

## Cabinet

**18 March 2024**

Wards: Merton Park, St Helier

### **Subject: Morden Town Centre Regeneration: Placemaking and Public Realm**

Lead officer: Lucy Owen, Executive Director for Housing and Sustainable Development

Lead member: Cllr Andrew Judge, Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development. Cllr Eleanor Stringer, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Civic Pride

Contact officer: Paul McGarry, Head of Regeneration and Economic Development

---

#### **Recommendations:**

- A. That Cabinet note the work underway to deliver the longer term vision for Morden town centre regeneration and the proposed activities relating to placemaking and public realm improvements which will commence spring 2024.
- 

#### **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1. Merton Council is committed to building a sustainable future for our residents and business; a future that has civic pride at the heart of what we do. We are working to improve our town centres and support the creation of vibrant spaces where people feel welcome and safe.
- 1.2. Morden town centre regeneration is a key priority for the council. We recognise and celebrate the positive attributes of the wider Morden area including;
- Popular parks, greenspaces and local heritage
  - Great schools and further education provision
  - Excellent connectivity with rail, underground, bus and tram all serving Morden
  - A range of business from major employers to independent business
  - Good quality and much loved neighbourhoods surrounding the town centre
- 1.3. However we are also aware that Morden town centre itself does not meet the aspiration of residents and the quality of environment, town centre offer and residential offer requires investment.
- 1.4. Our vision for Morden town centre is embedded in Merton's new local plan and sets the planning policies to guide our long term regeneration plans.
- 1.5. Major regeneration projects take time to come to fruition and involve a lot of up-front planning and preparation. The Council is actively working on a number of workstreams which together build towards achieving our vision for the town centre.

- 1.6. The main workstreams are
- Long term development and housing delivery  
Working with landowners and utilising the Council's land to secure a development partner to bring forward new homes and business space.
  - Public realm and healthy streets  
Working with TFL to establish a Healthy Streets vision for Morden's public realm including proposals to rationalise bus standing facilities and create new public spaces at the heart of Morden.
  - Placemaking  
Co-designing and delivering a series of 'meanwhile' shorter term improvements to the public realm whilst the longer term plans are being defined.
- 1.7. This report provides an update on an upcoming project to undertake meanwhile public realm enhancements for Morden town centre whilst officers prepare for the longer term regeneration plans for Morden.
- 1.8. The Council have recently appointed a multi disciplinary design team led by Sustrans to co-design with the community, small-scale public realm schemes, such as parklets, seating, planters and public art. This activity will run throughout the summer of 2024 utilising the Community Infrastructure Levy allocation for Morden public realm.
- 1.9. These activities represent the start of Morden regeneration and will be part of an ongoing conversation with residents and businesses regarding the future of Morden town centre and will be an opportunity to co-design and collaborate on short term practical improvements to the town centre.
- 1.10. This report also provides an update on the lettings of vacant units at the base of Merton Civic Centre which will add activity to the street scene and provide new community facilities for the town centre.

## **2 DETAILS**

- 2.1. Merton Council are fully committed to regenerating Morden into a thriving town centre with new homes, improved transport and public realm, revitalised retail and modern business space.
- 2.2. Our [Strategic Development Framework](#) document illustrates how our vision for the town centre could be delivered and it is captured in the [draft Local Plan](#), which is now in its final stages before adoption in 2024.
- 2.3. The long term vision for Morden town centre is an incredibly complex regeneration scheme. Like any major regeneration scheme across London, it takes time to develop the plan and procure a development partner.
- 2.4. From 2018-2020 the Council was working collaboratively with Transport for London on a joint venture proposal. It has been well documented that TFL faced significant financial pressures as a result of the pandemic. This was also a period of uncertainty in the wider development industry and was not the right time for the Council to progress with the scheme.

- 2.5. The Council commissioned expert advice to re-frame the development costs and viability and to recommend options for the Council to take forward the regeneration project. This work has concluded and options for taking forward the long-term regeneration of Morden are under consideration and will be brought to cabinet in due course.
- 2.6. The Council has also recently consulted on the use of funding generated through the sale of CHAS to create a lasting legacy for the borough. Investing in Morden town centre was a clear priority of this work and the Council is developing proposals to bring additional investment to the delivery of Morden town centre regeneration. The outcome of this work will be brought back to Cabinet in due course.



Vision for Morden Town centre

- 2.7. The project, whilst ambitious in scope, remains one of the priorities for this administration. Not only do we want to see an improved public realm and town centre amenities, Morden, is a significant driver for housing growth and the delivery of affordable housing in the medium to long term. We are also mindful that the process of launching the scheme to the market, identifying a development partner, preparing planning applications and the financial underpinning required is a lengthy process.
- 2.8. Our plans are now firmly embedded in Merton's new Local Plan which sets the vision for Morden and is the foundation of the project. We are aware that residents are keen to see change in Morden and achieving our vision will take time and transcend multiple administration cycles.
- 2.9. In the meantime, the Council has also commissioned a design team to undertake improvements to the public realm around the town centre. Working with key partners and stakeholders, we hope to engage residents and businesses in the coming months, on ideas for improved seating, planting and public art installations that will brighten up Morden in the short

to medium term and be the start of an ongoing conversation on the future of Morden.

2.10. In addition, we continue to improve the spaces on the ground floor of the civic centre, and have now let all of the available Council owned spaces. The final empty units are currently being fitted out. One of these will provide affordable workspace, with a new publicly available café during the day, and the space will also provide opportunities for evening events, helping to grow the night time economy in Morden.

2.11. **Neighbourhood CIL investment**

2.12. We will be investing £300,000 of Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL) to improve the look and feel of the town centre. Early in 2024, we will be consulting on a Meanwhile-Use Strategy for Morden town centre, which will inform the delivery of a number of projects identified in the strategy.

2.13. The first project that the NCIL contributed to, was the Community Garden at Morden Baptist Church on Crown Lane, which opened in 2021. The garden has been successfully delivered and is available for all to access and use as a local daytime green space.

2.14. We have also delivered a parklet on Abbotsbury Road which is used by people during their lunch breaks as well as providing a space for local delivery riders to stop and rest between journeys.

2.15. **Placemaking and Public Realm interventions and meanwhile use strategy**

2.16. In February 2024 the Council concluded a procurement process and have appointed a design team to take forward placemaking and public realm improvements in Morden town centre and to develop a 'meanwhile-use' strategy for the town centre.

2.17. [Sustrans](#) and [Lugadero](#), supported by local manufacturers [Firecracker Works](#) are the appointed design team. The project will be co-designed with the local community and will also provide a part-time employment opportunity for local young people as part of the social value attached with the contract.

2.18. Sustrans will lead on community engagement and co-design workshops from April 2024 with activities throughout the summer. The programme will involve the design and manufacture of the public realm interventions between Autumn 2024 and spring 2025.

2.19. Examples of similar 'meanwhile' public realm projects are highlighted below which are intended to add colour and vibrancy to Morden town centre whilst creating space for engaging residents. The project will also include the creation of a meanwhile use strategy for public spaces and vacant units which will support the longer term regeneration plans for Morden.





2.20. Tooley Street Parklet, seating and planting (Southwark)



2.21. Moor Lane community garden (Barbican, City of London)



2.22. London Bridge, seating and wayfinding

**102 London Road (former SoundLounge/HSBC unit)**

2.23. The Council has now procured an operator for 102 London Road. The unit is being transformed into a co-working and community social space as part of the Council's collaboration with South London Knowledge Exchange.

2.24. Construction works are well underway with new shopfronts installed and the interior completely refurbished and new kitchen and bar space being installed.

2.25. The operator will be Flex media who will base their own operations at London Road as well as managing the co-working space, community space and bar/café.

2.26. Previous collaborations with FlexMedia have included:

- LBM's Towards Employment Programme
- LBM with the Cultural Impact Award
- St Helier Music & Community Festival
- Croydon Plus Credit Union
- Eastern Electric Festival in Morden Park
- worked with a local charity Celeb FC to raise funds
- free DJ courses for local residents whilst supporting MIND

2.27. 102 London Road will provide for a range of entertainment and cultural activities to support Morden town centre and the evening economy. The proposed programme of activities includes;

- cultural brunches

- stand up comedy
- open mic nights
- charity events
- quiz nights
- cinema nights
- themed nights
- local talent shows
- monthly themed functions
- private hire - birthday/work parties/wedding receptions etc
- Podcast/producer studio for hire and training.

2.28. 102 London Road is planned to open by the end of March 2024 and will be a welcome addition to Morden town centre.

#### **4 Crown Lane (former Met Police unit)**

2.29. The Council has also utilised other vacant units underneath the Civic Centre to support local charitable and community organisations. The former police office at 4 Crown Lane; which has been vacant for a number of years has now been let to the Wimbledon Guild.

2.30. The new facility in Morden provides Wimbledon Guild with a greater presence and outreach in the borough and allows for more collaborative working and joined up support with other service providers such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and Merton Council by being co-located in the Civic Centre building.

### **3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

3.1. None for the purpose of this report.

### **4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED**

4.1. Community engagement and co-design will be at the heart of the success of the public realm improvements. Our consultant team will undertake a series of community engagement and co-design workshops to determine the location and types of public realm improvements the community and businesses would like to see in Morden town centre. The programme of community engagement will run from April 2024 through the summer period incorporating car-free-day events in September 2024.

### **5 TIMETABLE**

5.1. The design team will start community engagement in April 2024 to scope out ideas and co-design a menu of options that can be delivered to brighten up Morden town centre.

- 5.2. The co-design process will run throughout the summer of 2024 with a series of pop-up events and dovetailing with Car Free Day in September 2024.
- 5.3. Manufacture and delivery of the schemes will be from September 2024 to Spring 2025.

## **6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1. The Council has allocated £300,000 Community Infrastructure Levy to support public realm improvements in Morden town centre. Some small scale works have already been delivered including a contribution to the Morden community garden open space. £150,000 of the CIL allocation is earmarked for the public realm enhancement projects. Unallocated funds are held back for in-year ad-hoc projects or to match other local initiatives that may arise through our community engagement.

## **7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1. None for the purpose of this report.

## **8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1. The design of any public seating or public spaces will adhere to equalities duties and will also have an emphasis on providing safer public spaces, particularly for women and girls; reflecting the Council's action plan for the safety of women and girls.

## **9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1. None for the purpose of this report.

## **10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1. None for the purpose of this report.

## **11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT**

- None

## **12 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 12.1. <https://www.merton.gov.uk/planning-and-buildings/regeneration-projects/make-more-of-morden#toc-neighbourhood-cil-investment>