

Report to Cabinet

Report reference: C-011-2024/25

Date of meeting: 15 July 2024



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Commercial & Estates – Cllr Matthews

Subject: Regeneration and Placed Based Investment Fund

Responsible Officer: Andrew Small (07548 145665).

Democratic Services: Vivienne Messenger (01992 564243).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

Cabinet is **Recommended to Agree:**

- (1) The creation of an Investment and Regeneration Reserve of £1,020,000, ring-fencing the funding from the Fit for the Future Reserve, and;
- (2) To use this funding to progress feasibility, viability and achieve Planning permission for the first tranche of Place Based initiative schemes initially at both Centric Parade, Loughton and Brooker Road, Waltham Abbey.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The Cabinet endorsed a Place Delivery Strategy on 18 December 2023, pulling together existing strategies and plans which focused primarily on Place related issues to create a single understanding of both the considerations and ambitions agreed by the Council. From this, a direction of travel for the Council's delivery on its Place Based objectives will emerge.
- 1.2. Unsurprisingly, this paper identified sustainably meeting housing needs, regeneration and the provision of jobs as some of the biggest drivers of the Council's work on Place related issues.
- 1.3. The next step is to bring forward schemes which further these objectives and this report identifies resources to enable the feasibility and planning on two individual schemes to progress.

2. Detailed Report

- 2.1. The Place Strategy report presented to Cabinet on 18 December 2023 sought to provide a single point of focus for delivery against the Council's Corporate Plan place-based objectives. The Council has a number of strategies and plans which all map out ambitions and set parameters within which the Corporate Plan objectives would be delivered but these lacked an overarching view of how these would be brought together into a single focused delivery plan.

2.2. The Strategy translated the various plans into a more area driven set of priorities and locations for focus within the district that jointly recognised the need to maximise the Council's existing asset base and delivery resources in terms of using its strategic role to initiate wider placed based regeneration and redevelopment.

2.3. The paper set out a number of objectives that the Council seeks to address through its Place Based Strategy, these being:

By 2033 Epping Forest District will be a place where:

- (i) residents continue to enjoy a healthy, happy and good quality of life.
- (ii) new homes of an appropriate mix of sizes, types and tenures to meet local needs will be provided and well-integrated communities created.
- (iii) development respects the attributes of the different towns and villages.
- (iv) development needs will be met in the most sustainable locations.
- (v) Epping Forest will be conserved and enhanced.
- (vi) the historic environment will be preserved or enhanced.
- (vii) the recreational and nature conservation aims of Lee Valley Regional Park will be supported.
- (viii) a more sustainable local economy including tourism, aviation, research and development, construction and food production will be developed.
- (ix) a distinctive and attractive network of town and village centres will have been maintained.
- (x) the natural environment and landscape character will be protected and opportunities to improve access to the countryside will be taken, including by enhancing the District's green and blue infrastructure networks;
- (xi) public transport, walking and cycling infrastructure will be promoted to residents of new and existing developments to encourage sustainable travel;
- (xii) significant residential development will be located around Harlow to support the economic regeneration of the town; and
- (xiii) air quality will be improved.

2.4. The Council recognised that delivery of these objectives would require it to work with partners and developers, using its Planning powers, but also, recognising its important and unique role in shaping the future of the district, by sometimes leading on development using resources in its control. In this role, the Council can act as a catalyst to bring forward wider improvements through its investment in locations.

2.5. Understanding that this strategy would need funding to bring forward initiatives, the Council made provision in the budget as part of Fit for Future. Fit for the Future, set out a number of transformational ambitions intended to deliver longer term financial security whilst jointly delivering on Corporate Aims and objectives. The Stronger Place theme within Fit for the Future identified Council Assets and Economic Growth as key areas of focus which should be maximised in furtherance of the wider objectives. The Council approved the creation of a provision of £3 million, funded primarily from the interest on the Google sale, to progress work on these themes.

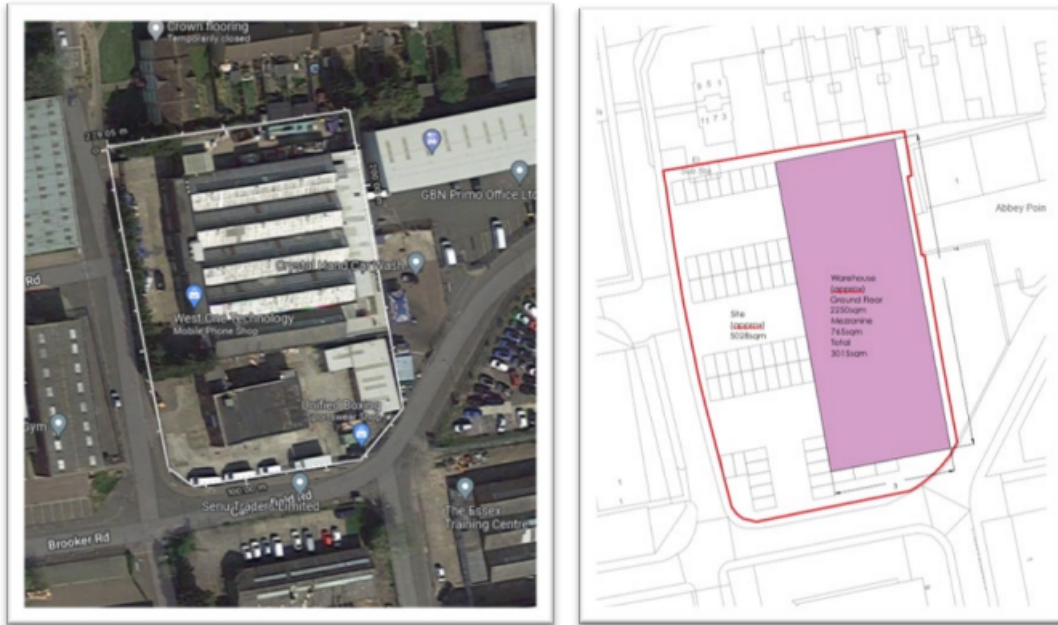
2.6. The Council working closely with its development arm, Qualis Commercial, has been reviewing its existing asset base alongside the above objectives to identify opportunities with the greatest immediate potential to progress the strategy's aims.

2.7. Two opportunities initially present themselves and are considered to meet enough of the wider objectives set out in the Place Based Strategy to warrant further exploration.

- 2.8. These being Centric Parade on Loughton High Road and the industrial units at Brooker Road, Waltham Abbey.
- 2.9. Centric Parade was purchased by the Council in 2019 partially for its regeneration potential and partly because the income from the commercial space would more the cover the cost of acquisition until a regeneration proposal could be brought forward.
- 2.10. The Cabinet Report in 2019 seeking authority to acquire the development included the following text:
- “...on the basis of the existing income, residential development opportunity and opportunity to directly support the local community by taking control of such a prominent town centre location. Key elements of the recently adopted Asset Management Strategy fully support this proposal ... to achieve the aims set out in the Local Plan.”*
- 2.11. Its consideration as an initial opportunity is supported by the wider ambition set out in the Place Based Strategy which states that:
- ‘Loughton will continue to be one of the district’s major towns, providing a retail, employment and education hub that maximises its good public transport connectivity and proximity to the Epping Forest and the forest-edge environment. The needs of Loughton residents will be met through an appropriate mix of housing in sustainable locations. Future development should maintain separation from neighbouring Theydon Bois, Buckhurst Hill and Chigwell. The main centre of Loughton High Road will be strengthened, and future development will support the Centre’s continued role as a successful retail centre within the District....’*
- 2.12. Centric Parade is a single storey row of commercial units set along the High Road bounded by other commercial units with multiple storeys of residential units above. This location is in the Council’s ownership and therefore represents an ideal opportunity for redevelopment of the existing units to provide modern commercial space with residential units above, mirror neighbouring properties.
- 2.13. This not only meets the objectives of providing a much-needed sustainable mix of housing provision in Loughton but also increases the footfall, vibrancy and strengthens the future of this key town centre trading location.
- 2.14. Qualis estimate that to progress this scheme through further viability, consultation stages and through Planning will cost up to £725,000, with an estimated £50,000 of this sum being payment back to the Council for Planning.
- 2.15. The Cabinet is asked to approve the allocation of this sum to fund this proposal, but with its release being subject to the Portfolio Holder being regularly satisfied through the process that the scheme presents a viable proposition to develop.
- 2.16. The second scheme for consideration is in Brooker Road, Waltham Abbey and follows the format for a similar scheme nearing completion at nearby Cartersfield Road.
- 2.17. The Council owns a series of mixed commercial units of differing sizes, with mixed tenancies and in deteriorating condition. The unequal end dates of the existing tenancies had represented a barrier to providing a regenerative solution to this site and so the Council, working through Qualis, has been seeking to acquire vacant

possession or tenancy break points with a view to aligning end dates sufficiently to enable a scheme to be brought forward.

- 2.18. The redeveloped scheme provides 3,015m² (32,453sqft) of light industrial, employment generating units. This includes 60 car parking spaces with 12 EV spaces, Secure by Design, BREEAM Excellent, EPC A+ and with EFDC net carbon zero 2050 compliance.



- 2.19. Redevelopment of the site achieves a number of Corporate objectives including the EFDC Corporate Stronger Place objectives of:

“We will improve existing spaces and create new places for people to live, play, gain skills and do business. Providing places for new businesses to start and opportunities for existing businesses to grow.

Maximising economic investment, potential and growth through partnerships and commercial opportunities”.

- 2.20. Additionally, it delivers on the Place Based Strategy of utilising the Council’s existing underutilised assets to further the Council’s wider place based ambitions by delivering quality commercial and retail space that increases employment opportunities and enhances the successful businesses base within the district.
- 2.21. Progressing this scheme through further viability and Planning is expected to cost £295,000 and Cabinet is requested to approve the allocation of this sum, but with its release again being subject to the Portfolio Holder being regularly satisfied throughout the process that the scheme presents a viable proposition to develop.
- 2.22. Subject to the viability and final assessment of cost, (achieved through this work), a further report will be brought to the Council setting delivery options for the scheme.

3. Resource Implications

- 3.1. The Council made provision within the 2024/25 Budget for the creation of a £3 million fit for the future Reserve to fund transformational activities. This work being intended to increase financial security whilst delivering the Council key Corporate Plan aims.
 - 3.2. Strong Place is a key theme within Fit for the Future and the proposals here represent the first stage of delivery against these objectives.
 - 3.3. The report seeks agreement to ring-fence £1,020,000 within a separate Regeneration and Place Investment Reserve to progress work on the proposals for Centric Parade and at Brooker Road.
- 4. Legal and Governance Implications**
- 4.1. None.
- 5. Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications**
- 5.1. None.
- 6. Consultation Undertaken**
- 6.1. None

Background Papers

Place Strategy for Epping Forest District Council – 18 December 2023