

'Opportunity Havant' – A Regeneration Strategy for Havant Borough

Response from Havant Civic Society

1. Introduction

The 'Opportunity Havant' Regeneration Strategy document was published at the Havant Borough Council Cabinet meeting on October 24th 2018. The document was written under the editorial leadership of Tim Pike, Council member for Havant St Faith's and the Cabinet lead for Finance and Regeneration and Andrew Biltcliffe, Head of Regeneration South.

On October 29th, Bob Comlay, Peter Hammond and Christopher Evans represented Havant Civic Society at a meeting with both Cllr Pike and Andrew Biltcliffe at the Civic Plaza. The outcome of that meeting was discussed with the full HCS committee on October 31st.

This document provides Havant Civic Society's response to the Opportunity Havant document.

2. The context for Regeneration

'Opportunity Havant' represents the first deliverable in the overall Regeneration Programme, a programme of work which will manage the requirements, design and delivery of component projects within a common governance structure. The Regeneration Programme itself will form part of a complex overarching programme comprising associated Infrastructure projects and other external programmes.

HCS asked if there was a single document which defines the high level governance model across the 'Regeneration Strategy', the 'Regeneration Programme', the 'Draft Local Plan to 2036' and other related infrastructure programmes but were told that none exists at this time.

3. The document's objectives

'Opportunity Havant' presents a vision of a portfolio of regeneration projects spanning the borough. Residents will be familiar with most of these projects through the Draft Local Plan 2036 while some, for example the concept of a second vehicle crossing to Hayling Island, appear to be 'new'.

As a publicity brochure for the Regeneration Programme, 'Opportunity Havant' builds a deliberately aspirational marketing vision for the main areas in the Borough aimed

'Opportunity Havant' – A Regeneration Strategy for Havant Borough

Response from Havant Civic Society

at 'talking up' the strengths of Havant for presentation to the external investors and partners essential to the delivery of the programme.

As a publication for the local community, the main surprise is that this document has been produced *after* the Draft Local Plan. We feel that the natural sequence of a planning cycle would have seen the strategic vision published *as a preface* to the Draft Local Plan itself.

At a high level, Havant Civic Society shares the authors' objectives and aspirations for the regeneration of Havant and as such, we welcome publication of this strategy. In particular, we like the stated intent to adopt an interventionist policy for the regeneration programme and also note with interest the following statement:

"Where necessary the Council will utilise its Compulsory Purchase Powers to bring forward schemes and will make the required budget available. This will give greater certainty over delivery of the Regeneration Programme."

Havant Civic Society believes it is important to take a high level view of the strategy presented and to be cautious about raising too much focus on some of the details it contains. At this early stage in the programme, spending too much time 'down in the weeds' simply distracts attention from more fundamental concerns regarding the overall programme governance.

4. External Stakeholders

When asked why the draft document had not been published for consultation, Andrew Biltcliffe responded that the regeneration strategy had never been seen as a consultative exercise. The public have already been consulted on the Draft Local Plan and when individual development projects are brought forward through the planning process, the public will have a further opportunity for consultation.

Havant Civic Society is concerned that this gives no opportunity for public consultation on the setting of the regeneration projects within the overall programme context.

We would have expected our concerns about lack of community consultation at the programme level to be addressed through definition of 'External Stakeholders' in the Governance Structure (Page 17). However, that named box on the chart is notable for its large size and absence of content. When we opened that discussion, Cllr Pike

'Opportunity Havant' – A Regeneration Strategy for Havant Borough

Response from Havant Civic Society

admitted that the detail had been removed prior to draft publication given that the content 'would have been contentious'.

Havant Civic Society fully appreciate the risks and issues associated with the phased delivery approach to the Regeneration Programme. The programme of work will be complex and successful delivery will be dependent on a number of external programmes, some of which are outside the control of HBC. The urgency of projects resulting from the Eastern Solent Coastal Partnership programme will, for example, inject critical dependencies into the Regeneration Programme plan.

In order to promote effective two-way communication with the community, we expect to see local communities represented at the External Stakeholder level. While the primary focus for Havant Civic Society is on the communities of residents, we would also expect to see inclusion of the professional communities providing for our health, education and safety.

5. Visibility of the Regeneration Programme report

A report on the Regeneration Programme was published along with the Opportunity Havant document but is deemed 'exempt' and not available to the public 'for commercial reasons'.

As stated in papers presented to the Cabinet meeting on October 24th which recommended publication of the 'Opportunity Havant' document, '*Communication is crucial for the regeneration programme.*' Havant Civic Society believes that sight of the Regeneration Programme report at an appropriate level forms part of that essential communication.

We see no reason why the Regeneration Programme report cannot be made public, suitably redacted at the detail level where commercial sensitivity may exist. Indeed, public visibility of this document should help the programme gain the support of local residents and businesses by providing clear evidence of progress.

If the prolonged lack of investment in renewal in the Borough is to be reversed through the more interventionist approach being adopted, then evidence of progress is essential.

6. The Case for 'Phase Zero'

The issue of low property values is expressed clearly in the 'Case for Regeneration' on page 3 of 'Opportunity Havant' and was highlighted by both Cllr Pike and Andrew Biltcliffe during our meeting as the major obstacle to progress on regeneration.

To try and address this issue, the regeneration programme is spread into three phases, the first of which is defined as 'Quick wins', with a timeline of 2018 – 2024. Phase Two and Phase Three cover the period 2024 to 2036. Without access to the Regeneration Programme report, we cannot comment on the content of these phases though it is clear from the Strategy Document that Phase One project delivery will likely be confined to the Civic Plaza area.

Given the extent of the brownfield estate in the borough, much of which has been derelict for a decade or more, Havant Civic Society disagrees with this limitation in scope. The well-known sites which blight Havant town centre will do nothing to attract outside investment. Before even setting foot in the town, any potential investor arriving by rail will be confronted by the disgrace which is the pedestrian bridge linking the Civic Plaza Area and the town centre. In short, the decades of evident decay do nothing to provide reassurance that the Havant Borough Council is serious about regeneration.

Building on the new interventionist approach, Havant Civic Society believes that the Regeneration Programme should kick off with what would effectively be a 'Phase Zero', bringing key brown field sites and derelict structures into council ownership and thus into the scope of phase 1. This preparatory phase should also include immediate action on the station footbridge to provide a clear demonstration of intent.

While we accept that the issue of the bridge is not directly under HBC control, all parties at the meeting agreed that it is critical to the success of the regeneration programme. Havant Civic Society would actively support any appropriate escalation to Hampshire County Council, Network Rail and Parliament to 'make this happen'.

We accept that Phase 0 would require significant capital expense and replacement of the railway bridge has some complex technical constraints. However, we can think of no single investment decision that would lift the spirit of the borough more and provide a clear demonstration of regeneration intent.

7. The growth of 'Retail' in Havant

During the meeting, we discussed the documented issue (Issue 12, page 9) entitled 'Reduction in the performance of Town Centre retail'. Havant Civic Society believes this 'issue' to be out of touch with our current experience. In particular, the retail offers in Portsmouth are declining in comparison with Havant Town Centre's steady improvement.

Since the last borough plan was adopted, the nature of retail in Havant has, in fact, changed beyond recognition. At the old town centre, naturally and geographically centred at the St Faith's cross roads, we have seen a variety of small and innovative new businesses established.

Within walking distance of St Faith's, we now have a thriving 'out of town' style retail development at the western edge of the extended town centre which is already bringing in significant footfall from outside the Borough. With this new, extended Havant Town centre within easy reach of the main south coast trunk road and a major national rail terminal, Havant is uniquely placed for regeneration, offering a wide variety of retail opportunities for residents and visitors alike.

8. The need for incremental revision of plans

The previous point illustrates our concern that the current plan review cycle is not keeping up with the speed of change in the community. Cllr Pike passed comment that the new planning cycle will allow for a shorter five year review period, however we are not convinced that this is frequent enough to enable timely mid-course adjustments to the plan when economic circumstances change.

While we agree that the Regeneration Programme must be built on a foundation of long term planning, it must also enable an element of incremental change at the detail level.

The current adopted plan was developed in 2012 and in particular its definition of Havant Town Centre has not kept pace with the changing face of business in the old town centre. It will be replaced in 2019 by the current draft local plan which, despite its lack of currency at some levels of detail will then be set in concrete.

Havant Civic Society and other local groups raised objections about the removal of East Street from the 'Town Centre' when the Draft Local Plan 2036 was originally

'Opportunity Havant' – A Regeneration Strategy for Havant Borough Response from Havant Civic Society

presented. These objections have been ignored and East Street's recent promising self-regeneration will be at risk if the Local Plan downgrades its importance in the eyes of the Council by excluding it from the area defined as the Town Centre.

Before the Local Plan to 2036 goes to the Cabinet and full Council for approval at the end of January, Havant Civic Society would like to see detailed adjustments to the definition of Havant Town Centre to cover the re-inclusion of East Street and the protection of its limited but essential parking provision. We agreed with Cllr Pike and Andrew Biltcliffe that Havant Civic Society would present a discussion paper detailing these changes.

9. In Conclusion

Havant Civic Society welcomes the 'Opportunity Havant' regeneration strategy and looks forward to sight of greater detail on the evolving Regeneration Programme. The Society looks to Havant Borough Council to provide an early demonstration of their new interventionist approach through radical action on the more immediate quick wins outlined in 'The Case for Phase Zero' (section 6 of this response.)

In the centre of Havant, small-scale retail and services are showing signs of growth which must be underpinned by a more appropriate definition of the town centre boundary before the new Local Plan is finalised in 2019.

The Society looks forward to working with the HBC Regeneration team as the programme moves forward.