

## A PLACE-BASED APPROACH TO ENGAGEMENT

Finance Investment Advisory Committee – 21 May 2024

**Report of:** Sarah Robson, Deputy Chief Executive & Chief Officer People & Places

**Status:** To Note.

**Also considered by:**

- People and Places Advisory Committee – 18 June 2024
- Improvement and Innovation Committee – 27 June 2024
- Cabinet – 16 July 2024

**Key Decision:** No.

**Executive Summary:** This report sets out a holistic approach to developing a 'place-based approach' to engagement as part of the regeneration of Council-owned assets within the Sevenoaks District.

**This report supports the Key Aims of:** the Council Plan, the Sevenoaks District Community Plan, Local Plan, Economic Development Strategy, Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr. Julia Thornton

**Contact Officer:** Sarah Robson, Ext. 7219

**Recommendation to Advisory Committees:**

To recommend to Cabinet to endorse a 'place based' to engagement as part of the regeneration of Council-owned assets within the Sevenoaks District.

**Recommendation to Cabinet:**

To recommend to Cabinet to endorse and adopt a 'place based' to engagement as part of the regeneration of Council-owned assets within the Sevenoaks District.

**Reason for recommendation:** The Council's property assets and the way in which they are used is key to transforming the way in which we, together with our partners, deliver public services to meet the needs of our communities. This requires a more focused strategic and engagement approach across the Council's portfolio of assets, one that maximises their role in regenerating Sevenoaks District and supporting communities.

## Introduction and Background

- 1 We're changing how we work in and with our communities, and how we use our Council assets and guide new development so people have the things they need nearer to where they live.
- 2 Alongside smarter working with public sector partners, voluntary and community groups and businesses, we'll foster more connected communities, increasing equality of access to services and opportunities.
- 3 This place-based, networked localities approach is about getting the right support, right buildings and right development all in the right place. Fundamental to its success is making the most of our assets.
- 4 This report details how we will think strategically and creatively about our assets use, management and community benefit, and ensure they deliver the social and commercial outcomes needed.
- 5 When the Council reviews its assets, it seeks to understand how the buildings are being used and managed, whether they are fit for purpose, provide value for money and meet current and future community and corporate need.
- 6 Using existing insight and carrying out further engagement and/or consultation to understand what our communities need will be central to the process and shaping development and implementation going forward.
- 7 In taking a place-based approach, the Council is able to not only address the aesthetics and protect the 'life' of its assets, but can also provide other elements which together create places where people want to live, work, visit or invest in line with the District's well-established 'Sevenoaks So Much More' place campaign.
- 8 The value of creating 'place' will underpin how we work with residents and other stakeholders to create communities. There are key elements which often influence the way people feel about where they live, for example, access to leisure, retail, parking and public services (such as libraries), housing, employment, quality public realm and open spaces, community safety and community cohesion and good transport.
- 9 Taking a place approach will align with the promises made in the Council Plan and the insights provided through the Community Plan, Local Plan, Climate Change Strategy, Town Centres Strategy, Economic Development Strategy, Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the District's Place campaign 'Sevenoaks So Much More'.
- 10 This approach will need to be embedded into other areas of work, including, but not limited to Kent County Council's (KCC) Communities Programme, West Kent Housing's Strategic Plan, West Kent Health & Care Partnerships Estates Strategy, Kent Police's Neighbourhood Policing Model and local Neighbourhood Plans.

## **This approach within the context within the Local Plan**

- 11 This approach will be mindful of the primacy of the Local Plan, prepared by the District Council, which remains the principal spatial planning document for the Sevenoaks District, contributing to the achievement of sustainable development and consistent with the NPPF. The existing and emerging Local Plan sets out the strategic priorities and policy drivers for the Sevenoaks District, for example, the number of new homes and jobs needed in the area and requirement for infrastructure and facilities, which should not be undermined.
- 12 Policies in neighbourhood plans need to be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the local plan, as well as having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and any other relevant legislation.
- 13 Neighbourhood plans, when approved (and then referred to as a 'made' neighbourhood plan), become part of the development plan for the area to which they geographically apply, which means that they are a key document in the determination of planning applications in that area.

## **Our assets**

- 14 Sevenoaks District Council holds a wide range of corporate assets across the District, comprising:
  - Leisure facilities
  - Offices
  - Depot
  - Car Parks
  - Assets leased to community organisations
  - Land assets, and:
  - Those which are used to generate a commercial income.
- 15 The demand for property and associated services continues to increase to meet service pressures and there is a need to align the Council's assets to ensure it remains relevant to the Council's overall direction and drive change and regeneration to meet demands.
- 16 The financial context from both a revenue and capital perspective continue to remain challenging with a continuing drive to reduce operating costs and efficiencies. In many cases reducing operating costs can only be delivered through major investment or redevelopment of assets, requiring a large capital input at a time when the capital budgets are in short supply.
- 17 Change is therefore needed to ensure that we become more efficient for the benefit of all residents and businesses and to ensure the assets we retain are maximised and play a bigger role in what we do and how we do it.

### **A strategic approach to our property assets**

- 18 The Council has, and will continue to take, a strategic approach to its property assets with a view to ensuring that all elements are fit for purpose.
- 19 The key aims are to ensure its assets are:
- Maximised
  - Managed strategically to support corporate aims and objectives
  - Supporting operational service delivery
  - Providing value for money and securing efficiencies for the future
  - Supporting the regeneration and growth of Sevenoaks District
  - Supporting communities and partners to thrive in the District
  - Reviewed to maximise their use, and income where appropriate
  - Procured and managed to minimise the impact on the environment
  - Fit for purpose.

### **A place-based approach to engagement**

- 20 Engagement does not only need to happen at the conceptual stage of a new development scheme, it can happen at different points or milestones whereby engagement continues with stakeholders and communities as part of the development and duration of a project.
- 21 By embedding a place-based approach to engagement as part of the Council's regeneration ambitions and management of its assets, will enable the Council (and its partners) to:
- Better understand and respond to the needs of local people
  - Be more accountable to local people
  - Plan and deliver better services
  - Make more efficient use of public resources
  - Take transparent decisions based on strong evidence
  - Build strong and positive relationships within and between local communities
  - Test out ideas and explore emerging issues
  - Measure the performance of the Council in delivering services.
- 22 Engagement can take place in many forms including:

- Visioning: to test concepts and the ‘art of the possible’.
  - Engagement: to gain understanding and bring opinion and confidence to enter into dialogue.
  - Conversations: a two-way process, which can open up opportunities for long-term participation.
  - Consultation: submitting views through a formalised process before decisions are made.
- 23 In essence, engagement enables participants to influence both the process and the outcome. Each type of engagement and/or consultation will involve different representation from across the Council, including, but not limited to Planning, Property and Commercial, Housing, Health and Communities, Economic Development and Tourism, Customer Solutions and most importantly, Communications.
- 24 An engagement and communications plan will need to be prepared, which identifies key stakeholders, both internal (members and officers) and external, taking a flexible and a mix of approaches to reach as many people as possible, including communities, partners, investors and government.
- 25 The engagement undertaken will build and refine our approach as intelligence is gathered. Initial engagement could be a conversational approach to ask residents about their lives and needs and to acknowledge what they have previously told us. It could ask what is liked about assets and how they are used /not used. As the engagement moves forward, this can be refined into more pin-pointed conversations about specific assets and their uses. The aim is to move to more focused discussions around options and explore opportunities for elements of co-design.
- 26 More focused qualitative engagement could be undertaken around asset clusters/areas to express priorities, aspiration and need. This is likely to include a survey of identified key assets – assessing the user likes. As part of any engagement it is likely there will be conversations with key stakeholders, opportunities for Members to get closer to the engagement, especially where there is a focus on local ward needs and alignment with linked projects.

### **How this approach is being used**

- 27 The Council's emerging Local Plan (Plan 2040) and Town Centres Strategy (April 2022), alongside Sevenoaks Town's Neighbourhood Plan identified Sevenoaks Town as an area for opportunity in terms of improving connections to Knole; exploring the relocation of the market; revitalising the eastern part of the town centre; the Post Office and telephone exchange site; improving the station arrival; and curating a programme of events, alongside expansion of its cultural scene; including more things to do in the evening; widening the leisure offer; and providing new homes that support different income levels and life stages.

- 28 The Council has a number of assets under its ownership in Sevenoaks Town, which alongside assets put forward by Kent County Council (KCC) could potentially contribute to a shared regeneration vision and provide a collaborative delivery framework for protecting the Council's and partners assets.
- 29 Various feasibility work and other due diligence studies have been undertaken to explore potential redevelopment options for the site.
- 30 A report is being presented by the Strategic Head of Property and Commercial through the Committee process, at the same time as this report. Using the place-based approach to engagement outlined in this report, the Council and its partners have ensured the community and stakeholders have been part of the conversations to consider, protect and enhance our assets as part of the initial regeneration concept to promote the town centre with great stories to tell.

#### Other options Considered and/or rejected

Without an effective and coordinated approach to 'place' in relation to Council-owned assets, the benefits of the significant regeneration investments made by the Council may not be fully realised.

#### **Key Implications**

##### Financial

There are no financial implications resulting from this report. Financial implications for delivery are contained within each Strategic Development investment proposal or project workstream.

##### Legal Implications and Risks

There are no anticipated legal implications arising directly from this report. There are no risk management implications resulting from this report. Risk implications for are contained within each project or workstream.

##### Equality Assessment

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users. The place based approach advocated through this paper seeks to have a positive impact by broadening the opportunities for communities to be engaged in the development of individual schemes.

##### Climate Change Implications

The decisions recommended in this paper directly impact our climate change ambition. The impact has been reviewed and there will be a decrease on carbon emissions produced in the district as a result of this decision. The adoption of the Local Plan, which includes policies in relation to climate change and the environment, is likely to have a positive impact to help decrease carbon emissions in the district, and support the resilience of the natural environment.

## **Conclusions**

By adopting a place-based approach to regeneration and protecting Council-owned assets, the Council can ensure it makes the best use of Council assets across the district.

Using existing insight and using engagement and/or consultation to understand what our communities need will be central to the process and shaping development and implementation going forward. In taking a place-based approach, the Council is able to not only protect the 'life' of its assets, but can also provide other elements which together create and regenerate places that deliver social and commercial outcomes.

### **Appendices**

Appendix 1: A placemaking approach to engagement.

### **Background Papers**

None

**Sarah Robson**

**Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer – People & Places**