

Southend-on-Sea City Council

**Report of Interim Executive Director Growth & Housing
To
CABINET
On
29 September 2022**

Report prepared by:
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**Agenda
Item
No.**

City Centre Strategy & Investment Plan

**Relevant Scrutiny Committee: Place Scrutiny Committee
Cabinet Members: Councillor Ian Gilbert
Part 1 (Public Agenda Item)**

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to set out the City Centre Strategy & Investment Plan which is a place-based plan which has been developed with partners following significant public and stakeholder engagement. The City Centre Strategy & Investment Plan outlines actions, both short and long term, to create a thriving, active, safe, and sustainable City Centre.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 **That the City Centre Strategy & Investment Plan (Appendix 1) is endorsed by the Council as a means to create a thriving, active, safe and sustainable City Centre.**
- 2.2 **That the governance arrangements and next steps, including Day One actions be noted and endorsed.**

3. Background

- 3.1 In June 2021, Cabinet agreed the development of a culture-led visual 'masterplan lite' for the City Centre and set aside £125,000 from the Covid Recovery Reserve to resource this work. Consultants "We Made That" and "PRD" were appointed to develop a City Centre Strategy & Investment Plan and this work was overseen by the Engineerroom, a cross-sector partnership group chaired by Philip Tolhurst.
- 3.2 The City Centre Strategy & Investment Plan (**Appendix 1**) takes a placemaking approach to the culture-led regeneration of the City Centre to create a reimaged City Centre that has a mix of cultural, creative, residential, leisure, community, learning, commercial and performance space. It is not a Council plan, rather a plan for the place, developed through the Engineerroom in consultation with key stakeholders.

- 3.3 The Strategy & Investment Plan is intended to set out ambitions for the City Centre and explore how the Council with private and other partners, might make the changes and improvements identified. It described changes that can happen quickly, as well as those that may be required in the years, even decades to come. It is intended to be a living document that will change and develop as new projects and investment comes forward. The Strategy has links to the Local Plan and Local Transport Plan and will seek to inform, and be informed by both.
- 3.4 Consultation with stakeholders, businesses and the public started in February 2022 to understand aspirations for the City Centre and has continued throughout the development of the Strategy & Investment Plan. 428 residents and stakeholders, including young people, have given their views about the future of the City Centre through face-to-face discussions, workshops, drop-ins, library exhibitions and also through an online survey. The anchor projects described in the Strategy were all identified through consultation and engagement as priorities for our residents, businesses and stakeholders.
- 3.5 The City Centre Strategy & Investment Plan sets out anchor projects in different areas of the City Centre and describes immediate actions to push projects forward (Day One activities).
- 3.6 In terms of governance, it is proposed that the Engineerroom continues to lead the City Strategy & Investment Plan overseeing delivery of Day One actions and longer-term activity. The Engineerroom will receive regular updates on key projects and stakeholders and will keep up momentum in terms of delivery.

4. Summary of the Strategy & Investment Plan

- 4.1 The Strategy & Investment Plan explores different spaces in the City Centre and identifies anchor projects in each area:
- Victoria Gateway
 - Forum and Central
 - Central High Street
 - Royals and the seafront
 - Kursaal
- 4.2 The Strategy & Investment Plan looks at each area and anchor project under 3 key themes:
- A different kind of City Centre
 - Healthier Lives
 - Inspiring Young Residents
- 4.3 Environmental sustainability, and equality and inclusion are cross-cutting themes that underpin all themes and activities in the Strategy & Investment Plan.
- Victoria Gateway
- 4.4 The strategy for the Victoria Gateway area is to accelerate access to services and facilitate transportation throughout the City Centre.
- 4.5 The first anchor project identified for the Victoria Gateway area is a reimagined Victoria Centre. The Council will need to lead on this project as the owner of

the centre. Large indoor and outdoor spaces create a unique opportunity to bring facilities and services right into the heart of the City Centre, building diversification around a core retail offer. The project will bring together a range of health and other public sector services with leisure, retail; cultural and learning uses.

4.6 The Council already owns the Victoria Centre and is investing in improvements through the capital programme to deliver some of the changes described. Our Levelling-Up round 2 (LUF2) bid also seeks further investment in the Victoria Centre to create new leisure, performance and creative spaces. This area of the City Centre also includes the Better Queensway development which will bring additional and improved homes to the City Centre along with a park and business spaces.

4.7 **Day One Actions identified in the Strategy & Investment Plan: Communicate more widely the future proposals for the Victoria Centre so that investors and developers can better understand the direct actions that Southend is taking to improve the City Centre experience.**

Liveable City Centre

4.8 The second anchor project is a Liveable City Centre. A joined-up approach to public transport and active travel could make Southend the easiest city to get around. It brings together public transport options and active travel solutions.

4.9 Work is already underway on the Local Transport Plan (LTP) and Bus Service Improvement Plan both of which will unlock active travel and public transport improvements across the City. We are also progressing with plans to deliver more electric vehicle (EV) charging points to support EV use and improve air quality.

4.10 **Day One Action in the Strategy & Investment Plan: Explore external funding to trial of new transport modes such as rental bikes and ensure that wider planned strategic and operational transport investment addresses these ambitions.**

Forum and Central

4.11 The strategy for the Forum and Central area is a Creative Business Hub - a clustering of creative businesses and learning uses.

4.12 The anchor project will deliver a creative businesses cluster in the City Centre to provide pathways for business growth and opportunities for young people to access skills and employment opportunities in the cultural and creative sector. Subject to demand, a reinvention of Central House or similar space could provide this opportunity.

4.13 Work with C2C and Network Rail is already underway to explore the art of the possible around mixed-use investment in Central Station. This could include creative commercial ground floor opportunities. The Council is also already prioritising investing in creative workspaces elsewhere in the City Centre including 90 High Street (The Ironworks) and in the Victoria Centre through our LUF2 bid (outcome expected autumn 2022).

4.14 **Day One Action from the Strategy & Investment Plan: Identify affordable space opportunities in high footfall locations that have the potential to**

become workspace hubs for target sectors and scope their potential.

Central High Street

- 4.15 The strategy for the Central area sets out how the High Street could become a greener, more sustainable place that can be used by children and their families.
- 4.16 The first anchor project in this Central area is a green and playable high street using green corridors as a destination for health, leisure and wellbeing. The High Street and Chichester Road become exemplary healthy streets through greening, integrated play opportunities, and exemplary walking and cycling environments.
- 4.17 The second anchor project is about creating a 24 hour economy, activating spaces during the day and at night and improving the sense of safety when in the City Centre. The LuminoCity festival and encouraging new leisure uses in the City Centre will promote safety at all times of the day and night.
- 4.18 **Day One Actions identified in the Strategy & Investment Plan: Identify existing resources that could be used to deliver greening and improved active travel in the City Centre e.g. tree planting. Seek external funding for greening projects across the City centre with the potential to include businesses grants for green roofs, improved public realm with appropriate planting and creation of pocket parks.**

The Royals & Seafront

- 4.19 The strategy for the Royals and seafront includes working with the new owner of the Royals to redevelop/repurpose the site and making active connections between the seafront and the high street via green, accessible public spaces.
- 4.20 The first anchor project for this area is repurposing the Royals to create a mixed-use site. The Royals is a gateway site in Southend, at a key moment where the seafront links to the High Street. Repurposing the building could provide a new anchor of activity for the high street which could include retail, leisure, residential and workspaces.
- 4.21 The second anchor project is to set the parameters for future development from the Royals and along the seafront linking the opportunities for the High Street with the seafront, the Kursaal, and all sites in between. It will activate this area currently characterised by service entrances and underused sites. With limited public sector ownership, the Council will have influence as the planning authority, but these changes will need to be led by the private sector owners here.
- 4.20 **Day One Action from the Strategy & Investment Plan for both anchor projects: encourage developers to work together using the Engineroom as a catalyst for conversation and action to develop a more detailed shared vision for this area of the City.**

Kursaal

- 4.21 The Strategy looks at the Kursaal area as hub for learning, creativity, fun and community engagement.
- 4.22 The anchor project for this area is the reinvention of the Kursaal as an Imaginarium a home for learning, arts and culture for all ages. The Kursaal is a well-loved heritage icon, with strong community support for its reinvention. A

new vision to reinvent this iconic building as an imaginarium will inspire and support children and young people through creative and cultural uses. This will need to be led by the private sector owner and the Council will need to be open minded to alternative uses which bring the Kursaal back into positive use.

4.23 This area of the City Centre also includes Marine Plaza which although delayed, has been granted a planning consent for a significant redevelopment including residential, restaurants, cafes and bars and the developers have stated will begin on site after the 2022 summer season. The Council will continue to work with all developers of stalled sites to explore opportunities to bring forward investment. This area also includes the Seaway Leisure development which will bring new leisure uses to the City Centre including cinema, hotel, leisure and food and beverage uses alongside public car parking (and EVs).

4.24 **Day One Action in the Strategy & Investment Plan: Continue to seek external investment with the aim of mobilising the Kursaal Imaginarium project. Funding has been secured through the Creative Estuary programme to generate a project plan for Kursaal as an imaginarium owned and delivered by the community for the community.**

5. Proposed governance arrangements and next steps

- 5.1 It is proposed that the Engineroom continues to lead the City Strategy & Investment Plan, overseeing delivery of Day One actions and longer-term activity. The Engineroom will receive regular updates on key projects and stakeholders and will keep up momentum in terms of delivery.
- 5.2 Further it is proposed that Engineroom is strengthened to include additional developers and landowners to bring together the key investors in Southend.
- 5.3 Engineroom will produce an annual report on key projects and initiatives identified in the Strategy & Investment Plan.
- 5.4 Immediate next steps are to deliver the Day One actions listed above in this report and to identify a named lead for the anchor projects.

6. Reasons for Recommendation

- 6.1 Evidence highlights that culture-led regeneration can have positive effects on myriad socio-economic factors including health and well-being, skills and learning, commercial opportunity, investment, and social connection. It underpins and adds value to a number of the 2050 outcomes and recovery priorities.
- 6.2 This Strategy builds on developments already in progress in the City Centre. The principle aim of the strategy and investment plan is to bring about social, health, economic, and environmental improvement for local people. This is central to delivery of Southend 2050. The Strategy also uses the creative & cultural industries in the City as a catalyst for positive regeneration of the City which reflects the priority it has as part of the Southend 2050 ambition and the underpinning role it plays across several 2050 themes and outcomes.

6.3 The Strategy provides strategic direction and a statement of intent for the City Centre and is intended as a tool to support and guide investment.

7. Corporate Implications

7.1 Contribution to the Southend 2050 ambition, outcomes and road map

As above, a thriving City Centre underpins several 2050 themes and outcomes including:

7.2 **We have a fast-evolving, re-imagined and thriving City Centre, with an inviting mix of shops, homes, culture and leisure opportunities.** The whole strategy seeks to achieve this reimagining of the City Centre, the proposed actions will create a vibrant, green, well used 24 hour City Centre which is accessible by all.

7.3 **There is a tangible sense of pride in the place and local people are actively, and knowledgeably, talking up Southend.** Through investment in visible improvements to the City Centre there will be positive impact on pride in place.

7.4 **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.** The strategy explores ways to create and activate spaces for the creative industry and supports new businesses and entrepreneurs in the sector.

7.5 **Southend provides fulfilling careers for our residents, and enough job roles to match the needs of the population.** Investing in the cultural economy, and therefore attracting more visitors and greater spend, should thereby create more and a wider variety of jobs. Similarly, the creative sector offers an exciting and growing range of career opportunities.

7.6 **People have a wide choice of transport options.** The strategy explores many transport options including improvements to walking and cycling routes.

7.7 **Southend is a leading digital City with world class infrastructure that reflects equity of digital provision for the young, vulnerable and disadvantaged.** Digital is a growing part of the creative sector, the creative hub proposed in the strategy will bring more digital businesses to the City Centre. Included in the strategy is improved public Wi-Fi which will support all residents and businesses connect digitally.

7.8 **The variety and quality of our outstanding cultural and leisure offer has increased for our residents and visitors and we have become the region's first choice coastal tourism destination.** Through investing in new cultural and leisure opportunities, including at the Victoria Centre, Seaway Leisure and Elmer Square, we are expanding the offer for both residents and visitors.

7.9 **Our streets and public spaces are valued and support the mental and physical wellbeing of residents and visitors.** The City Centre is a public space for which people have great affinity. Investing in public realm and other

reasons to spend more time there is evidenced to drive footfall so increasing numbers of people and City Centre business benefit.

- 7.10 **We act as a Green City with outstanding examples of energy efficient and carbon neutral buildings, streets, transport and Recycling.** Environmental sustainability is underpins the strategy and the greening of the high street key part of intended delivery.
- 7.11 **Even more Southenders agree that people from different backgrounds are valued and get on well together.** Cultural assets and activities such as those proposed in the strategy can create times and spaces which support community wellbeing and understanding.
- 7.12 **Residents are routinely involved in the design and delivery of services.** Extensive consultation has been undertaken with residents and stakeholders. 438 people engaged as part of the consultation, over 124 of these were young people.
- 7.13 **Our children are school and life ready and young people are ready for further education, training or employment.** Young people are a key theme and focus within the strategy, several proposed activities seek to improve learning outcomes and to provide better spaces for children and young people.

8. Finance and Value for Money implications

8.1 Financial Implications

- 8.1 The Strategy & Investment Plan has potential financial implications for the Council but in the main these will be for partners and for future investors in Southend. At this time, however, there is no request for additional investment from Council revenue or capital funds. Officer time will be required to co-ordinate the Engineerroom and Strategy actions – it is anticipated that one day per week of the Director of Regeneration & Growth and one day per week across the Capital and Economic Inclusion teams will be sufficient for this activity, which is already provided for in the existing staffing base budget for those teams.
- 8.2 Cost consultants have estimated that at current prices delivering anchor projects in their entirety will cost around between £100m and £150m. These costs are likely to escalate over the medium term given the inflationary pressures that will impact on the economy over this period. The developments will be phased over several years and funded by mixed sources including significant private sector investment. The Council may choose to provide match funding to contribute to and accelerate the delivery of projects and will also actively seek external funding, CIL and Section 106 monies, support initiatives through existing resources and crowd source funding. Any funding from whatever Council source will first need assessment against all the other Council priorities in our capital investment programme and revenue budget and also in the light of the significant demand and cost pressures being experienced by the Council.
- 8.3 The Council may decide to bring forward some capital projects directly, particularly where delivery sits most appropriately with the council e.g. public

realm and active travel, and in this case projects will follow the capital gateway process and will require reprioritisation of the existing capital investment programme to ensure there is no further net cost to the Council's capital investment programme.

8.4 Some Day One actions proposed have funding already identified and for other activities the Council will work with partners to identify funding including scoping sources identified above.

8.5 Regenerating the City Centre will have a positive impact on income to the Council. Increased residential units in the City Centre will bring in additional Council Tax income, although more residents will also mean more public sector service requirements; it will also drive local spend in the City Centre. Bringing in more businesses will also drive income through additional business rates yield. Central businesses will also benefit through increased Business Improvement District (BID) levy arising from there being more businesses.

9. Legal Implications

9.1 There are no implications arising from the adoption of the City Centre Strategy & Investment Plan. Legal implications may arise from the projects included within this Plan, which if delivered by the Council and of sufficient scale will be subject to their own Cabinet decisions and legal considerations.

10. Equalities and diversity Implications

10.1 Broadly speaking the improvements to the City Centre as set out in the Strategy & Investment Plan will have a positive equality and diversity impact. The Strategy has been designed with young people, healthier lifestyles, and inclusivity as key themes. It will also support those struggling with the cost-of-living crisis by bringing activity and investment to the City to unlock employment and housing opportunities.

10.2 There are several specific areas of the strategy that address improvements for young people including investment in education, leisure and cultural activities for example, improved play space, inclusive safe and learning spaces and the Kursaal Imaginarium.

10.3 The Strategy aims to address health inequalities, for example, by promoting active travel, accessibility, reducing poor air quality, addressing healthy eating. It looks at promoting equality of opportunity for older people or those with mobility problems by ensuring that travel options and the public realm are very usable by these groups.

10.4 The Strategy is firmly routed in supporting those with low socio-economic inclusion – it brings new businesses and therefore new jobs to the area, along with skills opportunities into the City Centre.

10.5 Council-led projects or activities described in the Strategy & Investment Plan will be subject to their own equalities impact assessments when they are closer to delivery stage.

11. Other corporate implications

11.1 Consultation

11.1.1 The consultation and engagement process throughout the development of the Strategy & Investment Plan has been extensive. 428 people including representation from citizens (across demographics), businesses, schools, councillors and stakeholders have given their views about the future of the city centre through face-to-face discussions, targeted workshops, drop-ins, library exhibitions and also through an online survey.

11.1.2 The key findings from this work include:

- Communicate and market future plans;
- Celebrate being different, doing something new;
- Support and collaborate with growing creative sector;
- Improve feeling of safety on the High Street;
- Expand offer of healthy activities;
- Take an environmentally pro-active approach;
- Recognise the Kursaal is a well-loved historic asset;
- Create an inclusive and accessible city where there is something for everyone;
- Quick win visual improvements to enhance the High Street environment;
- Focus on young residents and families.

11.2 Risk

11.2.1 The key risk in adopting the Strategy & Investment Plan is reputational if there are no quick wins or Day One activity evident to partners and residents. To mitigate this risk a strong communications campaign will be developed to ensure that the actions towards implementing the vision are clear to residents and stakeholders. The Day One actions have been costed and are considered deliverable.

11.2.2 There is a further risk that while the Strategy & Implementation Plan have been developed with the private sector, with the Engineroom leading this work, there will be an expectation that the Council makes significant investment delivering a majority of the projects and schemes identified. In mitigation, the Strategy & Investment Plan makes clear that delivery will only be possible through a partnership approach in which the Council will play a part but will not, and cannot be responsible for all the delivery or investment.

11.3 Green City/Environment/Climate Change

11.3.1 Environmental sustainability is a cross cutting themes running throughout the Strategy & Investment Plan. There are a range of positive transport and greening projects which will have a positive impact on the immediate City Centre and on-air quality and other environmental indicators that will be felt City-wide, including the promotion of sustainable transport and EV charging.

12. Background Papers

12.1 Culture-led Regeneration and the Town Centre - Cabinet 15 June 2021.

13. **Appendices**

13.1 Appendix 1 - Southend City Centre Strategy & Investment Plan