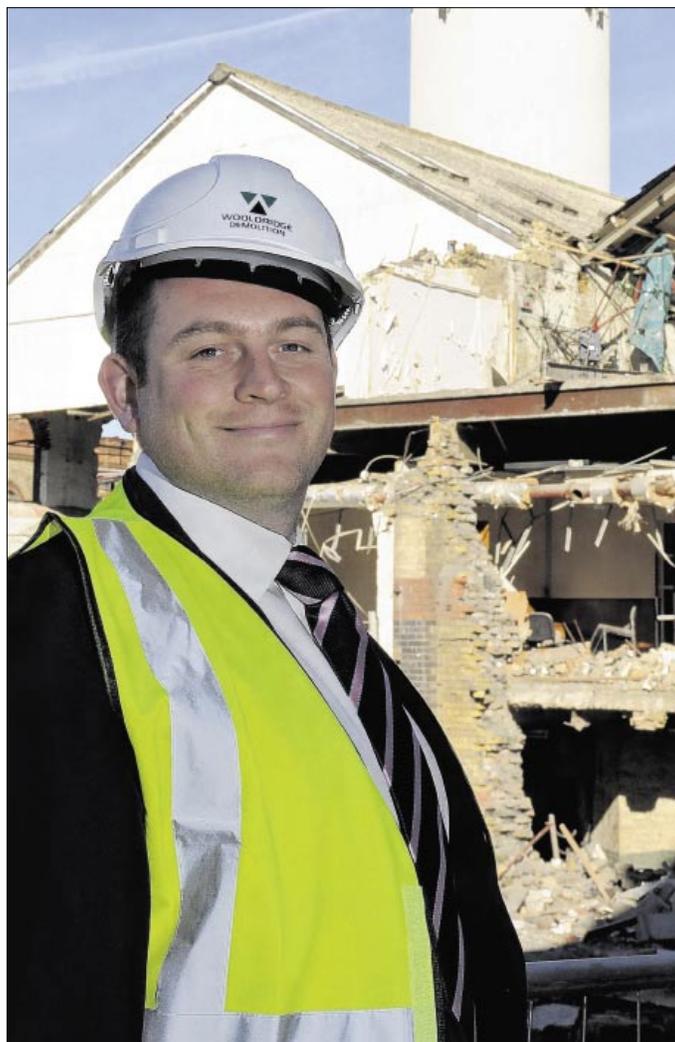


SPECIAL REPORT



BIG PLANS: Essential Land partner Scott Hammond at the site of the former paper mill in Milton Road, Sittingbourne

Picture: Andy Payton PD1773497

Spark that will help revitalise the town

MORRISONS is coming to Sittingbourne – and bringing with it up to 400 jobs.

The supermarket giant's new store will be a key feature of the £30m redevelopment plans for the former Sittingbourne Paper Mill site in Milton Road.

London-based developers Essential Land, which owns the site, revealed its new retail partner on Tuesday.

It is anticipated that the proposed 72,000 sq ft supermarket will create between 350 and 400 jobs.

Scott Hammond, partner at Essential Land, said: "We held discussions with a number of retailers but it was always our preference to improve choice for residents by attracting a top quality operator not currently represented in the town.

"We will be submitting a planning application for the Mill and Wharf sites, including new homes, leisure and community facilities and now the new Morrisons.

"There's been a few false dawns in Sittingbourne and the economic downturn has not

Exciting times are in store for Sittingbourne with the regeneration progressing and a new partner for a key site announced. Chief reporter **Hayley Robinson** reports.

helped. However, we see the addition of Morrisons as proof positive that the revitalisation of Sittingbourne is fast approaching. The Mill and Wharf sites are the spark which we believe will lead to further investment in the town."

Mark Chappell, development executive at Morrisons, said: "We are looking forward to helping regenerate the town by bringing our range of fresh food, excellent service and great value to Sittingbourne.

"Our professional team is already working with Scott and Essential Land on a new store that complements the wider scheme on both the Mill and Wharf sites as well as the town centre.

"Our discussions with the council indicate that our proposal is

very important for the future of Sittingbourne and we aim to deliver on that."

Morrisons has already made a multi-million pound investment in Sittingbourne with its warehouse and distribution centre near Kemsley, which created more than 900 jobs.

Public exhibition

Essential Land will be holding a public exhibition of its proposals at 1 - 5 High Street, Sittingbourne, from noon to 8pm on December 3 and from 10am to 4pm on December 4.

Members of the development team will be present to answer residents' questions.

Ambitious plans for prosperous future

Plans for the mill site include a cinema complex, a 10-pin bowling centre, up to 200 homes, a retail superstore and a community building and museum to commemorate the history of the Paper Mill. There will also be improved links, including new cycle and pedestrian routes alongside Milton Creek and improved access between the site and the town centre.

Other amenities would include the full reopening of the Sittingbourne and Kemsley Light Railway service and a waterside park alongside Milton Creek transforming the old docklands into a destination for local people and tourists.

Essential Land bought the site from Finnish paper company M-Real for £5.65m in June. While the vision for the site is subject to planning permission, the mixed use development is expected to create 300 building jobs and more than 400 jobs once the site is finished.

To find out about the scheme and participate in the consultation, visit www.sittingbournemill.com/future ConsultSittingbourneMill on Facebook and ConsultSM on Twitter.

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Finally, town centre is getting new lease of life

AFTER years of talk it looks like plans to regenerate Sittingbourne town centre are finally becoming a reality.

Last week the Sittingbourne Messenger revealed Travelodge plans to open a hotel as part of extensive redevelopment plans at the Bell Centre.

Now supermarket giant Tesco has submitted an outline planning application to Swale council with its vision for the Forum Shopping Centre – which it owns – and the surrounding area.

The ambitious plans include retail units on the centre's existing car park, a new office building south of St Michael's Road which could be used by Swale council for new civic offices and a hotel and multi-storey car park to the north-east of the site.



Cllr John Wright

St Michael's Road will be closed to cars and open to buses and taxis, with the road land-

scaped and pedestrian friendly with three new areas of public space and a new station square between Sittingbourne train station and the new retail units.

Milton Creek will also be the focus of significant retail development. Plans include a new Tesco store.

Access to the site will be via Eurolink Way with service access via Crown Quay Lane. A car park with 1,188 spaces will also be created and a new bridge linking the site with the town centre will be built over the existing rail track, station car park and the Ford car park.

■ To view the Tesco plans visit www.ukplanning.com and enter the reference numbers SW/10/1415 SW/10/1419 and SW/10/1420

This will be the place to be and a bright spot in the South East

News of the proposals have been welcomed in the town.

Cllr John Wright, executive portfolio holder for regeneration, learning and skills, said: "I've said many times before that Sittingbourne will be the place to be and that Swale has the potential to be a bright spot in the South East.

"Plus we managed to secure substantial funding from central government to complete major infrastructure works

such as the Northern Relief Road - that was and always has been the key to unlocking the development of central Sittingbourne, without it this wouldn't be able to go ahead.

"In the early days [when the council was looking for a preferred developer] there was only Hammerson [which owned the site north of the railway] and Tesco, now we have a choice."

Chairman of Sittingbourne

Retail Association Nick Smith, who runs D n J Smith newsagents in East Street, Sittingbourne, said: "I think it's a good thing. It will bring more people in to the town which is what should have happened a long time ago.

"Trade is down for everyone in the High Street the way the economy is at the moment.

"The population is here but not the places for them to spend their money."