

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to the Executive for Decision 16 December 2019

Portfolio:	Planning and Development
Subject:	Portchester Village Centre Regeneration Update
Report of:	Director of Planning and Regeneration
Corporate Priorities:	Protect and Enhance the Environment Strong, Safe Inclusive and Healthy Communities Maintaining and Extending Prosperity

Purpose:

To provide an update on the commercial prospects study for Portchester commissioned by the Council. To consider and approve the next steps for improvements to the layout of the public car parks to the south of Portchester (Village) Centre and pedestrian links. Since producing a Regeneration Vision for Portchester in 2017, Fareham Housing has identified Assheton Court for redevelopment, which is the subject of another report on this Executive agenda. If this proposed redevelopment goes ahead it has a clear relationship with the car parks which abut the site. The report also briefly explains the emerging Transforming Cities Fund bid to Government, which is looking to improve rapid transit in the wider Portsmouth City-Region, which could include improvements along the A27 close to Portchester (Village) Centre.

Executive Summary:

The report briefly outlines the background to delivering the proposed improvements to Portchester (Village) Centre, identified in the Vision produced after extensive consultation, entitled '*Putting the Village back into Portchester*' as part of the wider regeneration strategy. It reports on key findings from the commissioned consultant's report into the future commercial prospects for the Centre (Village). It provides an update on the possible implications of the Assheton Court redevelopment and emerging Transforming Cities Funding bid, if successful, on these regeneration ambitions. The report proposes the next steps to implementing improvements in the short-term to the layouts of the southern public car parks and pedestrian links to the Centre utilising existing Section 106 monies. Officers recommend that a procurement exercise is undertaken for the design and implementation of improvements to the car park and pedestrian linkages to the Centre. A future Executive Report in Summer 2020 will detail the necessary Traffic Regulation Orders for consultation.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the Executive:

- (a) notes the findings of the commercial prospects study and update on the emerging Transforming Cities Fund;
- (b) agrees that further work is undertaken by officers to ensure that up-to-date information on car park use is used to support work developing a detailed design car park scheme; and
- (c) agrees that Officers undertake a procurement exercise to develop and deliver a detailed scheme design to implement improvements to the southern public car parks and pedestrian linkages to the Portchester (Village) Centre, prior to consulting on a TRO in the Summer of 2020.

Reason:

To deliver environmental improvements and alterations to the car parks that will help support the future regeneration of Portchester (Village) Centre.

Cost of proposals:

The improvements will be met by available S106 funding for improvements to Portchester Centre.

Appendices:

Appendix A (Confidential): Provision of a Commercial Investment Viability Study for Portchester (4th November 2019).

Appendix B. Plan of the existing Portchester car park arrangement.

Appendix C. Plan of preferred revised (preliminary) Portchester car park arrangement.

Background papers:

Regeneration Vision for Portchester Village Centre entitled 'Putting the Village Back in Portchester' (June 2017).

Reference papers: None

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Executive Briefing Paper

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Briefing by:	Director of Planning and Regeneration
Portfolio:	Planning and Development

BACKGROUND

1. In July 2017, the Executive approved a Regeneration Vision for Portchester Village Centre entitled 'Putting the Village Back in Portchester' (the Vision). After extensive consultation, the Vision was finalised and set out a future strategy to help regenerate Portchester Village Centre. It looks, amongst several ambitions, to encourage redevelopment to help deliver housing and commercial vibrancy, encouraging business and community events in the precinct, ensuring the car parks operate in the best way to support traders and visitors. It also includes the visual appearance of the Centre, particularly the precinct itself, working with the current landowners, Hampshire County Council. It highlights the importance of improving the overall quality of the public realm (environmental), including the paving, street furniture, lighting and landscape.
2. Following the approval of the Vision in January 2018 an Executive Report was presented giving details of opportunities to change parking arrangements in the Council's car parks to the south of the village centre. The report was deferred in order that Officers had an opportunity to seek further up to date advice on the existing retail health of the village centre and its future commercial prospects. This would allow a further report to be presented to the Executive detailing the proposed improvements to the car park and associated public realm (environmental) improvements to be taken together, in light of this up-to-date advice.
3. Since then, two new important considerations have arisen. The first is the Council priority to redeveloped Assheton Court as a sheltered housing scheme, which is the subject of a separate Executive Report on this agenda, and implications for the regeneration of the Centre, if approved. Secondly, the possible implications of emerging improvements to the rapid transit (transport) network being developed by Hampshire County Council, in liaison with Fareham Borough Council, as part of the Transforming Cities Fund bid, if the partnership is successful in securing Government funding in March/April next year.
4. This report explains and seeks approval for the next steps towards implementing improvements to the layouts of the southern public car parks and links into the Centre, working with highway authority, using existing S106 monies to deliver these improvements.

KEY FINDINGS OF THE FUTURE COMMERCIAL PROSPECTS STUDY

5. During 2018 independent commercial advice was sought, primarily on the existing and future market conditions, including the likelihood of viable commercial investment taking place in Portchester. Following a procurement exercise, the local office of Vail Williams, property consultants, undertook a 'Commercial Prospects Study'.
6. The study assessed several factors, such as diversity of uses, vacancies, commercial yields and rents, retailer representation, safety, convenience, accessibility, environmental quality, and the socio-economic profile of the catchment area. It also included an assessment of alternative nearby competing centres and a survey with existing occupiers and landlords to ascertain current and future viability.
7. The study forms a confidential Appendix A. of this report.
8. The study highlights the fact that national and multiple retailers have generally shifted their investment into the top 50-150 centres, rather than 300-500 stores in the UK that they have traditionally focused on. Over the last 5 years, national retailers have not featured when opportunities have arisen in centres like Portchester, despite lease and rental agreements not preventing occupation.
9. Portchester is a location which offers 'convenience shopping', with a large amount of free parking. The study supports improvements to short-stay parking, considering the consultant's observations on the footfall within the retail pitch.
10. General access to the centre is not considered an issue, however the consultants highlight that some access links are visibly worn and poorly lit, and also lack signage directing customers to the pedestrian area.
11. It is worth highlighting that many respondents to the questionnaire highlighted that new or improved lighting, street furniture and signage would benefit the centre, as well as reducing the scale of planting to improve the centre's visibility.
12. The consultant's study explains that whilst the Centre cannot compete with the dedicated leisure offers and environment of nearby centres, such as Port Solent, through flexible planning it should encourage A3 (food and drink), A4 (drinking establishments) and services (e.g. A2) uses.
13. Whilst Portchester is unlikely to attract significant commercial investment from property companies, funds and institutions, as the margins and upsides are too low, a flexible approach to encourage diversity of uses in the centre, works to improve the aesthetics and convenient short-stay parking will help regenerate the centre.
14. To conclude, both the study and a dialogue with the consultants supports the premise that the Portchester (Village) Centre will continue to provide convenience, leisure and service shopping for the local population. Whilst the lack of national multiples may affect its wider attractiveness the centre has scope to develop its role into a future thriving mixed use local district centre, that acts as the focus for community interaction.
15. The study highlights the opportunity to improve the Centre through changes to the public realm (environmental) and existing ground floor uses when private leases expire through flexible planning policies. Public realm (environmental) improvements and new residents can help increase footfall, improve safety and uplift the attractiveness of the centre as a destination for local shopping and community interaction. For example, this potential can be seen in recent local investment with the conversion and extension of

the former bank on the corner of Castle Street to business space and a future ground floor commercial leisure use.

16. It is also worth highlighting that the Council operates flexible planning policies largely through the Adopted Development Sites and Policies Plan (2015), which allows for appropriate changes of use of ground floor commercial premises that support the future vitality of the centre. This approach recognises changing market dynamics over time and can help to ensure that vacancies are minimised. There will be opportunities to continue reflect a flexible approach through the emerging Fareham Local Plan 2036.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE ASSHETON COURT REDEVELOPMENT

17. It is important to highlight that there is on this agenda, an Executive Report for Assheton Court in Portchester, located south of the public car parks to the south of the Centre. This report outlines the benefits of redeveloping the sheltered housing scheme. The reason for highlighting this report is that if the proposal is approved it would include a small area of the adjacent public car park to the north. The inclusion of this land would enable a new larger sheltered housing scheme in what is an excellent location for older person accommodation.
18. The preliminary car park designs, which now include the proposals for the redevelopment of Assheton Court, suggest that there will be no net loss to the overall amount of car parking spaces, with a small marginal gain in spaces if improvements to the southern public car parks go ahead, subject to detail design and survey.
19. Whilst prior to Assheton Court being identified as a priority for the Council, the Portchester Vision did identify Council owned land to the south of the Coop (currently parking) could be used for potential residential development, however there is no commitment to do so. The extension of the Assheton site, which has a similar land take to the area south of the Co-op, would provide a deliverable and achievable alternative or addition that will positively contribute to the Assheton Court redevelopment and the benefits it will bring.
20. The Executive Report for Assheton Court therefore recommends that 'The inclusion of a small area of the adjacent Long Stay East car park within any redeveloped design on the proviso that no net loss in overall public car parking spaces will occur in the Fareham Borough Council car parks at Portchester village centre'.

THE POSSIBLE OPPORTUNITIES FROM THE EMERGING TRANSFORMING CITIES FUND BID

21. It is important to highlight that Hampshire County Council, as the highway authority, are the landowners and body responsible for the maintenance of the public realm comprising the precinct and surrounding footpaths and carriageways, some of which run through the southern car parks. Fareham Borough Council has been engaged in discussions with the County to help deliver potential to improvements both as part of developing the Vision for Portchester and after its finalisation in June 2017.
22. Since then the Government has announced, as part of the Autumn Budget 2017, the creation of the £1.7bn Transforming Cities Fund, with the aim of driving up productivity and spread prosperity through investment in public and sustainable transport in some of the largest English city regions.
23. Subsequently, the Council has been engaged with the County, and other partners, in making a bid for the Department for Transport's (DfT) Transforming Cities Fund (TCF)

for the Portsmouth and South East Hampshire (Portsmouth City-Region), which includes Fareham. In June of this year, an outline business case for funding was submitted to the DfT. On 27th September 2019, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire was short-listed as one of 12 regions that could proceed to the second stage of submitting a full business case to the DfT by 28th November 2019.

24. Whilst for the purposes of the submission bid, there is a range of conceptual proposals dependent on the level of Government funding available, they are largely focused on improving rapid transit (transport) network within the region. This network comprises of dedicated busways, bus lanes on roads and where practical traffic lights for buses. The funding bid is largely based around making improvements to this network, building on successful services such as the Eclipse. It also consists of a wider package of measures to encourage connectivity to rail services and other modes of sustainable transport (i.e. cycling and walking), as well as measures to improve the customer experience (e.g. better waiting areas, real time travel information and simple ticketing options).
25. As there are a range of different conceptual proposals and associated scales of investment, if this funding bid is successful this may result in small improvements to rapid transit along the A27 or very significant changes to the A27, including the roundabouts at West Street and Castle Street in Portchester. The conceptual proposals will be assessed by the DfT, and if successful, they will need to undergo preliminary and furthermore detailed designs, as well as road safety audits, before they could be implemented. There will also be public consultation to be undertaken as part of this process.
26. As part of the bid process the Council provided the County with the work they had undertaken as part of the Portchester Regeneration Vision and worked on the emerging TCF bid by making provisions for potential public realm (environmental) improvements within the Centre. Such improvements are also an important element of the business case for DfT funding to ensure that Centre rapid transit infrastructure is visible, attractive, convenient and will deliver efficient sustainable and connected public transport services. If successful, these funding proposals could help deliver a substantial component of the Regeneration Vision for Portchester. If the TCF bid is successful, it is anticipated that works could commence by Summer 2021, subject to Government announcements.
27. Due to the uncertainty surrounding the scale and detail of the TCF bid and including public realm improvements, subject to design and safety work to be undertaken, it is considered prudent to limit any potential earlier enhancements to areas where there is certainty that TCF funding proposals will not overlap. This will enable FBC to deliver some improvement works prior to TCF proposals coming forward if successful.
28. Given the above context of Assheton Court redevelopment and emerging TCF bid the following next steps are recommended.

NEXT STEPS: IMPROVEMENTS TO SOUTHERN PUBLIC CAR PARKS AND PEDESTRIAN LINKAGES TO THE CENTRE

29. Fareham Borough Council own, maintain and operate the existing car park to the south side of Portchester centre. They currently comprise five parking areas; a lorry park, two long stay car parks, and two short stay car parks. A plan of the existing arrangement is shown in Appendix B.

30. The Vision for Portchester identified potential changes to the car park, which reflected the views of local people to have free and accessible parking that meets the needs of local residents and village centre users, including young families.
31. Appendix C shows the preliminary design of the preferred revised arrangement. The objectives of the scheme are as follows:
 - The proposed car park improvements would provide more short stay spaces closer to the pedestrian precinct, with fewer long stay spaces but well orientated to the surrounding community uses. Overall there will be no net loss of public car parking spaces, whilst facilitating the redevelopment of Assheton Court and maintaining the existing Long Stay East car park for future short-term parking.
 - It would introduce parent and child parking bays, conveniently located to the smaller Short Stay car park close to the pedestrian precinct.
 - Relocate and increase the number of disabled parking bays, again to the smaller Short Stay car park close to the pedestrian precinct.
 - It would remove the Lorry Park, but then provide spaces for smaller Light Goods Vehicles that are to be accommodated in part of the new Short Stay South car park, allowing small goods vehicle to utilise the car park. The existing lorry park would then be converted into car parking spaces to increase the capacity. It is envisaged that lorries and Heavy Goods Vehicles will be allowed to park overnight to deter parking in residential streets.
 - The former Lorry Park and the smaller Long Stay car park (south of the Lorry Park) would be combined to provide a single Long Stay car park.
 - The proposals would look to improve the signage within and to and from the car parks.
32. In June and July 2016 extensive car park surveys were undertaken that underpinned the Portchester Regeneration Vision, justifying the need for the scheme as outlined above. In December 2018 further work was undertaken; observations of car park use were made which verified that there was only limited use of the car park by drivers or passengers then travelling beyond the centre on foot. It is proposed that work is undertaken by officers to ensure that up-to-date information on car park use is used to support further work developing a detailed design car park scheme.
33. The proposed improvements to the public car parks will require a revision to the current Traffic Regulation Order (TRO). Any changes are subject to a 21-day statutory public consultation, which includes a Public Notice in the local press, and on-site notices erected within the car park and the pedestrian precinct (maintained during the consultation). A copy of the proposals would also be available on deposit at the Civic Offices in Fareham.
34. In addition, in consultation with the highway authority, it is also recommended that early public realm improvements be focused on the pedestrian links to and from the southern car park. These are important links to the precinct and would benefit from qualitative improvements, which could include surfacing, new signage, improved lighting and street furniture.

CONCLUSION

35. Considering the commercial study, the potential redevelopment of Assheton Court and potential funding, if successful from the Transforming Cities Fund, it is recommended that a procurement exercise to develop and deliver a detailed scheme design to implement improvements to the southern public car parks and pedestrian linkages to the Centre be undertaken. A future Executive Report in the Summer of 2020 will detail the necessary TROs for consultation.

Enquiries:

For further information on this report please contact Claire Burnett, Strategic Lead for Economic Development & Regeneration (Ext 4330).