

**STEVENAGE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
MINUTES**

Date: Thursday, 28 January 2021

Time: 10.00am

Place: Virtual (via Zoom)

Present: Adrian Hawkins (Independent Chair)
Matt Partridge (Chief Executive, Stevenage Borough Council)
Councillor Sharon Taylor (Stevenage Borough Council)
Tom Pike (Stevenage Borough Council)
Councillor John Gardner (Stevenage Borough Council)
Chris Barnes (Stevenage Borough Council)
Dave Wells (Stevenage Borough Council)
Annie Piper (Stevenage Borough Council)
Lucy King (Stevenage Borough Council)
Councillor David Williams (Hertfordshire County Council)
Patsy Dell (Hertfordshire County Council)
Adam Wood (Hertfordshire LEP)
Norman Jennings (Hertfordshire LEP)
Briege Leahy (Herts Chamber of Commerce)
Martha Lytton Cobbold (Knebworth House)
Alice Loukaides (Citizens Advice Bureau)
Ed Jordan (WENTA)
Kit Davies (North Herts College)
Kevin Cowin (MACE)
Charles Amies (Homes England)
Greg Westover (Legal and General)
Steve Finlan (The Wine Society)
Karen Hillen (BEIS)
Malcolm Everly (Airbus)
Sally Ann Forsyth (Stevenage Bioscience Catalyst)
James Latham (Stevenage Bioscience Catalyst)
Sarah McLaughlin (Hertfordshire County Council)
Mary Hartley (East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust)
Hetty Thornton (Historic England)
Julie Newlan (University of Hertfordshire)
Duncan Parsley (GlaxoSmithKline)

Start / End Start Time: 10.00am
Time: End Time: 12.03pm

1 WELCOME AND CHAIR'S OPENING COMMENTS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, and wished all participants a Happy New Year. He referred to the welcome news about the Government's lifting of the

holding direction on the SG1 planning application, and congratulated HCC and SBC staff for their work in connection with the recently opened Stevenage Covid-19 Vaccination Centre at Robertson House.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Board was advised that apologies for absence had been received from Stephen Ward (Catapult), Charlotte Blizzard-Welch (Citizens Advice Bureau), Sarah Brierley (East & North Hertfordshire Health Trust), George Stephens (East and North Hertfordshire Health Trust) and Simon Russian (Montagu Evans LLP).

Alice Loukaides was substituting for Charlotte Blizzard-Welch and Mary Hartley was substituting for Sarah Brierley.

3 MINUTES - STEVENAGE DEVELOPMENT BOARD - 27 OCTOBER 2020 / MATTERS ARISING

It was **RESOLVED** that, subject to the addition of Hetty Thornton (Historic England) to the list of those present at the meeting, the Minutes of the meeting of the meeting of the Stevenage Development Board held on 27 October 2020 be approved as a correct record.

4 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST AND OPENNESS

The Board received the latest conflicts of interests list. Councillor John Gardner (Stevenage Borough Council) asked that his name be added to the list to reflect his interest due to his role as a Member of the Borough Council.

5 REGENERATION PROGRAMME UPDATE

At the Chair's invitation, Councillor Sharon Taylor (Stevenage Borough Council) advised that the lifting of the holding direction relating to the SG1 planning application referred to earlier in the meeting had demonstrated the strength of joint working. She expressed her gratitude for the support the Council had received from HCC, the LEP, the Development Board and the applicant/developer (Mace) in pressing the Government to lift the holding direction. She also thanked the SBC Planning Team for their professionalism in responding to the MHCLG's questions and requests for further information regarding the planning application.

Chris Barnes (SBC Assistant Director, Regeneration) gave a presentation updating the Board on the Town Centre Regeneration Programme. In general terms, the challenges of the third Covid lockdown had had a level of impact. Sites were fully open, but there had been longer lead-in times for sub-contractors and supply of materials, meaning that the contractual risk had been pushed more towards the client. Ongoing work was continuing with contractors to maintain safe working practices. Overall, progress had been good, but an impact on completion dates was now being realised.

Chris provided the following updates in respect of specific projects:

- (i) Town Square/North Block project – this had progressed well and the Team had

- been pleased with the initial positive feedback from the public and local businesses;
- (ii) Bus Interchange – Wilmott Dixon had now commenced the Main Contract works; and
 - (iii) Queensway North – some of the scaffolding had been removed at the rear of the development to reveal the improved external appearance. A photograph showed the high-quality design and finish of one of the residential show apartments.

Chris responded to a number of questions from Board Members, as follows:

- In respect of the co-working space in Queensway North, confidential negotiations had been taking place for a number of months with a potential client for the overall running of this space, including the sub-letting of various elements of the space. It was hoped that the final stages of the legal process could be resolved within the next few weeks.
- With regard to the Marshgate project included in the Town Investment Plan, the contractor (Reef) had carried out some background work in the use of funding to progress the scheme, including the use of private sector financing; and
- Private Rented Sector – there remained a degree of risk but modelling work, since the pandemic began had not changed the projected occupancy rate of the new Marshgate apartments with this type of tenure.

A Board Member felt that an interesting item to focus on at a future Board meeting would be the Bus Interchange project.

Hetty Thornton (Historic England) offered the services of her Team to provide advice to the SBC Regeneration Team regarding conservation matters in connection with the projects taking place within the Stevenage Town Square Conservation Area.

6 TOWN DEAL - FEEDBACK FROM DISCUSSIONS WITH GOVERNMENT

The Chair advised that he, together with Matt Partridge, Tom Pike and Chris Barnes from Stevenage Borough Council, had met with representatives of the MHCLG on 26 January 2021 for a check and challenge session on the submitted Stevenage Town Investment Plan. He commented that it had been a testing session, but that the MHCLG's questions were well answered by the Team. He came away from the meeting with much optimism.

Chris Barnes (SBC Assistant Director, Regeneration) gave a presentation on the steps to be followed following the check and challenge session on 26 January. Should the Plan proceed to the next stage, the next step would be for Heads of Terms to be proposed by the MHCLG, with the Board being allocated 2 months to agree a project confirmation table and spend profile. Thereafter 12 months would be allocated for the development of Business Cases for each project, with the potential for the drawing down of funding for fast-track projects alongside the preparation of these Business Cases.

Chris advised that the immediate next steps would be the production of a TIP delivery plan; identification of resourcing requirements and schedules; preparation of Business Case templates and methodology; Board governance review and work

plan; appointment of Responsible Officers and sub-groups; learning lessons from other towns; production of an Engagement, Communications and Marketing Plan; and positive engagement with partners about potential delivery mechanisms.

Matt Partridge (SBC Chief Executive) gave an overview of the questions/answers raised at the check and challenge session:

- Involvement of local MP – it was made clear that the Local MP had been invited to every Board meeting but had not attended any meeting.
- Evidence was supplied as to the national contribution the Stevenage TIP would make and the mutual benefit between the town and large scale businesses.
- The uniqueness of the TIP bid (in terms of the New Town element) was emphasised, in terms of it forming a blueprint for other New Towns.
- There was a focus on evidencing the need for some of the projects included in the TIP submission in the light of social deprivation.
- The complexities of achieving a number of the TIP schemes, such as the Station Gateway project.
- The Leisure Centre project, against the background of the current national position with leisure providers struggling to survive due to the Covid pandemic.
- The inter-relationship between the TIP projects and the SG1, Queensway North and Matalan schemes.
- The scope and scale of the Heritage Centre project and its role within the proposed Civic Hub building; and
- The challenges of attracting match-funding, especially in connection with the Leisure Centre and Gunnels Wood Road Infrastructure improvement projects.

Tom Pike (SBC Strategic Director) commented that the answers to the questions had focussed on the ambition, impact and deliverability of the TIP projects. Particular mention was made of the potential for expansion of the excellent life sciences sector already present in Stevenage.

Chris Barnes confirmed that there would be an opportunity to review the number of fast-track TIP projects, should circumstances change.

Karen Hillen (BEIS) stated that she was unable to advise on a precise timescale as to when the Board would be informed of the outcome of the Stevenage TIP submission. However, she would keep the Team informed of developments as they arose.

7 FEEDBACK FROM GENERATION STEVENAGE EVENT AND NEXT STEPS

Norman Jennings (Hertfordshire LEP) gave a presentation on the “Generation Stevenage” virtual careers fare held on 1 December 2020.

Norman advised that the event had been well-attended and had provided information on career opportunities for young people in Stevenage and the surrounding area, particularly in the field of science and technology. The event had been subsequently promoted by the Hertfordshire Opportunities Portal and had received over 7,000 views of various pages on the Portal.

In terms of the event itself, Norman commented that it was noteworthy that a slightly

disappointing number of Stevenage Schools had featured in the top ten list of the numbers of those who had participated from each school.

Norman stated that it was hoped to hold a further Generations event later in 2021 to focus on career opportunities to be created from the Stevenage Town Centre Regeneration projects (e.g.) construction jobs and related professional technical qualifications/careers.

The Chair advised that the Government had recently published a White Paper on Further Education (FE), primarily aimed at dispelling the illusion that possession of a degree was the only way to progress in the work environment, but also address skills gaps by re-aligning the needs of employers with the opportunities available for young people through FE.

At the Chair's invitation, Kit Davies summarised the White Paper. Kit stated that this was the first FE White Paper for 12 years, and contained the following 5 themes:

- Placing employers at the heart of the skills system.
- A focus on higher level technical skills (including commitments to Level 3, 4 and 5 qualifications).
- Training and Development for adult learners (a commitment to lifelong learning, whilst providing a more flexible system for study).
- Streamlined financial accountability – including simplifying processes for applying for external funding and allowing FE institutions increased financial autonomy; and
- Teaching – addressing pay disparities and an enhanced recognition that the training and development of people was key in achieving a skills output.

Kit explained that the White Paper had generally been well received by the FE sector. The sector acknowledged the need for the “levelling up” agenda and had the promotion of skills at its heart. Some of the proposals would require consultation and legislative changes, and some would be able to be actioned sooner than others. In broad terms, the White Paper echoed a number of the skills themes contained in the Stevenage Town Investment Plan document.

County Councillor David Williams commented that there was currently a review of the existing Hertfordshire Skills Strategy. Briege Leahy (Herts Chamber of Commerce) advised that she was happy to provide the Chamber's support in any engagement with small and medium sized businesses regarding the skills agenda.

There was a general acceptance that Universities/FE Colleges and schools needed to work together to ensure that a greater quality of career choice was presented to young people, both at degree/professional and vocational level, in order to best match what be the most appropriate career paths for each individual.

At the Chair's invitation, Sally Ann Forsyth (Stevenage Bioscience Catalyst) advised the Board of plans for development of the Catalyst/Catapult site, which was part of the leading European cluster of STEM related science companies. Although at the planning state, Sally Ann stated that the plan was to add 50% onto the Catapult site, moving further out from the existing campus. To fuel this growth in cell and gene technology would require the expertise of additional staff. The importance of skills in

the area of digital analytics and their application would also need to be addressed.

Sally Ann advised that an Economic Impact Analysis of the Stevenage Bioscience Catalyst was being carried out by an independent consultancy, in terms of its progress/achievements over the past 10 years and looking forward to the next 10 years. The Analysis was expected to be complete in February, and she offered to share the content with Board members.

The Board was supportive of the concept of the future creation of an environment to support the enhancement of Research and Development in the town, with the Chair describing possible options, including some form of Science and Technology Enterprise Zone in the Gunnels Wood Road area.

8 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

1. New School site

County Councillor David Williams (HCC) asked the SBC senior officers to chase up the outstanding issue regarding garages, with a view to an urgent resolution of this matter, as it affected the progression of the Section 106 Agreement relating to the new School site in the Town Centre.

2. Debenhams site on Roaring Meg Retail Park

Councillor Sharon Taylor (SBC) reported that, following the demise of the Debenhams chain of stores, interest had been shown from other parties in taking over occupation of the soon to be vacant Debenhams store on the Roaring Meg Retail Park.

9 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Chair advised that it was hoped that the next meeting of the Board would be held in Mid March 2021 (date to be advised).