

# Sittingbourne Town Centre and Milton Creek Supplementary Planning Document

Adopted September 2010



Study Area



**Study Area**

## Foreword

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The regeneration of Sittingbourne is getting closer. Last summer, we asked for your comments on our ideas for Sittingbourne town centre and your visions for the future of the town. Sittingbourne has not been alone in experiencing the effects of the economic downturn over the last couple of years and the masterplan seeks to put forward a realistic set of proposals to guide the regeneration of the town centre over the next 10 to 15 years. We have looked closely at transport and financial viability and taken your views into account in finalising our plan. We are now proud to adopt the Sittingbourne Town Centre and Milton Creek masterplan, which we believe is both flexible and ambitious enough to ensure that Sittingbourne is well placed to maximise opportunities for new investment and regeneration.

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.

There is an opportunity 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 and completion of the masterplan is just the start of that exciting process.

**Cllr Andrew Bowles**

**Leader of the Council**



## Foreword



The 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 to fifteen 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.

We hope that the green shoots of regeneration will soon be apparent and we look forward to taking Sittingbourne into a new era.

**Cllr Gerry Lewin**

**Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Sustainable Planning**

## **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. 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.

**1.1.3** This SPD has been the subject of extensive public consultation in accordance with the statutory regulations. The representations received during the consultation phases have been taken into account in finalising the document. Consequently, in accordance with the statutory regulations, the SPD is now part of the development plan for Swale and is a key material consideration for deciding planning applications within the town centre and will be given substantial weight in this process.

## **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** Sittingbourne now has a new high speed rail link to London St Pancras and the aim will be to maximise this opportunity for the town. New and improved pedestrian and cycle links will be provided in the town, with a new landmark bridge across the railway linking the town centre with new retail, residential and community uses in the Milton Creek area. The aim will be to achieve a seamless integration of the new townscape and community to the north of the railway with the improved and upgraded town centre to the south of the railway.

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

# 1 INTRODUCTION

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. This was carried forward in Swale's Regeneration Framework (2006), which recognised the regeneration of central Sittingbourne and Milton Creek as a high priority. This was also reflected in the Government's Thames Gateway Delivery Plan (2007) and in investment decisions made by the Homes and Communities Agency. Swale's current Sustainable Communities Strategy (2009) continue the theme and it is also a key part of the vision and objectives of the emerging Swale Borough Core Strategy. There is

therefore a strong and consistent policy context and ongoing commitment for securing 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 floorplate opportunities 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 possibility of closure of St. Michael's Road (between Crown Quay Lane and Dover Street). This would, if coupled with the redevelopment of the Forum Centre, generate 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** If this option is pursued, 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 new east west link will 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 could be achieved without a negative impact on the rest of the town centre in terms of traffic, congestion and accessibility. Development proposals would nevertheless need to be the subject of a detailed traffic impact assessment.

**1.3.10** The Milton Creek area to the north of the town centre and railway line was 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 sets 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 and the former Mill site to the west of Mill Way may be the subject of a separate SPD.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

**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-side park and Church Marshes countryside parkland 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 with the town centre and railway station, as well as opening up opportunities for redevelopment in Milton Creek. A key feature of the Swale Borough Local Plan (2008) was that this bridge be retail lined to promote seamless integration with the new and older parts of the town centre. Whilst this is still the ideal, the economic context has changed substantially and the deliverability of such a feature could present serious viability issues. Consequently, whilst a flexible approach will be taken, it is imperative that a bridge is provided, which is of high quality and design; accessible at all times; and integrates the old and new areas of the town. This could become a key feature of the town centre and the design could possibly come forward via a high profile design competition.

**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. High-speed domestic services to London St. Pancras commenced in December 2009. 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 an opportunity for the regeneration benefits of these services to 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.

**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.

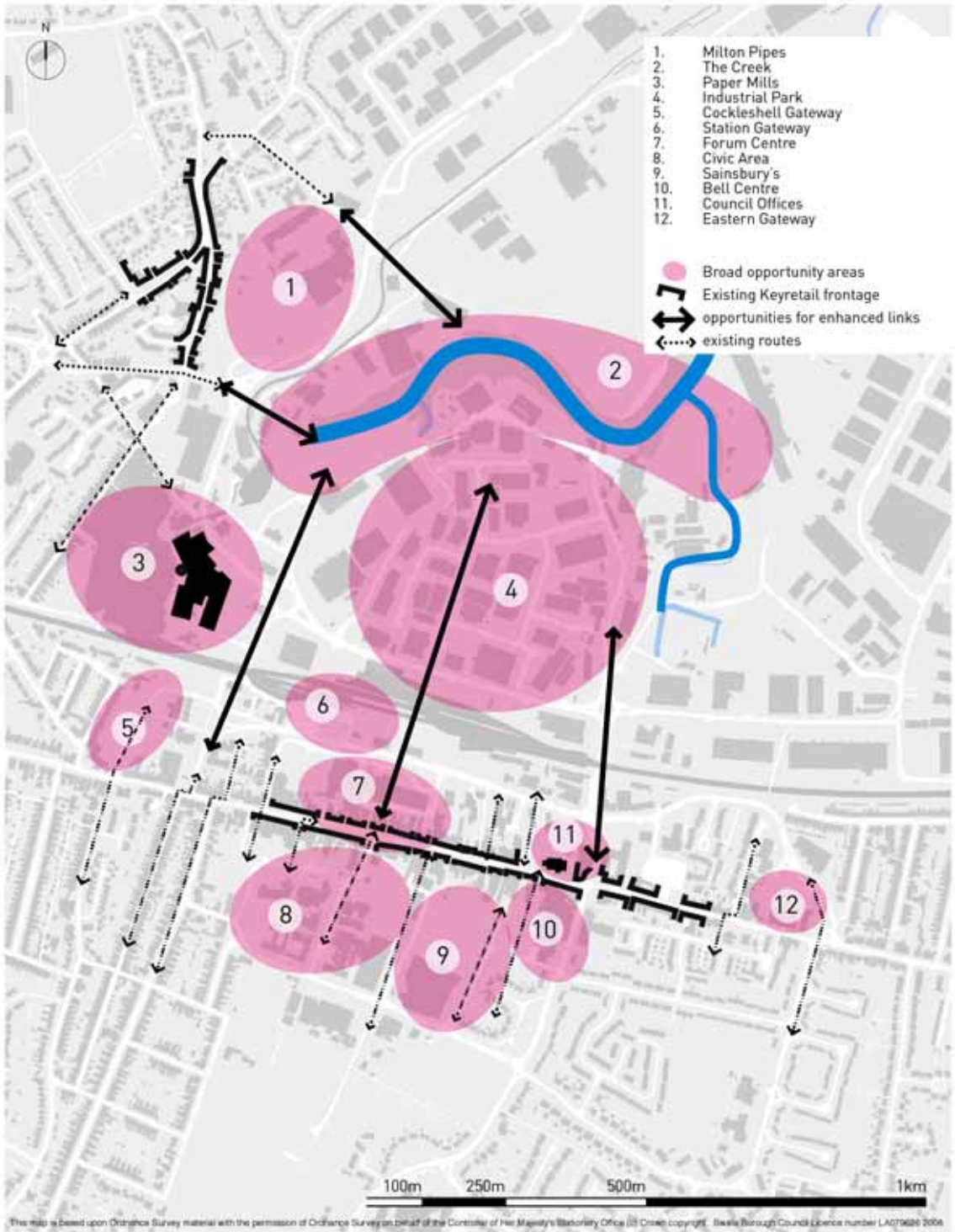
**1.3.18** Tesco currently own significant areas of land both north and south of the railway line and are currently preparing proposals for redevelopment. The Council is working closely with their agents to ensure that the proposals that come forward benefit the town as a whole, responding to local need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

**1.3.19** There is also 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; re-integrating the Creek and Milton Creek parkland with the town via green links; new and improved public transport services; attractive and safer streets and high quality buildings.

**1 INTRODUCTION**

**Figure 1.1 The Opportunity Areas**



## 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 will be saved until the LDF Core Strategy is adopted in 2013, 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) and is in accordance with the statutory regulations (The Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England)

Regulations SI 2204 (2004) as amended by SI 1371 (2008) and SI 401 (2009). 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. These representations are summarised in a separate document.

## 1.6 SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL

**1.6.1** As part of the SPD drafting process a combined Sustainability Appraisal / Strategic Environmental Assessment was carried and published for comment alongside the consultation draft. Since the consultation stage, the statutory regulations for SPD production have been amended and no longer require an SA. An Appropriate Assessment was also produced in accordance with the Habitats Regulations and has been amended following consultation.

## 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.



