

MEDIA RELEASE

Renaissance Southend Ltd

For Immediate Release

£44 million scheme is first piece of the town centre jigsaw

Southend's regeneration partners have secured funding for a major first step in plans for new developments across the town centre over the next five years.

The funding, agreed jointly by East of England Development Agency (EEDA) and Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), will allow work to start on a 311-vehicle, basement car park for Southend-on-Sea Borough Council, who are also contributing to the cost of the new spaces. This will free land for the development of Elmer Square.

The University of Essex has reached a separate agreement with developers Hollybrook Ltd for 560 student rooms over the top of the car park, following a planning permission granted by the Borough Council last year.

Richard Ellis, chair of EEDA, said: "This is an important first step in securing Southend's full potential within the wider Thames Gateway economy by achieving knowledge-based, sustainable growth. With construction set to start almost immediately, in spite of the downturn, this project will kick-start the wider physical and cultural regeneration of Southend."

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council, which will manage the new car park and owns the nearby Elmer Square site, has been working closely with all the partners to help realise its ambitions for the town.

Commenting on the funding decision, John Lamb, Southend-on-Sea Borough Council's Deputy Leader and Executive Councillor for Enterprise, Tourism & Regeneration, said: "This is wonderful news for the Borough and is testament to the hard work by officers, our partners in Renaissance Southend, EEDA and the HCA."

"It is the first domino to fall in the regeneration of Southend and shows everyone's commitment to push forward for the Borough's future despite the current market difficulties."

Dr Tony Rich, Registrar of the University of Essex, commented: "Much needed student accommodation will allow us to extend our offer to attract the best young talent both in the UK and across the world to Southend. Growing student numbers will bring additional vitality to the town centre and their spending power is important to the town's economy."

According to the town's regeneration company Renaissance Southend, the development will have far reaching effects for other parts of the town. New parking in London Road will free up development plans for Elmer Square, the proposed site for a new library and for the expansion of South East Essex College and the University of Essex and be a positive message for others thinking of investing in Southend town centre.

The company's partners, Southend-on-Sea Borough Council, the University of Essex, South East Essex College as well as EEDA and the HCA, see the delivery of the London Road site as the key to delivering the education and cultural infrastructure for the town – a major objective within the Southend Central Area Masterplan.

Anthony McGarel, Director of Finance at South East Essex College, said: "With this funding in place, we can now be far more positive in taking forward our plans for Elmer Square to the Learning & Skills Council. We're closer to realising our ambition of securing Southend's reputation as a centre for educational excellence."

"Each year, the number of applications at the College outperforms the previous year by the hundreds and that's because the quality of our courses and tutors, and the opportunities we help create, are second to none. With a new College building, we'll be able to provide more applied learning spaces in areas such as diverse creative and construction, which will have a positive knock-on effect on our local and national economy."

Once the new parking is completed in 2010 it's expected that work will then begin on Elmer Square. Demolition of the nearby multi-storey car park is expected in 2011, with the College extension completed by September 2012. A second phase to include new space for the University and the new library would follow on.

"We are delighted that we have been able to help deliver the first piece of a jigsaw that will transform Southend town centre and herald the start of other planned regeneration projects," said Theo Steel, Chairman of Renaissance Southend. "It is another good example of what can be achieved when all the agencies work closely in partnership to deliver schemes that will benefit the town."

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