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Group are favourites to be chosen partner

Spirit of Sittingbourne recommended for regeneration

Report by **Suz Elvey**

suz.elvey@KRNmedia.co.uk

A GROUP called Spirit of Sittingbourne is likely to be Swale Council's chosen partner for regenerating the town centre.

The newly formed consortium consists of property consultant Essential Land, which acquired the old mill site off Milton Road last year, London-based property developer Cathedral Group and financial fund managers Altyon.

Scott Hammond, partner at Essential Land, said: "We are naturally delighted that Spirit of Sittingbourne has been recommended as the preferred partner to Swale Council.

"We know from our consultation to date that people have shown interest and enthusiasm for regeneration. More specifically, we know that a significant number of people would like to see an improved leisure offer and our vision includes this."

Mr Hammond revealed the consortium's proposals include a square in front of the railway station and a civic quarter with a library, health centre, homes and shops based around Central Avenue.

Stressing the plans would generate employment and investment in the town, Mr Hammond added: "All of these initiatives

will help to enhance Sittingbourne as a destination in the local region, attracting visitors and those from further afield."

The consortium has been recommended for the role in a report issued by the council but a final decision will not be made until the authority's cabinet meets on Wednesday, February 9. Spirit of Sittingbourne has a countdown to next week's decision on its website, which shows an aerial view of Sittingbourne with cartoon images of a bicycle, an owl, a set of cutlery and a tree flashing in the middle of it.

Council leader Councillor Andrew Bowles said: "I am delighted that we are moving closer to an exciting agreement, which will give the centre of Sittingbourne the regeneration it so badly needs and which has been promised for so long"

Spirit of Sittingbourne was selected from three applicants, whittled down from five bids, during what a spokesman described as a rigorous six-month selection process.

The council's interview panel, which was made up from professional advisers as well as council members, felt the consortium's approach was "most likely to achieve long-term regeneration in the way the coun-

cil wants", according to the spokesman.

Cathedral Group was responsible for a £50 million housing and retail development in London's Docklands in 2001 and has been chosen to enhance part of Bromley High Street.

Altyon is already working with Essential Land, dealing with the financial side of the developments for the old mill site.

The report stresses that other planning applications for the town centre, including ones submitted by Tesco, will still be processed in the usual way.

Essential Land wished to make

it clear the Spirit of Sittingbourne town centre proposals were separate from the mill site proposals, which it intends to submit planning applications for this month.

The council will release more information once a decision has been made.



Cultural square: Plans for the space in front of the station

