

Committee: Cabinet Report

Date: 23 June 2008

Agenda item:

Wards: Merton Park, St Helier, Ravensbury, Cannon Hill, Lower Morden

Subject: Morden Town Centre Regeneration Strategy

Lead officer: Michael Owens - Head of Regeneration and Leisure

Lead member: Councillor Diane Neil Mills – Cabinet Member for Regeneration

Key decision reference number: 618

Reason for urgency:

To enable the proposed consultation material to be prepared and signed off in time to meet the programme contained in Appendix B of this report.

Recommendations:

- A. That the Cabinet endorse the proposals to undertake consultation with residents and stakeholders on the aims and objectives contained in the draft Vision with a view to developing an ambitious and realistic vision for Morden Town Centre.
 - B. That Cabinet agree that the approval of the detailed consultation programme is delegated to the Director of Environment and Regeneration in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration.
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1. Purpose of report and executive summary

- 1.1 To seek Members comments on the proposal to undertake consultation with residents and stakeholders regarding regeneration options of Morden Town Centre.

2. Details

- 2.1 Merton's Community Plan identifies Morden's regeneration as a priority for the area. The Council's Business Plan for 2008/2011 commits the Council to making Morden Town Centre more competitive and better able to provide for local needs.
- 2.2 The Council continues to progress the production of its Spatial Plan for the Borough – the Local Development Framework (LDF). Morden will feature in the forthcoming plan as a key Town Centre and regeneration area for the Borough with considerable assets that need to be protected and further enhanced to serve Merton's residents and also as a place with the capacity to accommodate growth.

2.3 In September 2007, the Leader of the Council, Councillor David Williams established an informal Members' Working Group comprising Members of the three political parties drawn from local wards. Officers have created a Project Group led by the Director for Environment and Regeneration. These groups have worked together in a series of meetings to analyse the potential for Morden's regeneration. A number of principles have emerged from that analysis that will inform the development of a long term Vision for Morden.

3. The potential for Morden's regeneration

3.1 Morden has a number of strengths as a local centre that can be developed to ensure long-term sustainability and realise the regeneration potential of Morden. Key assets that should make up a successful town centre such as good public transport accessibility, proximity to London, employment opportunities, retailing, leisure, open space all exist in Morden. However these qualities are not always apparent; Morden has the potential to be far greater than at present.

3.2 Morden currently suffers from a number of weaknesses in relation to the housing market. The area's housing offer is overwhelmingly dominated by family housing. There is a very limited supply of apartments and accommodation geared to smaller households despite the increase in demand from young professionals and from an ageing population. The dominance of suburban family housing does not provide the population density to maintain the facilities and services in a centre the size of Morden.

3.3 The Council's strategy for regenerating Morden contains a number of interlinked strands including improvement of the public realm, rationalisation of the road network, improving the transport interchange and increasing the quality and quantity of Morden's retail and commercial offer.

3.4 The overarching strategy for regenerating Morden and realising the changes noted in paragraph 3.3, is to diversify the housing offer through intensification of residential development at the heart of the town centre. Additional population within the centre itself will make existing businesses and services more viable and help sustain more facilities in the future. Diversifying the range of housing types in Morden will also help achieve a more balanced and cohesive community. Planning agreements will be sought from new development to achieve physical and social infrastructure improvements.

3.5 Pressure for development and intensification in accessible areas is strong throughout London. The regeneration strategy will provide the Council with an opportunity to manage intensification in a structured and phased approach that delivers growth, but in a way that is suitable for Morden's context and respects the suburban characteristics of the area.

3.6 Morden's role as a District Centre has diminished over the past decade as other nearby centres have expanded and the general nature of retailing has changed towards larger format stores such as at Colliers Wood. Morden retains its function as the civic centre and geographic heart of the Borough. However, commercially, Morden provides local, convenience shopping for the local catchment area. The role of the centre needs redefining in order to re-capture local spend and attract additional income.

- 3.7 Morden also provides an important role as a transport interchange between local buses and London Underground. Addressing the functionality of the transport interchange and its impact on the function of the town centre is central to regenerating the area and defining a future role and purpose for Morden.
- 3.8 Being a typically suburban centre, Morden has a strong 'green' infrastructure, with Morden Hall Park and Morden Park at its periphery. It has the capacity to benefit from the success of Wimbledon and (potentially) Colliers Wood, sitting in the hinterland of each. The Civic Centre affords a status of Civic Hub on Morden, which could be improved. There has also been some growth in small businesses, including some that respond to opportunities given by the Mosque and its visitors.
- 3.9 There are a number of realistic opportunities to regenerate Morden. The Council and Transport for London (TfL) together own, control and manage large tracts of land, property and the public realm in the Town. London needs to accommodate growth, and development potential exists here. There is scope to improve the transport infrastructure in terms of appearance, function and capacity. The Council is also wishing to promote within the next two years, short term transport proposals which will rely upon third party funding for their continued development and delivery. Approaches to TfL for funding are being prepared and will be submitted later this year to attract resources. This work will run alongside and be informed/influenced by the wider regeneration plans for the town and other projects in the Public Realm such as the Living Streets Audit (see 3.11 below).
- 3.10 The Council is in control of a number of assets including the Civic Centre, the library and Morden Park Pool. There is therefore an opportunity, which is being actively managed by the Council, to add value to these assets as part of the regeneration strategy. These assets include the various car parks held under lease by the Council and the freehold of the Abbotsbury Road triangle site and of course the Civic Centre itself. Opportunities around the Civic Centre are being explored in greater detail, although it must be stressed that there is currently no case to justify the consideration of any relocation of the Council functions away from the Civic Centre. There is untapped retail potential and latent demand for leisure, culture and an underdeveloped evening economy.
- 3.11 A catalyst for the regeneration of Morden will be the improvement of the public realm. Improvements to London Road through signage, paving, street trees and a reduction of clutter will be led by the Council in the short to medium term in order to send a clear signal to the development market that Merton Council is committed to achieving positive change in Morden. The first step in this initiative is for the Council to lead the commissioning of a 'Living Streets' audit (in consultation with TfL) which will be undertaken later this year subject to funding.
- 3.12 Morden is well placed to provide services and support that respond to changes in the way people work – offering alternatives to central London commuting yet retaining easy access to the city core. Growing services and better meeting the needs of existing communities could, as a by-product, impact on the attractiveness of the centre to new comers.

3.13 It is believed that the key assets are in place and that Morden has a uniqueness that sets it apart from other regeneration schemes in London. To regenerate and be a sustainable centre for the future, more quantum and a more diverse range of what Morden already has to offer is required. In summary more Morden is needed.

4. Emerging vision

4.1 The vision for Morden is to create a distinctive and vibrant centre by making more of Morden's assets.

4.2 Prior to embarking on a regeneration strategy and comprehensive masterplan for Morden, it is proposed to first consult the public and key stakeholders to establish the baseline for a shared vision for the future of Morden. The consultation process for September 2008 will therefore focus on understanding participant's views on the list of aims and objectives set out in paragraphs 4.6 and 4.7 at this stage.

4.3 The aims and objectives of the draft vision have been formulated by officers in discussion with the Members' Working Group and have been assessed by external professional expertise (including Volterra - economic consultants). It is believed that the objectives set the right tone for the future of Morden.

4.4 In essence Volterra suggested that Morden should:

- create a recognised identity, attract new higher earning residents and provide improvements for existing residents;
- intensify retail provision and build on the towns local facilities;
- improve its ability to cater for small business and attract residents in to the town;
- recognise that the existing housing stock is both an attraction and a limitation and the housing strategy is likely to be the key determinant of the future of the town. The dominance of suburban family housing is attractive to families, but the lack of smaller units means that Morden does not provide for the increasing market demand for one, two and three bedroom apartment style living. The housing strategy will help to regenerate Morden and foster a more mixed community by providing a more varied offer of housing styles and typologies, including flats, townhouses and mews houses.

4.5 The next stage will be to refine the vision with the involvement of the public and local stakeholders. Commencing with the consultation in September 2008, feedback will be worked up into a full regeneration strategy, leading on to the creation of a masterplan for Morden in 2009.

4.6 A copy of the draft vision and planning analysis is attached as Appendix A for background information. The Vision Document will evolve as communication with stakeholders and the public increases. It is intended that a final draft of the vision will be produced and reported to Members in early 2009 (as set out in section 6 of this report).

4.7

Aim:

The aim is to change the perception of Morden, from somewhere people *have* to visit, to somewhere people *want* to visit and live and work. This can be achieved by regenerating Morden to be a sustainable town centre, transport node and generating a renewed sense of civic pride.

4.8

Objectives:

- Re-define the role of the suburban centre, creating an economically sustainable and viable town centre by building on Morden's assets.
- Re-enforce Morden's leisure, cultural, educational and civic opportunities.
- Improve the quantity, quality and mix of commercial, residential, retail uses.
- Intensify underdeveloped sites; making more efficient use of land incorporating higher density housing and commercial and enterprise opportunities that exploit Morden's excellent public transport links and accessibility.
- Intensify the centre at a suitable scale in order to help protect the character and distinctiveness of Morden and the adjacent suburban neighbourhoods.
- Enhance accessibility between the town centre and its suburban hinterland and open spaces, achieved by reducing severance caused by traffic, 'greening' Morden through tree planting and improving the pedestrian environment and public transport facilities.
- Achieve high quality urban design, architecture and public realm incorporating high quality spaces and streets with pedestrians as the priority – not the car.
- Provide more opportunities for the community to meet, socialise and make better use of their town centre through provision of attractive, safe and accessible public spaces and community and leisure facilities.

4.9

Building Heights

The heights of buildings at the centre of Morden will be determined based upon a balance between development viability and public preference.

As part of the public consultation, indicative building heights will be suggested for various sites within the town in order to receive people's views.

4.9

Density

The vision does not state that the strategy is to provide 'high' density housing, but simply 'higher density' – ie, more than what currently exists. It is possible to provide higher density housing in a way that respects Morden's suburban characteristics – yet provides for future growth in the town centre. Again, these issues will be discussed during the consultation process.

5. Communication

- 5.1 Local communities and local stakeholders are essential to the success of this strategy because:
- Morden is under-performing in relation to its local market. Local spending power has to be attracted to the existing Town Centre and better opportunities need to be generated for people to visit and use the centre.
 - If Morden began to work better for local people, it would begin to develop assets that could create a better market for in –movers. The existing community needs to welcome ideas for Morden’s expansion.
 - Local businesses working together can build the town centre “Offer”.
 - Local Stakeholders (Morden Park/National Trust, PCT/ The Health Centre, the Mosque, Transport for London) can make decisions about services and land/property development that can help foster and realise the vision).
- 5.2 A Consultation and Communication Strategy is therefore key to managing the consultation process and securing buy in as the Vision is crafted.
- 5.3 The proposed programme for the Consultation and Communication Strategy is in Appendix B.
- 5.4 The cost of the process is approximately £10,000, which will be met from within existing approved resources.

6. Next steps

- September 2008 - Consultation on the draft vision to commence
- December 2008 – Members’ Working Group review on progress and initial conclusions from Consultation
- 11th February 2009 – Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel
- 16th March 2009 - Cabinet report on conclusions and recommendations following consultations

7. Governance arrangements

- 7.1 For the Council, the project will be managed by an Officer Project Board led by the Director for Environment and Regeneration and with decisions referred through the formal process of Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees in the normal way.
- 7.2 It is proposed that the informal cross party Members’ Working Group meet to review the outcome of consultation in late 2008, providing an effective an internal mechanism for engaging members in developing proposals and acting as a sounding board, advising officers in drafting recommendations. Following the consultations in September 2008, the project will be governed as set out in paragraph 7.1.

7.3 The Town Centre Partnership offers an important mechanism for drawing local stakeholders together and building community ownership of the vision and it is proposed that the Council continues to support and work with that group as a key partner in the process.

8. An overview of the project elements

8.1 For the Council, there are a number of elements to the Morden Centre Regeneration. These are being managed as a series of Work Packages within the context of the overall Project Management Arrangements.

8.2 These are:

- The Civic Centre and its future
- The Development Potential of the Town Centre and the main development sites
- Transport and Traffic management
- Town Centre Management
- Economic, social, environmental and cultural regeneration
- Improving the Public Realm

8.3 The Project is dependent on a number of external factors for its success. Projects running in parallel to the moreMorden project, such as the proposals for Morden Park and the leisure centre, are independent of the regeneration plans, but nonetheless are key to achieving successful regeneration. Although these projects are distinct entities, they all remain in the remit of the Environment and Regeneration Division and will be considered as part of the wider regeneration strategy.

9. Alternative options

9.1 The absence of an overarching regeneration strategy for Morden will mean that there will be less co-ordination and consistency between LBM projects and no overall vision or consistent approach to any development proposals that may come forward. Without the regeneration strategy there will be less market interest in Morden and the Council would continue to manage retail decline.

9.2 The Council would also be left with a growing property liability on Abbotsbury Triangle and the Civic Centre sites. Promotion of a regeneration strategy is consistent with the Council's duty to pro-actively manage and increase the value of its property assets.

9.3 The public realm in Morden is operated and maintained by Transport for London and dominated by through traffic and bus layover infrastructure. This scenario would continue, as without a vision for Morden, the Council has little leverage to negotiate public realm improvements from TfL. A regeneration strategy would also provide an opportunity to bid for additional external funding from GLA and other sources.

10. Consultation undertaken or proposed

10.1 Undertaken:

10.2 Visioning Workshop: 16th April 2008

10.3 Members Working Group: 7th May 2008

10.4 Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel: 4th June 2008

10.5 Proposed:

Cabinet: 23rd June 2008

10.6 Public Consultation: September 2008
(please refer to consultation strategy – Appendix B)

11. Timetable

11.1 Dates as above.

12. Financial, resource and property implications

12.1 The resources required to carry out the consultation include existing officer time in relation to undertaking the preparation and implementation of the consultation process as well as publicity and printing costs.

12.2 The consultation costs of £10,000 can be met by approved existing budgets.

12.3 As the Vision has no statutory planning status at this stage, there is no impact from the consultation on the Council's property interests.

13. Legal and statutory implications

13.1 The proposals set out in this report are in accordance with the requirements of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and relevant regulations and Government guidance.

13.2 Future elements of the wider regeneration programme (but not the initial consultation being proposed in this paper) may be subject to formal EU tendering requirements. Even if there is no formal EU requirement to enter into a competitive process, the Council may elect to follow a competitive process to select a third party with whom the Council chooses to work. Details of such will be reported back to Cabinet and lead members as and when required.

14. Human rights, equalities and community cohesion implications

14.1 At this stage, in seeking approval to initiate public engagement, there are no human rights or equalities implications. However in September 2008 as the vision and regeneration strategy is firmed up an Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out, as a statutory requirement of the strategy.

14.2 With regard to community cohesion, consultation with residents and stakeholders supports the following key priority in the Merton Cohesion Strategy 2006-10: "providing opportunities for all our residents to become actively involved in their communities, creating a sense of ownership, feeling valued and increased social capital".

15. Risk management and health and safety implications

15.1 At this stage there is no business risk in seeking approval to share our ideas with the public. However, as the regeneration strategy develops there will be business risks. These risks include those mentioned in section 9 of this report. The details of any risk implications will be reported to the Members Working Group and appropriate Panels and Cabinet in due course (dates of which are set out in section 6 of this report).

16. Appendices – the following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report

16.1 A. moreMorden draft Vision

16.2 B. Communications and Consultation Strategy

17. Background Papers – the following documents have been relied on in drawing up this report but do not form part of the report

17.1 C. Volterra Consultants: Economic Assessment – available in the Member's Resource Room.

17.2 Volterra were appointed to undertake an independent economic analysis of Morden, which will inform and help shape the vision for Morden.

17.3 The consultant's draft findings were published on 16th May 2008. The economic analysis report is available for background information in the Member's Resource Room. The economic analysis will be used to test development scenarios for Morden after the vision work has been finalised following community engagement and consultation in September 2008.

18. Contacts

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19. Useful links

19.1 Merton Council's Web site: <http://www.merton.gov.uk>

19.2 Readers should note the terms of the legal information (disclaimer) regarding information on Merton Council's and third party linked websites.

19.3 <http://www.merton.gov.uk/legal.htm>

19.4 This disclaimer also applies to any links provided here.