

**Folkestone Town Centre - Expression of Interest to Future High Streets Fund  
March 2019**

**Appendix C**

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## 1. Strategic Policy

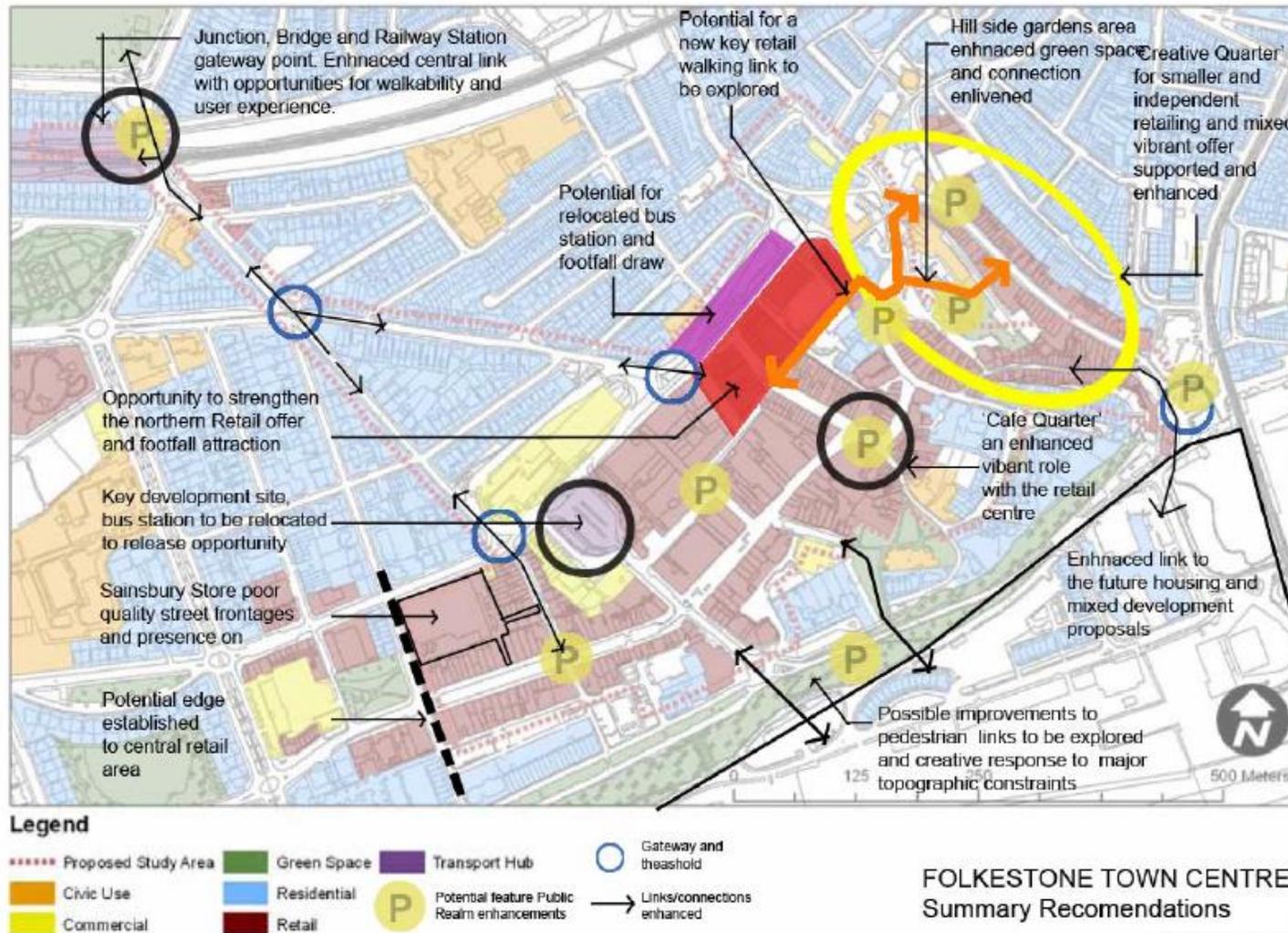
As part of background work required by Folkestone & Hythe District Council to support the Policy and Places Local Plan, a number of studies have been undertaken to consider the retail and commercial floorspace requirements of the district and the role that Folkestone Town Centre plays now and in the future retail hierarchy.

In 2015, a Town Centres study was undertaken by Peter Brett Associates and this identified a number of issues, including:

- The general diversity of uses was considered to be 'reasonable', but there is an almost-entire absence of an evening economy which is well under-represented
- There are a high numbers of vacant units and the majority of retail stock is in small, often constrained premises
- The tourism offer is important in the town, particularly around the harbourside area and also in an around the Leas.
- The retail offer of the Creative Quarter complements the more 'mainstream' offer elsewhere in the town centre, but better integration is required if its benefits are to be fully realised.
- The Street market (at that time only operating in Sandgate Road) was identified as suitable for further development and intensification - 'perhaps by different types of markets on a weekly/monthly basis (farmers markets, craft markets, seasonal markets and so on'
- The physical geography of the town creates access difficulties between the primary and secondary retail environments and the tourist-focussed harbourside.
- The environmental quality of some of the retail secondary areas are looking tired and are in need of investment: Improving the quality of the townscape was identified in the on-street pedestrian survey as a key aspect for improvement.

The study also identified a number of development opportunities in Folkestone Town Centre, as shown in Figure 1 below

Figure 1 Core opportunities in Folkestone town centre as identified by PBA study 2015



Source: Peter Brett Associates Town Centre Study 2015

Alongside the finalisation of the Places and Policies Local Plan, which relates to the Core Strategy adopted in 2013, a review of this Core Strategy is also underway in the district. This Core Strategy Review has completed its final consultation and there is an Examination in Public in April. This has specific content on the strategy for Central Folkestone which is shown below. This recognises the need for further investment in Folkestone Town Centre to diversify uses and enhance the quality of the townscape.

## Policy CSD6

### Central Folkestone Strategy

New development in central Folkestone should deliver investment in the daytime and evening economy through a mix of commercial, cultural, entertainment and educational uses and contribute to public realm improvements that enhance the physical environment/sense of security, and improve connectivity both to and within the Town Centre, in line with policies SS4 and SS5.

Figure 5.4 identifies zones within the town where there are sets of linked opportunities: two spatial 'arcs' where Folkestone can develop to maximise its potential. Between these lies the heart of the historic Bayle and Leas Conservation Area, a place which should be the focus of preservation and enhancements.

Within the *Central/West Development Arc* there are opportunities for mixed-use development providing major new office and retail businesses or other services that will contribute to the wider regeneration of Folkestone and the district, particularly at the bus station site and at Guildhall Street, Gloucester Place and Shellons Street and, in the long-term, the redevelopment of the Sainsbury's store and adjacent areas at Bouverie Place West. Residential development may be supported, provided it delivers genuinely mixed-use development or it enables the full commercial potential of the area to be realised. Furthermore:

- New development should be of very high-quality design that contributes to and improves the existing character and townscape of the area.
- It is appropriate for development to support delivery of public realm and transport improvements within and to the north of the arc.
- Development will need where appropriate to detail the delivery of measures, or contribute to improvements in, skills/training in nearby deprived areas.

The *Seafront/Creative Quarter Enterprise Zone* provides major opportunities for development to contribute to strategic needs and to upgrade the fabric of the town, drawing from its past and potential sense of place:

- Further development by the charitable sector and others through conversion and re-use of derelict land promoting cultural, educational uses, visitor attractions, and other small-scale active uses will be encouraged.
- Principles relating to creative enterprise zones will be applied to the Creative Quarter to intensify use for creative and digital industries to ensure no net erosion of space.
- Within this arc development must maximise wider benefits to the Town Centre through improved connectivity and transport links and providing uses that attract pedestrian footfall, and proposals within the boundary set out in the Policies Map must be in accordance with policy SS10 (Folkestone Seafront).

Across these arcs, and within central or deprived places in the town, development bringing investment for schools, new education and training provision and workforce development measures that increase the skills attainment of local people in priority economic sectors will be acceptable.

## 2. Current Folkestone Town Centre Initiatives

A number of initiatives have been undertaken recently or are still underway which reflected the Council's high level commitment to both addressing the challenges and issues facing the town, as well as to make more of its growth potential.

### Folkestone Seafront – SE LEP Local Growth Fund

In round 2 of the South East LEP's LGF allocation in 2016, £5.6 mill LGF funding was allocated to help bring forward the mixed residential and commercial scheme planned at Folkestone Seafront which is being led by Sir Roger Da Haan's Folkestone Harbour & Seafront Development Company.

The LGF funding contribution towards this £22.1 million scheme was used for flood defence works, improving access and raising the development platform level for the seafront mixed use development.

Outline planning permission for the overall scheme was granted in 2015 (see Figure 2) and is set to bring up to 1000 new homes and 10,000 sqm of commercial space to the Folkestone seafront

The LGF funded elements of the scheme were completed in 2018 and following the granting of full planning permission in 2018, the first phase of the development which will bring forward 84 homes is now underway.

Figure 2 Future Development of Folkestone Seafront and Harbour (planning approved 2015)



### Folkestone Community Works - an EU funded Community Led Local Development (CLLD) Programme

Folkestone Community Works is a community-led local development programme for the most deprived parts of the eastern, harbour and central parts of Folkestone. This came about as a result of Folkestone & Hythe District Council being successful in their application and awarded the funding for the programme in 2017, due to the high levels of deprivation in the area.

The programme will run until 2022 and is a European funded programme, with money from the European Social Fund (ESF) and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). This together with matched funding from project applicants will bring around £4.5 million to the area to spend on projects that help residents into jobs, support businesses to growth and create jobs and better integrate services for both residents and businesses alike.

Brexit will not impact on the programme because the European funds are already committed and have been received by the Government.

The programme operates through Calls for Projects and there have so far been two rounds. Five ESF-funded projects commenced in January 2019 which aims to help residents on their journey into work and 14 SME business grants have been awarded to businesses located within the geographic area to support their growth.

Further information is available on the programme at [www.folkestonecommunity.works](http://www.folkestonecommunity.works)

### Folkestone Townscape Heritage Initiative

The Folkestone Townscape Heritage Initiative (FTHI) is a partnership project between Kent County Council, Folkestone & Hythe District Council and the Creative Foundation (Charity) to enhance the old town area of Folkestone. £1.3million was secured from the HLF in 2014 which was matched with £400,000 from Kent County Council and £100,000 from Folkestone and Hythe District Council.

The Folkestone THI specifically sought to improve the townscape through providing grants to:

- Repair and conservation of in-use buildings
- Reinstatement of architectural features
- Brining vacant historic floor space back into use
- Enhancing routes, paths, steps and public space

Other benefits of the THI scheme are that it has enabled more people to learn about Folkestone's heritage and it has empowered residents to take an active part in their community and to make decisions about their heritage.

The THI project has improved the living and working environment of the Creative Quarter through improving the visual quality of the Old High Street and has supported the creation of improved new shop fronts and attractive facades. It has also served to enhance the shopping experience with attractive shop fronts which has led to improved footfall and economic performance. This in turn has encouraged more businesses to move in to the area and further developed the Creative Quarter as a niche retail destination.

### No Use Empty Initiative

Kent County Council (KCC) launched its 'No Use Empty' (NUE) campaign in 2005, and the primary aim of the Initiative is to improve the physical urban environment by bringing long empty residential properties (defined as empty for over 6 months) back into use as quality housing accommodation. The scheme provides an interest-free loan to developers to undertake the necessary works.

In 2016, Folkestone & Hythe District Council added further funding to the county scheme to enable a larger loan to be provided within the district.

To date the scheme has awarded £1.2million in loans within Folkestone & Hythe district, which has attracted £2.3m of private/public sector leverage.

Since the introduction of the scheme, the scheme has enabled some of the larger buildings in Folkestone, which require more investment, to be tackled. These properties have typically been those in close proximity to Folkestone town centre and the harbour area. Figure 3 shows details of one of the Folkestone Town Centre properties that has benefitted from this scheme.

Figure 3 No Use Empty Funded Projects in Folkestone

| <b>127 Sandgate Road, Folkestone</b>   |   |
|--|---|
| A five storey mid terraced freehold property circa 1970s. Situated in the prime commercial locality in the town centre.  |   |
| The building had been empty since 2008 until the new owners acquired it and transformed into affordable apartments and retaining a commercial unit to the lower ground floor which is occupied by an Architect firm. |   |
| <u>Empty: 5 Years</u>  |   |
| <u>Residential Units: 7</u>  |   |
| <u>Commercial Units: 1</u>   |   |
|    |  |
| Project Cost: £436,000   |   |
| Loan: £236,500   |   |

### Folkestone Coastal Community Team and the Coastal Community Fund

In 2016 Folkestone received funding from MHCLG to establish a Coastal Community Team and develop an Economic Plan. This plan guides the activities of the team through identifying the key economic issues facing Folkestone and sets out both the short term and longer term priorities to bring economic growth to the town.

The plan identified a series of projects, many of which aim to address the issues identified in our Expression for Interest for the Future High Streets Fund.

A submission for Coastal Community Funding (CCF) was sought in 2017 to take forward some of the initiatives identified in the Economic Plan but this was unsuccessful. Another submission has been made more recently in 2017, and the outcome is still awaited and expected in April. If successful, this funding will be used for specific projects which:

- **Promote Folkestone** – including creating a *Folkestone brand*, which links the heritage and cultural aspects of our coastal town, providing a *digital high street*, Wi-Fi, town centre advertising media podium and developing a *communication strategy* which focuses on a joined up common vision which supports local businesses and

create an exciting customer experience through the storytelling of Folkestone as a seaside destination.

- **Enhance the street scene** – including through physical *town centre improvements*, such as wooden seating, trees & floral planters, additional sensory illuminations and automated access barriers; *additional public realm CCTV* and a *town centre public art work* that emphasises the link to the sea and town brand; and the employment of a *dedicated team of rangers and officers* to provide front line support and services to the town's residents and visitors.
- **Provide a sustainable managed street market** - with an improved offer, *layout* and *appearance* to maximise the market's appeal and success, support core businesses, encourage entrepreneurs, increase tourism and reflect the town's diverse community.
- **Enable better connectivity** – through the purchase of an *eco-friendly land train* and developing a year round route to move people around the disparate areas of the

#### The 'Spirit of the Leas' HLF project

The Folkestone Coastal Park "Spirit of the Leas" project aims to restore historic routes and structures in the Coastal Park and along the Leas in Folkestone, as well as to develop an understanding and appreciation within the community of the roles played by the Coastal Park, Leas Cliff Hall and the Leas in Folkestone's development as a coastal resort. The capital improvements in this project will serve to improve connectivity between the town centre and the Lower Leas Coastal Park and help to improve the flow in between. The coastal park is a major tourist attraction in Folkestone and this will help to bring more of the visitors in to the town centre.

This project has been a long time in development, with the Expression of interest for it submitted in 2014. Following funding from HLF to develop the project, a stage 2 application (final stage) was submitted in February 2019 and a final decision is expected in April. If successful the HLF will contribute 73% of the funding for this £670,000 project, with £30,000 coming from Folkestone Town Council and the remainder from Folkestone & Hythe District Council.