

EASTLEIGH LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 8 June 2021

GUIDING REGENERATION PRINCIPLES FOR EASTLEIGH TOWN CENTRE

Report of the Corporate Director

Recommendation(s)

It is recommended that ELAC:

- (1) Consider the Guiding Regeneration Principles document – Together we make Eastleigh, at Appendix 1 and recommend for adoption by Cabinet at the meeting on the 24 June 2021**

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- (2) Approve the Guiding Regeneration Principles document – Together we make Eastleigh, at Appendix 1**
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Summary

The Guiding Regeneration Principles document captures the key themes that together will guide the regeneration of Eastleigh town centre as we recover from the pandemic. It aims to give strategic direction to delivery in the short to medium term, and frame more detailed discussions with stakeholders about how we collectively shape Eastleigh in the future.

Statutory Powers

Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 i.e. the Local Authority's general power of competence, including power to act for the benefit of its area or persons resident or present in its area.

Strategic Implications

1. This report relates to the Prosperous Place Corporate Objective - Reinvigorating town and local centres - Creating vibrant, active places where people want to spend time, generating the right environment for economic, social, and cultural prosperity.
2. Led by the Cabinet Member for Economy, town and local centres are considered a cross-cutting issue that relates to all the Corporate Plan 2015-2025 objectives.

Introduction

3. Our towns and local centres have been changing gradually for some time, due to competition from both online and out-of-town retail and leisure offers which has led to the slow decline of the retail sector.
4. The pandemic, and the social distancing restrictions imposed by the Government, have further impacted our Local Centres and the businesses within them. The pandemic has accelerated existing trends to the extent that footfall has decreased (50%-60% during lockdown in Eastleigh), shopping online has increased (nationally 20% to 33.8% sales by the end of the 2nd lockdown), and occupancy levels have fallen (93% to 89% in Eastleigh town centre, excluding charity shops, since February 2020).
5. The Council is committed to the economic recovery of our towns and local centres, already making use of the Government's Re-opening High Streets Safely (RHSS) Fund to support the safe reopening of our 'High Streets' and prepare action plans to support the economic recovery across all six of the Borough's town and local centres.
6. Research conducted by the RHSS team tells us that, of the six main retail areas looked at across the Borough, Eastleigh town centre has had the largest increase in the number of vacant units during the pandemic. This is not surprising given it is the largest retail area and the one with the highest proportion of retail chains, which have struggled in the last 15 months. This reflects the national picture. Local centres with higher numbers of independent businesses have fared better.
7. As Covid restrictions begin to lift there is still a great deal of uncertainty. We don't yet know the full impact of the pandemic in terms of; the future need for office accommodation, the emerging relationship between bricks and mortar and online retail, and what will underpin the 'High Street' offer since the decline of the retail sector, but early intelligence points at flexibility and mixed uses being key to creating a sustainable town centre. Many aspects of our 'High Streets' are still evolving, and all in the context of a Climate Emergency.
8. The regeneration of Eastleigh town centre is an important priority for the Council, who for many years have been acquiring property assets, redeveloping sites, and undertaking extensive public realm improvements to stimulate market-led regeneration. Recent examples include Fanfare Place / Bandstand Court on Romsey Road and the former Post Office site on the High Street. These mixed-use developments aim to bring new residents into the town along with purpose-built commercial units.
9. Councillors recognise the need to re-think the strategic positioning of Eastleigh town centre and ensure there is clear strategic direction for the future. There is support at both a Cabinet and Local Area level to reclaim the 'High Street' as a destination that serves our communities as a place to live, work, socialise, and access public services and cultural activities.

Guiding Regeneration Principles

10. The Prosperous Place Corporate Strategy 2018 sets out that 'national issues manifest themselves differently at a local level and retaining local distinctiveness between communities is a priority for the Council, strategic approaches for each of our towns and local centres will be set out in their own strategy documents'.
11. Through consultation with staff from across the organisation, the Strategic Planning Team has drafted a set of eight 'Guiding Regeneration Principles'. These were presented to ELAC Councillors and relevant Cabinet Members at an internal workshop for discussion and comment on the 4 March 2021. Feedback has been collated and the amended version of the document can be seen in Appendix 1.
12. The proposed 'Guiding Regeneration Principles – Together we make Eastleigh' are overarching principles to guide the regeneration of Eastleigh town centre. They form the foundation for strategic planning and future policy development and aim to frame more detailed discussions with stakeholders about how we collectively shape Eastleigh town centre in the future.
13. The eight Guiding Regeneration Principles work together to ensure Eastleigh develops a strong identity - is locally distinct, sustainable and resilient for the future;
 - Principle 1 A great place to live
 - Principle 2 A great place to do business
 - Principle 3 A green town
 - Principle 4 Meeting the needs of its communities
 - Principle 5 Well-connected and accessible
 - Principle 6 A place you want to spend time
 - Principle 7 A distinct town
 - Principle 8 Strong leadership and effective partnerships
14. A more detailed summary of each principle can be found in Appendix 1. The 'Guiding Regeneration Principles' set out a high-level vision statement for each key theme. It is anticipated that as we move forward, Council delivery across the town will reflect these eight themes, which will serve to move us closer to these proposed vision statements.
15. The essence of the principles is that 'Together we make Eastleigh' and it is anticipated that the Guiding Regeneration Principles will be the basis on which we engage with partners about the future of the town following further work with Councillors and Council staff to identify priorities and actions.

Financial Implications

16. There are currently no financial implications as the matters are policy procedural matters only.

Risk Assessment

17. The risk of not adopting a more strategic approach is that Eastleigh town centre will become a less attractive destination, and less competitive to comparable local centres in the region. It will fail to attract external funding and investment and will not be able to meet the needs of its communities. Adopting a more strategic approach and focusing delivery across these eight key themes will result in a greater sense of direction and improved strategic, programme and service planning in the longer term.

Equality and Diversity Implications

18. Town centres, by their very nature, need to be inclusive places and the importance of this is picked up within the 'Guiding Regeneration Principles' document, in particular Principle 4 - A town that meets the needs of its communities. The town already promotes inclusion in a variety of ways: good accessibility due to flat topography, seating, pedestrian areas and disabled parking; Safer Places and Breastfeeding welcome initiatives; annual Mela and Pride events. The Council wants to build on this approach and will work with local community groups to understand how we can make the town more inclusive. In addition, Equality Impact Assessments will be completed prior to the commencement of relevant delivery activities.

Climate Change and Environmental Implications

- 20 A Climate change report is not relevant at this stage as the report deals with policy procedural matters only and does not directly lead to an increase of Greenhouse Gas/CO₂, damage ecology or the environment.
- 21 'Guiding Regeneration Principle 3 – 'A green town' aims to support adaptation to climate change; protect the environment and promote environmental resilience for Eastleigh town centre. We will be seeking to work with residents and businesses to change behaviours in a positive way. Climate change reports will be provided at point of delivery.

Conclusion

- 22 Eastleigh town centre has been significantly impacted by both changes in consumer behaviour over many years, and the pandemic. Councillors at Cabinet and a Local Area level recognise the need to strategically reposition the town. It is recommended that the 'Guiding Regeneration Principles – Together we make Eastleigh', as set out in Appendix 1, are approved by Councillors, and used as a starting point to shape and guide the future regeneration of Eastleigh town centre.

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CORPORATE DIRECTOR

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Appendices Attached: 1 – Together We Make Eastleigh

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - SECTION 100D

The following is a list of documents which disclose facts or matters on which this report or an important part of it is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. This list does not include any published works or documents which would disclose exempt or confidential information.