

Case Study - Town Centre Regeneration

A £90million regeneration of Dartford Town Centre is underway with more funding promised from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM).

The flagship development at Lowfield features a Tesco superstore as an anchor retail unit with other retail outlets, cafes, restaurants and bars. The development will also include extension and enhancement of Central Park and the creation of a pedestrianised zone in the heart of the town. The proposals will provide hundreds of jobs for local people and reinvigorate the heart of the town, bringing people back into the Town Centre and acting as a catalyst for further inward investment.

Dartford is at the centre of the biggest regeneration project in the country and is focusing on building a town centre that meets the economic, cultural and leisure needs of its expanding community.

The first Town Centre Strategy went out to consultation in 1996. It was based on a study commissioned two years earlier which identified the Town Centre's key strengths as its local shops and market rather than as a centre for business and tourism.

The key features of the 1996 strategy were:

1. Resistance to out-of-town retail development
2. Greater diversity of uses
3. Establishing a resident population in the town
4. Expansion of leisure and cultural offer
5. Improving accessibility and user-friendliness
6. A two-way ring road
7. A new "Memorial Square" in front of the Library

The key features of this strategy were incorporated into the Local Plan and Kent County Council's Local Transport Plan. Dartford Borough Council has followed the Strategy consistently since 1996. In particular it has secured:

- retail redevelopment at Prospect Place which is due for completion this summer. The first phase is already trading
- the first two phases of the two-way ring road, with funding from Local Transport Plan provision and the Prospect Place development
- a Sainsburys superstore in the centre of Town, together with significant improvements in the Thursday market site funded through this development

At the same time Dartford Borough Council has:

- Worked with KCC through the Kent Thameside Association Fastrack Steering Group to finalise proposals for the Fastrack rapid transit system linking the Town Centre with Kent Thameside.
- Refused planning permission for an edge-of-centre superstore which in its opinion would have undermined the Town Centre Strategy.

In 2000 the Council took another look at the Town Centre with the intention of strengthening its relationship with stakeholders and securing greater ownership of the

regeneration objectives. A series of workshops looked at and challenged issues and objectives and resulted in the formation of a Town Centre Partnership and Forum.

The Partnership has been largely responsible for kick-starting the latest regeneration project at Lowfield Street in the heart of the Town Centre with a particular focus on the evening economy.

A feasibility study examined the regeneration potential of Lowfield Street and reaffirmed the case for a town square in front of the Library and put forward a new road pattern which could achieve this.

A developer has been found to take the Lowfield Street project forward and Tesco has committed to siting a supermarket at the heart of the development. A planning application has been submitted and should be determined this summer. The Council has resolved to use its Compulsory Purchase powers to facilitate the development should planning permission be granted.

The Council will continue to review its regeneration strategy alongside these new developments and has recently agreed a study brief with the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) which will lead to the production of a new regeneration framework. The brief will highlight the main areas for further development including the Theatre Quarter and the gateways to the town.

It will also look at the scope for implementation of proposals based on the recent award of funding - potentially in excess of £10 million - by the ODPM. The study brief will highlight the main areas for further development including the Theatre Quarter and the gateways to the town.

Dartford Borough Council is planning significant improvements to the Orchard Theatre itself and the surroundings as part of broader proposals to create a Theatre Quarter.

The next phase of Dartford Town Centre regeneration will bring:

- A greater choice of shops and restaurants by 2006
- Clawback of lost expenditure, leading to economic recovery in retail sector
- A safer, pedestrianised environment
- Cultural growth around the new Theatre Quarter
- Sustainable housing growth with up to 600 new homes in the town centre by 2006