



TOWNS AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE 4 December 2019

Subject Heading:

This report outlines the progress made to date on the Romford Town Centre Masterplan project; the next steps and timescales for completion.

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Policy context:

Planning policy

SUMMARY

This report provides an introduction to, and summary of work undertaken to date in respect of the Romford Town Centre Masterplan project. The project was commissioned in October 2018 to deliver a comprehensive, design-led development framework for Romford. The objective of the project is to develop a Masterplan that will guide and facilitate Romford's future growth appropriately and sustainably, building on its unique characteristics to deliver a high quality, cohesive and vibrant town centre for Havering.

The intention is to adopt the Masterplan document as formal planning policy so that it becomes a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The SPD will form part of a suite of sub-policies under the Boroughs Local Plan (LP) when this is adopted in 2020. The Council's LP has been submitted to the Secretary of State and has been subject to an Examination in Public. It is anticipated that consultation on the planning Inspector's proposed modifications to the Local Plan will take place in early 2020.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members of the Towns and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee note:

- The contents of this report and progress made to date with the Romford Masterplan project
- The findings of the consultation report (Appendix 1)
- The next steps and associated timescales in relation to the adoption of the Masterplan by Cabinet

REPORT DETAIL

1. Context & background

- 1.1 Romford is the Borough's primary town centre and is identified as a Metropolitan Centre in both the London Plan and the Local Plan. It is a market town, with a Market Charter dating from 1247, and has a strong sense of history and heritage with a unique position as a gateway town between London and Essex.
- 1.2 Much like many other town centres across the country, Romford has faced a number of socio-economic challenges. The changing dynamics of town centres and the decline of the high street is well documented. As such, Romford has not been immune to the impacts of these changes. Some of the key drivers influencing these changes include:

Changes in retail and leisure sectors

Shifts in consumer habits and technological innovations have influenced the way people interact with town centres. The rise of online and convenience shopping has resulted in town centres now having a broader role with greater emphasis on culture, leisure and consumer experience. This shift has significant implications for retailer and business occupiers; the preference now being for smaller and more flexible units with stock holding that is closely correlated to demand.

Evolving work practices

Changes in working practices have also affected town centres. Technological advances have progressively enabled mobile working which, in turn, has led to shifts in demand for flexible working spaces over traditional office floor spaces. This, coupled with affordability challenges, has resulted in changes to the structure of employment spaces/uses in town centres generally, as well as Romford.

Changes in population dynamics

The changing dynamics of Romford's population is also a contributing influence. Romford's ageing population coupled with significant growth in young adults (16-29) is leading to wider town centre requirements in relation to the associated consumer interests of these demographic groups.

- 1.3 In October 2018, the Council commenced the Romford Town Centre masterplan project in order to review, refresh and deliver a revitalised new vision and development framework for Romford.
- 1.4 The Council commissioned a high quality professional design team led by Maccreevor Lavington architects to develop an ambitious and forward looking masterplan for Romford. In addition to this, the Council also contracted Avison Young as economic development and property advisors to ensure the masterplan is supported by robust economic analysis and that it is ultimately, deliverable.
- 1.5 In tandem with the Romford Masterplan, the Council in its function as the Local Planning Authority (LPA) has been preparing a new Local Plan (LP) for the Borough. To this extent, it should be noted that the final Masterplan will become a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) once adopted. Given the LP is the Borough's overarching spatial plan, it takes precedence in the hierarchy of adoption. At present, it is envisaged that the Romford Masterplan SPD will be adopted in summer 2020, soon after the Local Plan.
- 1.6 Once adopted, the role of Masterplan SPD will be to:
 - Provide supplementary guidance to relevant policies in the LP (particularly spatial Policy 1);
 - Support the implementation of relevant policies in the new London Plan (particularly spatial Policies SD1, SD6, SD7 and SD10);
 - Help inform the proposed early review of policies in an adopted LP;
 - Help inform site allocations for inclusion in the early review of the LP and;
 - Sit alongside and complement guidance in other Havering SPDs and the Mayor of London's Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG).
- 1.7 A key component of Masterplan is the inclusion of 6 development briefs which are included to provide more detailed guidance on strategic development areas in around Romford Town Centre. These strategic areas have been identified by the Council has having the opportunity to support Romford's future growth through the provision of mixed development and associated social infrastructure.

2 Masterplan Vision & Objectives

- 2.1 The main aim of the Masterplan is to provide a vision for Romford which is supported by detailed guidance that enables opportunities to be realised so

that that Romford retains its strategic role within Havering, north east London and Essex.

2.2 The intention is for the Masterplan to set out a vision for the period up to 2041. The emerging draft vision for Romford is:

Romford will be a mixed and vibrant regional Town Centre with a distinct character. It will consist of a refined retail offer complimented by a rejuvenated market, with a focus on local goods and services, maintaining its role as a major leisure destination, with an enlarged employment offer, an early evening food and beverage offer and new residential community.

2.3 The Masterplan vision is supported by 8 objectives. These interrelated objectives are illustrated and explained below.



2.4 The objectives for Romford are supported by strategies to provide guidance on how to turn the objectives in to good growth and deliver the social infrastructure that is needed to support this growth.

Character & Townscape

2.5 The Masterplan provides guidance for character areas to inform a townscape strategy that helps to preserve and enhance Romford's heritage, historic places and buildings whilst accommodating emerging characters from new development. Emphasis is placed on improving Romford's unique selling points such as Market Place whilst simultaneously addressing barriers that divide character areas within the town centre, such as the ring road.

Space & Landscape

- 2.6 Good quality space and landscape within Romford Town Centre can support and embellish the built fabric, thereby encouraging more visitors to linger for longer in the Town Centre and allowing residents to enjoy a high quality, liveable place. The Masterplan proposes a wide range of public spaces including high quality streets, pocket parks, squares and roof gardens supported by more access to natural features where possible e.g. River Rom.

Movement & Connectivity

- 2.7 The Masterplan seeks to enhance the quality of access to Romford by making walking and cycling more attractive. This is achieved by creating a balanced network of urban streets, offering a choice of ways to get around and prioritising active travel as well as public transport. Initiatives such as the Liveable Neighbourhoods scheme will support these changes by transforming roundabouts into new street level crossings, freeing up space for more active frontage along the ring road while enhancing the quality of the main north-south & east-west connections through the town centre. The masterplan proposes to rationalise car parking by offering high quality car parking in strategically located, attractive car parking areas that people feel safe to use. A new station entrance on Exchange Street is proposed to improve access to the west of the town centre. Incorporating an interchange with a potential tram line and an improved bus network will help alleviate congestion and activate key sites here.

Uses & mix

- 2.8 The Masterplan proposes to focus a retail core of activity around the Market Place and South Street, with other locations working in harmony to support the central area. Acknowledging the changing nature of retail, the Masterplan seeks to deliver smaller shops and a more varied food and drink offer, all working to support a unique and distinctive Romford. Employment and business space will be focussed around the station, Waterloo Road and Rom Valley Way. The Masterplan encourages growing pockets of cultural activity alongside leisure uses, using anchors to catalyse activity and drive footfall. New residential development brings further opportunities, and the Masterplan uses these to support Town Centre activities for everyone and as a means to deliver new resources and infrastructure.

Sustainability

- 2.9 There is an opportunity to ensure Romford's growth is built on a platform of sustainable infrastructure with significant environmental, wellbeing and placemaking benefits. The Masterplan considers and outlines opportunities for Romford through a number of channels such as: the promotion of a greener environment with increased bio-diversity; reducing the risk of future flooding through the incorporation of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS), and improved waste collection and storage facilities. Additionally,

opportunities are also proposed for Romford to transition to a low energy, zero carbon town in the future.

Economy

2.10 Sustaining and improving Romford's economy is a key consideration for the future of the town centre. The Masterplan suggests approaches to support this such as:

- Revitalising the market so that it is a distinct destination in its own right, unique to Romford;
- Diversifying the range of activities in the town centre to support vitality and long term viability of the core retail offer by expanding options to visit the town centre;
- Promoting Romford as a destination for business by increasing the range, type and quality of work and employment spaces available;
- Ensuring that Romford is positioned to capture the benefits of the new Crossrail link and managing any potential impacts;
- Developing Romford's creative, cultural and leisure offer as key attractors for visitors, businesses and residents.

Inclusivity, Health & Wellbeing

2.11 Inclusivity, health and wellbeing is wrapped within the key themes collectively, and is a core component that underpins these themes. In particular, with relation to movement, active travel is promoted not only as part of a healthy lifestyle but as part of improvements to air quality. Streets and spaces are also designed to be equitable to all modes of travel and to all people, thus championing inclusivity. The uses proposed and the community-focused components also support this inclusivity, ensuring the town centre is for everyone. For residential components, the masterplan promotes maximising affordability and ensuring a mix of tenures and dwelling types.

Deliverability

2.12 The success of the Masterplan is, to a significant extent, dependable on the deliverability of the proposals contained within it. Work to finalise this strategy in the Masterplan is still ongoing, but key to supporting the delivery will be:

- Ongoing successful collaborations between the Council and associated delivery partners including but not limited to GLA, TfL, JV partners to support wider regeneration initiatives, development opportunities and economic growth.
- Utilisation of Council land and assets to assist with site assembly and enable comprehensive development that supports the Masterplan objectives.
- Inviting wider investment and funding to assist with and bring forward social infrastructure requirements to underpin growth and:
- Creating appropriate conditions that attract positive and significant external investment opportunities to Romford, in line with the

Masterplan vision to deliver a beneficial step change that facilitates good growth in Romford.

3 Consultation

3.1 A foundation of the guiding principles that underpin the emerging masterplan document is the empirical evidence collected through an extensive public consultation and engagement process. This has been led by the Council's appointed specialist engagement agency – Make:Good – who have consulted a wide range of stakeholders, including:

- Local people
- Local organisations
- Schools
- Council partners

3.2 In addition to this, the masterplan team has also engaged the following partners and stakeholders to inform the development of the masterplan:

- Land owners
- Prospective developers
- Business representatives
- Council departments.
- Sub regional & statutory agencies – GLA, TfL, Environment Agency
- Havering's Quality Review Panel (QRP) - a professional peer review panel led by independent architects/design professionals to critically review the design principals and emerging proposals.

3.2 In relation to consultation with local people, the Council has carried out a wide range of events which has resulted in over 1,200 people being engaged in the process. The feedback has overall been very positive and to the draft proposals set out in the Masterplan. All information has been collated through a programmed sequence of engagement events that have taken place over the course of the year. These include:

- Public exhibition events
- Pop-up stalls at strategic locations around the town centre
- Targeted engagement seminars with stakeholders and key organisations in the Romford
- 1-2-1 meetings
- Presentations at local events

3.3 The events have also been supported by a detailed communications strategy which has used a number of channels and media formats to circulate information and updates about the project. These include: Facebook, Instagram, local press and a dedicated project webpage: <https://www.yourromford.co.uk/>

3.4 A full report setting out the findings of the consultation for the Masterplan are set out in Appendix 1 of this report.

4 Next steps and timescales

4.1 The next steps and associated timescales for completing the project are summarised as follows:

- Completion of internal Council consultation on draft SPD – *November 2019*
- Review workshops with Leader and Members – *January 2020*
- Cabinet approval for statutory consultation – *April 2020*
- Review of feedback/update SPD – *May 2020*
- Adoption of Romford Masterplan SPD*- *June 2020*

*Note: this assumes successful adoption of the Local Plan

5 Appendices

Appendix 1: Romford Masterplan Draft Consultation Report

IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

Financial implications and risks:

None

Legal implications and risks:

Policy protocol – the draft Romford Masterplan SPD will eventually form a sub-set of policies to the emerging Havering Local Plan. As such, the SPD can only be adopted once the Local Plan has been adopted.

Judicial Review – as with all public authority decisions, there is a risk that the SPD could be challenged for a Judicial Review if adopted.

Human Resources implications and risks:

None

Equalities implications and risks:

An Equalities Assessment has not been included with this report as the primary purpose of this paper is to summarise progress on the project to date, and next steps.

The intention of the Romford Masterplan is to adopt it as a Supplementary Planning Document. As such, the Council will be required to demonstrate and

evidence all equalities considerations as part of this process which will include detailed Equalities Assessments.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None