

Keyword: Cathedral Group

£110m town redevelopment selects partner

After a rigorous and thorough application process, the Spirit of Sittingbourne consortium has been selected as Swale Borough Council's development partner to regenerate Sittingbourne town centre over the next five years.

The Spirit of Sittingbourne consortium comprises specialist PPP developer Cathedral Group Plc, property consultants Essential Land LLP and financial fund managers Altyon LLP (who are both working locally already on the Sittingbourne Mill and Wharf sites). The consortium beat Spenhill - Tesco's regeneration arm - and St James's Investments to secure the project at a meeting of Swale Borough Council's cabinet last Wednesday 9th February.

The scheme, which Swale Borough Council judged to be the most likely to achieve long term regeneration, rejuvenate and invigorate the town centre through high quality planning, design and architecture, is not just focused on the redevelopment of one site, but on the redevelopment of the whole town centre. Award-winning architecture practice Studio Egret West will act as lead designer, masterplanner, architect and landscape architect on the development.

Initial proposals for the scheme include a series of mixed-use development opportunities that introduce a clear hierarchy to the retail format and footprint of the town centre:

- A new Station Square will transform the arrival at Sittingbourne, creating a welcoming, shared space for pedestrians, cyclists, taxi drop off, kiss-and-ride and bus and rail interchange.
- A completely new Cultural Quarter with an 8-screen multiplex cinema and flexible performance venue. The square in the Cultural Quarter will be able to be cleared for weekends and special events such as markets, performances and sporting occasions
- A brand new Civic Quarter made up of three components: a civic hub (including a new library, café and community meeting rooms), a health centre and the existing Swallows leisure centre

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- A pedestrian-friendly spine of activity will connect the land to the north of the railway line with the town centre under the railway arch. High quality public realm way finding, lighting and art works will increase footfall and extend the proposed waterside park (part of Essential Land and Altyon's Sittingbourne Mill development) deeper in to the town centre
- Later phases of the development will include residential and large format retail developments at other locations in the town centre

The scheme will generate £250m of economic improvement over the next ten years and will create 1100 jobs.

"We are delighted that Spirit of Sittingbourne has been chosen as Swale Borough Council's partner. Our proposal was focused on the redevelopment of Sittingbourne town centre as a whole and we are pleased that our creative approach to the scheme will enable us to instil a new spirit in the hearts of those who will live and work in Sittingbourne and deliver a vibrant new town centre," said Richard Upton, Cathedral Group Chief Executive.

"We know from our consultation to date that local people have shown considerable interest and enthusiasm for regeneration. More specifically, we know, for example, that a significant number of people would like to see an improved leisure offer in the Town and our vision includes this," said Scott Hammond, of Essential Land Council Leader Andrew Bowles said: "I am delighted that we are now a significant step closer to an exciting agreement which will give the people of Swale, and Sittingbourne in particular, the town centre regeneration which it so badly needs and which has been promised for so long. We will now sit down with the consortium and discuss the development agreement, the details of which will be released in due course."

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