

**STEVENAGE DEVELOPMENT BOARD  
MINUTES**

**Date: Tuesday, 5 May 2020**

**Time: 10.00am**

**Place: Meeting to be held by tele-conference**

**Present:** Adrian Hawkins (Independent Chair)  
Matt Partridge (Chief Executive, Stevenage Borough Councillor)  
Councillor Sharon Taylor (Stevenage Borough Council)  
Adam Wood (Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership)  
Councillor John Gardner (Stevenage Borough Council)  
Norman Jennings (Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership)  
Kevin Cowin (Mace Developments)  
Tom Pike (Stevenage Borough Council)  
Chris Barnes (Stevenage Borough Council)  
Andrew Fisher (Barton Wilmore)  
Briege Leahy (Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce)  
Councillor David Williams (Hertfordshire County Council)  
Patsy Dell (Hertfordshire County Council)  
Martha Lytton Cobbold (Knebworth House)  
Sharon Brownlow (Catapult)  
Kit Davies (North Hertfordshire College)  
Neville Reyner (Groundwork East)  
Charlotte Blizzard Welch (Stevenage Citizens Advice Bureau)  
Ed Jordan (WENTA)  
Sally Ann Forsyth (Stevenage Bioscience Catalyst)  
Karen Hillen (BEIS)  
Graeme Collinge (Genecon)

**Start / End** Start Time: 10.00am  
**Time:** End Time: 12.10pm

**1 WELCOME AND CHAIR'S OPENING COMMENTS**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, including new attendee Sally Ann Forsyth (CEO of Stevenage Bioscience Catalyst, but representing Herts LEP).

The Chair advised that preliminary work on the Stevenage Town Investment Plan (TIP) was progressing apace, with the Board having met on 3 occasions in a relatively short space of time. If any Board members felt that they wished to contribute to the process, and had been unable to do so during the meeting, then he would be happy for them to contact him direct.

## 2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Board was advised that apologies for absence had been received from Charles Amies (Homes England), Malcolm Evely (Airbus), Greg Westover (Legal & General) and Steve Finlan (the Wine Society).

## 3 CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS AND OPENNESS

The Board received a conflicts of interest list.

County Councillor David Williams asked that his role as Chair of the Hertfordshire Growth Board be added to his conflicts of interest entry in the list.

Sally Ann Forsyth stated that she was also a Board Member of the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership.

## 4 MINUTES - STEVENAGE DEVELOPMENT BOARD - 7 APRIL 2020 / MATTERS ARISING

It was **AGREED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Stevenage Development Board held on 7 April 2020 be approved as a correct record, subject to an amendment to the final sentence of the sixth paragraph of Minute 7 – Impact of Covid-19 on Programme – to clarify that WENTA was providing support to businesses at the Business Technology Centre.

## 5 JOURNEY SO FAR - LATEST UPDATE

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

Chris presented a series of photographs which showed progress made on the Queensway North development, the Town Square Public Realm project and the Town Centre North Block scheme. Other notable projects in the pipeline included the SG1 scheme (on 14.5 acres of town centre land, with 11 development plots and 1,800 new homes). A planning application had been submitted for the New Bus Interchange (an integrated transport hub for the central parts of the town).

In response to questions, Chris confirmed that

- pre-Covid lockdown, the public's response to the regeneration proposals had been mostly positive. The more the physical works had progressed, the stronger the enthusiasm for the proposals. This had been aided by enquiries received at the Visitor Centre in the Town Square; and
- it was likely that there would be increased construction costs due to the delays caused by Covid-19, although the scale of these was at present unknown. Every step would be taken to minimise the extent of increased costs.

## 6 TOWN INVESTMENT PLAN PROGRESS

Andrew Fisher (Barton Wilmore), assisted by Graeme Collinge (Genecon), gave a

presentation which provided an update on progress in connection with the production of a Stevenage Town Investment Plan (TIP), in the form of a study of the assets, opportunities, challenges and investment focus for the Development Board.

In terms of Stevenage assets/strengths, Andrew highlighted the following:

- A strategic location, with good proximity to London and strong rail, road and air infrastructure links;
- Strong local housing market, with proven demand and values and positive delivery, including via town centre regeneration;
- Strong and growing economy – manufacturing and science strengths, with bio-science and technology clusters, high skilled employment and high workforce engagement;
- Significant international businesses located centrally, with major expansion investments being made and over £1bn of private funding invested into the Bioscience cluster;
- Distinctive New Town Heritage and identity, with an Arts and Culture Strategy in place. Demand for new and improved arts and leisure offer and celebration of heritage;
- North Hertfordshire College - rated as a 'Good Provider' by OFSTED and with good connections to local businesses and providers and progress being made in local education provision with positive outcomes from several local secondary schools;
- Positive programme of town centre regeneration and delivery, including land acquisition and public realm investment;
- Clear future vision and well established public / private partnerships / leadership;
- Consolidated land ownerships and significant publicly owned land and assets, particularly in the town centre; and
- Willingness to embrace growth and change and a positive cross organisational partnership approach over recent years.

In relation to Stevenage challenges, Andrew advised that these included:

- Economic - Low self-containment - Highly mobile workforce, but high value jobs appeared to be taken by people travelling in. GVA growth in recent years behind Herts/England.;
- Economic - Physical separation of employment areas and the need to enhance connectivity;
- Regeneration - Town centre had limited evening economy and still required significant regeneration. Good progress, but lots more to do as part of the £1bn regeneration framework;
- Regeneration - Potential challenges for current retailers, given high proportion in the clothing sector and desire for a higher-end offer;
- Regeneration - Lack of employment within the town centre, or other sources of footfall; self-contained due to the way the town was designed and with facilities that have aged around the same time;
- Infrastructure - Positive moves in transport and infrastructure, but with challenges still remaining, such as connecting Gunnels Wood Road businesses with the central parts of the town, as well as the rail station connectivity;

- Infrastructure - Relatively high levels of affordable housing need and this is a Council priority;
- Infrastructure - All future growth scenarios for Stevenage suggested a deficit in infrastructure funding with forward funding required consistent with the picture across Hertfordshire;
- Education/Skills - Workforce engagement was high, but resident earnings were lower than expected;
- Education/Skills - Lower levels of skills above level 4 and occupations amongst Stevenage's resident working age-population;
- Education/Skills - Potential to enhance opportunities, provision and aspiration for higher end skills for local young people and their parents, with progress being made in a number of skills; and
- Education/Skills - Lack of Higher Education presence in the town.

In respect of Stevenage opportunities, Andrew presented the following:

- Economic – Given its assets, some major multi-nationals, and the investment made in the Stevenage Bio-Science cluster, potential for productivity to increase to match potential;
- Economic - Leakage of retail and leisure expenditure - enticing higher end retailers to improve the retail mix and capitalise on / recapture Stevenage's population catchment. Untapped potential of a cultural offer;
- Economic - Capitalising on opportunities to internalise employment within Stevenage, whilst improving town centre permeability, thereby promoting re-vitalisation;
- Regeneration - A proactive approach to public sector investment was leveraging even greater private sector commitments. The potential was there and the next stages of development in the Town Centre needed to be considered now;
- Regeneration - A re-balancing of the housing stock – high quality homes from apartments to family and executive homes, and quality provision for all homes;
- Regeneration - Town Centre and wider Town provide a good development platform including availability of brownfield land, market/investor demand across all sectors, framework in place and opportunity for densification, including Gunnels Wood Road;
- Regeneration - Scope for flexible approach to planning in the town centre, reflecting criteria based planning policies in the Local Plan;
- Regeneration - Unique heritage as a New Town, and strong appetite to build on the existing cultural offer;
- Infrastructure - Significant infrastructure investments being made already - relocation of the bus station, 5<sup>th</sup> Platform at the Rail Station, maintaining the momentum for sustainable transport; and
- Education/Skills - Given the above, potential for further enhancement of education and skills for local people to increase awareness of and access to high value employment, addressing inequalities and driving further business investment growth.

With the above in mind, Andrew suggested the following draft vision for the Board/TIP:

Draft vision: *“Reflecting our heritage as the UK’s first New Town, our vision is to reinvigorate Stevenage so that it represents the aspirations of its people and makes provision for the opportunities they seek.*

*We will create a 21<sup>st</sup> Century New Town that maximises the benefits of our local economy whilst providing a combined retail, leisure, cultural and residential offer that will meet the needs of our population and attract visitors and investment well into the future.”*

This would be supported by core values guiding all the projects and schemes being put forward. This includes tackling climate change, developing wealth building opportunities, embracing digital and innovation, and an environment that supports health and wellbeing information.

Andrew further suggested Investment Themes of Regeneration/Land Use; Skills & Enterprise; Connectivity; and Culture & Heritage. In terms of Investment outcomes against each of these themes, the following was recommended:

#### Regeneration/Land Use

- Deliver a balanced town centre economy that used a new residential community, local employment, evening economy and a diverse range of uses to maximise activity and provide the strongest offer possible;
- Improve the physical appearance of the town to make it more investable attracting new investment house funds;
- Develop the identity of Stevenage and promote the place to existing and new people;
- Facilitate the next phase of Stevenage Central beyond SG1; and
- Maximise the regeneration benefits of publicly owned land to release development.

#### Skills & Enterprise

- Dramatically enhance the levels of high-quality start up and grow on workspace, encouraging entrepreneurship;
- Close the skills gap between business needs and resident skills levels to increase local ambition and increase self-containment;
- Building on existing key sector strengths in manufacturing and science to enable ongoing sustainable growth; and
- Secure direct inward investment to the bioscience cluster and its wider supply chain to maintain and enhance national and international standing.

#### Connectivity

- Improve existing and facilitate new physical connections to connect residents, businesses and the town centre;
- Enable the downgrading of Lytton Way to improve cross town connectivity, release land for development and help create a high-quality quarter around station as part of a liveable town centre;

- Radically improve the appearance, function and capacity of the town's rail station as a key point of arrival / connectivity and development opportunity; and
- Re-invigorate the networks of non-car connections, particularly between key destinations to improve the desirability of links between key areas such as GSK campus / Town Centre / Old Town to change behaviour and secure environmental benefits.

### Culture & Heritage

- Enhance the vitality of the town centre through the introduction of new quality cultural and leisure assets that drive footfall, including as part of an evening economy;
- Engender a network of creative industries spaces and hubs, including digital, to attract and develop talent and to support economic growth;
- Increase levels of cultural participation across Stevenage's resident population as part of a wider drive to raise aspirations; and
- Widen the cultural offer of the town, whilst celebrating the New Town heritage to help change perception and image of Stevenage at the national level.

Andrew referred to the scale of ambition for the Board to consider, which could be a combined Stevenage TIP Programme that could be higher than a £25M programme for example comprising £25M MCHLG Town deal monies and whether further aligned bids or funding streams could be secured.

Graeme Collinge introduced a series of case studies of other significant investment projects across the UK, including the Advanced Technology Centre, Blackpool; Advanced Technology Centre, Crawley; IMET Advanced Skills Centre, Alconbury; The Home Theatre, Manchester; The Factory Arts Centre, Manchester; the Helix, Newcastle; No. 1 Great Central Square, Leicester; and Citybike, Liverpool.

The Chair thanked Andrew and Graeme for an excellent presentation.

The following comments were made by Board Members during the debate on the presentation:

- County Councillor Williams highlighted the support from the County Council, LEP and Growth Board to show strong evidence of partnership working, which was endorsed by other Board Members;
- Councillor Taylor considered that all homes should be high quality, not just those described as aspirational homes. The aim should be to ensure that the build quality was such that it would be difficult to distinguish between social/affordable and aspirational homes;
- Sally Ann Forsyth (Herts LEP) commented that the Bioscience cluster was limited for new development as it would require external infrastructure . However, there were a number of start-up businesses wishing to come onto the Bioscience campus. This was confirmed by Sharon Brownlow (Catapult). Andrew/Graeme, together with Patsy Dell (HCC), would instigate a separate conversation with Sally-Ann and Sharon regarding this matter;
- Councillor Taylor considered that the vision should align with the Stevenage

Central vision which encompassed the entirety of the central area of Stevenage . Andrew confirmed that the Town Deal element would be part of the wider ambition to deliver improvements to the town;

- Both County Councillor Williams and Councillor Taylor were of the view that it should be stressed to Government representatives responsible for the Town Deal that, as a New Town, Stevenage was different from many other towns covered by the Deal (especially the fact that most of the new town was built at roughly the same time and hence had deteriorated at roughly the same rate);
- Martha Lytton Cobbold felt that maximising the benefits of the local economy was important, but also was ensuring the retention of spend within the locality;
- In response to a question, Chris Barnes confirmed that the issues of community wealth building and climate change would be tied into projects across the four TIP themes;
- In response to a further question, Tom Pike stated that the current and future challenges faced by Covid-19 need to be reflected in the TIP as far as possible;
- Sally Ann Forsyth commented that the Stevenage Bioscience Catalyst was working with the Government to identify the key sectors which would need to be supported and developed in the UK following Covid-19. Cell and Gene technology was one such area, and Stevenage was well placed to contribute to this process, being in the centre of the largest bioscience cluster in the UK;
- In reply to a question, Graeme Collinge advised that Gross Value Added (GVA) would be a key output of the TIP to measure community wealth building; and
- Adam Wood (Hertfordshire LEP) considered that the four core values should be applied to all potential TIP projects so that all schemes endeavoured to address crucial issues, such as climate change and community wealth building. He added that the Case Studies presented by Graeme were really helpful in providing a taste of the types of projects that the Board may wish to pursue and the potential impact they could have on the town.

Andrew Fisher (Barton Wilmore) raised the issues of Arts/Leisure/Culture and connectivity/infrastructure as two further subject areas that required engagement by the Board in defining suitable projects that could be considered for inclusion in the TIP.

The Chair felt that, in view of the helpful work carried out by the Skills Sub- Group, there was scope for further Sub-Groups to investigate these issues and report back to the Board.

It was therefore **AGREED:**

1. That an Arts, Leisure & Culture Sub-Group be established, to be chaired by Martha Lytton Cobbold (Knebworth House), and report back its findings to the Board.

[Note: at the time of the meeting, Cllr Taylor volunteered SBC Councillor Richard Henry to serve on the Sub-Group; and Kit Davies (North Herts College) volunteered his Head of Creative Arts to also serve. Tom Pike offered the support of SBC officers and referenced the recently agreed Stevenage Reimagined Cultural Strategy that had been developed with local partners.]

2. That a Connectivity/Infrastructure Sub-Group be established, to be led by Patsy Dell (HCC), and with the possible involvement of Sally Ann Forsyth and Sharon Brownlow, also to be supported by SBC officers.

## 7 ARTS, CULTURE AND LEISURE THEME

[Covered under previous item: Town Investment Plan Progress – see Minute 6 above.]

## 8 SKILLS THEME UPDATE

Norman Jennings (Hertfordshire LEP) reported back on the work of the Skills Sub-Group, established at the Development Board meeting held on 7 April 2020.

Norman advised that the first meeting of the Sub-Group had focussed on three key themes:

- **Opportunities** – it was felt the Town Fund and other Regeneration projects provide for a wealth of opportunities, but that with the current rich mix of businesses operating in Stevenage that there had always been and remained some first class opportunities for employment and careers for Stevenage residents.;
- **Capabilities** – there was a need to further develop the untapped capabilities of local residents to ensure they were best positioned to maximise the opportunities that currently existed and would hopefully be available in the future. It was felt that there was good provision available within the town to help develop these capabilities, however there may be a need for greater co-ordination of some of this provision; and
- **Aspirations** – as previously mentioned at the Development Board meetings, there was a concern that, as with other local New Towns, there is an opportunity to help look at routes for young people to acquire higher level skills and there was a need to inspire young people and their influencers to maximise their potential.

In terms of the current position with the labour market, Norman explained that the employment rate for Stevenage grew faster than any other District in 2018, and at circa 84% was the highest in the county, which was a real positive. Workplace earnings in Stevenage were higher than the county average and second only to St. Albans,. However, resident earnings were lower than the county average and lowest of all Districts.

In respect of employment by sector, Norman advised that the top two sectors in Stevenage, accounting for circa 33%, were health & social care and wholesale/retail. Next highest was professional/scientific and manufacturing, accounting for circa 22%, so again arguably different ends of a spectrum in terms of earnings potential and possible qualifications.

Norman had looked at data which showed first indications of the Covid-19 impact on the labour market, i.e. job posting analytics. Over past 4 weeks leisure/travel, sales and customer services occupations had seen an average 54% reduction in postings.



Over same period, business/public services and administrative occupations had seen a reduction of 330 postings (33%). Conversely, there had been a smaller reduction in professional scientific and manufacturing occupations. This highlighted the precarious nature of some of the typically lower qualified jobs.

In relation to skills/qualifications, Norman stated that Stevenage had the lowest percentage of residents with a Level 2 qualification and the second lowest with a Level 4+ qualification. Apprenticeships were discussed and seen as a positive opportunity for young people. There had been 660 apprenticeship starts in 2018/19, a 4% reduction on 2017/18, but in the top 4 across all Districts. Further analysis showed that, as a rough guide, apprenticeship starts accounted for 0.75% of the population, the highest in the county, whereas in St. Albans it was 0.37%. There was clear evidence that vocational skills training was seen as an alternative by more in Stevenage than elsewhere. It was worth noting that Stevenage had a 16-18 NEET rate of 4.98%, which compared with the county average of 2.6%.

Norman advised that the Board now had the opportunity to build a co-ordinated approach of provisions/solutions.

Kit Davies (North Herts College) commented that the overall reduction in the number of apprenticeship opportunities in Stevenage should be considered in the context of the significant reduction in opportunities nationally over the past few years.

Norman explained that there was a lot of good provision and solutions which was already helping to address the needs of the local business and residents communities. More work was required to catalogue this before the Board started to identify and commission other solutions. The following information was available to assist in this process:

- Stevenage had 10 secondary/special schools, with 80% graded 'Good' and the remaining 20% receiving support to improve;
- Stevenage was one of only 3 Districts that had a Careers Hub. Careers Hubs provided a focus for that all-important transition that young people made from education to employment and brought together schools and local employers to help prepare young people for either the world of work or their next steps on their career paths. It aimed to ensure that all young people had access to impartial and balanced careers advice. All 10 Stevenage schools were involved with the Careers Hub, scoring an average 5.6 Gatsby Benchmarks against a county average of 4.8;
- Stevenage residents had access to a grade 2 FE college with one of the highest achievement levels in the county and one of the highest in the region. The college continued to grow its curriculum offer, including apprenticeships, in order to meet current and future employer and resident needs. In addition, there were at least 2 Independent Training Providers based in Town, which provided for a good balance and choice for young people with regards to further education;
- There were also 2 providers delivering ESF skills support for unemployed based in the town. Reed in Partnership and SPS supported unemployed individuals back into the workplace, achieving a good rate of sustainable employment;
- The Stem Discovery Education Centre was based on the Airbus site. This would provide for a wonderful opportunity for Key Stage 2 & 3 pupils to experience the

wonders of a STEM related career. It was expected that circa 2500 pupils would benefit from this facility each year. However, to truly maximise this opportunity for Stevenage, employers' further development was required, as was more funding to cover the running costs;

- Stevenage Borough Council, in partnership with the NHC, had recently secured funding to operate a Construction Skills Hub focused on town centre regeneration. This Hub would operate with the support of the key developers i.e. MACE, REEF, and would provide opportunities for both employed and non-employed residents who wished to pursue a construction focused career/job. It would hopefully link to the STEM centre to promote STEM related activities within the construction sector;
- Stevenage was home to a number of nationally recognised major employer apprenticeship schemes: MBDA, GSK, Airbus regularly achieved awards and recognitions at the National Apprenticeship Awards. In most cases, for every 1 apprenticeship vacancy within these schemes, they would have at least 4 or 5 good quality applicants, but they were not always local. On the flip side some local employers, including those on the science campus, were struggling to attract local applications for good quality apprenticeship opportunities;
- Stevenage businesses had access to a number of predominantly business skills providers via Wenta, Chamber of Commerce and Herts Growth Hub; and
- The University of Hertfordshire (UH) was leading on developing an application to secure funding to establish an Institute of Technology (IoT) in Hertfordshire. If successful, this funding would provide capital funds to develop state of the art premises, equipment and curriculum to meet the needs of local employers at Level 3 and above. UH had indicated that the focus of their application would be Life Science.

In respect of the next steps, Norman reported that the Skills Sub-Group had agreed to establish a small working group to take forward the skills agenda to the next steps. The working group had put together an outline action plan as follows:

1. Establish an assessment of currently available programmes and initiatives, to be led by SBC with support from Herts LEP and NHC;
2. To commission a more detailed analysis of the Stevenage skills and labour market (similar to a county wide approach undertaken by the LEP/HCC);
3. Further review the current Herts Skills Strategy to establish relevance to a similar Stevenage strategy;
4. To provide a review of similar approaches in other towns;
5. Produce video/social media content to help to promote the wonderful business base and therefore opportunities available in the Town, to be led by SBC;
6. Having undertaken steps 1 – 4 above, to develop a Stevenage Skills Strategy, to be led by SBC and members of the Skills Sub-Group;
7. To develop draft project proposals, to be led by the Skills Sub-Group and using measures to appraise projects;
8. To develop a skills page within the Stevenage Even Better website to be led by

SBC with links to HOP, NHC, Stem Centre, showcasing local employers etc.

Norman advised that there was a lot of discussion at the Sub-Group about the importance of using the excellent business assets that Stevenage had to raise further the aspirations of both young people and their influencers. It was agreed that using video or social media content to promote Stevenage excellence may assist with raising aspirations. However, it was important that there was clarity regarding the audience, i.e. young people and/or influencers, such as parents/teachers etc.

In order to avoid duplication of efforts, the Board was informed that it had been agreed that there was a need to engage key employers and young people and to collate existing materials, from employers/NHC/SBC/HOP etc. Then the Sub-Group would be in a position to identify gaps and a budget requirement. Once produced, an approach would need to be agreed to the sharing and distributing of the materials.

## **9 COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE**

Chris Barnes (Regeneration Manager, SBC) advised that plans were in place to improve the Stevenage Even Better website, including a new “My Town” section with information about the Town Deal campaign, “Meet the Development Board” pages, and with the ability to add information as the campaign developed.

Chris stated that the new pages would align with the Even Better branding, while being designed slightly differently to create a separation with the existing. The majority of the content would be taken from the MyTown sections on gov.uk and would encourage visitors to visit the portal and provide their views. As the campaign developed additional content could include an ‘opportunity map’ of the town, outlining some key investment areas alongside a potential standalone news and reviews/blog section to keep the pages ranking highly and to create a greater separation between the existing Even Better pages and the new MyTown content.

It was **AGREED**:

1. That, once agreed, the Vision and Core Values relating to the Development Board and the Town Investment Plan (TIP) be published on the Stevenage Even Better website.
2. That Board support officers ensure that the social media presence regarding the TIP is maximised in readiness for a publicity campaign as soon as the UK comes out of lockdown.

## **10 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

### Town Fund Programme

Matt Partridge (Chief Executive, SBC) asked Karen Hillen (BEIS) if she was able to provide any insight from the Government regarding the Town Fund, and the possibility of it being a factor in the recovery from Covid-19, or it even being enhanced to further aid the recovery.

Karen Hillen replied that any plans to modify the Town Fund Programme in the light of Covid-19 were being worked on by Government officials. However, she advised that £12.5M of High Street Fund monies had been re-prioritised towards Town Business Improvement Districts (BIDs). She commented that the Minister was looking for “shovel ready” projects which could proceed as soon as the lockdown restrictions were eased. Further Government Guidance on Town Deals was expected later in May 2020, although late July 2020 remained the deadline for the first batch of Town Investment Plans to be approved. If the Stevenage TIP was likely to be ready by late July, then the Development Board should indicate this to the Government as soon as possible.

## **11 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance, and advised that the next Board meeting (also likely to be held in a teleconferencing format) would take place **at 2.00pm on Wednesday, 3 June 2020.**

Future meetings were scheduled for:

- Wednesday, 29 July 2020: 10.00am – 12.00pm
- September 2020 (date tbc)
- December 2020 (date tbc)