

Future High Streets Fund

Call for Expressions of Interest

Application Form



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Applicant Information

Bidding authority: Thurrock Council

Area within authority covered by bid: Grays Town Centre

Bid Manager Name and position: Brian Priestley Regeneration Programme Manager

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Additional evidence, such as letters of support, maps or plans should be included in an annex.

Applications to the Fund will be assessed against the criteria set out below. Further information on the scoring criteria and their weighting will be published by the department before the end of January 2019.

Submission of proposals:

Proposals must be received no later than 2359 on **Friday 22 March 2019**.

An electronic copy only of the bid including any supporting material should be submitted to highstreetsfund@communities.gov.uk.

Enquiries about the Fund may be directed to highstreetsfund@communities.gov.uk.

SECTION 1: Defining the place

This section will seek a definition of the high street or town centre to be covered within the bidding authority. Places should:

- Explain the high street/town centre geography
- Indicate the population of those living and travelling to this centre, how this links to the wider economic area and its role in the lives of those within the catchment area

1.1 Geographical area:

Include information setting out the extent of the high street/town centre area covered in the proposal and a description of this centre.

Please include maps and supporting evidence as annex documents if required.

*Please limit your response to 500 words. **450***

Grays is the main District Centre serving Thurrock and is defined as a Major District Centre in the South Essex Retail Study 2017. The town centre is the main focus for culture, administration and education for the whole Borough and provides a convenience retail and service role for residents of Thurrock and for visitors and people who work in the town centre. The town centre is in the ward of Grays Riverside and is the main administrative centre for Thurrock with Civic Offices, museum, theatre and South Essex College Grays Campus offering HE/FE education.

The main town centre is concentrated in areas A and B in Figure 5.1, page 11 of the appended Grays Town Centre Framework. The main shopping thoroughfare is High Street with the main anchors being a Morrisons Supermarket and the Grays Shopping Centre, owned by New River. Secondary retail areas spread out to the east along Orsett Road and Clarence Road and to the west along George Street.

To the north in area B is the Thameside Complex, a 1960's built building which is showing its age but nevertheless contains the Central Library for the Borough, the theatre, and Registry Office. To the South is the Council's Civic Offices, the recently developed South Essex College Grays Campus and the rail station. In between is located the main town centre, including a Grade 2* listed Art Deco Cinema that has stood vacant for some 20 years and has been acquired by J. D. Wetherspoons who have planning permission to refurbish and use the building. The busy Essex Thameside Rail line runs through the town centre. A pedestrian level crossing allows access but frequent and lengthy closures cause significant severance between the town centre and its catchment south of the rail line. The Council is working with Network Rail and C2C to implement an alternative with funding support from SELEP through the Local Growth Fund.

The most recent Experian Goad data for Grays shows a total of 208 service and retail units in a gross floor area of 44,714 sq.m, comprising 25.6% convenience retail, 34.8% Comparison retail, 28.7% Service, 10.5% vacant.

In addition to the civic and cultural facilities and events in the town centre, reports of public consultation appended identify other key reasons for people using the town centre including the availability of banks, estate agents, street market, medical facilities, and convenience retail. These serve primarily the five wards of Grays and South Stifford and Chafford South and people working in or near to the town centre. Grays Rail Station is also a key attractor with over four million passenger movements per year and due to ample parking and the Oyster Card validity ending at Grays, attracts people from across the Borough.

1.2 Population and links to wider economic area:

Information on the population living and working in the town centre area, how the area acts as a centre of social and economic activity and its links to the wider economic catchment area.

With supporting evidence to include:

Resident and workplace population, travel to work catchment area, town centre footfall, commercial space, retail activity, cultural activities, diversity of uses and social/ historical importance of the centre

Please limit your response to 750 words. Word Count=749

A Brief History

Grays received its market charter in 1221. Through the 19th century its port supported a fishing village and the largest fleet of sailing barges in Britain, industry grew to support these. Today's town centre grew from the 1850's with the opening of the rail line and to serve industry based around minerals extraction and riverside wharfs. The retail and social role of the town centre grew to serve the growing population and became established as the main district shopping and social centre including four cinemas with seating for audiences of up to 2000. Decline started with the opening of Lakeside Shopping Centre in 1990. The Council supports the proposed expansion of Lakeside Shopping Centre but recognises that this expansion and wider changes in the way we shop continue to challenge the role of Grays making it clear that intervention is required.

Grays Town Centre within the wider context of Thurrock

Thurrock has a resilient, diversifying economy, driven by port-related industries, logistics, renewable energy sectors, a growing cultural and arts related economy – High House Production Park is home to the Royal Opera House Production Workshop and Costume Centre and a dedicated Engagement team who work with schools and the local community. Thurrock's flourishing economy gives it a function of place that, despite its proximity to London, enables Thurrock to stand its own ground.

Grays is one of six Economic Growth Hubs in Thurrock and in this context is unique as the only town centre and its role as the largest town centre with borough wide significance. Besides its retail offer, Grays is the main administrative and cultural centre for Thurrock hosting the Civic Offices, Thameside Theatre, South Essex College Grays Campus and the Borough museum, serving people throughout the Borough and beyond its boundaries. South Essex College serves students attending courses at each of its campuses located in Grays, Southend and Basildon, offering courses at HE and FE level.

Grays town centre today

The South Essex Retail Study 2017 by Peter Brett Associates for South Essex Planning Authorities recognises the role of Grays as the main town centre serving the whole Borough. In 2018 Hatch Regeneris assessed the role of the town centre, its population and its relationship to its catchment (Appended).

The town centre has 750 businesses with the main concentration in retail, financial and professional services and business support services. There are some 6000 jobs within the town centre, 50% of which are in public administration, education and health sectors. The second largest employer is retail which provides 15% of these jobs. About 6700 people commute into the town centre, mostly (5410) from elsewhere in Thurrock but also from other districts in Essex and London. Out-commuting is 6000, mostly (3,620) to elsewhere in Thurrock but also in to London and other districts in Essex.

The theatre is a major attraction and singlehandedly represents the vast proportion of the night-time economy. Between April 2018 and March 2019 there were 240 professional and amateur shows and events, 96 hires and a range of supported events.

The theatre has close ties with the Royal Opera House and works with the Town Partnership to deliver events such as Thurrock International Celebration of Culture, Christmas light switch on, open air cinema, Grays in Bloom etc.

Public consultations informing the vision for the town centre (appended) identify other reasons for people's visits as the banks, estate agents, street market, medical facilities and convenience retail and the ease of access in and around the town centre from car parks. Grays amenities serve the residents of the five wards of Grays, adjoining wards covering South Stifford and Chafford South and people working in the town centre. There is a significant element of passing traffic stopping briefly for services. Grays Rail Station attracts over four million passenger movements per year and, due to ample parking and the Oyster Card validity ending at Grays, attracts people from across the Borough.

Resident Population

The population of the Grays Riverside Ward is 12,944, with 49% in full-time and 12.2% in part-time employment. 6.6% are unemployed, above the average for Thurrock. Health conditions such as child obesity, binge drinking, smoking, hypertension and diabetes are all significantly higher in Grays Riverside Ward than the average for England.

The area immediately south of the town centre includes one of the 10% most deprived areas based on indices of multiple deprivation. Residents are reliant upon the town centre, emphasising the importance of retaining convenience retail and services that meet their needs.

SECTION 2: Setting out the challenges

Clear description of the issues and challenges facing this area.

This section will seek a description of the issues and structural challenges facing the high street or town centre area to be covered within the bidding. Places should:

- Describe the key challenges facing the area
- Provide evidence to support this argument (additional sources can be included in annexes). Set out why this place would benefit more from moving forward to co-development than other places within the area

We will not accept bids covering town centre areas that are not facing significant challenges.

2.1: Challenges

The Strategic Challenge

Scale of growth

Grays' strategic location makes it an ideal place to accommodate growth in all sectors. The Council is ambitious in its approach to growth but recognises that growth in both housing and employment needs to be supported by well planned local infrastructure. As the main town centre in the Borough Grays has a clear role to play in this regard.

The assessed annual housing need for Thurrock currently stands at 1,381 dwellings per annum (based on 2016 sub-national population projects, the Strategic Housing Market Assessment, and improving affordability). As such, the Council are planning for growth to provide 28,000 new jobs and 32,000 homes over the next 20 years. This is an evidence based approach to determine an indicative numerical target. The emerging Local Plan layers this evidence base with a bottom-up, place making-led approach which will determine the narrative for change and scale of growth. The scope of transformation and growth is based on our ambition to create excellent quality and sustainable places, coupled with the development capacity in the existing fabric of places, natural environment, services and infrastructure provision.

Comprehensive Approach to growth

Thurrock Council favour a comprehensive, design-led approach to meeting growth needs that, alongside homes and jobs, can enable the delivery of community infrastructure. We intend to take a comprehensive approach to growth that:

- allows for development of sufficient scale to facilitate provision of key community, education, employment and transport infrastructure;
- focuses development in more sustainable locations that already benefit from existing facilities and where growth opportunities can be linked to regeneration priorities; and
- provides opportunities for successful place-making.

Small scale and piecemeal development does not readily allow for these benefits to be realised. It becomes difficult to fund and co-ordinate necessary infrastructure or provide sufficient development quantum to help support new services including public transport, small scale local retail, and other community and leisure facilities. Thurrock Council want to draw from best practice to take forward growth in the Borough and deliver a necessary step-change in quality in order to challenge perceptions of Thurrock as a place and improve the quality of life for existing and future communities.

Network of Garden Communities

As we prepare to face this challenging growth agenda, we feel that the borough's assets present a ready set of conditions to build on to create a **network of garden communities**, including:

- a function of place underpinned by an established and growing economy;
- a distinctive sense of place underpinned by the landscape setting, historic fabric, and the River Thames; and
- strong regional connectivity to underpin sustainable growth with higher density, housing-led mixed-use developments.

We are working closely with colleagues in Homes England and MHCLG to develop the 'network of garden communities' as a place-making concept to sit alongside the emerging new Local Plan and underpin growth across the borough under the following three categories:

- Urban style, housing-led transformation around existing town centres and movement infrastructure in Aveley, Lakeside, South Ockendon, and North Grays Villages will deliver sustainable development that invests in and adds to the community infrastructure, public realm and open spaces. High Quality design outcomes will have a real impact on changing people's perception of places in Thurrock and create a sense of pride
- Housing growth in Chadwell St Mary, East Tilbury, Stanford le Hope, and Corringham will support the growing economic hubs near the River Thames in the East and South of the borough. We want to take an innovative approach to create a new kind of mixed use that embraces the borough's port and industrial economy to create conditions for vibrant, diverse and sustainable living.
- Standalone new settlement centred on an existing railway station in West Horndon has the potential to meet a large proportion of housing need for Thurrock and wider South Essex.

We have also recently been awarded support from MHCLG to deliver Design Charrettes in Aveley and explore methods of engagement with landowners, residents and businesses that can enable us to determine the appetite for growth and transformation in a consultative way. The Design Charrettes process in Aveley along with initiatives such as the Future High Streets Fund will enable us to also test our ambition for growth in individual places, and ultimately inform the Local Plan-making process.

Grays as the main town centre

Grays is one of six growth hubs in Thurrock where regeneration and growth in housing and jobs is to be focussed but is unique in its role as a Major District Town Centre. The other hubs have very different roles in meeting the needs for logistics and energy production (Thames Enterprise Park, DP World and Tilbury), serving as a regional shopping centre (Lakeside) and the creation of a new town (Purfleet). Grays has continued to function as a traditional town centre but has struggled since Lakeside opened in 1990 and with trends in the way people shop and what they expect from a town centre. The key challenges are:

- The long term decline in the traditional commercial and social role of the town centre, starting with the opening of Lakeside Regional Shopping Centre.
- Negative images of the town centre reflected in extensive public consultation, including declining retail offer, lack of attractions, weak evening economy, preponderance of low value retail, poor quality of the town centre environment, perceptions of crime and safety, accessibility and parking.
- Encouraging footfall by repurposing the town centre and encouraging housing development. Set in the context of low development returns, poor rents and low investor confidence, responding to the need to encourage the investment required.

- The scale of investment needed to deliver the Council's ambitious plans and continue the impetus established by current funding from Thurrock Council, the Local Growth Fund and network Rail.

The town centre needs interventions that address market failures reflected in low development returns, low rents and low investor confidence despite there being clear opportunities.

Opportunity for Change

The Council has a strong track record of delivering projects in partnership with stakeholders and a clear plan to transform the town centre contained in the Grays Town Centre Framework Refresh (appended) which sets out the approach to delivering on the vision for the town centre. This vision is based on public consultations in 2013 that attracted over 1500 responses from residents and business, with further consultation in 2016. The reports of consultation attached show that respondents place a high value on the town centre and particularly the regular street markets, theatre and a range of services such as banking and access to public services. However, the consultations indicate a range of issues of concern relating to the quality of the town centre environment, crime and safety, declining retail offer, lack of attractions, weak evening economy, preponderance of low value retail, accessibility and parking (Reports attached).

The Council is working closely with Network Rail on a £27 million project to replace a particularly dangerous level crossing in High Street, on a rail line that divides the town centre from a large part of its immediate catchment area. The project opens up currently unfunded development opportunities and the potential to assemble further land to enable a comprehensive redevelopment to provide new outlets at ground floor with flats over. It would thereby introduce a growing resident population to support future footfall and provide opportunities to enhance the public realm and environment. In acquiring the land the Council would, as land owner, need to find ways in which it can control use to respond to the unmet needs of visitors and commuters and, crucially, to catalyse the evening food and drink offer to support an emerging cultural hub based around the theatre and museum.

The challenges in detail

Town Centre Health and economy

Town Centre health checks in 2007 (Roger Tym and Partners) and 2018 (Hatch Regeneris) demonstrate the change and decline in the traditional role of the town centre:

- Representation from GOAD Experian defined key retailers has fallen from a relatively low 5 to 2 (currently these are a small Boots and a Morrisons supermarket). Closures during this period have included New Look, W.H.Smith, Woolworth, Sports Direct and Superdrug.
- Zone A rents have fallen from a relatively low £484/sq.m to £412/sq.m
- Yields have grown from a relatively high 9% to 11%, indicating low and falling investor confidence.
- Vacancy has increased from 9% to 11.1% and is set to increase further with the owners of Grays Shopping Centre reporting that they have agreed early termination of a number of leases.
- There is little market interest in locations within the town centre, with the only 'town centre use' interest being two inquiries for the same edge of town centre location. There is no identifiable market interest for class B1 offices.
- The retail offer is dominated by low value and discount retailers, although there are signs of independents moving in to the town centre. These have included specialist

outlets such as Trop Shop (Tropical Fish) and a range of shops and hairdressers reflecting growing populations of East Europeans and African/Caribbeans.

- Relatively high number of ‘money’ shops.
- Weak evening economy, most outlets in the town centre are closed by 6pm

The South Essex Retail Study 2017 defines Grays as a Town Centre serving the Borough as a whole. However, the Venue score rating indicates the challenges faced by the town centre which is given a location grade as ‘Major District’ and a market position as ‘Lower Middle’, reflected in a Venue score rank of 547 and an overall score of 56. The study also identifies that requirements for convenience and comparison retail are expected to fall over the period to 2026, despite high growth in housing demonstrating a need to repurpose the town centre.

The town centre provides some 6000 jobs but over the last 5 years job numbers have declined in contrast to an 11% increase in the Borough as a whole. Business start-ups, proportion of homeworking and sole trader owned business are all below the average for Thurrock and for England. Employment in the town centre is highly concentrated in low productive sectors including public administration, education and health.

The Town Centre Health Check by Hatch Regeneris demonstrates that Grays faces a range of socio-economic and environmental challenges relating to employment, entrepreneurial activity, lack of sector diversity, skills, deprivation and the quality of public realm.

Environment

An Environmental Audit by Hatch Regeneris in October 2018 scored the town centre at 2.6 where 1 is very poor, 3 fair, and 5 very good. Results are summarised below;

Summary	Score (1-5)
Construction of carriageway (loose, broken, missing, uneven, temporary, obstructions)	3.0
Seats/ planters/ hanging baskets/ litter bins (paintwork, broken uneven, parts missing, not working, badly sited, not present).	2.5
Public facilities, telephones, bus stops/ shelters (Condition)	4.0
Graffiti, fly-posting, vandalism	2.5
Barriers to movement (servicing, general traffic, lack of safe crossing facilities etc.)	1.5
Cycle parking (formal or informal, availability, capacity).	1.0
Maintenance and repair of buildings, shopfronts and canopies	2.0
Personal security and police presence	3.5
Wheelchair access and facilities for the blind or partially sighted	4.0
Total	24.5
Overall Score	2.6

Congestion on London Road/Orsett Road (Area B indicated in the Appended Grays Town Centre Framework) hinders access to the town centre and undermines the quality of the pedestrian environment. Access for pedestrians and cyclists can be difficult. Air pollution from vehicle emissions has justified the establishment of an Air Quality Management Area in this part of the town centre.

Levels of crime in the town centre remain consistent over time and are relatively low in comparison to figures for England but are high for Thurrock. Based on 2016 figures there were 115.77 incidents per 1000 persons, compared with 47.62 in Thurrock as a whole and 149.58 for England. However, Thurrock Council’s Residents Survey in 2016 revealed that only 43% of residents in the ward feel safe going outside in their local area at night. The perception of crime is relatively high and has often been stated during public consultations as a reason for not visiting the town centre. The perception of crime appears to be

exacerbated by the quality of the environment and low levels of activity in the town centre, particularly in the evenings because most businesses are closed by 6pm. The Thurrock Council Resident Survey also revealed that 51% of residents in the ward are not satisfied with the local area where they live for reasons relating to environment, crime, and facilities available to them. In repurposing the town centre these issues will need to be addressed to maintain and enhance the vitality of Grays.

People

Consultations have shown that people who live and work in Thurrock value Grays and are disappointed to witness the way in which it has declined. Importantly a key challenge is to recognise that, while there is change in the way that town centres function, many residents in the Grays Riverside ward rely on the town centre for their day to day shopping needs and for services. This role/function needs to be retained while adapting to the wider pressures affecting the town centre.

2.2: Rationale for selecting town centre area

Set out your rationale for choosing this town centre area as opposed to other centres within your local authority, and why this area is most in need.

*Please limit your response to 500 words. **Word Count =498***

Of all the town centres in the Borough Grays is the one that residents really identify with as the main town in the Borough, it therefore has a role in the lives of all Thurrock's residents. Equally, it is also the town centre most in need of intervention to reverse the spiral of decline in its offer, sense of place and physical environment. The importance of Grays in Thurrock and the desperate need for intervention is clear: uplifting the quality and offer at Grays is likely to have most impact on perceptions among residents of Thurrock, and the development industry and over time help to attract inward investment.

Recognising the challenges to the future vitality and viability of the town centre and the importance of the town centre to communities in the Borough, the Council adopted a detailed plan in the form of the Grays Town Centre Framework Refresh 2018 (attached). The 2018 refresh reflected that some projects included in the initial version were completed or underway but that there remained a significant portfolio of projects to be delivered to ensure the continued improvement of the area as a sustainable town centre.

The economy of the other growth areas in the Borough is based strongly on logistics and energy generation, regional shopping (Lakeside) or the creation of a new town at Purfleet. Grays is unique within the Borough as the only town centre identified as an Economic Growth Hub. Growth in jobs and homes is to be concentrated with a focus on the need for and potential to accommodate a diverse range of complementary uses that can create a vibrant town centre.

The Council currently has established strong partnership with other organisations to bring forward key projects in Grays such as South Essex College and is currently working closely with Network Rail and C2C to replace one of the most dangerous level crossings in the Network Rail Eastern Region. The project is supported with funding from the Local Growth Fund, the Council and Network Rail and opens opportunities for redevelopment of land for new town centre mixed use units with residential above and improvements to the urban realm.

There is therefore an impetus in Grays that we can build on. While other projects referred to elsewhere in this submission have and will benefit the town centre, the Town Centre Health Check by Hatch Regeneris shows that more needs to be done. The Grays Town Centre Framework sets out opportunities to build further on this work to make and embed a truly transformational and lasting change. Funding from MHCLG can therefore add value and enable the town centre to capitalise on the opportunities that have been identified or are currently being created.

Other town centres in the Borough, particularly Tilbury and South Ockendon, are in need of strong interventions to boost their town centres but planning for these is not sufficiently advanced at present and the Council would envisage these being brought forward for the next round of the fund.

SECTION 3: Strategic ambition

This section will seek evidence of the level of ambition from the local authority, support from stakeholders and evidence that the local authority is well-placed to use the Future High Street Fund to tackle these challenges in a way that will fit with wider existing plans. Local authorities should:

- Set out a high-level vision for improving their area and how this links with need expressed in Section 2
- Demonstrate how this ambition will align with other funding streams (public or private)
- Cover how investment from government will support the area and help overcome these challenges
- Demonstrate engagement with and support from local stakeholders including other tiers of local government, if applicable (supporting evidence of this support such as letters should be attached as an annex)
- Show how this will link to wider strategic plans, including the Local Plan and Local Industrial Strategies e.g. around housing and local growth
- Provide an estimate of how much revenue funding they would need to support the development of their strategic vision and business case for a specific proposal

This phase relates to defining places and challenges and we therefore are not asking for specific project proposals at this stage.

However, if a local authority has been working on a specific project that they feel is deliverable in the short term if they were to receive capital funding at an early stage, we invite them to make that clear here. While the details of the project will not be considered in our decision-making at this stage, we may consider fast-tracking these projects during co-development.

We will not accept bids that do not provide sufficient evidence of support from local stakeholders.

3.1 Town centre vision and ambition for change

Set out your vision for regenerating your high street and how this links with the challenges outlined in section 2.

Please limit your response to 750 words. Word Count-747

Town Centre Vision

The Council and its partners have established an ambitious programme aimed at addressing the challenges and ensuring the future of the town centre. This is reflected in the adopted Local Plan (e.g. Policies CSSP1, CSSP2, CSTP7, CSTP8), Thurrock Economic Growth Strategy, the Boroughs Vision for Grays and the Grays Town Centre Framework 2018 (the full vision is on page 4 of the attached Framework).

Grays town centre has been a longstanding priority for the Council. We have made significant progress delivering key interventions, securing funding and developing partnerships to tackle the outstanding challenges. These interventions will have an impact, however, despite these efforts market confidence and developer interest remains low. The Future High Streets Fund will enable land assembly, site redevelopment for flexible spaces at ground floor and residential on upper floors, transformational public realm and improved movement. The council intends to act as a town centre developer and subsequently retain ownership of developed units to ensure that uses and activities accommodated within them are consistent with the vision and the town centre framework.

The Grays Town Centre Framework, town centre health check and progress on other projects place Grays in a good position to move swiftly to land assembly and physical intervention if funding becomes available.

The Grays Town Partnership under its brand Love Grays has developed its manifesto to deliver improvements working with partners in business, with residents and with the Council (Manifesto attached).

Ambition for Change

The vision recognises that Grays cannot compete with larger centres and cannot 'buck the trend' in the wider economy. It needs to focus on its strengths and opportunities, expressed in the Town Centre Framework, meeting the needs of local populations and visitors, promoting activities that attract people to the town centre and providing new homes to establish additional local footfall and activity. The Council has a strong track record of delivery in the town centre;

- As land owner and Education Authority working closely with South Essex College to develop a 15,000 sq.m FE/HE college in Grays town centre.
- As landowner working with Norfolk and Waveney Enterprise Services (NWES) to redevelop a vacant Court building owned by the Council for supported business units, now operated by NWES and occupied by 61 companies employing 1 to 30 people.
- Working with Community Interest Company 'Things Made Public' to develop proposals in consultation with residents and businesses to use a Council building as a community incubator unit and to develop a programme of community art and greening projects in the town centre.
- Working with Network Rail and C2C to replace a dangerous level crossing with an underpass and new public realm and creating development opportunities.

The ambition for change and the spatial vision set out in the Grays Town Centre Framework reinforce the role of the town centre as the main district centre serving Thurrock. It is the administrative centre for the Borough including municipal, education, health and leisure and community facilities. It will cater for Thurrock's communities and act as a focus for growth in jobs and homes, with a new transport zone around the rail station. The Framework sets out a range of interventions to support the repurposing and the future viability and vitality of the town centre including;

- Development Opportunity sites for new residential and mixed use development to enable densification and encourage footfall.
- Improvements to the road network to address issues of congestion and accessibility.
- Refurbishment of the Thameside Complex to enhance the theatre and the role of the site as a cultural and community hub.
- Reconfiguration of Civic Offices to enhance delivery of services and to provide event and meeting spaces for local businesses and communities.
- A pedestrian underpass of the rail line that reconnects the town centre to its hinterland, new public realm, and opportunities for development around the rail station.
- Enhancement of Grays Beach Park as a destination riverside open space and including a pier to provide for river bus services.

The recent acquisition of the Grays Shopping Centre by New River gives potential to lever in considerable private sector match funding. New River is developing ambitious investment plans for their landholding and is working in partnership with the Council to ensure plans are integrated and complementary.

The Council recognises the importance of its role in addressing market failures reflected in low development returns, low rents and low investor confidence and is investing some £40million of capital in the town centre, supported by £10.8 million from the Local Growth Fund and funds from Network Rail.

3.2 Engagement and alignment of vision

Set out how your town centre vision aligns with other funding streams, both public and private, including details of partnership working with the private sector in this area.

Show how your vision fits with wider strategic plans such as housing, transport and Local Industrial Strategies.

Please limit your response to 750 words. Word Count=742

The Council recognises that it must take a lead but that the future of Grays town centre depends upon the involvement of all stakeholders. The Council is committing land it owns and £40 million from its Capital Programme to the town centre.

At regional level the LEP has recognised the importance of Grays town centre in referring to key projects in the SELEP Strategic Economic Plan and providing funding from the Local Growth Fund. The South Essex Retail Study 2017 produced in partnership with all the local authorities of South Essex identifies Grays as a Major District Centre serving the borough as a whole. At local level the role of Grays is supported in the Adopted Local Plan and the Town Centre Framework.

The Council's adopted Local Transport Strategy supports the delivery of the adopted core strategy. Policy TTS1 Delivering Sustainable Growth supports the formation of a Transport Zone around Grays Rail Station, including an improved means of crossing the rail line and improved accessibility in to and around the town centre.

Engagement

In 2013 the Council carried out public consultation to determine the vision for the town centre, with over 1500 responses from residents and town centre businesses (reports attached) followed by workshops. The local plan adopted in 2015 stated the spatial vision for the town and was subject to the statutory consultations required for development plans.

The Town Centre Framework was subject to public consultation. The responses show a high level of support (see Q3.3).

The Council supported the establishment of the Grays Town Partnership and continues to support its activities with staff and funding. The Council's town centre Coordinator is supporting a restructure of the Partnership to recognise its growing role in the town centre and setting it on a stronger footing for the future.

Projects also include bespoke engagement. The first of several rounds of engagement is currently underway to inform the design of the proposed underpass and public realm and an Urban Realm Design Guide for the town centre

Funding

The SELEP Strategic Economic Plan supports projects in Grays town centre. The LEP awarded a £1.5 million loan to enable the conversion of the former magistrate's court in to supported business space. The LEP has awarded £10.8 million from the Local Growth Fund to fund works to replace a level crossing of the rail line. Network Rail have funded project development work for the project currently amounting to £350,000 for the last design stage and upto £1.5million for the current design stage.

The Council has committed £9 million from its Capital programme towards the underpass, along with development returns from its developments and £1.2million in S.106 funds. Further S.106 funds have been used for road improvements and open space improvements.

The Council is investigating opportunities for using its land holdings for beneficial development including housing delivery in the town centre and is in discussions with New River to establish a joint approach to development and repurposing the town centre.

Working with Partners

As previously referenced the Council has a strong track record of delivering projects in Grays with partners:

- South Essex College Grays Campus: The Council worked with the college to construct on its land in the town centre and continues to work with the college to coordinate education and training and to identify opportunities for the college to expand.
- Grays South Regeneration Area: The Council is working closely with Network Rail and C2C to develop an alternative means for pedestrians to cross the rail line that severs the town centre. Funding is provided by the Council's, Network Rail, and a grant from the LEP Local Growth Fund. The Council is investigating with Network Rail and C2C opportunities for a joint residential and mixed use development around the station.
- Grays Magistrates Court: The Council worked with NWES to refurbish the vacant building as a business centre. As land owner the Council provided the bulk of the funding and a loan also from the Local Growth Fund.
- The Council is working with a CIC, 'Things Made Public', on proposals for a Community Incubator Unit food and music venue in one of its buildings and programmes for public art and community greening in the town centre.
- The Grays Town Partnership has delivered a range of successful events including Christmas light switch-on, open air cinema and Grays in bloom.
- The Council is working with New River, the owners of Grays Shopping Centre, with proposals for significant investment in their landholding.

3.3 Support for town centre vision

Provide details, including letters of support, for your vision from (where applicable):

- *Other tiers of local government including Mayoral and non-Mayoral Combined Authorities and county councils where applicable*

Other local stakeholders including:

- *Local Enterprise Partnerships*
- *Business Improvement Districts*
- *Private sector*
- *Community groups*

Please limit your response to 500 words and include evidence of this support as an annex where appropriate. Word Count=437

In 2013 the Council carried out an extensive consultation to inform the vision for Grays and received over 1500 responses from residents and businesses (appended). Interested respondents were invited to a series of well attended workshops and all attendees at workshops were consulted on the vision before it was adopted by the Council's Cabinet in July 2013.

Grays Town Centre Framework provides the implementation framework for projects arising from the vision and was subject to public consultation in 2016. It received a high level of support from respondents, with 69% of responses stating that they either 'support' or 'strongly support' the overall approach. There was support for the proposed approach to each of the areas of the town centre identified in the Framework with those supporting or strongly supporting the approach to the town centre and station (85%), Orsett Road (80%), Grays Riverside (83%), London Road/Hogg Lane (72%) and Clarence Road (75%).

From 12 December 2018 to 8 March 2019 the Council carried out the Your Place Your Voice Consultation at venues throughout the Borough as part of the Issues and Options stage 2 consultations on the emerging local plan. The responses are currently being analysed.

Individual projects are subject to bespoke engagement and consultation. For example, the Grays South Regeneration Area has been presented to the Grays Town Partnership and is currently the subject of a series of stakeholder discussions to inform the design approach. Stakeholder engagement is planned for each design stage over the next two years in addition to the statutory consultation required for planning applications.

The Council has worked closely with the Grays Town Partnership whose current Terms of reference and manifesto under the partnership's Love Grays brand are attached.

Letters of support attached from

1. South East Local Enterprise Partnership.
2. Opportunity South Essex: Private public partnership supporting business and inward investment.
3. Thurrock Business Board: Coordinated voice for Thurrock Businesses.
4. Love Grays Partnership: Partnership of businesses in Grays town centre.
5. New River: Owner of Grays Shopping Centre, largest land owner in the town centre with 50 units.
6. South Essex College: FE/HE College in the town centre
7. Orchards Community Forum: Forum of residents living in and near the town centre
8. Riverside Community: A community organisation with funding from the lottery Big Local fund.
9. NWES: Operator of the Old Court House Business Centre.
10. Things Made Public: CIC developing proposals for a Community Incubator Hub, and community arts and greening projects.
11. Network Rail: Partner in delivering a key project in the town centre.
12. Thurrock CVS: Membership organisation supporting community, faith and social enterprise in Thurrock.

3.4 Estimate of revenue funding needed

Provide details of how much revenue funding you need to develop project plans for capital funding (including detailed business cases).

Include estimated breakdowns of how you would spend this revenue funding

Please limit your response to 500 words.

The proposals will focus on bringing forward surplus Council owned sites, land assembly, development for uses that will bring vitality and footfall to the town centre including new housing, leisure, and developing the evening economy, and associated transformational change to public realm and access. The development of the business case is expected to require:

- Report on Title and desk top studies of site constraints: £30,000
- Development capacity studies: £20,000
- Valuations and Development Appraisals: £50,000
- Other supporting surveys, reports and legal input: £40,000
- Writing the business case: £50,000

Appendices:

Grays Town Centre Framework Refresh 2018

Grays Town Centre Evaluation December 2018 by Montagu Evans/Hatch Regeneris

Grays Town Centre Public Consultation March 2013 by Enventure

Consultation Report: Grays Businesses. March 2013.

Grays Town Centre Regeneration Stakeholder Vision Workshops June 2013 by Amanda

Murrell Associates

Love Grays Partnership Manifesto and Terms of Reference.

Adopted Core Strategy Local Plan which is too large to email but can be viewed at

(https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/sites/default/files/assets/documents/core_strategy_adopted_2011_amended_2015.pdf),