on the potential of the creative industries as integral to a future mixed-use economy, with enhanced community benefits within the Town Centre. This would increase opportunities for residents, visitors and businesses to grow the local economy and improve the quality of life. Currently this middle area has a significant number of empty or underused properties and is neglected in appearance. The benefits in regenerating the central High Street area as a cohesive arts and education 'quarter' include:

- Create a new identity and economic focus for the central area of Southend High Street, which is being vacated by retailers and therefore in decline.
- Crime reduction through bringing underused buildings and public realm into alternative use.
- Community facilities with dedicated use for residents of the Southend Central Wards (the most deprived wards in Southend). Would support public health outcomes particularly around Mental Health.
- Provide the infrastructure for new skills development programmes and well-being activities through arts and culture targeted at deprived residents.
- Create economic growth and local market for the creative industries in Southend (who currently have to export their business or procure services from outside the Borough). The creative industries are an important sector in Southend and South Essex, currently without sufficient production spaces and public venues.

- These would encourage more footfall with visitors, and residents attracted to use the town centre, thereby encouraging additional spend in existing retail and hospitality.
- Create new pathways into employment through specific facilities and a 'safe space' for young people (age 14 – 25) to engage with the skills development outside of formal education (see LGA Review).
- The development of Focal Point Gallery (FPG) as the only dedicated public contemporary arts venue in South Essex and Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation to enhance and grow its offer. Investment in equivalent facilities elsewhere have proven social and economic benefits.
- Specific facilities and a 'safe space' for young people (age 14 – 25) to engage with the skills development outside of formal education and create new pathways into employment.
- Kick start and enable the growth of the Night Time economy.

4.11 The findings suggest that some of these benefits could be achieved by 1) remodelling of underused areas of the current Forum building and external square will increase the use of these assets, particularly for skills development and cultural activities and 2) identifying underused properties for creative sector uses. These findings and the consultation informing them will be used to develop the masterplan lite described in section 5.

Green City

4.12 The Council has declared a climate change emergency and adopted its Green City Action Plan which sets out the actions which will be delivered to become a Green City. Active steps are being taken across the borough, including the town centre, to effect change and progress towards the commitments made. In the town centre specific greening and energy projects are being implemented alongside changes to enable people using the town centre to walk and cycle, all of which have been supported by external grant and/or commercial funding enabling more to be delivered.

4.13 The Green City Action Plan includes a focus on the actions the Council can take to improve the energy performance of its own estate. Grant funding is being used to explore the ability to generate and supply low carbon energy, providing cheaper energy and reducing the pressure on the existing power grid. An assessment is currently taking place on Victoria Shopping Centre following the Council's purchase of the site, in order to identify a sustainable low carbon solution that drives performance and cost improvements.

4.14 Another Green City Action Plan focus is on building climate resilience across Southend which includes prioritisation of greening and enhancing green and open spaces in Southend. Further grant funding is supporting delivery of more plants, trees and greenery into the town centre to reduce heat stress and offer a safer and more welcoming space for residents and visitors. Additional greening is

being delivered through the Better Queensway project with 190 news trees, and 7,000 sqm of new park and green space. Better Queensway is also enabling the shift to sustainable travel with 1,400m of new cyclepaths and EV charging supporting modern, sustainable town centre living.

Improving the look and feel and feeling safe

4.15 Local feedback and national research continues to highlight the importance of good quality, well maintained, safe and attractive public spaces in encouraging people to make good use of them. Over the last year public spaces have also become more important for those who don't have a private garden or courtyard and in supporting people's mental and physical wellbeing.

4.16 £750,000 grant funding from the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) is being used to develop and implement the first phases of a design to enhance the public realm between the Elmer Square, Southend Central Station and the High Street. The design, found at appendix 2 is recommended for approval through this report. The vision is to create a welcoming and attractive place in the heart of Southend which enhances connectivity between venues and places of interest; and is part of the findings of the options appraisal (as set out in paragraph 4.9). It has been developed using the same co-design principles as the area where London Road meets the High Street with engagement from a wide range of stakeholders including Forum Management Limited Board, Focal Point Gallery Advisory Group, BID, South University of Essex, C2C Rail and South Essex College. The big screen remains a key focus for the space and therefore we have used the concept of cinema thinking back to the previous use of the surrounding area in the 1920s to feature:

- Raised seating lawns reflecting the traditional layout of seating blocks and isles in a theatre
- A sense of green space, trees and quality materials
- A natural seaside themed play area with specialist tactile stimulation
- Food and beverage with plenty of seating opportunity
- Stage area for arts, culture and performances
- Open space for events, markets and exhibitions
- Community garden, sculptures and art to promote skills and learning
- Lighting to connect corridors, raise interest and reduce crime
- A common material palette to promote diversity of use
- Wayfinding that creates interest and promotes connectivity
- Removal of barriers and clutter to promote an open, welcome environment.

4.17 Further funding will be required to implement this vision in full and these works may form part of a future town centre Levelling-Up Fund (LUF) bid which is referred to in an accompanying report.

4.18 Improved public realm has also been delivered in a number of streets adjoining the High Street including where London Road meets the High Street. The new design, to be completed August 2021, will encourage and enable pedestrians to move more freely throughout the space which will be enhanced

with planters, benches, modern paving and improved wayfinding. New cycle parking will also support the shift to sustainable travel while new street lighting and CCTV will improve safety and security, as well as a replacement automated bollards system and other security measures that will enable close control over vehicular access to the High Street, making for a safer and more pleasant visitor experience. The designs also incorporate sustainable urban drainage to assist with water management.

- 4.19** In addition to the investment in public realm, grant funding is currently available⁴ to match fund business investment in external shop renovations in terms of design, cleanliness and safety. This seeks to help businesses make their premises more attractive to draw greater footfall while also helping to improve the general appearance of the town centre.

Active & involved / participation

- 4.20** Given the complexity of, and interest in the town centre it is not surprising that driving change in the town centre is often brought about through partnership with stakeholders, funders, partners and residents.

- 4.21** The Council has been successful in securing funding from a range of sources in relation to the town centre indicative of the robust articulation of need and delivery and strong partnership arrangements with funders. This totals over £30m from a range of partners including Homes England, the South East Local Enterprise Partnership and Department for Transport. This is in addition to the commercial investment secured through partnerships with the likes of Swan Housing Association and Turnstone Estates.

- 4.22** The Safer Southend Stakeholder Group, comprising local business representatives, council representatives and other organisations including Police, was established in response to the pandemic to plan for and support safe reopenings in the town centre, seafront and across the borough. This group has shaped the spend of the of Reopening High Streets Safely Fund, including the 'Imagining a New Future' works which will be presented by Focal Point Gallery as banners along Southend High Street, seen from Victoria Circus to Pier Hill 2021. The group is now looking at the Welcome Back Fund, which includes additional funds specifically for coastal resorts and will enable a positive response to the various economic impacts of the pandemic in Southend. The £228k fund for 2020/2021 will help to prepare for a greater number of visitors over the coming months by improving the look and feel of the High Street and main shopping areas across the borough, supporting events, and other initiatives to help to boost footfall and encourage people back into the High Streets. A plan of activities and interventions that the funding would be spent on has now been submitted to Government for approval. This includes activation at the top of the High Street, events support, and communication and publicity.

⁴ <https://www.southend.gov.uk/business-1/town-centre-interventions-project#:~:text=The%20Shop%20Front%20Renovation%20Scheme,%2C%20shop%20branding%2C%20and%20lighting.>

- 4.23** Work with existing partnerships, such as the Southend Business Improvement District (BID) and the Engineroom, has continued with their involvement in different areas of focus. The Engineroom, which was established following the in-depth scrutiny project, has continued to engage with some potential developers in the background while energy has been focused on support and reopening. The Southend BID is currently in its second 5 year term and has played a key role in responding to the impacts of the pandemic on businesses in the town centre, as well as regular ongoing work enabling public realm improvements to be identified and quickly put in place. The BID, together with other stakeholders, participated in the in-depth Scrutiny project in 2018-19 and the High Street summit in 2018. The actions arising from the summit have been completed with any new issues related to the areas of focus now picked through existing groups such as the Community Action Group (CAG).
- 4.24** Over the last year, the Southend Creative and Cultural Network (SCCN) has been established to enable creatives to connect and come together to create new opportunities to maximise the potential of creative Southend as distinctive location which attracts and develop skilled workers and residents with enriched lives. They have been involved with work to date and will be engaged with the masterplan development. In developing the options appraisal extensive consultation has taken place with individuals and organisations focusing on the needs of people, to then inform the development of physical assets. The combined feedback led to the creation of user profiles which any new development should look to facilitate.
- 4.25** Concrete Culture has developed as a successful new residents collective in the last year. Their focus is on the reactivation of the Kursaal with culture-led uses and is therefore a partnership with whom further collaboration is planned. Concrete Culture have undertaken extensive public consultation in the town about the building's role and future uses. The second survey has recently been launched and will complete at the end of June and is seeking to develop greater insight in to demand for particular facilities/offerings/opportunities in the future. Culture-led regeneration plans for the High Street would be developed in tandem with plans for the Kursaal to ensure the facilities provided and business plans are complementary rather than in competition. The involvement of grass roots creative and cultural practitioners was another need identified from the Culture Vision discovery and new networks to support the sector have been introduced in the last few months.

5 Next Steps

- 5.1** The options appraisal and Culture Vision principles for culture-led regeneration provide a framework and focus for deriving the benefits set out in paragraph 4.9. They have also helped to inform the design for Elmer Square which, if approved, the first phases will be delivered during 2021/22 with grant and/or capital programme funding to be sought to deliver the remaining phases. If implemented this project will support a number of the recommendations from the scrutiny report 'Reimagining the town centre'. Specifically it will improve feelings of safety, increase footfall in an area of the town centre which has seen much investment

in the Forum, increase dwell time in the centre and energise one of the key squares in the town centre by making the space multi-functional.

5.2 The masterplan lite, to be developed over the next 9 months, will provide an actionable framework for short, medium, and long term investment and delivery which supports a continually evolving and thriving town centre based on the principles of a walkable neighbourhood. It will recognise that intervention and investment in the projects identified through the options appraisal set out at 5.4, the next phases of the Elmer Square design, and other projects which the masterplan work sets out as delivering positive outcomes for the town centre. It will recognise that delivery will not only be by the Council but a range of partners and commercial investors and will set out the case for their investment as well as provide the context and information for funding bids by the Council. It will highlight the potential of the town centre and draw on stakeholders, existing partnerships, such as the Engineroom and Southend BID, and Southend's vibrant creative sector – from grassroots organisations to well established multi-area businesses, to inform the work and its delivery.

5.3 It will be a short, focused piece of work which will build on the work already completed and will deliver:

- A set of clear ambitions for the town centre with a strong spatial, visual element;
- A framework for improvements in the short, medium and longer term taking account of the principles set down in the SCAAP and existing initiatives/plans such as the Green City Action Plan;
- A document which can be used as a prospectus to help guide future investment, funding bids and new inward investment into the area by all landowners including the private sector, the Council and other partners/stakeholders;

5.4 A clear sense of buy-in from the stakeholders involved in the town centre. The options appraisal identified the opportunity to bridge the gap between the needs of the creative sector and the disadvantageous appearance of vacant buildings in the central area of the High Street through looking to secure funding, partners or attracting commercial investors to deliver:

- Production and workshops space to support the creative industries but also community activity and skills development;
- Specific facilities and a 'safe space' for young people (in particular age 0 – 5 and age 14 – 18) to engage with the creative industries outside of formal education;
- Dedicated retail venues or markets for local arts and crafts;
- Project spaces to develop and present artworks or projects;

- Café/restaurant/bar to contribute revenue for the above and contribute to the night-time economy;
- Public realm improvements including public art commissions to reflect Southend as a creative and unique place.

The principles and findings of the Culture Vision, options appraisal and the Elmer Square design will be woven into the masterplan.

- 5.5** The masterplan lite will be developed alongside the new Local Plan ensuring read across and making best use of resident and stakeholder input to inform all areas of work. It will also be undertaken in tandem with the development of a bid to the second round of the Levelling-Up Fund (LUF), creating a framework and evidence base against which the bid will be set. A report brought in parallel with this paper (report number 21/010) sets out the commitment to make a bid to LUF for a package of measures driven by culture-led regeneration in the town centre. The masterplan will not only provide a strong context for the LUF bid but the mix of interventions to be included in the bid will be drawn from this work, taking into account the deliverability and costs, and benefits and outcomes.

6 Other Options

- 6.1** Members could decide not to progress with the masterplan lite work and embedding of culture-led regeneration in the town centre and more widely across the borough. This would reduce the likelihood of the benefits set out in paragraph 4.9 being realised, a lack of focus for investment and development in the town centre and the absence of a framework for the corresponding Levelling-Up Fund bid and any subsequent funding applications.

- 6.2** Members could also decide not to progress with the landscaping of Elmer Square in line with the plans appended. This design has been produced in discussion with the College, University and Focal Point Gallery amongst others so alternatives would require further consultation and would risk undermining the contributions and input to date. This would result in the square remaining in its current form and the need to negotiate the reallocation of the LGF funding prior to its end date or handing the funding back which would be to the detriment of Southend and have a reputational implication.

7 Reasons for Recommendations

- 7.1** Despite the global pandemic good progress has been made on town centre projects. They are often considered individually rather than as a complete picture so the reports seeks to bring them together to articulate the range of interventions in relation to the outcomes they are collectively delivering while forming the building blocks for next steps. The Options Appraisal has also reaffirmed the need to place this work within a masterplan with culture-led regeneration principles to avoid projects being developed in isolation or competition.

- 7.2** The masterplan lite will set out an ambition and principles for growth and investment in the town centre. This will provide a framework for funding bids and a tool for securing commercial investment in areas which resonate with Southend and help to deliver agreed outcomes.
- 7.3** As plans for the Thames Estuary Production Corridor progress in other areas of the region, Southend is in danger of missing out without clear and committed plans for significant cultural and creative regeneration projects. These recommendations will place the Council in a position to take advantage of new funding as it becomes available to support recovery and economic growth.

8 Corporate Implications

- 8.1** Contribution to the Southend 2050 Road Map
A number of roadmap projects are included in this report such as Better Queensway, the Local Plan and the town centre itself. 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:
- 8.1.1** *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 – these plans will service cultural provision currently lacking to increase the offer, and through a town master plan position Southend as a major cultural coastal destination.*
- 8.1.2** *Our streets and public spaces are valued and support the mental and physical wellbeing of residents and visitors – through investment in the public realm in the town centre to improve people’s experience of being there and giving greater reason to dwell.*
- 8.1.3** *People in all parts of the borough feel safe and secure at all times – through the consideration of secure by design principles throughout implementation and Purple Flag criteria to ensure that new spaces are created to design out crime.*
- 8.1.4** *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.*
- 8.1.5** *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, in jobs and skills, and in growth of commercial space creating additional reasons for people to use the area.*
- 8.1.6** *Key regeneration schemes, such as Queensway, seafront developments and the Airport Business Park are underway and bringing prosperity and job opportunities to the borough*

8.1.7 *Even more Southenders agree that people from different backgrounds are valued and get on well together* – the options appraisal has undertaken extensive consultation to ensure recommendations create spaces that are open to all, where people from all background can meet and learn through culture and creatively.

8.2 Financial Implications

8.2.1 A requirement for £125,000 to build on the work to date and develop a masterplan lite is proposed to be funded from the Covid Recovery Reserve. Having such a framework and vision in place should serve to attract further external funding and commercial investment in the town centre in the future in areas which contribute towards outcome delivery, such as the Levelling-Up Fund bid set out elsewhere on this cabinet agenda.

8.3 Legal Implications

8.3.1 Any procurement related to the development of the masterplan will be done in compliance with the organisation's corporate procurement rules.

8.3.2 Any changes to the Forum Building and external area will need to be approved by the Forum Management Board. This process has already commenced for the external works.

8.4 People Implications

8.4.1 Delivery of the actions to date have been undertaken within existing resource and partnerships. The next stage will continue to make use of those skills and capacity while also drawing on external expertise.

8.5 Property Implications

8.5.1 Any changes to the Forum Building and external area will need to be approved by the Forum Management Board. This process has already commenced for the external works.

8.6 Consultation

8.6.1 Engagement, co-production, co-design and partnership have been key tenants of interventions in the town centre and have included the partnerships set out in the report. The 2018/19 scrutiny project drew on the insight and experiences of a range of stakeholders as well as making use of the 2050 conversations feedback while Sunrise was predicated on community engagement and co-production. The principles of the new shop front grants and 0% loans were tested with the business community and wide consultation has been undertaken in relation to the major projects at both a project and a planning level.

8.6.2 Extensive consultation has taken place to understand the impact of the halt of the original scheme, and the current needs of residents, visitors and creative professionals that must be considered when creating an alternative plan. The

decision was taken to focus discussion of the needs of people, to then inform the development of physical assets.

8.6.3 Interview consultations have taken place with the following partners; YMCA, ROH Bridge, Chase High School, A Better Start Southend, South Essex College, University of Essex, Swan Housing, Trust Links, SAVS, SECH, South Essex Homes, Creative Estuary, Concrete Culture, TOMA, The Old Waterworks, Southend Culture Network, City Fibre, Creative Estuary, SBC Youth Council, Cultural Assembly, Focal Point Gallery's Advisory Group and SBC colleagues with particular focus children's services and education, vulnerable residents, digital provision, public health and diverse communities.

8.6.4 In addition, results from the following public consultation surveys have been included in establishing the recommendations.

- Culture Vision Survey (July 2020)
- ASELA: What Next for the Creative Industries in South Essex (March 2021)
- Concrete Culture consultation (March 2021)
- 99 by 19 Young People's Consultation (Interim report April 2021)

8.6.5 The combined feedback led to the creation of user profiles for which any new development should look to facilitate. Full user profiles of the following groups can be found in Appendix 3;

- Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Residents
- Working Residents
- Diverse Communities
- Town Centre Leisure Seekers
- Early Years
- School Age
- Teenagers and Young Adults
- Freelance Creative Practitioners
- Students
- Digitally Poor

8.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications

8.7.1 Equality and Diversity is at the heart of these recommendations. They aim to increase access to arts and cultural provision, upskilling in digital creativity in the centre of Southend which is demographically lower socioeconomically and in receipt of creative provision. By understanding the landscape through extensive public consultation with a diverse range of residents and user groups, we are able to recognise the needs of people from different communities, particularly those of disadvantaged backgrounds, and design plans accordingly. Individual assessments will be undertaken for the various projects and policy changes as part of their development as appropriate.

8.8 Risk Assessment

- 8.8.1** A risk assessment has not been undertaken on the project report. Where appropriate, risk assessments would be undertaken in relation into the various interventions.
- 8.9** Value for Money
- 8.9.1** This is set out in paragraphs 4.29-4.30 in relation to existing projects.
- 8.9.2** Any work procured to support the development of the masterplan would be subject to a procurement process ensuring value for money.
- 8.10** Community Safety Implications
- 8.10.1** There are no additional community safety implications as a result of this report. Consideration of community safety will be intrinsic to the Masterplan and has been to some of the projects and partnership outlined, such as Purple Flag in reviewing the safety of the night time economy and secured by design principles in Better Queensway.
- 8.11** Environmental Impact
- 8.11.1** The paper identifies a number of interventions underway which directly contribute towards the realisation of the Green City Action Plan. This will be a key consideration for the Masterplan and is a direct ask of some funding bids, such as Levelling-Up.
- 9** **Background Papers**
- Cabinet report 16th January 2020**
Town Centre Scrutiny Project 2018-19
Options appraisal User Profiles
- 10** **Appendices**
- Appendix 1 – Culture Vision**
Appendix 2 - Elmer Square design and phasing