

This report will be made public on 14 September 2021



Report Number **C/21/34**

To: Cabinet
Date: 22 September 2021
Status: Non-Executive Decision
Responsible Officer: Ewan Green - Director of Place
Cabinet Member: Councillor David Monk, Leader of the Council
Councillor David Wimble, Cabinet Member for the District Economy

SUBJECT: FOLKESTONE TOWN CENTRE PLACE PLAN

SUMMARY: This report presents the Folkestone Town Centre Place Plan for approval. The report sets out an overview of the work undertaken to develop the plan and the key actions proposed as priorities for delivery. The report also seeks approval for the submission of an application to the Government's Levelling Up Fund.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To receive and note report C/21/34.
2. To approve the Folkestone Town Centre Place Plan.
3. Agree the projects prioritised for further development in support of a Levelling Up Fund application.
4. To authorise the Director of Place, in consultation with the Leader, to submit an application for funding to the Government's Levelling Up Fund.
5. Note that consideration will be given to partnership and stakeholder structures required to support ongoing delivery of the plan.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The role of town centres is changing and the Place Plan takes a holistic view of the way in which Folkestone Town Centre can continue to harness the natural potential of the area. With a fantastic coastline, great transport links, a thriving culture and leisure offer, investment in new homes and businesses and growing communities, Folkestone has much to celebrate already.

However there is also much that needs to be done to build on this and ensure the town centre continues to adapt and diversify moving forward to meet the changing role of town centres.

- 1.2 There are key strategic drivers which set the context for the development of a plan for Folkestone town centre.

- 1.3 The Council's **Corporate Plan 2021-30 'Creating Together Tomorrow'** recognises the need to reinvigorate all district town centres, particularly investing in Folkestone town centre.

Ambition 3: A Vibrant Economy sets out priority actions to reinvigorate high streets through investigating opportunities for diversification, attracting investment into non-retail uses, such as creative workspace, leisure, housing, cultural and heritage-related activities. A key action in the corporate plan is the completion of the Place Plan.

- 1.4 The Place Plan also aligns strongly with, and supports the aims of, the corporate plan Ambitions in relation to positive community leadership, a thriving environment and quality homes and infrastructure. Sustainability is an underpinning theme throughout the Place Plan and this responds positively to the council's declaration of a climate emergency.

- 1.5 The **Folkestone and Hythe Core Strategy Review 2020** identifies the following strategic considerations for town centres:

- The challenge to improve employment, education attainment and economic performance
- The challenge to enhance maintenance and management of natural and historic assets
- The challenge to improve the quality of life and sense of place, vibrant and social mix in neighborhoods, particularly where this minimises disparities
- The challenge to plan for strategic development which fosters high quality place making with an emphasis on sustainable movement, buildings and green space.

- 1.6 To address these challenges the Council has worked with partners and communities to develop a Folkestone Place Plan which sets a vision and direction for the town centre including necessary infrastructure investment required to achieve sustainable change.

The development of the Place Plan takes a holistic view of the way in which Folkestone Town Centre can continue to harness the natural potential of the area.

Urbanists, We Made That (and their specialist consultant team), developed the plan on behalf of the Council following extensive engagement with a wide range of stakeholders which was a key activity in identifying opportunities, creating a vision for the future and setting out the way in which this can be delivered.

2 Development of the Place Plan

2.1 The Place Plan has been developed through a series of different research and engagement activities.

2.2 An urban appraisal was completed which formed the initial basis for the development of proposals within the Place Plan. The appraisal includes findings from desktop research of previous studies and consultation, as well as additional specific research aimed at better understanding the history, use and operation of Folkestone Town Centre. On the ground observational analysis also formed a vital part of the appraisal, as it revealed more nuanced behavioural and qualitative aspects that are otherwise hard to capture.

The urban appraisal can be viewed via the following link:

https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/media/3772/Folkestone-Place-Plan-urban-appraisal-draft-/pdf/We_Made_That_219_Folkestone_Place_Plan_Appendix_1_Urban_Appraisal_RevB_compressed.pdf?m=637641272164970000

2.3 The engagement process for the plan made a commitment to listening to the full spectrum of Folkestone's communities, to ensure that the Place Plan was guided by the views and priorities of strategic and delivery partners, businesses, community stakeholders as well as the wider public, residents and visitors.

We Made That held a variety of events and used a range of communication methods to ensure that a wide range of opinions and voices were encouraged, captured and presented. Focused workshops, one-to-one conversations, stakeholder meetings, a dedicated website and two well-attended public webinars were organised throughout the course of the Place Plan's development.

The engagement approach was designed to provide multiple opportunities for interested parties to have their say in shaping the Place Plan, making sure that the team fed back how suggestions had been incorporated as the Place Plan developed.

More specifically, the webpage was held on our corporate site and provided detail of scheduled activity with access to recordings of the webinar and project output as the project progressed. Members of the public and stakeholders were able to engage directly via an FHDC email option.

As well as promoting all events digitally, press releases were issued and an article was included in the most recent Your District Today to reach all residents and posters put up in key locations (local supermarkets and notice boards). Members of the public who did not have digital access were able to request a hard copy of the webinar slides and associated surveys and were encouraged to give their feedback.

The engagement plan can be viewed via the following link:

[https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/media/3771/Folkestone-Place-Plan-engagement-report-draft-/pdf/We Made That 219 Folkestone Place Plan Appendix 2 Engagement Report RevA.pdf?m=637641272484130000](https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/media/3771/Folkestone-Place-Plan-engagement-report-draft-/pdf/We%20Made%20That%20219%20Folkestone%20Place%20Plan%20Appendix%20Engagement%20Report%20RevA.pdf?m=637641272484130000)

- 2.4 A final round of engagement was held in August 2021 seeking feedback on the final draft plan, with particular focus on the actions and interventions proposed. A summary of this feedback has been collated and is attached as Appendix 1.
- 2.5 To help inform the Place Plan, specialist consultants performed specific technical appraisals relating to: (1) transport and movement in the town centre; and (2) a review of opportunity sites, how they could be re-purposed or developed in the future should the opportunity arise.
- 2.6 Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the initial scope of the place plan brief and engagement proposals and views from Members were incorporated into the work of the consultant team.

Folkestone Town Centre Working Group reviewed the scope of the place plan brief and were consulted at various stages of the plan's development.

- 2.7 All Members have had sight of the Place Plan and the opportunity to feedback comments on the draft document.

3 Folkestone Town Centre Place Plan (please refer to Appendix 2)

- 3.1 The Place Plan is structured around addressing the 'grand challenge' of overcoming decline in the town centre to ensure it has a sustainable and vibrant future.
- 3.2 The plan sets clear 'missions' and proposes specific actions to help shape the future of the town centre. These have been developed based on the opinions gathered during the engagement process and findings from the urban appraisal.

The 'Grand Challenge' sets a bold and overarching target for the future of the town centre. To address this cross-cutting aim, six 'missions' have been developed. These respond directly to specific issues from the appraisal process, and correspond with specific proposed actions and interventions, and clear, targeted impacts.

The actions to deliver the missions are grouped according to geographic areas of the town centre. This mission-oriented approach is intended to

create a clear pathway to attain sustainable and inclusive growth led by both public, private and voluntary sectors.

3.3 The structure of the plan is shown below:



3.4 The plan sets out a range of actions which are aimed at delivering outcomes in support of all 6 'missions'. It is important to recognise that some of the actions, in particular those with a longer timescale, are highly aspirational and not necessarily within the control of the Council.

3.5 The plan is not a planning policy adopted by the Council but presents an overall direction for development and investment in the town centre which will be a material consideration in relation to planning processes for built development projects in the town centre.

4 Delivering the Place Plan

4.1 It is recognised that the actions outlined in the plan are not solely the responsibility of the Council to deliver. There is however a clear leadership role for the Council to ensure that the overall ambition in the plan is pursued vigorously.

4.2 In line with the ethos of, and priorities within, the Corporate Plan 2021-30 the Council leadership role will be to:

- Promote the plan to communities, partners, investors and government.
- Lead delivery of a range of actions across short, medium and longer timeframes.

- Support delivery of actions by partners in the public, private and community sectors.
- Co-ordinate and report on overall delivery of the plan.
- Continue to engage across all stakeholders and communities as part of the development of projects.

4.3 Consideration will be given to partnership and stakeholder structures required to support ongoing delivery of the plan. This will include reviewing the role of the Accelerated Delivery Board which was established to facilitate major projects across the district.

5 Levelling Up Fund

5.1 The Government's Levelling Up Fund (LUF) was announced at the 2020 Spending Review and will focus on capital investment in local infrastructure thereby building on and consolidating prior programmes such as the Local Growth Fund and Towns Fund. In doing so, it will also create opportunity across the country, prioritizing bids that invest in regeneration and growth in places in need and areas of low productivity and connectivity.

The focus of the LUF is investment for infrastructure which has 'a visible impact on people and their communities'. The investment priorities for the LUF are investments in transport, regeneration and town centres and culture and there is a requirement that projects support the government's carbon net zero goals and have minimum impact on nature and our natural assets.

LUF bids must demonstrate that they will have visible, tangible impact on people and places, and support economic recovery. The application process includes the requirement for a full Treasury Green Book Appraisal.

5.2 The government has prioritised districts according to need and Folkestone & Hythe is in the highest level of need category (category 1) which means that preference will be given to bids from our area.

All district councils can bid for up to £20m either for a single project or a package of multiple projects which are cohesively and coherently related. Each district and LPA is limited to funding for a single project, with all government funding required to be spent by 31 March 2024 (or March 2025 in exceptional circumstances).

The launch of the fund in February 2021 invited round 1 applications to be submitted in June 2021 for those with projects that were able to commence delivery in 2021-22. For districts intending to submit projects in later rounds (with round 2 expected to be announced in 2022), £125,000 capacity funding has been provided to councils in category 1 (such as FHDC) to prepare for application. It is proposed that the £125,000 is utilised during 2021/22 with any balance being carried forward to 2022/23, and will contribute towards the costs of both the internal resource to accelerate delivery of Corporate Plan ambitions and external technical support to develop the application process.

- 5.3 There is no specific requirement that the Council provides match funding as part of the application. It should be noted however that projects included in the application require to be developed to a detailed design and costing stage and be subject to a Treasury Green Book Appraisal.
- 5.4 It is proposed that an application to the Levelling Up Fund is progressed and that external technical support will be commissioned to support the development of the detail required of the application process.
- 5.5 It is proposed that the following projects, identified as priorities within Section 7 of the Place Plan, are developed to a level of readiness for potential inclusion in a LUF application:
- Station Arrival and Town Centre Connections
 - Improved Gateway to the Town Centre and Bouverie Square
 - Sandgate Road and Town Centre Public Realm
 - F51 Environs and Payers Park
 - Harbour Line & Tram Road
 - Sunny Sands
- 5.6 The development of the above projects will require specialist transportation input to investigate in more detail roads, infrastructure and car parking implications.
- 5.7 Funding to support the development of the LUF application is available within existing budgets and through utilisation of the Government capacity grant.
- 5.8 It is important to note that it is not realistic to expect that all of the above will be included in a deliverable LUF application (i.e. projects required to complete LUF spend by 31st March 2024). The further development of the various projects (and their component parts) will establish robust delivery programmes and this will be used to determine the scale and nature of the application.

6. IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Legal Officer's Comments (NM)

There are no legal implications arising from the report.

6.2 Finance Officer's Comments (CS)

As outlined within 5.2 the Council has been awarded £125,000 capacity funding. It is anticipated this will be largely utilised in 2021/22 but any residual sum will be carried forward for use in 2022/23. The sum will as outlined above be provisionally allocated £50,000 to support the additional capacity for the accelerated delivery resource and the remaining £75,000 for external technical support in developing the bid itself.

Clearly there will be financial implications of any resulting project from the Levelling Up bid. Those implications will need to be evaluated, approved and incorporated in a future Medium Term Capital programme once known.

6.3 **Diversities and Equalities Implications (GE)**

There are no negative equality and diversity implications directly arising from this report. The development of the Place Plan has been subject to a range of public engagement activities that has allowed members of the public, local businesses, strategic partners and community interest groups the opportunity to get involved and help shape the final draft of the plan.

The Place Plan considers the needs of all residents regardless of whether or not they have a protected characteristic. The differing needs of people, including those with different protected characteristics, will be further considered as projects and interventions are developed further.

6.4 **Climate Change Implications (OF)**

There are no direct Climate Change Implications arising from producing this report. The Folkestone Town Centre Place Plan sits within the Council's wider objective to secure regeneration of Folkestone town centre which if properly managed will help minimise associated carbon emissions. As stated earlier in the report, investments priorities for the LUF has a requirement to support net zero goals and have minimum impact on nature and natural assets. As a result, Folkestone Town Centre Place Plan can provide opportunity to incorporate climate resilience and adaptation measures to ensure sustainable change.

7. **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 - Final Consultation Feedback

Appendix 2 - Folkestone Town Centre Place Plan

8. **CONTACT OFFICERS AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Councillors with any questions arising out of this report should contact the following officer prior to the meeting:

Ewan Green, Director, Place

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E-mail: ewan.green@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk

Background documents:

The following published documents have been relied upon in the preparation of the report: