Future High Streets Fund

Call for Expressions of Interest

Application Form

Applicant Information

Bidding authority: Dartford Borough Council

Area within authority covered by bid: Dartford Town Centre

Bid Manager Name and position: Lewis Kirnon, Communications, Marketing and Commercial Manager

Contact telephone number: 01322 343352

Email address: lewis.kirnon@dartford.gov.uk

Postal address: Dartford Borough Council
Civic Centre, Home Gardens, Dartford, Kent, DA1 1DR

Additional evidence, such as letters of support, maps or plans should be included in an annex.

Applications to the Fund will be assessed against the criteria set out below. Further information on the scoring criteria and their weighting will be published by the department before the end of January 2019.

Submission of proposals:

Proposals must be received no later than 2359 on Friday 22 March 2019.

An electronic copy only of the bid including any supporting material should be submitted to highstreetsfund@communities.gov.uk.

Enquiries about the Fund may be directed to highstreetsfund@communities.gov.uk.
SECTION 1: Defining the place

This section will seek a definition of the high street or town centre to be covered within the bidding authority. Places should:

- Explain the high street/town centre geography
- Indicate the population of those living and travelling to this centre, how this links to the wider economic area and its role in the lives of those within the catchment area

1.1 Geographical area:

Introducing Dartford Town Centre...

Formally defined by the Dartford Town Centre Framework (2018), Dartford Town Centre is set out in the map in Annex A. Extending south of Dartford rail station, it is the main service centre for Dartford Borough, containing a wide range of commercial and public services, including:

- the town’s main local retail core. This consists of the High Street, anchored by two 1970s covered shopping centres (the Orchards and Priory Centres) and accompanied by a more recent retail park (Prospect Place). In recent years, the retail stock has deteriorated (see Challenges in Section 2.1), and measures have been taken to consolidate retail provision;

- cultural, leisure and civic amenities, including the Orchard theatre (a 956-seat venue serving a regional market); Central Park (a formal Edwardian park covering some 58 acres on the south side of the town centre); the Library and Museum, set adjacent to the park; the ‘Acacia Complex’ of historic buildings, entertainment venues and open space; and Dartford’s Civic Centre;

- a number of major development sites, including former retail locations such as the former Co-op department store and a large site previously owned by Tesco to the south of the town centre.

.... and its wider ‘story’ as a place

Looking beyond its individual functions and assets, Dartford is shaped by its industrial past, its proximity to London and by its location at the heart of the Thames Gateway, an area with enormous growth potential.

Historically, the town was a major industrial centre: paper, cement, chemicals, engineering and power generation were all important industries, linked with the economy of London and the wider Estuary. Within the town centre, the Carnegie library and Central Park are reminders of the philanthropy that supported an industrial community; in land use terms, the town centre is bounded to the north by the large former Glaxo SmithKline pharmaceuticals plant, now being redeveloped as part of a major regeneration scheme.

Dartford’s identity has been shaped by the people who were born and grew up here. The Mick Jagger Centre, a community arts and cultural venue plays tribute to one of Dartford’s most famous sons, while the town’s street signs reflect the influence of Sir Peter Blake, the godfather of British pop art.

 Relationships to London have been, and remain, important, both in terms of commuting opportunities and markets for local businesses – and, linked with its industrial heritage, Dartford has long been a location for activities linked with the London market.

Crucially, Dartford is an area of major housing and population growth. The Borough’s population is expected to rise by around a third over the next 20 years (to around 130,000), including at major developments such as Ebbsfleet Garden City and closer to the town centre. There has also been a significant expansion of employment in business parks such as Crossways, adjacent to the M25.
However, despite rapid growth, Dartford’s town centre underperforms. The remainder of this proposal sets out the reasons why – and our strategy to address it.

1.2 Population and links to wider economic area:

Population overview

At the centre of the Thames Gateway, Dartford is one of the UK’s fastest growing boroughs. In 2017, 107,500 people lived in the Borough – an increase of 10% since 2011. Looking to the future, Dartford’s population is forecast to grow by 24,000 between 2016 and 2036: an increase of 23% - higher than in any other district in the South East LEP area.

Looking more locally, the ‘Dartford Town Area’ (defined as roughly the Dartford urban area, with the town centre at its core) has a growing population of 51,000. The ‘Town Area’ has a relatively young demographic, with an average age of 37; according to Experian, “younger households settling down in housing priced within their means” and “families with limited budgets with limited resources” form the two largest household typologies.

Economic profile

In 2017, there were 56,000 employee jobs in Dartford, of which 23,000 were in the ‘Dartford Town Area’. Across the Borough, there were relatively high levels of employment in retail (reflecting the influence of Bluewater), construction, transport and logistics and business administration and support services. On the whole, the Borough has a relatively buoyant economy: between 2013 and 2018, business stock grew by 39%, the second highest rate of increase in the South East LEP area.

However, the town centre’s share of employment is relatively modest, with the ‘Town Area’ accounting for just 37% of employee jobs in the Borough. This reflects the high levels of economic activity at major peripheral developments (Bluewater and the business parks near the M25/A282) which have expanded rapidly over the past 20 years.

Economically, Dartford’s position in the Thames Gateway and on the edge of London is crucial. Around 35% of the Borough’s workforce travel to London (including the near boroughs of South East London), reflecting its well-connected location.

Town centre catchment area

Dartford town centre generally caters to a local retail market. The most recent retail analysis (completed some time ago, in 2010) identified a ‘core catchment’ consisting of the town centre and immediate surrounding neighbourhoods. Nevertheless, the town contains a number of non-retail service functions and cultural amenities that serve the Borough as a whole (with some – such as the Orchard Theatre – catering to a wider regional catchment). According to Springboard, weekly footfall in the town centre was around 105,000 in 2018.

Town centre uses

A map of the town centre is attached in Annex 1. Key uses include:

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1 ONS, MYPE 2017; Census 2011
2 ONS, population projections
3 Dartford Borough Council (2018), Dartford Town Area: Area Profile
4 ONS, UK Business Count, 2018
5 ONS, Census 2011
6 Dartford Borough Council/ GVA Grimley (2010), Dartford Retail and Commercial Leisure Study - Plans
• **Retail activity.** The town centre’s primary frontage is concentrated on the High Street and the Orchards and Priory Centres adjacent to it. This area contains several national multiples, although vacancy rates (discussed in the next section) are relatively high. Areas of secondary frontage include the Prospect Place retail park, and Hythe Street, which offers a range of financial and other services, as well as retail. The town centre also hosts a bi-weekly market in the High Street, which remains important to its success.

• **Cultural and public service amenities,** including the Orchard Theatre, Library and Museum and Central Park.

• **Limited office-related activity,** the largest component of which is the Civic Centre. Wider office-based employment in the town centre is limited, with much of the Borough’s office stock based in business park locations.

• **A growing stock of housing,** contributing to Dartford’s overall rapid growth, and complementing significant development just outside the town centre boundary.

On the whole, the range of uses – especially in relation to commercial leisure and non-retail employment activities – is somewhat limited, given Dartford’s housing growth and otherwise good connectivity. This is explored further in the next section.

**Social and historical importance**

Briefly referenced earlier, Dartford town centre is a location of some historical importance, particularly in relation to its industrial heritage. Most of the town centre is within a conservation area - its characteristics are set out in greater detail in Annex B – and the street pattern retains its original Roman form. Particularly relevant to this expression of interest however is the extent to which the town has changed in the past 20-30 years, as much of its historic extractive and manufacturing industry has been (successfully) replaced by lighter manufacturing, service and distribution activities and substantial housing growth. It is in this context that the town centre’s function needs to evolve.

[749 words]
SECTION 2: Setting out the challenges

Clear description of the issues and challenges facing this area.

This section will seek a description of the issues and structural challenges facing the high street or town centre area to be covered within the bidding. Places should:

- Describe the key challenges facing the area
- Provide evidence to support this argument (additional sources can be included in annexes). Set out why this place would benefit more from moving forward to co-development than other places within the area

We will not accept bids covering town centre areas that are not facing significant challenges.

2.1: Challenges

Current challenges...

Despite Dartford’s rapid growth, the town centre faces a number of challenges. Some of these are shared with towns across the country faced with a need to respond to a changing retail landscape – but some are unique to Dartford’s geographical position and growth agenda. In summary, our challenges fall into five linked categories, relating to: retail capacity, the purchasing power of the local market, limited non-retail uses, viability and environmental and congestion challenges. The following paragraphs consider each of these in turn.

Challenge 1: We have an excess of retail capacity...

Dartford town centre’s surplus of retail capacity has been recognised for several years, and pre-dates the current ‘crisis’ in the retail sector. In 2010, the Dartford Retail and Commercial Leisure Study noted that “there are widespread concerns that [the town centre] has experienced a decline in the attractiveness of its shopping offer”, with high vacancy rates and an excess of smaller units that are unattractive to the modern retail sector.

Two factors specific to Dartford reinforce this situation:

- first, the town centre is on the doorstep of very strong competition. Bluewater is a major regional retail and entertainment destination (with around 300 stores, 50 restaurants and an IMAX cinema) and has seen substantial investment in recent years. Over the longer term, larger neighbouring town centres such as Bexleyheath have also been important competing centres. In retail terms, Dartford town centre is a secondary location, despite hosting the Borough’s main concentration of local service activities

- second, the configuration of the town centre’s retail stock presents a particular challenge. Unusually for a town of Dartford’s size, the town centre contains two indoor shopping centres of similar vintage and layout, both of which have high vacancies and neither of which are configured to modern demand. In consequence, neither centre provides a ‘focal point’ for retail activity in the town, nor offers critical mass.

As a result, Dartford experiences high vacancy rates and a high level of short-term retail occupancy. It is important to note that this applies to premises with primary as well as secondary frontage, in 2018, vacancy rates stood at 11% and 14% respectively. These are actually improved somewhat by the recent demolition of a number of vacant units on Lowfield Street, in the south of the town centre.

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7 Dartford Borough Council/ GVA Grimley (2010), Dartford Retail and Commercial Leisure Study
Like many other towns, this long-standing over-supply of retail space has been reinforced in recent years by changes in general retail patterns (including the shift towards online retailing). In Dartford town centre, this has meant the loss of a number of established multiples (including Next, Mothercare, Waitrose and a large Co-op department store). Not all of these operators have been replaced by other retailers: where they have, the replacements have tended to be at the discount end of the market.

Unsurprisingly, demand for new retail premises in the town centre has been weak: there has been no new assessment of retail capacity since 2010, reflecting the lack of commercial interest in retail-focused investment: the most recent major retail proposal (a scheme led by Tesco focused around Lowfield Street) was cancelled in the light of the firm’s national decision to retreat from a number of large projects.

Challenge 2: Local purchasing power is limited...

While Dartford town centre ought to be an important service centre for the Borough as a whole, ease of access to competing centres (at least for those with access to transport) means that the town centre is, in retail terms, reliant on a more localised market. While the town’s demographics are changing as a result of major new housing development, it is likely that there is a strong retail dependency on local residents with relatively limited disposable incomes.

Challenge 3: Non-retail uses are (relatively) limited...

There is a significant concentration of public amenities and non-commercial leisure opportunities in Dartford town centre – and there are some distinctive gems, such as the museum and library and the Orchard Theatre. However, the town centre is over-dependent on retail as a driver of footfall, creating a significant challenge given the current weakness of the retail offer. In particular, it is worth noting that:

- town centre commercial leisure opportunities are limited. In part, this reflects the strength of the offer in other locations (especially at Bluewater, which offers an entertainment and restaurant venue of regional scale). But there ought to be an opportunity for a different sort of offer in the town centre, perhaps grounded in greater diversity and reflecting the relatively high number of independent operators within the town centre generally. This has however proved difficult to bring forward, given the challenges (set out below) in repurposing existing retail premises and the wider current demand constraints that the town faces.

- Dartford is a major centre for employment. Across the Borough as a whole, there is a jobs density of 0.97 – the highest of any district in Kent. But within the Borough, the main concentrations of employment are outside the town centre – for example at the major business park at Crossways adjacent to the M25 and (in retail and leisure) at Bluewater. Within the town centre, there are some public sector office uses (such as the Civic Centre), but both the supply and demand of alternative (especially higher-value) employment space is limited. This impacts both on the potential for additional footfall in the town centre and on the scope (in current circumstances) to bring in a greater diversity of uses.

Challenge 4: New developments face viability challenges...

The challenges set out above lead to a further challenge: that of significant viability constraints in bringing forward schemes that would seek to ‘repurpose’ the town centre for alternative uses. For example, the former Co-op site, subject to plans for a mixed-use leisure and residential development, currently faces a private funding shortfall, and the long-planned redevelopment of the station area has also not yet proved possible to bring forward – in spite of substantial new residential development in the vicinity of the town centre (such as on the Northern Gateway site). The implication is that while Dartford as a whole is growing rapidly, the long-term challenges in the town centre (and the costs of brownfield regeneration) continue to act as a deterrent to private sector investment.
Challenge 5: There are specific environmental and accessibility constraints

Underpinning all of the above, Dartford town centre is faced with some distinctive environmental and transport-related challenges. In particular, the A226, which runs as an ‘inner ring’ around the town centre is highly congested and imposes a significant severance effect, particularly on the north side between the station and the town centre. This is exacerbated by the use of the town centre road network by drivers seeking to avoid congestion on the A2 and M25/ A282 approaching the Dartford Crossing, and the ring road area has been designated an Air Quality Management Area.

Finally, while there has been substantial recent investment in the local public realm (such as in Central Park, new town centre signage and the forthcoming development of Brewery Square on the south side of the town centre), there are some local access and legibility challenges – all of which help to reinforce the weakness of the retail offer and the constraints on investment.

Future risks...

These challenges present several risks when considered alongside the substantial housing and population growth that Dartford is experiencing (and will continue to experience over the next 20 years):

- first, there is an economic risk of disinvestment in the town centre, even as alternative employment and retail locations perform well. While the town centre has lost a number of retailers in recent years, the national retail outlook (and commentary from the shopping centre operators) suggests that there are ongoing vulnerabilities – and unless action is taken to reduce the overall retail footprint and reorient the town centre to a more diverse range of uses, the risk of further losses is likely to increase.

- second, unless the town centre can offer a diverse range of services (public and third sector services, cultural amenities, commercial leisure, employment), it risks losing its position as a ‘focal point’ for the life of the town. This could be especially damaging given the high volumes of new residential development: once established, travel patterns that do not make use of the town centre could become hard to break, and a failure to embed the town centre as a place that can benefit and be enjoyed by new and existing residents would present a significant social risk.

- finally, congestion and poor air quality are already significant challenges for the town. Yet the town centre provides a central public transport node (rail, bus and the Fastrack bus rapid transit system). Maximising the use of this is important for the sustainability of the wider (highly developed and constrained in transport terms) urban area; a failure to do so as a result of limited demand for town centre uses presents and environmental risk.

... and how capital investment via the Future High Streets Fund could help

Set against these risks and challenges, Dartford town centre has the potential to take advantage of the significant opportunities presented by the area’s growing population: if we can work with the market to diversify the town centre offer and reduce its retail dependency, there is a growing pool of potential demand that ought to help it thrive.

It is in that spirit that last year, we published the Dartford Town Centre Framework, our strategy for the future. The key elements of this are set out in response to Question 3.1 below, and include plans for the repurposing of the existing covered shopping malls, improved public realm and investment in cultural infrastructure. Within this context, a potential scheme for which Future High Streets Fund investment may be suitable is the development of the first phase of the Cultural Quarter and Health Hub, to be developed on the former Co-op department store site, explained in greater detail in Section 3.

[1,664 words – no maximum word limit]
2.2: Rationale for selecting town centre area

The case for Dartford town centre

There is a strong case for selecting Dartford town centre as the focus for this expression of interest to the Future High Streets Fund:

• first, it is the main town centre within the Dartford local authority area, located at the centre of Dartford urban area (which itself accounts for around 70% of the population of the Borough). It accommodates Dartford’s main concentration of ‘local’ and convenience retail, its main transport hub and its key cultural amenities. While there are a number of smaller high streets within Dartford Borough (for example at Swanscombe), these are essentially small local service centres, and do not include the range of amenities, or the catchment of Dartford town centre.

• second, it is strategically important. Dartford’s approved Core Strategy identifies Dartford town centre (and the adjacent Northern Gateway regeneration site) as a priority area for development. Although prepared in 2011 (in a different retailing environment) the Core Strategy also identifies a need to “revitalise Dartford town centre and improve its range of attractions and environment”, including through the refurbishment/ redevelopment of the Priory and Orchards shopping centres and the redevelopment of the Co-op site. More recently, a comprehensive Framework for the town centre has been prepared (discussed further in Section 3.1 and attached as Annex XX), with which this expression of interest is linked.

• third, there is clear evidence of both major challenges that require intervention to resolve, and opportunities that could be gained. These are set out in detail in Section 2.1: in summary, the over-supply of retail and a limited diversity of uses currently acts as a brake on the town centre’s success, but if this could be resolved, the area’s growing population presents a route to increasing demand.

• fourth, we believe that there are concrete opportunities in Dartford town centre in which Future High Streets Fund investment could make a substantive difference and could unlock private funding. We have highlighted a range of opportunities in Section 3.1 below, one of which (the first phase of the Cultural and Health Hub) is ’shovel ready’.

Other options considered

However, as part of the process of developing this expression of interest, we considered other ‘town centre’ areas. These fell into two categories:

• other locations within the Borough. None of the Borough’s other existing ‘high streets’ would meet the criteria for the FHSF, given their small scale. There are also no locations within Dartford’s large newer developments (such as Ebbsfleet) that are relevant to the challenges set out in the FHSF prospectus.

• other designations within the town centre. The area we have defined is consistent with the Town Centre Framework. While it would be possible to concentrate the area covered by this expression of interest more narrowly on the High Street itself, this would exclude many of the town centre’s key assets, challenges and opportunities and would also fail to align with our town centre strategy.

[485 words = 500 max]
SECTION 3: Strategic ambition

This section will seek evidence of the level of ambition from the local authority, support from stakeholders and evidence that the local authority is well-placed to use the Future High Street Fund to tackle these challenges in a way that will fit with wider existing plans. Local authorities should:

- Set out a high-level vision for improving their area and how this links with need expressed in Section 2
- Demonstrate how this ambition will align with other funding streams (public or private)
- Cover how investment from government will support the area and help overcome these challenges
- Demonstrate engagement with and support from local stakeholders including other tiers of local government, if applicable (supporting evidence of this support such as letters should be attached as an annex)
- Show how this will link to wider strategic plans, including the Local Plan and Local Industrial Strategies e.g. around housing and local growth
- Provide an estimate of how much revenue funding they would need to support the development of their strategic vision and business case for a specific proposal

This phase relates to defining places and challenges and we therefore are not asking for specific project proposals at this stage.

However, if a local authority has been working on a specific project that they feel is deliverable in the short term if they were to receive capital funding at an early stage, we invite them to make that clear here. While the details of the project will not be considered in our decision-making at this stage, we may consider fast-tracking these projects during co-development.

We will not accept b’ids that do not provide sufficient evidence of support from local stakeholders.

3.1 Town centre vision and ambition for change

Our vision and ambition

“Great towns like Dartford, are defined by their people. They are defined by their history; through their local heritage, festivals, food and local traditions. But a great town is also defined by its ambition and ability to adapt to change”

Jeremy Kite, Leader of Dartford Borough Council

Our vision is set out in the Town Centre Development Framework, adopted in July 2018. This contains an ambition that “through high quality design and innovative thinking, Dartford will be a place which invests in its people and future generations, celebrating their creativity and talent to deliver on the aspiration to make Dartford a ‘Town Centre for the Future’”, with six objectives:

- enhancing the town centre economy, through an increased diversity of uses, to respond to the needs of a young, growing population
- increasing leisure and recreation opportunities within the town centre...
- … and embedding arts and creativity as part of the town centre mix, building on existing cultural amenities
- improving movement around the town, in terms of traffic flow and pedestrian and public transport links
- embedding innovation, e.g. in digital connectivity and in encouraging new forms of employment
... and linked with all of the above, changing perceptions of Dartford as a place to live, work and visit.

This presents a strategy for diversity and quality, in the light of an ambitious growth agenda. To deliver this, the Framework identifies several spatial interventions, including:

- **Highways improvements** to overcome congestion and connectivity constraints, currently being taken forward by Dartford Borough Council and Kent County Council.
- **Measures to improve cultural amenities and the public realm**, being led by Dartford Borough Council. These have already delivered environmental improvements around Acacia Mansion House, and will build on a long-term programme of investments.
- **The repurposing of several major sites for mixed-use development**, including Lowfield Street (Brewery Square), the former Co-op site and land adjacent to Dartford station.

We aim to achieve a coordinated programme of intervention, funded through a variety of sources. However, this is not a 'closed process': we want to involve a wide range of partners, and opportunities will evolve over time. In that spirit, discussions have been advanced with the operators of the two covered shopping centres, both of which have emerging proposals for the repurposing of their facilities for alternative use (for example for leisure and workspace purposes), and we are committed to the development of a commercial strategy (in line with the Development Framework) setting out a practical 'route map' for the town centre's resilience and diversity over the next 5-10 years.

**Partnership arrangements and capacity for delivery**

Dartford Borough Council will lead the delivery of our strategy. We have capacity to deliver: we are managing one of the Thames Gateway's largest programmes of new housing delivery (and its associated infrastructure), through our direct role as a local planning authority and as a leading stakeholder in the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation. Within Dartford town centre, we have made significant progress in bringing forward key sites for repurposing within the context of the wider strategy – although viability remains a challenge.

However, we cannot deliver the strategy alone – nor do we want to. We have a positive partnership with Kent County Council (including through the allocation of the joint Strategic Transport Programme funding pot), and with Homes England, and we have strong support from a range of private and public partners.

**Specific project proposals**

Within our overall strategy for the town centre, there are several projects that could potentially be suitable for FHSF funding. One stands out as being well progressed and deliverable over the short to medium term.

This involves the first phase of the development of the former Co-op department store, known as the Cultural and Health Hub on the Westgate site. The Westgate scheme will repurpose surplus former retail capacity for alternative uses, through a joint venture between Muse Developments, Dartford Borough Council and Homes England. Ultimately, it will deliver 140 new homes (including affordable housing), a 6-8 screen cinema and hotel and a comprehensive food and beverage offer.

The first phase includes development of a health facility, including a GP 'super surgery' (potentially over five floors in a 20,000 sq ft building). Early delivery of this could help to unlock the wider development. It will drive footfall to the town, help bring new and existing residents together in the town centre and improve the local public service offer. Plans for the new facility are well advanced (see [www.westgate.dartford.com](http://www.westgate.dartford.com)) and will continue to be developed.

[746 words]
3.2 Engagement and alignment of vision

Alignment with Dartford Borough Council strategic plans...

The current adopted Dartford Borough Council Core Strategy (2011) sets out the Council's long-term spatial strategy to 2026, planning for up to 17,300 homes and 26,500 jobs over the Plan period. This reflects an estimated population increase of 43% in 2006-26.

Our plans for the town centre are sequential to the approach set out in the Core Strategy. Policy CS2 identifies Dartford Town Centre as a priority area for development and seeks its revitalisation through improving its range of attractions and environment. It states the importance of reversing the present deterioration of Dartford Town Centre and supporting its growth to accommodate mixed use development, with key development sites identified. The Development Framework SPD quoted earlier builds on Policy CS2, identifying a programme of intervention on which this expression of interest draws.

... and practical actions

Our strategic plans for the town centre also align with the practical measures that we are taking to support the town centre's development. These include the current High Street Revival programme, a series of events and initiatives to support Dartford's retailers, the Dartford Creative arts programme (supporting our strategic objective of bringing greater cultural amenity into the town) and an ongoing programme of communications and promotion.

Alignment with other strategies across the wider economic area

Looking beyond our own local strategies and plans, there is a close alignment between our objectives and those of our partners across our wider economic area. In particular:

- the South East Local Enterprise Partnership has recently published Smarter, Faster, Together, its 'starting point' for a new Local Industrial Strategy. Focused on how the South East can support productivity growth, Smarter, Faster, Together notes that "there is an opportunity to repurpose the High Street to provide new opportunities for modern business growth" in the context of changing retail patterns. At the same time, the LEP recognises the importance of the Thames Gateway, and the need to develop the longer term economic narrative for the Gateway (including Dartford).

- in this context, the Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission Report contains a high level vision for the Gateway, identifying potential for a "tapestry of productive places" along the Thames. Crucial to the TE2050 vision is the recognition that the Estuary will only be successful if it is considered as a 'network' of places, in which town centres supporting growing communities will have a crucial role.

- more locally, Thames Gateway Kent Partnership reinforces this view, with a vision of the area (which stretches from Dartford to Faversham) as an "area of thriving towns and cities" encouraging harmony between new and existing residents. TGKP's Growth Plan (2014) identifies Dartford town centre as a key strategic location – highlighting (at an early stage) the Co-op site that is now close to fruition and which forms a potential investment through the Future High Streets Fund.

- across Kent, the recently-updated Growth and Infrastructure Framework provides an important basis through which the County and District Councils can work together to plan for the infrastructure that their growth agendas require, while more specifically, Delivering Growth without Gridlock (Kent's Local Transport Plan, 2016-31) identifies improvements to transport infrastructure in Dartford town centre as a priority for the Borough.

Funding streams
Our strategy for Dartford town centre will require funding from a variety of sources: it is a multi-faceted and sustainable strategy, rather than one that relies on a single large investment. From the public sector, we are already (with Kent County Council) delivering a package of investment from the South East LEP’s Local Growth Fund to support transport and public realm improvements in the town centre, forming part of the Strategic Transport Programme. This programme, and further investment from the Borough Council, will continue to deliver as any FHSF comes on stream.

There is private sector willingness to invest, subject to the resolution of current viability constraints. The development of the Co-op site cited earlier is evidence of this: there is developer interest in bringing forward a £75 million scheme with the support of Homes England, which could be unlocked with early support for associated public infrastructure.

**Partnership working**

Strong partnership arrangements are in place across the public sector (particularly Dartford Borough Council, Kent County Council and Homes England). We have an ongoing dialogue with the private sector (including major developers and the operators of our shopping centres), as well as with town centre traders and (especially through our recent investment in arts and culture) the town centre’s creative community.

[744 words]

### 3.3 Support for town centre vision

There is strong support for our vision for Dartford Town Centre. Last year, we consulted widely with residents, town centre businesses, investors and other stakeholders on the Town Centre Framework: the document attached as Annex B reflects the outcome of this engagement. Extensive consultation has also taken place on the plans for the Westgate scheme.

We have also worked closely with a number of partner organisations in progressing our vision and this expression of interest, and we are pleased to attach letters of support from strategic partners, local business organisations, investors and other stakeholders.

**Strategic partner support**

Letters of support are attached from:

- **Kent County Council**, a key partner in progressing the renewal of Dartford town centre, particularly in taking forward the series of highways interventions that form part of our strategy
- **Thames Gateway Kent Partnership**, the sub-regional partnership for North Kent, which identifies the town centre as a key priority
- the **South East Local Enterprise Partnership**, which at a wider spatial scale, identifies town centre repurposing and growth in the Thames Gateway as priorities.

**Local town centre business partners**

A letter of support is attached from the closely with the **Dartford Town Centre Partnership**, which consists of a cross-section of businesses and other stakeholders which work together to improve environmental and trading conditions in the town. Since 2002, we have worked closely with the Partnership and the working groups that they support – ensuring that there is a strong business voice in the development of our vision and strategy and galvanising business support for key projects.

**Investors and developers**

We have a strong relationship with the main investors in Dartford town centre: we have attached letters of support from:
- **Muse Developments Ltd.** Muse is a national developer specialising in mixed-use development and urban regeneration schemes. In Dartford, it is leading the development of the Westgate scheme on the former Co-op site (highlighted in this expression of interest as a potential project for direct FHSF investment)

- **Ellandi**, a leading shopping centre investor, and owner of the Priory Centre in Dartford. We are in discussions with Ellandi regarding opportunities to repurpose the Centre to a more diverse range of uses, in line with our strategy

- **Daejan (Dartford) Ltd.**, part of Daejan Holdings plc and the owner of the Orchards Centre. Similarly, we are in discussions with Daejan to explore the potential for diversification within the Centre.

**Other stakeholders**

In addition, reflecting the importance attached within our strategy to the development of Dartford town centre's cultural offer, we have support from XXXXX, a community-based arts partnership. Directly relevant to the development of the Health Hub as part of the Co-op site development, we attach a letter setting out support from NHS Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley.

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**3.4 Estimate of revenue funding needed**

Our understanding is that should our expression of interest be progressed to the next stage, a Full Business Case (compliant with the Green Book methodology) will be required.

As indicated above, we consider that it would be possible to bring forward the ‘Health Hub’ element of the Co-op (Westgate site) development in the short to medium term, and at this stage, we envisage that this would form the basis of our request to the FHSF.

The total capital cost of the Health Hub (including fit-out) is around £12.4 million, of which £4.7 million is available through the Estates and Technology Transformation Fund and Community Infrastructure Levy – leaving a balance of around £7.7 million.

Plans for the site are well advanced, although at this stage, we have not prepared a full business case accounting for all (economic) costs and benefits. We anticipate that revenue cost requirements will be limited to the development of the FBC (given the extent of planning that has already taken place), which we would anticipate to be in the region of £75k.

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**Annexes:**

- **Annex A:** Dartford Town Centre: Overview and key maps