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£1bn scheme a step closer

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DREAMS of a £1 billion regeneration scheme for Sittingbourne are a step closer to becoming a reality.

Swale council announced this week that its preferred partner for the transformation of the town centre is the Spirit of Sittingbourne consortium.

Proposals include a public square in front of Sittingbourne train station with a hotel and cultural facilities, including a performance venue and cinema, plus a civic quarter based around Central Avenue with library, health centre, retail and new residential accommodation.

Spirit of Sittingbourne is made up of Essential Land, which is developing the old paper mill site, property developer Cathedral Group and financial fund managers Alyton.

The consortium was chosen

by the council's interview panel because its approach was 'the one most likely to achieve long term regeneration in the way the council wants'.

Scott Hammond, partner at Essential Land, said: "We are thrilled the council's regeneration panel unanimously decided to select Spirit of Sittingbourne as the preferred partner to regenerate the town centre.

"We know from the consultation on our Mill proposals that there is a lot of interest and enthusiasm for regeneration. The feedback we received inspired our proposals for the town centre.

"We want to create a town that people can be proud of and help enhance Sittingbourne as a destination in the region. This is a great opportunity for people to participate in the improvements to their town and we hope to bring about these improvements quickly.

"We're making good progress on finalising our Mill propos-

als and will be submitting a planning application later this month."

Council leader Cllr Andrew Bowles said: "I am delighted that we are moving closer to an exciting agreement which will give the centre of Sittingbourne the regeneration which it so badly needs."

The Sittingbourne masterplan, which was adopted in 2009, shows the closure of St Michael's Road with traffic diverted along Euro-link Way, a redesign of the High Street to allow two-way bus flow, a new learning campus, about 2,500 new homes, a mix of local independent traders and national chains and multi-storey car parking. It also includes the redevelopment of Milton Creek with 1,070 new homes and education in addition to health facilities.

■ A report on the Spirit of Sittingbourne plans will go to Swale council's cabinet for a decision on Wednesday.



ARTISTS' IMPRESSIONS: How Cultural Square could look, left, and a projected view of Memorial Square in Central Avenue

