

Key Decision Required:	Yes	In the Forward Plan:	Yes
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CABINET

19 JULY 2019

REPORT OF THE BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC GROWTH PORTFOLIO HOLDER

A.1 DOVERCOURT TOWN CENTRE MASTERPLAN

(Report prepared by Tom Gardiner)

PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

This report seeks Cabinet approval of the Dovercourt Town Centre Masterplan (Dovercourt Rediscovered) and agreement to progress the development and delivery of a number of projects. The report presents a vision for the future of Dovercourt and a range of interventions which will support revitalisation of the town centre.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dovercourt Rediscovered (the Masterplan) examines the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that currently impact Dovercourt town centre, and develops a strategy for the revitalisation of the town. The Plan establishes a strong and positive vision for Dovercourt town centre; seeks to guide and influence future development; and promotes a targeted range of public realm improvements to support the transformation required.

The Masterplan is presented as a prospectus for change and articulates a vision for the regeneration and transformation of Dovercourt as:

“a thriving town with an attractive High Street, a range of shops and cafes and regular street markets: a town which is proud of its heritage but also able to respond to new opportunities. A town with a high quality public realm and open spaces, stunning beaches and good connections - an attractive place to live, work, shop and visit”.

A copy of the Dovercourt Town Centre Masterplan is attached at **Appendix A**.

The plan identifies development opportunities and a range of public realm improvements that could help transform the appearance and prosperity of the town. The plan outlines twenty key regeneration projects (the Dovercourt Twenty), that have been specifically proposed to transform the image and quality of the town, with the express purpose of attracting residents and visitors to the centre, thereby reanimating the town; re-establishing its lost vibrancy; and encouraging private sector investment to reverse the downward spiral of decline. The plan demonstrates that there is significant market failure in relation to investment and that the Council has a key leadership role to intervene and address this.

The range of interventions proposed include the redevelopment of sites such as the Milton Road Car Park, addressing derelict Starlings site, the provision of new parking facilities, public realm improvements, shopfront improvements, the reanimation of the station area, and the provision of improved street signage. The ‘Dovercourt Twenty’ also include

proposals to strengthen the management of the town and that of the street market, and also advocates the use of festivals and events to re-establish the vibrancy of the town.

Delivery of the vision requires the Council to take a lead role through the development and delivery of three priority projects that will have a high impact and stimulate further investment:

- Starlings Block Development & Milton Road Car Park Development
- Kingsway South
- Station Plaza

From the above it is intended to bring forward detailed proposals for delivery of the combined Starlings Site and Milton Road Car Park project to Cabinet in September 2019.

The Kingsway South and Station Plaza projects would be developed to a 'shovel ready' stage whereby they would deliverable should funding become available (in particular external grant funding).

Funding for the above is already identified in the Council's budget.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- a) Approves and adopts the Vision and Masterplan for Dovercourt Town Centre, as set out in the Dovercourt Masterplan Revisited document attached at [A.1 Appendix A](#);
- b) Notes the development opportunities and public realm projects outlined in Section 4 of the Masterplan (the Dovercourt Twenty); and
- c) Agrees that the following Projects be developed with detailed business cases for delivery being reported to Cabinet for approval:
 1. Starlings Block Development & Milton Road Car Park Development
 2. Kingsway Public Realm Improvements
 3. Station Plaza

PART 2 – IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

DELIVERING PRIORITIES

The Dovercourt Town Centre Masterplan responds directly to the corporate goals identified within the Council's Corporate Plan and to the objectives of the Council's Economic Development Strategy (EDS). Approval of the Masterplan also accords with the Council's community leadership role.

Specifically the scheme responds to the following Corporate Goals:

Health and Housing

- Promote healthier lifestyles and wellbeing
- Deliver a quality living environment
- Local regeneration

Employment and Enjoyment

- To support business growth
- To enable better job prospects

- Attractive events programme

Our Priorities and Projects 2018/2019, Corporate Director (Planning and Regeneration)

- Strategy and plan for Harwich and Dovercourt public realm.
- Economic growth

The scheme also responds to the following objectives of the Council's Economic Development Strategy:

- Objective 1: Supporting Tendring's growth locations by intervening in areas where the potential for economic growth is highest and where there is a strong case for intervention particularly (but not exclusively) in Harwich, Clacton and West Tendring.

FINANCE, OTHER RESOURCES AND RISK

Finance and other Resources

There are no direct financial or other resourcing implications with regard to Cabinet's endorsement of the draft Dovercourt Town Centre Masterplan. In and of itself the document is a prospectus for change, which articulates a vision for the regeneration and transformation of Dovercourt.

Finance and other resourcing issues only become an issue with the further development and then delivery of the project interventions identified.

Given the sums likely to be involved it is evident that the Council will need to prioritise its investment over time set against other corporate priorities, and work with its private and public sector partners in an effort to secure third party support (where this is considered to be appropriate).

As finance and other resources become available (including external grant funding) it is recommended that priority is focussed on those project interventions that are likely to secure the most catalytic and positive transformation of the town centre. That is not to say that some of the smaller/less impactful projects proposed should not be pursued at the same time, as some of these present the opportunity for quick/easy wins that will help demonstrate the Council's determination and commitment to transform Dovercourt town centre.

Risk

The successful implementation of the Masterplan is subject to a number of potential risks. These include:

- An inability to successfully engage with, and secure the support of the Council's public, private and voluntary sector partners in pursuing the delivery of the Masterplan's principal recommendations;
- Failure of the Masterplan to secure the regenerative and transformational change envisaged;
- Capacity (financial/human) within the Council to effectively manage the delivery of the Masterplan's principal objectives;
- Reputational damage arising from the Council's inability to deliver the land use, public realm, and urban design objectives identified in the Masterplan; and
- A shift in corporate priorities and policy objectives following political change (national and local).

The Regeneration, Inward Investment, and Growth Team will continue to control and mitigate these risks as part of its administrative and management function and will identify, track, and report on risks in line with the Council's established programme and project management protocols.

It is proposed that the vision, aims and objectives of the Masterplan along with its principal site development and public realm interventions be communicated to staff across the organisation to ensure that the Plan's overarching objectives are recognised and understood as being a corporate priority and to establish how and where each of the Council's Directorates might contribute to delivery.

It is proposed that the Council engage with its principal public, private and voluntary sector partners as well as the Dovercourt community to secure support for the spatial objectives of the Plan as well as its proposed project interventions.

LEGAL

Councils are empowered to promote and build greater economic growth through regeneration projects using subsidiary powers under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 and General Power of Competence under Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011.

The delivery of the individual projects identified will be subject to the future approval of detailed business cases.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Consideration has been given to the implications of the proposed recommendation in this report with respect of: Crime and Disorder; Equality and Diversity; Health Inequalities; Area or Ward Affected; Consultation and Public Engagement; and any significant issues are set out below:

Evidence suggests that there is a direct link between economic prosperity and social inequality. The Dovercourt Town Centre Masterplan seeks to improve the economic performance and vitality of the town by creating a more appealing environment through targeted interventions focussed on vacant and rundown sites, and by securing improvements in the quality of the public realm.

Area or Ward Affected

The Dovercourt Town Centre Masterplan focusses on the Harwich and Kingsway Ward.

Consultation and Public Engagement

In refreshing the Dovercourt Town Centre Masterplan the Council's professional team undertook two consultation events. These sought to secure the views, thoughts, aspirations and comments of:

- The Council's Cabinet
- Ward Councillors
- The Harwich and Dovercourt Coastal Communities Team
- The Harwich and Dovercourt Tourism Group
- Essex County Council (Localities and Highways Teams)
- The Council's Corporate Team and relevant Heads of Service

PART 3 – SUPPORTING INFORMATION

BACKGROUND

Dovercourt has suffered from the generic decline in the popularity of English seaside towns and as a consequence of this and other local factors (such as the transformation of working practices at Harwich International Port), the town's economy has contracted. The condition of the built environment and the quality of the public realm has seen a commensurate decline. Dovercourt High Street has lost its pre-war (WW2) vitality and this is demonstrated by the number of derelict residential and commercial premises that are located in close proximity to the town centre.

The Council had previously commissioned a comprehensive Masterplan for Dovercourt Town Centre. The Masterplan sought to rediscover Dovercourt as a thriving seaside town with a vibrant and successful town centre. The proposals sought to create a distinctive place based on heritage, and a shared belief in the future of the town.

At the beginning of 2018 whilst the Council remained committed to the aims and objectives of the Masterplan (Dovercourt Rediscovered), but it had become increasingly evident that market conditions in the town were declining. This is very much in line with town centres across the country but also recognised that Dovercourt suffers from market failure in relation to investment which requires the Council to intervene.

In view of this and in an effort to kick-start the regeneration of Dovercourt, the Council appointed a professional team of consultants to review and refresh the Masterplan. The professional team comprised:

- Urban Initiatives Studio – Project management, Urban Design and Masterplanning
- Montagu Evans – Property Market Analysis, and Viability Appraisal
- Stockdale – Quantity Surveying and Development Costs
- Ash Sakula – Landscape and Architecture

The brief was to test and to reaffirm the design principles, public realm improvements and development objectives set out in Dovercourt Rediscovered and set out a range of interventions that would support realisation of the vision for the town.

Reporting to the Council's Corporate Director Planning and Regeneration, the Client Team for the commission comprised:

- Head of Regeneration
- Head of Property Services
- Head of Sport and Leisure
- Head of Public Realm
- Town Centre Coordinator

Vision for Dovercourt

In the early phase of their work, consultants recommended that the vision for the town (as articulated in Dovercourt Rediscovered), remained as relevant and valid today as it was when the Masterplan was originally developed, and so with the agreement of the Client Team the established vision was adopted as the principal objective to guide and refresh the Masterplan.

The vision seeks to secure Dovercourt as: a thriving town with an attractive High Street, a range of shops and cafes and regular street markets: a town which is proud of its heritage but also able to respond to new opportunities. A town with a high quality public realm and open spaces, stunning beaches and good connections – an attractive place to live, work, shop and visit.

Town Centre Strategy

The draft Masterplan identifies nine principal objectives which together establish a Town Centre Strategy for the renaissance of Dovercourt. The Strategy seeks to:

- Reinforce the town centre as a place for local facilities and services;
- Intensify the town's role as a place to live and work;
- Enhance the town's character and strengthen its distinctiveness;
- Enhance the town's accessibility by all modes of transport;
- Provide high quality public realm;
- Offer quality public spaces that invite people to stay;
- Support small interventions that animate the town centre and deliver quick improvements to catalyse change;
- Effectively promote and market the town; and
- Proactively manage the town centre to ensure that it is fresh, safe, well maintained and welcoming.

Spatial Concept

The Town Centre Strategy is used to inform the Spatial Concept that underpins the Masterplan. The principal elements of the Spatial Concept are as follows:

- **Town Centre**

This area (High Street and Kingsway) provides the focus for town centre activities and is the location where mixed use development should be promoted. Ground floor frontages should be active in this area and include: retail; services; restaurant; leisure; and employment uses. New residential ground floor uses are not supported in this location.

- **Town Centre Nodes**

Three nodes are identified where key movement routes converge. These are at the junction of the High Street and Kingsway (the main crossroad in the town centre), at Bath Road, and at the railway station. Each of these nodes has been identified as a place where people naturally congregate. These locations should offer a high quality public realm, the potential for people to sit, and enable pedestrians to cross roads along desire lines. The draft masterplan advocates that the built form around these places should be legible and distinctive.

- **Public Realm Improvements**

Public realm improvements are proposed along the High Street and Kingsway, to create a high quality pedestrian environment in the centre of the town, enhancing its character and appearance.

- Key Connections

The Spatial Concept identifies important approach routes into the town centre via Cliff Park and Dovercourt Beach, and advocates that these connections should provide a quality environment for pedestrians that is overlooked and well defined by development.

The Spatial Concept also identifies two new connections. The first connects Milton Road with Cliff Park to enable direct access to the park from Kingsway opening up a new leisure route. The second is a proposal to provide better access to Beacon Hill Fort from Cliff Park to better integrate these spaces. The Masterplan identifies Beacon Hill Fort as a potential new visitor destination and recommends that opportunities should be sought to provide access and to connect this with the circuit of leisure routes serving the town.

- Public Spaces

A new public space is proposed on Kingsway outside Kingsway Hall and the Library to provide a focal point for the community and for public life. It is envisaged that the space could accommodate a regular street market, festivals and other events and in so doing deliver a step change in the perception/image of the town.

Four pocket spaces on key routes are also proposed, where people can meet, sit down and enjoy the town centre. The spaces are located at the Railway Station (Kingsway North), the Queen Victoria Statue (Kingsway South), on the High Street West of Orwell Road, and at the intersection with Hill Road (to provide a resting space on the hill slope).

- Car Parking

Two new car parking locations are proposed. A surface car park on the Starlings Block (a derelict site to the East of the High Street/Kingsway crossroad), providing replacement spaces for the Milton Road Car Park that is reaching the end of its life.

The Spatial Concept also identifies a site to the North of Dovercourt Railway Station (accessed from the A120), as a new overflow car park, serving the town during peak demand. Both of these proposed car park facilities would help bring footfall through more peripheral parts of the High Street and Kingsway respectively, and in so doing support businesses and town centre vitality more widely.

- Development Opportunities

The Spatial Concept identifies a number of vacant and under-used sites that present opportunities for development and in so doing, the repair of Dovercourt's urban fabric. Mixed use developments with active ground floor uses are recommended within the town centre and on the seafront to animate streets and generate footfall. Residential development is proposed in the more peripheral/secondary locations (such as Milton Road).

Town Centre Masterplan

A copy of the draft revised Dovercourt Town Centre Masterplan is attached at **Appendix A**.

The Masterplan shows in principle design solutions indicating how development sites could be brought forward, and how public realm improvements could be implemented. The Plan provides a range of proposals that have been developed to demonstrate the potential for change. The cost and viability implications for principal sites are also examined.

Development Opportunities

The Masterplan identifies a number of key development opportunities in the town centre that are considered important for the regeneration of Dovercourt. For the most part these are underused, vacant or derelict sites which have a negative impact on the image of the town and undermine the quality of the pedestrian environment. The Masterplan asserts that the redevelopment of these sites would repair the urban fabric, deliver new activities and housing, establish a sense of enclosure and animation along the streets and breathe new life into the town centre.

The development opportunities in the town centre are identified in the plan below:



Some of the sites identified are in the ownership or under the control of the Council, whilst the majority are privately owned. The Masterplan advocates that the Council should work with landowners to explore how these sites could be brought back into active use and how

they could support the regeneration and renaissance of the town.

The development sites are as follows:

- Starlings Block – High Street (East)

It is proposed that the western corner of the Starlings Block could, in the longer term, accommodate a mixed-use building that provides active ground floor uses towards the High Street and animate the corner with Bath Road. The Masterplan advocates that the height of the development should mirror that of buildings in the High Street (three storeys), plus a roof or set back storey. The Masterplan goes on to propose that the remainder of the Starlings Block (that which is currently hoarded and derelict), be redeveloped to provide animated public space and a new town centre car park., providing 59 car parking spaces including six disabled spaces.

- Milton Road Car Park

It is proposed that the Milton Road Car Park be redeveloped as a residential scheme, to establish a positive frontage and enclosure to Milton Road and to enhance the setting of Kingsway Hall. The Masterplan advocates that this could take the form of three storey town houses above a shared under-croft car park. In addition this scheme could also provide an additional 15 public car parking spaces on Bagshaw Road.

- Private Car Park – Orwell Terrace (North)

It is proposed that the small private car park located at the Northern end of Orwell Terrace be redeveloped with a mixed use scheme to establish a positive frontage onto the High Street. This development could also incorporate a pedestrian connection linking Milton Road with Cliff Park.

The development would need to provide a sensitive contextual response to the adjacent historic buildings, including the listed Orwell Terrace and Cliff Park. It is recommended that heights should not be of more than three storeys with a set-back or roof storey incorporated. Car parking should be integrated within the development and not visually dominate the public realm or the Park.

- Derelict Corner Plot - Orwell Terrace (South)

The Masterplan advocates the redevelopment of the derelict site at the northern end of Orwell Terrace overlooking Dovercourt Bay. The development should be residential led, but the location would support an active ground floor use, such as a café or restaurant, which would benefit from the footfall along the seafront.

- Station Building – Kingsway (North)

The Masterplan advocates the refurbishment of the Station Building in order to help animate the station environment, and suggests that the building could be used as a co-working space providing rented desk space, a meeting room, and a café. The Plan also suggests that a bicycle rental facility and tourist information point could also be incorporated in such a development.

- Derelict Sites - Victoria Street

The Masterplan advocates that the two derelict sites on either side of Victoria Street should be redeveloped for residential use. The new buildings should face Station Road, and be designed to help define and reanimate the street space in Station Road and Victoria Street.

- Former Amusement Arcade – Kingsway (North)

The Plan identifies the opportunity to bring back into use the former amusement arcade and promotes the need for any redevelopment to provide an active ground floor use such as a retail unit, café or restaurant. This site has been granted planning permission, which is expected to be implemented shortly.

In addition to the sites referenced above, the Masterplan identifies other development opportunities (shown hatched blue on the plan) that, albeit not critical for the regeneration and enhancement of the town centre, could be brought forward with housing or mixed use development to contribute to the intensification and animation of the town.

Public Realm Improvements

The Masterplan also identifies a range of public realm improvements, which are presented as indicative/conceptual projects. If these were to be taken forward then each project would need to be the subject of more detailed work. Inter alia this would include transport modelling, residual valuations and impact assessments. Each project (or the suite of projects) would also need to be the subject of engagement with the relevant public and private sector bodies as well as the Dovercourt community.

The principal aims of the proposed public realm improvements are to:

- Enhance the connectivity, directness and safety of pedestrian routes;
- Provide a higher quality pedestrian and cycling environment;
- Offer amenities for people to ensure that being in the town centre and moving around it are easy, enjoyable and interesting; and to
- Improve the overall image and perception of the town centre.

The Masterplan identifies the following streets and junctions as locations for public realm improvements:

- High Street
- Kingsway
- Station Road
- Milton Road
- Empire Road and Mill Lane (providing a link from Kingsway to the seafront via the existing underpass).

The proposed public realm projects include:

- Town Centre Car Park

A new surface car park is proposed on the Starlings Site that transforms this vacant and derelict site into a positive space in the town centre. The car park provides replacement parking for the Milton Road car park in a friendlier surface level format,

and helps generate footfall along the High Street and into Kingsway via Milton Road.

The design also provides a new pocket space along the High Street with opportunities for landscaping, seating and play. The proposal includes for the re-provision of public toilets, which would otherwise be lost as part of the Milton Road Car Park redevelopment.

- Kingsway Public Space

A new public space is proposed outside Kingsway Hall. This would create a new focus in the town centre and provide a new location for the street market, as well as for festivals and other events. The space would require the closure of the central section of Kingsway South, however a retained bus service (using bus-gates) and out of hours servicing could be accommodated as part of the design. If the street market were to be located to this location, then the weekly closure of the High Street would no longer be necessary, resolving traffic flow and congestion in the town on market day.

The Masterplan presents an alternative to this proposal which would limit interventions to the widening of footways and improvements to the public realm. Whilst this approach would result in an enhanced street scene, it would not have the catalytic and transformative impact as that described above, and neither would it be suitable as a new location for the street market.

- Pocket Spaces

Other proposals include the creation of pocket spaces on the High Street, a new plaza outside the station, and an improved setting for the Queen Victoria Statue at the southern end of Kingsway

The potential public realm projects are identified on the plan below:

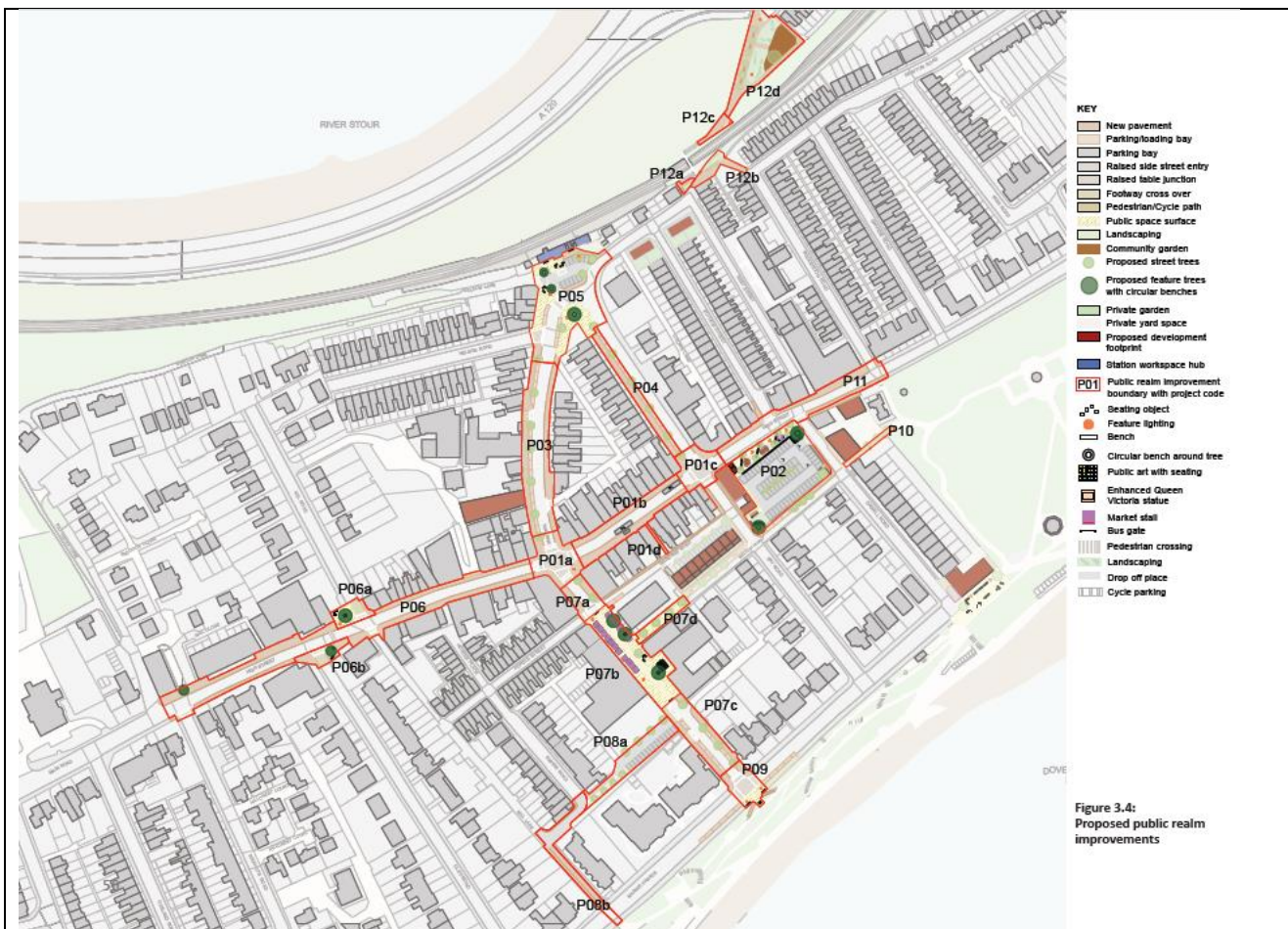


Figure 3.4:
Proposed public realm
improvements

Prioritisation of Public Realm Projects

The Masterplan identifies a catalogue of public realm projects, which if implemented would have a positive impact on the transformation of the town. These include the public realm projects referenced above, but also include: proposals to improve the visual appearance of the town's shopfronts; the reanimation of the station; improvements to the weekly street market; a signage strategy; the implementation of meanwhile uses; a programme of festivals and events; and the establishment of a dedicated town centre management organisation.

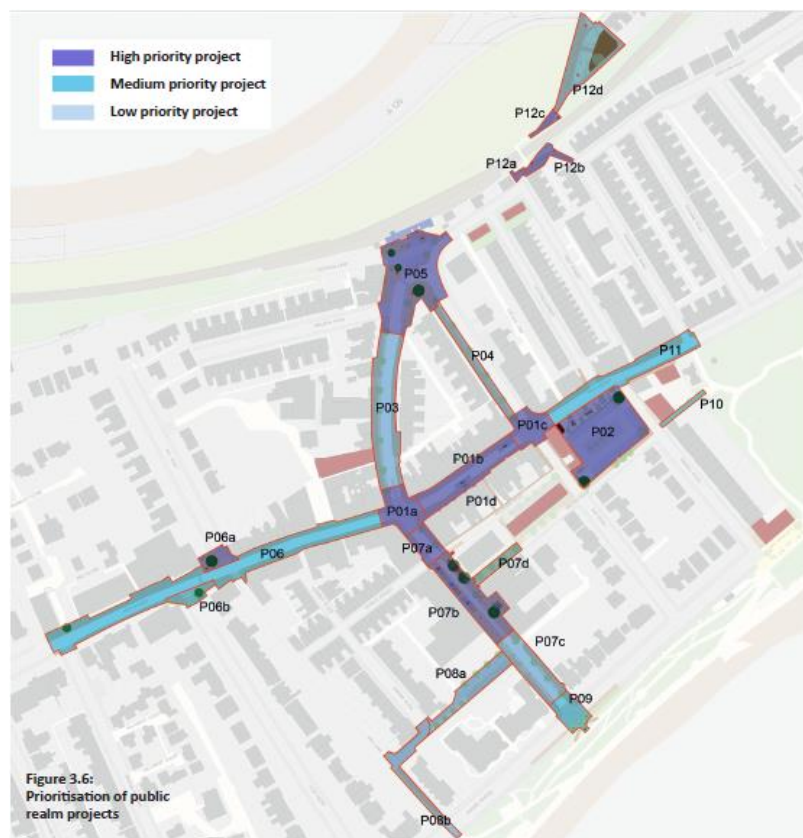
It is unlikely that funding will be available for the entire suite of public realm projects, and therefore each project intervention has been scored against its potential to support the regeneration of Dovercourt. The proposed public realm interventions are ranked as being High, Medium, or Low.

High priority projects are considered critical for the regeneration of Dovercourt. These projects will have a transformative impact, act as a catalyst, and bring major improvements to residents and visitors to the town.

Medium priority projects are considered as important to the regeneration of the town, as they improve important parts of the street scene, albeit in more peripheral locations.

Low priority projects are less critical to the regeneration of Dovercourt, but remain important as they seek to upgrade the street scene by connecting streets and contributing to an overall coherent image and appearance throughout the centre.

Public Realm Project Plan and Prioritised Project List



Project Code	Project Name	Priority
P07b	Kingsway South: Public space outside Kingsway Hall and Library	high
P02	Starlings site: Car park and public space	high
P05	Station Forecourt: Public space and public realm improvements	high
P01a	High Street and Kingsway Junction: Public realm improvements	high
P01c	High Street and Station Road Junction: Public realm improvements	high
P06a	High Street West: Pocket space	high
P01b	High Street Centre: Public realm improvements	high
P07a	Kingsway South: Public realm improvements	high
P12a	Railway Bridge: Improved access to steps and landscaping	high
P12b	Grafton Road: Improved pedestrian link and landscaping	high
P12c	North of Railway Bridge: improved pedestrian link and landscaping	high
P06b	High Street West: Pocket space	medium
P06c	High Street West: Public realm improvements	medium
P11	High Street East: Public realm improvements	medium
P10	Creation of pedestrian link from Milton Road and Cliff Hill Park	medium
P09	Queen Victoria Statue: Improvements to the setting of the statue	medium
P12d	Ingestre Street: Enhancement of open space	low
P03	Kingsway North: Public realm improvements	low
P04	Station Road: Public realm improvements	low
P07c	Kingsway South: Public realm improvements	low
P07d	Milton Road: General enhancement and closure to traffic	low
P01d	Backshaw Link: Repaving and enhanced lighting	low
P08a	Connection between Kingsway and Empire Road: formalise and improve route	low
P08b	Mill Lane: Improve path and underpass	low

The regeneration of the town centre will require a concerted effort and collaborative approach by the Council and its public, private and voluntary sector partners, working with the community to secure the transformation required.

Section 4 of the Masterplan reviews the above and proposes twenty key regeneration projects (the Dovercourt Twenty), which include the redevelopment of sites such as the Milton Road Car Park, the provision of new parking facilities, public realm improvements, shopfront improvements, the reanimation of the station area, and the provision of improved street signage. The 'Dovercourt Twenty' also include proposals to strengthen the management of the town and that of the street market, and also advocates the use of festivals and events to re-establish the vibrancy of the town.

CURRENT POSITION

Work to refresh the Dovercourt Town Centre Masterpan has been concluded and is presented as part of this Cabinet Report for approval.

Delivery of the vision requires the Council to take a lead role through the development and delivery of three priority projects that will have a high impact and stimulate further investment:

- Starlings Block Development & Milton Road Car Park Development
- Kingsway South
- Station Plaza

From the above it is intended to bring forward detailed proposals for delivery of the

combined Starlings Site and Milton Road Car Park project to Cabinet in September 2019.

The Kingsway South and Station Plaza projects would be developed to a 'shovel ready' stage whereby they would deliverable should funding become available (in particular external grant funding).

Funding for the above is already identified in the Council's budget.

FURTHER HEADINGS RELEVANT TO THE REPORT

There are none.

BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR THE DECISION

There are none.

APPENDICES

A.1 Appendix A – Dovercourt Town Centre Masterplan