

**STEVENAGE TOWN FUND BOARD
MINUTES**

Date: Friday, 31 January 2020

Time: 11.00am

Place: The Whitwell Suite, Holiday Inn, St Georges Way, Stevenage SG1 1HS

Present: Matt Partridge (Chief Executive, Stevenage BC) (Interim Chair)
Councillor Sharon Taylor (Stevenage Borough Council)
Adam Wood (Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership)
County Councillor Derrick Ashley (Hertfordshire County Council)
Neville Reyner (Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce)
Amy Rich (Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce)
Councillor John Gardner (Stevenage Borough Council)
Martha Lytton Cobbold (Knebworth House)
Charlotte Blizzard Welch (Citizens Advice Bureau)
Ed Jordan (WENTA)
Claire Dicks (MBDA)
Kit Davies (North Herts College)
Kevin Cowin (Mace Developments)
Liz Cerroti (The Wine Society)
Karen Hillen (BEIS – also representing MCHLG)
Tom Pike (Stevenage Borough Council)
Chris Barnes (Stevenage Borough Council)
Dave Wells (Stevenage Borough Council)

Start / End Start Time: 11.00am
Time: End Time: 1.05pm

1 WELCOME AND CHAIR'S OPENING STATEMENT

The Interim Chair of the Board (Matt Partridge, Chief Executive of Stevenage Borough Council) welcomed all those in attendance to the first meeting of the Stevenage Town Fund Board. He commented that the Board was coming together at a time of great opportunity for Stevenage to work together to drive forward the regeneration programme over the coming months and years.

The Interim Chair stated that this was an opportunity to maximise the regeneration potential of Stevenage, and he was heartened to have such a great range of partners involved in the Board, many of whom would be aware of a number of exciting projects now underway in the town centre and other parts of the town, such as Gunnels Wood Road and around the Glaxo Smith Kline campus.

The Interim Chair felt that celebrating and building on the heritage of Stevenage as the UK's first New Town was very important as the Board sought to make it to make it the best place it could be for the benefit of all those who lived and worked in the town.

The Interim Chair stated that this first meeting of the Board would:

- consider what the Town Fund was for;
- consider the regeneration thus far, to aid consideration of where investment would yield the best results;
- receive a summary of the Local Industrial Strategy for Stevenage; and
- discuss what areas should be focussed on by the Board in the future.

At this point, all in attendance introduced themselves. Tom Pike (Strategic Director, Stevenage Borough Council) advised that apologies for absence had been received from Councillor David Williams and Patsy Dell (Hertfordshire County Council), Steve Finlan (the Wine Society), Charles Amies (Homes England), Greg Westover (Legal & General) and Stephen Ward (Catapult).

The Interim Chair also thanked Karen Hillen (BEIS) for her advice and support regarding the set-up of the Board.

The Interim Chair explained that, in addition to the Town Deal opportunity, Stevenage had previously been allocated £19M of Growth Deal 3 (GD3) funding via Herts Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). Stevenage Borough Council, Hertfordshire County Council and Herts LEP had been in conversation with the Government for a considerable time, seeking the release of release this funding for regeneration projects.

The Interim Chair advised that in recent days local partners had been informed that the Secretary of State had asked that the oversight of the allocated £19M GD3 funding for the town centre regeneration projects be merged with the Town Fund opportunity under a single Stevenage Development Board. This Board would be tasked to oversee the use of growth funding and development of a Town Deal.

This would require the drafting of Terms of Reference for the Stevenage Development Board, along with the recruitment of an independent Chair to oversee this.

The Interim Chair stated that the Government would liaise with local partners regarding the recruitment process for the appointment of an Independent Chair of the Board, ideally to be in place for early March 2020.

2 TERMS OF REFERENCE

In view of the points made in the previous item, the Interim Chair advised that this item was withdrawn from the agenda.

3 CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Councillor Sharon Taylor (SBC) declared that she was a Member of Hertfordshire County Council and was on the Hertfordshire LEP Board. Kit Davies (North Herts College) declared that he was also on the Hertfordshire LEP Board, and Claire Dicks (MBDA) declared that she was a Local Enterprise Envoy.

In terms of the format for Minutes of Board meetings, in terms of the balance between the recording of information available to the public and confidential matters, Karen Hillen (BEIS) agreed to take this matter up with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and report back.

4 OVERVIEW OF THE TOWN FUND

Tom Pike (Strategic Director, SBC) presented a report which provided an overview of the Town Deal opportunity, and the key steps that would need to be taken to achieve a Town Deal for Stevenage. Appended to the report were the Government's Town Fund prospectus and the Greater Grimsby Town Deal prospectus (as an example of a previous Town Deal).

On 1 November 2019, the Government issued the Towns Fund prospectus inviting 100 towns to develop proposals to benefit from up to £25m funding each from a £3.6bn fund. The prospectus summarised the objectives of the Fund and the arrangements that were expected to be put in place to enable eligible towns to put forward Investment Plans to benefit from up to £25m funding.

The prospectus stated that the objective of the Fund was to drive the economic regeneration of towns to deliver long term economic and productivity growth through: regeneration, planning and land use; skills and enterprise infrastructure; and connectivity.

The Board noted that included within the prospectus was an allocation of funding for each town, to be released in November / December 2019, to support the development of a Town Deal Board and preparation of a Town Investment Plan to set out the vision, governance, opportunities and business case for the town to benefit from Government investment. For Stevenage Borough Council this sum was £173,000.

The Strategic Director explained that the prospectus identified a number of short-term actions that would need to be taken in order to put forward a Town Investment Plan and proposals for up to £25m. The prospectus also sets out a requirement for a Town Board to be established by the end of January 2020 and a Town Investment Prospectus to be developed and submitted in the first part of 2020. Within the Towns Fund prospectus, the District or Borough level Council was asked to act as the lead body for the creation of the Town Deal Board and the subsequent Town Investment Plan. This should work in collaboration with other local partners.

In response to a question, the Strategic Director confirmed that further Government guidance on the production of an Investment Plan was expected in March 2020.

Adam Wood (Hertfordshire LEP) commented that, regardless of the requirements of the Town Fund prospectus, it was important for a Stevenage Investment Plan to be prepared, in order to identify important projects that might not fall within the Town Fund remit, but could be funded or delivered through other means.

5 THE JOURNEY SO FAR...

Chris Barnes (Regeneration Manager, SBC) gave a presentation in respect of the Stevenage Regeneration journey so far.

The presentation included an overview of the key policies and outcomes set in the Stevenage Local Plan, including the scale of proposed new homes (including affordable housing), new employment and regeneration opportunities for the town. The presentation provided a short update on some of the commercial sector developments in recent years, including the existing business office developments, planning applications and expansions carried out at Airbus, MBDA, GSK Campus and Maxwell House. The presentation highlighted some of the challenges and strengths of the town, and a summary of key elements of the 2015 Regeneration Framework that had informed the Local Plan.

The Regeneration Manager went on to summarise some of the developments that had already taken place in the town, the development of the SG1 project, enhancements being planned for public realm in the town centre and other projects, such as the developments at Queensway and the new Visitor Centre in the town centre.

The comments made by Board Members included support for a vibrant town centre, including some of the types of enhancement planned in the SG1 scheme, and the importance of engaging residents with the planned developments and future needs for the town centre. Discussion took place regarding the importance of the cultural offer, including possible pop up opportunities, along with the importance of diversifying the offer in the town, in terms of commercial space, as well as leisure and new homes to help develop a thriving and successful town.

The Public Sector Hub was seen as a positive contribution, with the co-location of services providing a much improved experience for users, and the importance of linkages around the town centre was also stressed.

6 LOCAL INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY AND STEVENAGE

Adam Wood (Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership) gave a presentation regarding a Local Industrial Strategy for Stevenage.

The presentation included the reasons why the LEP was supporting the regeneration of Stevenage, the location and connectivity of Stevenage with London and its attractions for house buyers, developers and businesses, and a summary of the LEP-funded regeneration activities both outside and within the town centre.

The presentation gave a summary timeline for a Local Industrial Strategy for Hertfordshire, and the alignment of the Strategy with the structure of the Industrial

White Paper. Further work was required to investigate the foundations of productivity, namely Ideas, Infrastructure, Place, People and Business Environment.

The presentation highlighted developments in London to the south and the Cambridge – Milton Keynes – Oxford Growth area to the north, which presented challenges and opportunities for Hertfordshire and provided the context in which the Local Industrial Strategy would be delivered, and highlighted possible ways that the potential of Hertfordshire might be fulfilled in the future.

The presentation showed that the Hertfordshire Growth Board had been established to provide a collective and strategic response to the place leadership and growth challenges faced by the County; to speak with one voice and offer scale to attract infrastructure investment from the Government and the Private Sector; and to create delivery impact so more could be achieved for the County's people, places, environment and economy.

The next step would be for the Local Industrial Strategy to be signed off by the Hertfordshire LEP in March/April 2020.

It was acknowledged that there were a high number of small and medium sized businesses in Stevenage. It was felt that a possible work stream for the Board going forward would be to help, support and encourage small and medium sized businesses.

7 TOWN FUND BOARD POTENTIAL WORK PLAN

Tom Pike (Strategic Director, SBC) gave a presentation regarding a potential Work Plan for the Board.

Up to £25m could be available, but match funding or other Government agency funding could be brought in. The Board needed to develop an Investment Plan by Summer 2020. A range of existing plans were in place, but there were opportunities to focus on new priorities.

The Board noted that the next steps could involve a Working Group developing a long list of project options for the Board to consider; developing business cases (with support from commercial advisors and technical experts); developing a consultation plan; understanding the criteria for the Investment Plan (ensuring a strong evidence base for delivery); and looking broadly at other sources of funding, rolling funds or match funding that could support a Town Investment Plan.

Board Members commented as follows:

- it was important that the projects supported by the Board would be exemplars in terms of environmentally friendly features;
- in terms of educational excellence, it would be worth learning from the colleges at Grimsby, Dudley and Western (Bristol) who had been commended as promoters of best practice;
- there was a host of evidence/information already available to feed into the next steps;

- it would be important to integrate some key parts of central areas of the town in future plans;
- the Investment Plan should contain a solid evidence base, with clear objectives as to what was to be achieved; and
- it was possible that a number of additional representatives may be invited to future meetings of the Board.

The Board agreed to the Interim Chair's suggestion that the presentations made at the meeting be circulated to all attendees.

The Interim Chair concluded the meeting by thanking all present for attending, and looked forward to working together to develop an Investment Plan bid for the town.

CHAIR