

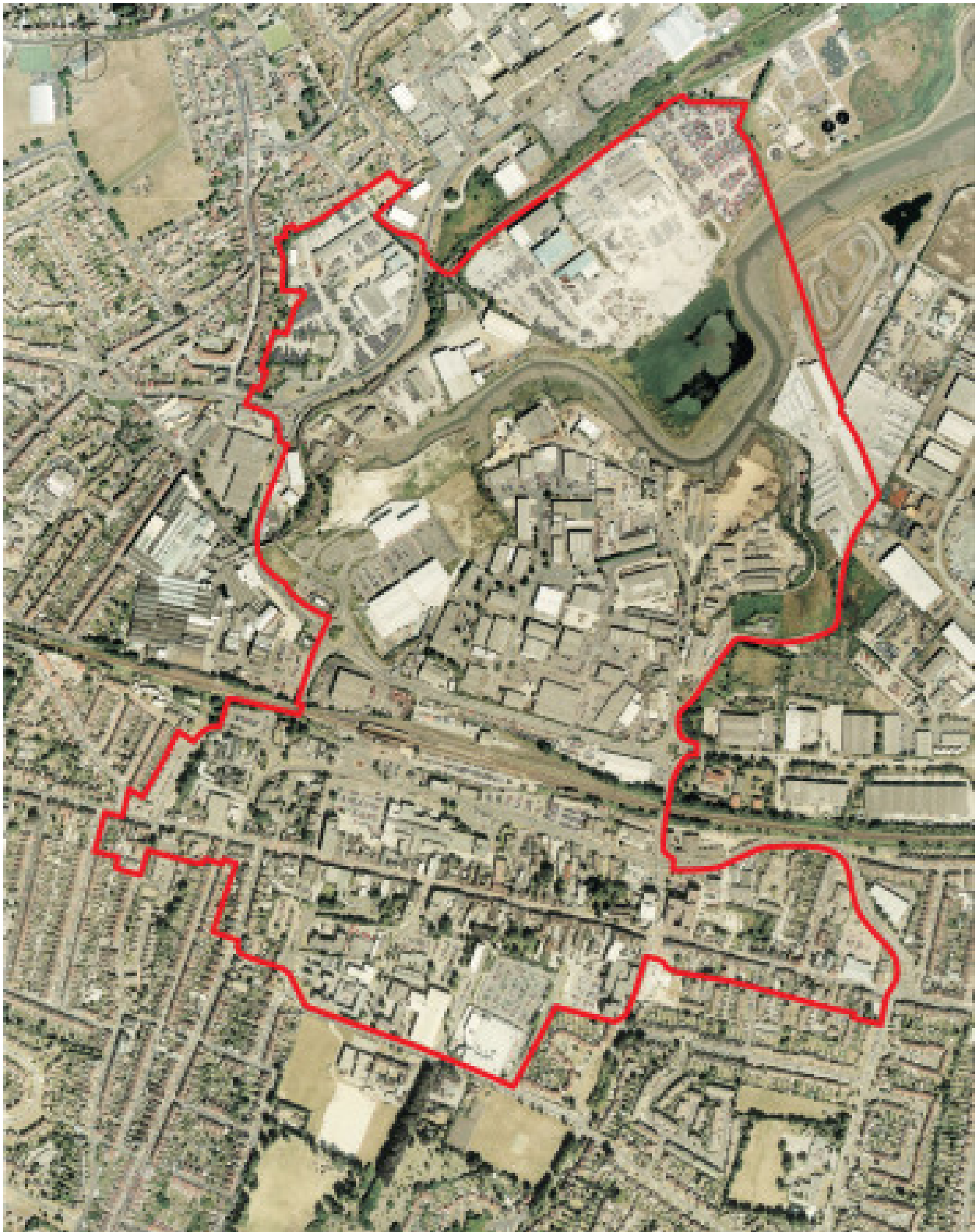


Sittingbourne Town Centre and Milton Creek Supplementary Planning Document

Consultation Draft March 2009



Study Area



Study Area

Foreword

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The regeneration of Sittingbourne is getting closer. Last summer, we asked you to tell us the key issues for Sittingbourne town centre and your visions for the future. We have also looked closely at transport and financial viability. We are now proud to present the draft Sittingbourne Town Centre and Milton Creek masterplan.

The masterplan aims to deliver real improvement in the quality and attractiveness of Sittingbourne for shopping, new homes, business, leisure and culture, and establish the town as a key centre for learning and skills in North Kent.

We are aiming to create an entirely new neighbourhood at Milton Creek, which will seek to achieve the highest standards of design and layout for new buildings, built on eco-friendly and sustainable principles. This will, in turn, be linked to the town centre and to other parts of the town via a new bridge over the railway, opening up new areas and facilities for both current and future residents.

Our plan will build on and enhance the unique local character and heritage of the town and make Milton Creek itself part of the town once again.

We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity before us to regenerate Sittingbourne into an attractive, thriving, competitive and prosperous town.

I very much hope you will take time to look at the draft plan for the future of your town. We look forward to hearing your views.

Cllr Andrew Bowles

Leader of the Council

Foreword

Picture .2



The draft masterplan for the regeneration of Sittingbourne Town Centre and Milton Creek is based on policies in the Swale Borough Local Plan (adopted in 2008 which allocated this area for regeneration). It is also based on a great deal of technical and practical research and, of course, the views of residents, businesses and landowners.

The Plan is ambitious and despite the current economic conditions, we plan to deliver this regeneration over the next ten years to achieve a Sittingbourne we can all be proud of.

Our masterplan indicates the locations for the main land uses, the amount of each type of development, and what form and scale any new buildings should take. It gives clear guidance to developers on the standards and the type of development that is required, and the transport, community facilities and other infrastructure necessary to support it.

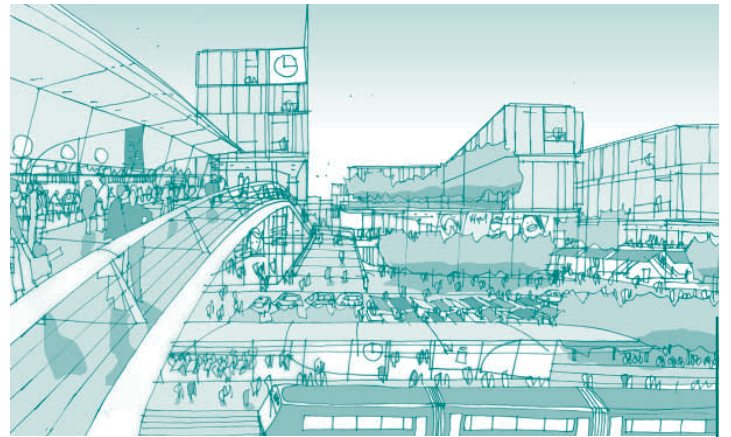
It will then be for developers and their architects and designers to take these principles and interpret them in imaginative, innovative and attractive ways, which Swale Borough Council will then consider through planning applications.

Please send us your comments on the plan before 1 May 2009. We will then analyse responses and present a revised masterplan to the Council for approval in summer 2009.

Cllr Gerry Lewin

Executive Member for Sustainable Planning and Culture

Chapter 1: Introduction



1.1 PURPOSE OF THE SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT

1.1.1 The Council has prepared this Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to guide the regeneration and development of Sittingbourne Town Centre and the Milton Creek area. It elaborates upon policies contained within the Swale Borough Local Plan (2008) and has been prepared in accordance with Government Guidance and the overarching policy context set at national and regional levels, including the Governments Sustainable Communities Plan, the Thames Gateway Growth Area plans, South East regional planning Guidance and the Kent Structure Plan. It also reflects the aims and objectives of the Swale Sustainable Communities Strategy.

1.1.2 The SPD takes the form of a masterplan. This can best be defined as a document outlining the use of land and the overall approach to the design and layout of a development scheme in order to provide detailed guidance for subsequent planning applications. The masterplan contained within this SPD provides advice on the nature and form of acceptable development, uses and design responses. It will be a strong material consideration and afforded significant weight when determining any future planning applications.

1.1.3 This version of the SPD has been produced as a draft for consultation purposes. It is available to view and comment upon for a period of six weeks. All comments received in this period will be considered by the Council and, where appropriate, changes made to the masterplan. After these changes have been made the SPD will be formally adopted by the Council for development control purposes.

Comments can be made by 5pm on 1 May 2009 in writing to the Council or via the Council's interactive consultation website.

Please write to the Council at:

Planning Policy
Sittingbourne Town Centre SPD,
Swale Borough Council,
Swale House,
East Street,
Sittingbourne
ME10 3HT

Tel: (01795) 417850
Email: planningpolicy@swale.gov.uk

Or visit us online at:

<http://swaleldf.swale.gov.uk>

If you have already visited the online consultation page and left your details we will be contacting you with more details as to how to become involved.

1.2 DELIVERING A STEP-CHANGE FOR SITTINGBOURNE

1.2.1 This SPD will deliver a step-change in Sittingbourne, creating an attractive and vibrant new retail core in the town centre comprising a mix of high street names in modern premises including new foodstores and department stores as well as smaller independent shops, cafes and restaurants.

1.2.2 A new Learning Campus and possibly a new Town Hall will be provided in the town, located at a major new civic square outside the station. The square will be the heart-beat and focus of life and activity in the town and will include performance space, spill out areas for cafes and restaurants and a location for the town's market.

1.2.3 New and improved pedestrian and cycle links will be provided in the town, with a dramatic new retail lined bridge across the railway linking the town centre with new retail, residential and

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community uses in the Milton Creek area. This will be seamlessly integrated with the improved retail offer and high-speed railway services into London.

1.2.4 New development will be of architectural excellence, instilling civic pride and transforming the image and perception of Sittingbourne.

Our vision for the future of Sittingbourne Town Centre and Milton Creek is:

“Sittingbourne will be transformed into a thriving, competitive and prosperous town through:

- *a major enhancement in the quality of the retail offer and attractiveness as a shopping destination, with new and improved public spaces and buildings of architectural excellence;*
- *new, wider ranging and high quality local and town-wide services, leisure and cultural facilities and attractions, balancing innovation with traditional values, meeting the needs of current and future residents;*
- *establishing the town as a leading centre for learning and skills in North Kent;*
- *building on and enhancing its unique local character and heritage, built form and the rediscovery of Milton Creek; and*
- *the creation of a vibrant new community and lifetime neighbourhood at Milton Creek.*

Sittingbourne will be at the forefront of the eco-agenda and a model of sustainability. The Town Centre and Milton Creek will be a place of opportunity where people from all backgrounds will want to live, work and visit”.

1.3 THE OPPORTUNITY

1.3.1 This document is a framework for change with tools to help that change take place. Inspired and directed by the masterplan, regeneration in Sittingbourne Town Centre and Milton Creek will transform the area to a vibrant, multi-functional and diverse place, allowing the town centre to grow, improving links with neighbouring areas, and ensuring that the benefits are shared by local people and visitors, and by both present and future generations.

1.3.2 Sittingbourne is entering a period of change: it has been recognised by Swale Borough Council, Kent County Council and the Homes and Communities Agency (formerly English Partnerships and the Housing Corporation), that improvements need to be made to the quality of the town centre, not only in physical terms but also in terms of the quality and range of services and facilities provided. The Local Plan established the principle for new mixed use development in the Town Centre and in the Milton Creek area. This SPD, which has been informed by extensive consultation with the public, local businesses, many local and national organisations, developers and landowners, provides the means to grasp this opportunity for the benefit of the town and community as a whole.

1.3.3 Sittingbourne is located at the eastern end of the Thames Gateway, a national priority for growth and regeneration. Swale Forward was established in 2003 as the local regeneration

partnership for the Borough, charged with co-ordinating the Government’s Thames Gateway investment and ensuring a joined-up approach to regeneration activity. Within Swale Forward’s Regeneration Framework (2006), the regeneration of central Sittingbourne and Milton Creek is recognised as a high priority. This has been subsequently reflected in the Government’s Thames Gateway Delivery Plan (2007) and in investment decisions made by the Homes and Communities Agency. A strong policy context therefore exists for the transformation of the town.

1.3.4 The town has a population of approximately 42,000 people. The town centre is orientated on an east-west axis with the historic High Street comprising the retail focus of the town. This includes a range of building styles and retailers of varying size and quality. To the north of the High Street is the Forum Centre, which is a relatively small-scale shopping centre that has now outlived its usefulness and presents a poor image for the town. It has been identified as being in need of repair and redevelopment to improve its relationship with the High Street and surrounding spaces.

1.3.5 To the south of the High Street is a Sainsbury’s foodstore, cluster of civic uses and facilities (including the Swallows Leisure Centre, Library and Police Station) and the (vacant) Bell Centre, a much smaller shopping centre with plans for refurbishment and reuse. Many of these uses are located within a swathe of surface car parking, representing an inefficient use of the land and poor quality, unattractive spaces.

1.3.6 Whilst Sittingbourne is the principal town centre within the Borough, it has suffered from significant retail expenditure leakage to other towns. Some 70% of all expenditure on core comparison goods is leaking from the town centre. The Council aims to address this and is thus seeking to improve the quality and quantum of the retail offer in the town centre. At present, retail choice is constrained in the town centre by a lack of larger and medium sized units and floorplates to accommodate modern retailer need and demand. Redevelopment of the town centre retail core thus needs to address this issue if Sittingbourne is to start clawing back retail expenditure to the town.

1.3.7 To facilitate this, the SPD allows for the closure of St. Michael's Road (between Crown Quay Lane and Dover Street). The closure of St. Michael's Road coupled with the redevelopment of the Forum Centre generates a large area of opportunity for accommodating generous retail footprints in an attractive retail environment forming part of an increased and improved retail circuit.

1.3.8 In order to maintain permeability through the centre a new east west link through the area will be required for pedestrians and cyclists which would be aligned closer to the railway line. This SPD allows for the new east west link to be sufficiently wide to allow for limited vehicular access for emergency services, maintenance and servicing as required.

1.3.9 As part of the development proposals for retail in the town centre, transport studies have been undertaken that demonstrate that the closure of St. Michael's Road will not have a negative impact on the rest of the town centre in terms of traffic, congestion and accessibility.

1.3.10 The Milton Creek area to the north of the town centre and railway line is primarily industrial in nature, reflecting the historic legacy of the Creek as a transport corridor and with manufacturing uses associated with this. Many of these uses, in particular paper making, have now ceased and represent a major opportunity for regeneration on brownfield sites in very close proximity to the town centre. The SPD will set the framework for this. Also in the Milton Creek area, though outside the immediate boundary of the SPD area, the former Paper Mill site represents a significant opportunity for redevelopment.

1.3.11 The Milton Creek area provides a direct link through the town centre to the surrounding countryside and coast. This is a unique local asset and the opportunity exists through the SPD to integrate and strengthen these links through the future development of the town centre and Milton Creek area. Green routes through the town will be

promoted, opening up access to the Creek and surrounding countryside for the benefit and enjoyment of all.

1.3.12 However, the railway line forms a major barrier to movement between Milton Creek and the town centre. Connections are minimal, and those that do exist are narrow, with restricted headroom, thus compromising vehicle movements and limiting options for many vehicles including buses. They are also unattractive routes for pedestrians and cyclists.

1.3.13 The Local Plan and this SPD are promoting a new link across the railway line, integrating the north side of the tracks seamlessly with the town centre and railway station as well as opening up opportunities for redevelopment in Milton Creek. Importantly, a key condition of the Local Plan (2008) aspiration is that the bridge is lined with retail use, is seamlessly integrated with the redevelopment of the town centre and that it is publicly accessible to all at all times of the day.

1.3.14 Given the height at which the bridge needs to cross the railway line there may be a need for new development in the town centre to come forward with design responses that allow for and integrate these level changes within the proposed scheme but without undermining connections to the High Street and east west permeability through the town. It will need to be of a high quality design and contribute to the delivery of a step-change in the quality of the town centre environment and the retail offer.

1.3.15 The railway station itself provides an opportunity to facilitate change. Improved services to London by train will commence shortly through the provision of high-speed domestic services to St. Pancras. Through a much enhanced service to major development areas in London and northern cities as well as national and international services, Sittingbourne will be opened up to a wider market and provide a window of opportunity within which the regeneration benefits of these services can be captured, acting as a catalyst for change in the town and a step-change in its image.

1.3.16 Development in the town centre also needs to be closely coordinated with the completion of the Sittingbourne Northern Relief Road, which will be delivered in two further phases. The Milton Creek crossing phase will be complete by late 2011. The routing, timing and funding of the final link connecting to the A2 at Bapchild is not yet confirmed. The Northern Relief Road is important for the town centre and Milton Creek as it provides scope to remodel the transport network in the town, redirecting most through traffic away from the centre and reducing congestion.

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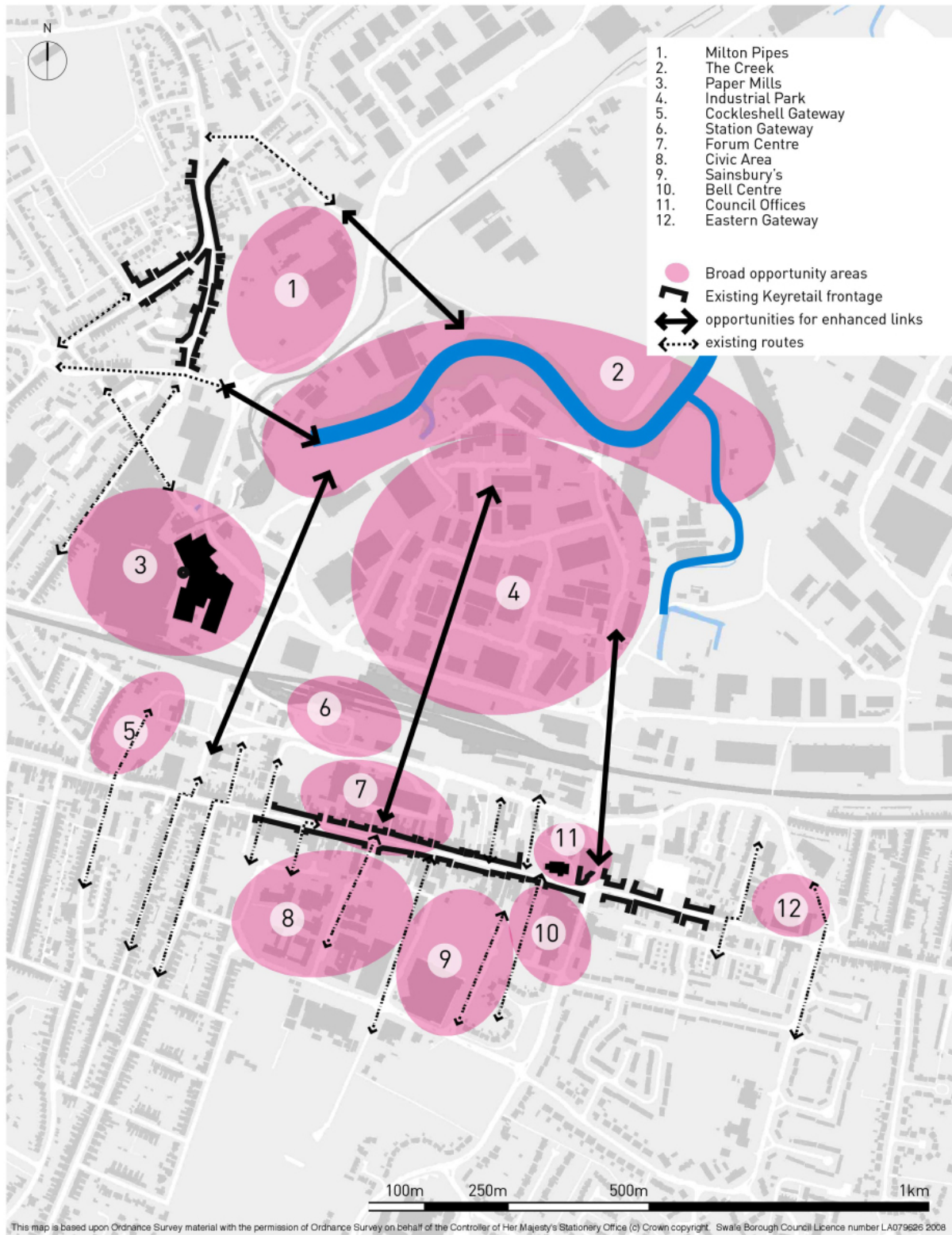
1.3.17 This opportunity for Sittingbourne is founded on creating a sustainable and balanced community fostered on the principles of good place making, providing opportunities for all people at all stages of their life. The Local Plan identifies the need to provide a mix of new homes in the area and to ensure that all the necessary supporting social and community infrastructure, such as education and health, culture and heritage facilities are put in place.

1.3.18 Spenhill, the regeneration arm of Tesco, own significant areas of land both north and south of the railway line and are currently preparing proposals for redevelopment. The Council is working closely with Spenhill to ensure that the proposals that come forward benefit the town as a whole, responding to local need and respecting the local character and context of the town centre and Milton Creek areas.

1.3.19 There is developer interest across a number of sites and the Council has also met with the various parties to understand their intentions. This SPD provides a framework for this change to take place.

1.3.20 This is a truly “once in a lifetime” opportunity to deliver significant benefit for local people and businesses with new shops and places to eat and drink, modern affordable homes, education and training opportunities, health, leisure, culture, heritage and community facilities, a wider range of job opportunities; new and improved parks and open spaces, green links from the town giving access to the Creek and other natural areas, new and improved public transport services, attractive and safer streets and high quality buildings.

Figure 1.1 The Opportunity Areas



1 INTRODUCTION

1.4 RELATIONSHIP TO THE LOCAL PLAN

1.4.1 This SPD provides guidance for the future development of Sittingbourne Town Centre and the Milton Creek area. It will be used to supplement relevant policies within the adopted Swale Borough Council Local Plan (2008). In particular, this SPD will supplement policies B27, AAP7 and AAP8 of the Local Plan (the 'parent' policies). This SPD sets out the spatial planning and design issues, principles and recommendations that Swale Borough Council will use to determine planning applications in the Sittingbourne Town Centre and Milton Creek areas.

1.4.2 This SPD is intended to provide certainty to developers and landowners. However, it must also be flexible enough to accommodate changing market conditions and community aspirations.

1.4.3 The Local Plan is saved until February 2011 although its horizon date is 2016. Key policies including the 'parent' policies for this SPD may need to be saved until the LDF Core Strategy is adopted in 2012 and possibly beyond. Should the 'parent' policies require revision through the Core Strategy to reflect changing circumstances, this can also be considered. This reflects the importance of flexibility and is reiterated by recent economic changes which have led to a downturn in the market between the publication of the Local Plan and production of this SPD. In particular, economic changes will have an impact on spending power and the ability of developers to deliver schemes in the immediate future.

1.5 THE PROCESS

1.5.1 The production of this SPD has followed Government guidance as set out in Planning Policy Statement 12 (PPS12). It has been informed by extensive consultation with the local community, including residents, businesses, organisations, landowners and developers. We have also consulted with the statutory consultees, such as the Environment Agency and others.

1.5.2 In May 2008 an exhibition was held in the town centre explaining the purpose of the SPD and asking for comments from participants as to what should be included within the masterplan. Almost 600 comments were received, covering a wide range of aspects including transport, development, services and the environment.

The Exhibition



1.5.3 In parallel to this, the Council produced a leaflet seeking responses to the challenges and opportunities for Sittingbourne. This was made available at the exhibition and through the Council's online consultation system. More than 200 forms were completed. The comments received through this process have helped to shape the SPD and are summarised in the appendix.

The Exhibition



1.5.4 In addition to the exhibition and leaflet, a series of stakeholder workshops were convened, firstly with Council Members and then with a cross section of local groups with an interest in the future planning of Sittingbourne. At these workshops we asked participants what they liked and disliked about the town centre and Milton Creek, and what they thought should be changed and improved. Again, these have helped to shape the SPD, particularly the vision and objectives.

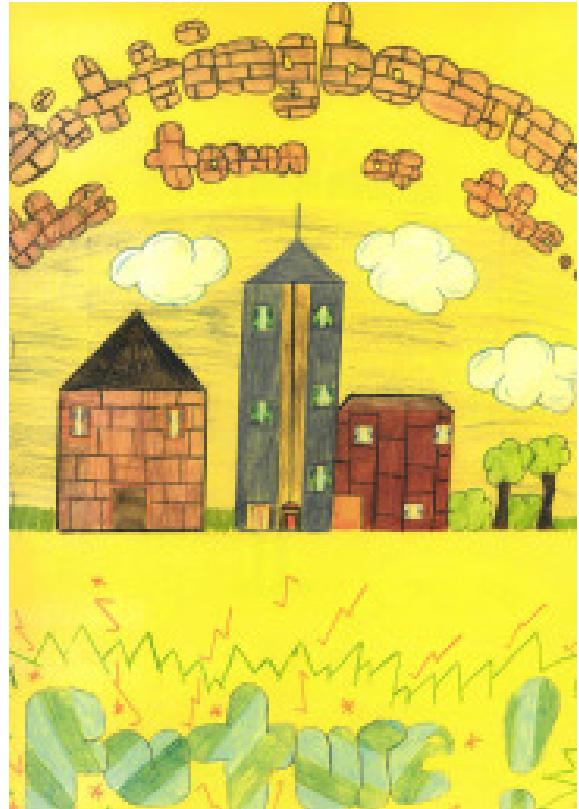
The Workshops



1.5.5 Further, a number of one-to-one meetings were held with developers and landowners to understand their intentions and aspirations. A transport user group was also established to understand transport, accessibility and movement issues, through which consensus could be reached as to the future movement strategy for the town.

1.5.6 Pupils from Minterne Junior School also put together their thoughts in a book called 'Sittingbourne: the town of the future'. This sets out what the pupils like and dislike about Sittingbourne, and how they would like to see it change in the future.

The Minterne Junior School Book



1.5.7 The feedback from these events and sessions has informed the SPD. It has also been shaped by a review of previous planning and design studies and reports.

1.5.8 The SPD is now available for a period of six-weeks for comment. After this period, comments will be reviewed and changes made to the SPD as appropriate, following which the Council will formally adopt the SPD. It is anticipated that the SPD will be adopted in the summer of 2009. The final SPD will include a Consultation Statement summarising the consultation process and comments received.

1.5.9 It should be noted that when planning applications are submitted public consultation on those schemes will take place as part of the development control process and before any decisions are made, ensuring that the public can make representations on any aspect of the proposals. .

1.6 SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL

1.6.1 As part of the SPD process a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) has been carried out. This is to ensure that the recommendations put forward by the SPD are fully considered in regard to how they contribute to sustainable development. The SA is a document that is subject to the same consultation process as the SPD and is freely available to the public for comment.

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1.6.2 Once adopted, the SPD and SA will be monitored and if necessary reviewed to ensure that the vision and objectives are being met, the guidance remains relevant and that sustainable development is being delivered.

1.7 STRUCTURE OF THE SPD

1.7.1 This SPD is presented in seven further sections, which set out the following:

- Section 2 presents an overview of Sittingbourne as it is today in terms of its built form and fabric;
- Section 3 presents the vision and objectives for the SPD area;
- Section 4 presents an illustrative masterplan and the guiding principles for development;
- Section 5 provides more detail on development districts identified in the masterplan area;
- Section 6 presents the transport and movement strategy for the masterplan area;
- Section 7 presents a 'green charter'; and
- Section 8 presents the delivery and implementation strategy for the masterplan area.