

Public Document Pack



ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 13 September 2021
Time: 6.00pm,
Location: Council Chamber
Contact: Ramin Shams 01438 242308

Members: Councillors: M Downing (Chair), A Mitchell CC (Vice-Chair),
J Ashley-Wren, D Bainbridge, S Booth, A Brown, W Kerby, M McKay,
S Mead, C Parris and S Speller

AGENDA

PART 1

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2. MINUTES - 22 JUNE AND 5 JULY 2021

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meetings of the Environment and Economy Select Committee held on 22 June and 5 July 2021.

Pages 3 – 8

3. UPDATE ON THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF CV-19 PANDEMIC ON THE LOCAL ECONOMY

To consider an update report on the Economic Impact of CV-19 pandemic on the local economy.

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4. URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS

To consider any Part 1 business accepted by the Chair as urgent.

5. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

To consider the following motions –

1. That under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1 – 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as amended by Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

2. That Members consider the reasons for the following reports being in Part II and determine whether or not maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

6. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

To consider any Part II business accepted by the Chair as urgent.

Agenda Published 3 September 2021

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Monday, 5 July 2021

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Michael Downing (Chair), Adam Mitchell CC (Vice Chair), Julie Ashley-Wren, Doug Bainbridge, Stephen Booth, Adrian Brown, Wendy Kerby, Maureen McKay, Sarah Mead, Claire Parris and Simon Speller

Start / End Start Time: Time Not Specified
Time: End Time: Time Not Specified

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no apologies for absence.

Councillor Claire Parris declared an interest as trustee of St. Nicholas Community Association.

2 **SUMMARY OF DECISION FROM 22 JUNE MEETING**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Summary of Decisions of the Committee meeting held on Tuesday 22 June 2021 be noted. The minutes of the 22 June 2021 meeting will be considered at the next meeting of the Committee.

3 **EXECUTIVE PORTFOLIO HOLDER RESPONSE TO THE NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRES REVIEW**

The Select Committee received a response from the Executive Portfolio holder on the Neighbourhood Centres Review. The Select Committee established to review the Neighbourhood Centres on 13 March 2019 and agreed a scope on 25 June 2019. Covid19 impacted the end of the review process; however, prior to this, Members managed to carry out a number of site visits with officers which led to a number of local actions and subsequent recommendations. 5 Recommendations were proposed to the Executive. The Executive Portfolio holder responded to the recommendations set out in the agenda report.

It was **RESOLVED:**

- That the Committee endorsed the Executive Portfolio holder response as set out in the agenda report.

4 **NEXT STEPS IN THE REVIEW INTO THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON STEVENAGE**

The committee received a report on next steps in the review of the economic impact of Covid19 on Stevenage. The report set out the review progress. Members agreed to invite Business Relationship Manager to the Select Committee to clarify how the Council was supporting self-employed and other businesses hit hard by the pandemic.

It was **RESOLVED:**

- That the next steps in the review into economic impact of Covid-19 on Stevenage be noted.
- That the mapping exercise be noted.

5 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

6 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

7 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR

**ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Tuesday, 22 June 2021

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Adam Mitchell CC (Chair), Julie Ashley-Wren, Doug Bainbridge, Stephen Booth, Adrian Brown, Wendy Kerby, Sarah Mead, Claire Parris and Simon Speller

Start / End Start Time: 6.00 PM

Time: End Time: 7.10 PM

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Michael Downing and Maureen Mckay.

2 TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee noted the Terms of Reference.

3 MINUTES - 13 JANUARY 2021

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Committee meeting held on Wednesday 13 January 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 REPORT BACK FROM THE SUB GROUP LOOKING AT THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON YOUNG PEOPLE

The committee received a sub-group report and suggested recommendations relating to the impact of Covid19 on young people as part of the Committee's wider review of the economic impact of the pandemic on Stevenage.

The Committee met on 10 October 2020 and agreed to set up a sub-group led by Councillor Speller. Councillors Downing, Mitchell, Barr and Mckay volunteered to sit on the sub-group, and helped to discuss and investigate the economic impact of Covid19 on young people.

The Committee agreed on the following scope for the sub-group:

- Meet with Schools Head Teachers, North Herts College Principal, HCC YCH Services for young people and STEMPOINT East

- Find out what are the main challenges to young people regarding Covid-19 in education and employment
- Make recommendations for partners to work together to offer practical help for local young people

Councillor Speller provided a presentation in regards to the report. He advised Members that six meetings of the sub-group had taken place to conclude the recommendations. The following co-opted persons (volunteered) played a key role in providing information on the economic impact of Covid19 on young people.

- Helen Spencer, STEMPOINT East
- Judith Sutton, Area Team Manager North Herts & Stevenage HCC YCH
- Kit Davies, Principal & CE North Herts College
- Sean Trimble, Head Teacher Larwood School
- David Pearce, Head Teacher Brandles School
- Mark Lewis, Head Teacher Alleyne's Academy

Councillor Speller described the sub-group report as qualitative and case driven. He advised Members on Near Horizon and Far Horizon Recommendations as set out in the report.

Members debated the sub-group report, and appreciated the time and efforts that had been put into the report. Members suggested the following could be considered to be added to the recommendations:

- The Council to provide help and support to arts as well as STEM students;
- To provide young people with opportunities to help in cleaning the environment e.g. through litter picking.

The Committee thanked all officers, Members, and co-opted Members and organisations for helping in collating information for concluding the report.

It was **RESOLVED:**

- That the Committee endorsed the recommendations as set out in the sub-group report, together with the Members recommendations at the meeting as set out above.
- That a copy of the sub-group's report be sent to the contributors.

5 **ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2021-22**

The Committee received a suggested Work Programme and agenda planning for the future meetings. The Work Programme is a flexible working document that is subject to change as new issues arise. Members were encouraged to suggest items to be

included in the Work Programme at any time.

The Scrutiny Officer outlined the following key issues that would be discussed at the future meetings:

- Continue the scrutiny of the impact of Covid19 on Economic Development in Stevenage and the Council's response (To agree any further evidence and meetings required to complete the review);
- Scrutinise the Council's Climate Emergency Strategy Action Plan (Review of the Action Plan Consultation response)
- Update on the 2016 Business Technology Centre Review (To consider delivery of WENTA contract since July 2019)
- Local Neighbourhood Centres – Consider the Executive Portfolio Holder Response
- Bulky Waste Charging Proposal – Officer Key Decision – In a Portfolio Holder Advisory Group
- Indoor Market Medium Term Investment Business Case –In a Portfolio Holder Advisory Group
- Final Future Town Future Council Parking Strategy – Keep a watching brief on the progress of the Strategy
- Parks and Open Space Strategy – In a Portfolio Holder Advisory Group
- Trees and Woodland Strategy – In a Portfolio Holder Advisory Group

It was **RESOLVED** That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

6 **ACTION TRACKER**

The Scrutiny Officer presented the Action Tracker to the Committee. The Action Tracker contained useful information to track the progress of items that the Committee had previously scrutinised.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Action Tracker be noted.

7 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

8 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

9 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR

**Mapping exercise for E&E Select Committee – Economic Impact of CV-19 pandemic on the local economy –
Updates following 5 July 2021 meeting reported to 13 September 2021 meeting**

Issue	Who's effected?	Who identified to address this/provide data and interview? (whether they are internal SBC or external partner)	What evidence/data can they provide?	Meeting interview/ evidence received date: Link to Committee meeting where evidence/interview was undertaken:	Meeting scheduled for date: If complete sign off in table:	Action & date required
Impact on self employed	Self Employed	Mena reach out to BTC to request an interviewee volunteer	Invite written responses through Mena's contacts	Interviews to take place at 13 September meeting	Scheduled for 13 September 2021	SW liaising with Mena Caldbeck re approaching witness for written response/ interview for September 2021 meeting. ✓
Impact on SMEs	Small, Medium Sized Enterprises	Mena reach out to BTC to request an interviewee volunteer	Invite written responses through Mena's contacts	Interviews to take place at 13 September meeting	Scheduled for 13 September 2021	SW liaising with Mena Caldbeck re approaching witness for written response/ interview for September 2021 meeting. ✓
Impact on larger	Large	Mena reach out to	Invite written	Interviews to take place at 13	Scheduled for	SW liaising with

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Agenda Item 3

Issue	Who's effected?	Who identified to address this/provide data and interview? (whether they are internal SBC or external partner)	What evidence/data can they provide?	Meeting interview/ evidence received date: Link to Committee meeting where evidence/interview was undertaken:	Meeting scheduled for date: If complete sign off in table:	Action & date required
companies Page 10	Stevenage based companies	larger companies to request interviewee volunteers	responses through Mena's contacts	September meeting	13 September 2021	Mena Caldbeck re approaching witness for written response/ interview for September 2021 meeting. ✓
Impact on different Sectors		No interviewee required.	National Data & KPIs Regional LEP data – redundancies DWP -Work & Pensions data Local numbers affected by Debenhams & Arcadia Group store closures in Stevenage.	Evidence supplied to 13 January 2021 meeting - Link	Complete at January meeting Business Relationship Manager, Mena Caldbeck provided evidence - Complete Jan 2021	

Issue	Who's effected?	Who identified to address this/provide data and interview? (whether they are internal SBC or external partner)	What evidence/data can they provide?	Meeting interview/ evidence received date: Link to Committee meeting where evidence/interview was undertaken:	Meeting scheduled for date: If complete sign off in table:	Action & date required
Impact on Young People	Young People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •SBC Cllrs Speller, Mitchell, McKay & Barr to form sub-group to look at impact on YP – joined by the Chair of E&E Cllr Michael Downing •External witness – Helen Spenser STEMPOINT East (formerly SETPOINT Hertfordshire) •External witness – Alleyne's Academy Head teacher, Mark Lewis •External witness - North Herts College Principal Kit Davies 	<p>Sub Group to provide written input</p> <p>Princes Trust – Impact on YP (office in Luton) Mena to approach</p>	22 June 2021 - Link	<p>Complete at 22 June meeting</p> <p>Member Sub-group carried out their own research over 6 meetings and provided a report and recommendations for the review to the E&E at the 22 June 2021 meeting</p>	Send a copy of the report to all contributors, explaining the Committee route and process

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Page 12		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •External witness Judith Sutton, HCC YCH •SBC Cllr Sandra Barr to look at the impact on non-vocational /non STEM Young People & approach Head Teachers at Brandles and Larwood Schools 				
Generation Stevenage / Skills:	Young People	Chairman Stevenage Development Board, Adrian Hawkins and Hertfordshire LEP Operations Director, Norman Jennings to provide a few	Update to September 2021 meeting on how the event went plus data/press release and any future plans?	13 September 2021 Written submission from Adrian Hawkins, Chairman Stevenage Development Board provided to the 13	Complete at 13 September meeting	SW to make renewed contact with Adrian Hawkins & Norman Jennings to provide written feedback on the outputs from the Generation Stevenage event. ✓

Issue	Who's effected?	Who identified to address this/provide data and interview? (whether they are internal SBC or external partner)	What evidence/data can they provide?	Meeting interview/ evidence received date: Link to Committee meeting where evidence/interview was undertaken:	Meeting scheduled for date: If complete sign off in table:	Action & date required
Pass		paragraphs on Generation Stevenage/Skills		Sep meeting. (see Appendix A)		
Job – YP targeted Kickstart Scheme (6 month job placements for 16 – 24 year olds)	Young People	Take up of the Kickstart scheme	Mena to provide data	Aiming for September 2021		SW to check with the Business Relationship Manager, Mena Caldbeck if the information is now available?
Impact on Women	Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Cllr Rossati lead on looking at impact on women •Gareth Wall is able to assist with data and the points raised by Cllr Rossati 	Gareth Wall to provide data	Gareth provided data to 13 January meeting - Link 05 July 2021 updated data - Parliamentary Women & Equalities Committee report & recommendations	<p>Complete at 13 September meeting</p> <p>Update 13 September 2021</p>	SW to check with the Gareth Wall if any update information is available? ✓ Gareth provided the following link to the Coronavirus and the gendered economic impact

Issue	Who's effected?	Who identified to address this/provide data and interview? (whether they are internal SBC or external partner)	What evidence/data can they provide?	Meeting interview/ evidence received date: Link to Committee meeting where evidence/interview was undertaken:	Meeting scheduled for date: If complete sign off in table:	Action & date required
				Feb 2021 - Link		
Page 14 Impact on BAME	BAME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •No lead Member was identified • Gareth Wall assisted with data 	Gareth Wall provided data from the Parliamentary Select Committee – Unequal Impact? Coronavirus and BAME People	13 January 2021 - Link	Complete at 13 September meeting Update 13 September 2021	SW to check with the Gareth Wall if any update information is available? ✓ Gareth provided the following link to the Parliamentary Select Committee report - Coronavirus and BAME people
Impact on Disability Groups	Disabled Groups	•Gareth Wall assisted with data	Gareth Wall provided data		Complete at 13 September meeting Gareth Wall provided the link for the 13 September 2021	Update to 13 September meeting - Coronavirus, disability and access to services

Issue	Who's effected?	Who identified to address this/provide data and interview? (whether they are internal SBC or external partner)	What evidence/data can they provide?	Meeting interview/ evidence received date: Link to Committee meeting where evidence/interview was undertaken:	Meeting scheduled for date: If complete sign off in table:	Action & date required
Impact on low incomed Page 15	Low incomed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •No lead Member yet identified •Possibly Gareth Wall is able to assist with data again? 	Gareth Wall to provide data (Touches on issues Cllr Mitchell was raising re people struggling with rents, mortgage arrears, CT payments, reduced wages or long term wage suppression)	13 January 2021 - Link	Complete at 13 September meeting Update 13 September 2021 Link to House of Lord's Library – impact on low income families and social security support	SW to check with the Gareth Wall if any update information is available? ✓
Impact on Private Investment (Planning & Development activity)	All residents/ workforce/ businesses	Private investment / market: Zayd and the DM team can give a flavour of the current balance of planning	Data from James Chettleburgh on trends Update on Old Town	13 January 2021 - Link Update provided by the Council's	Complete at 13 September meeting Update provided to	SW to check with the James Chettleburgh & Ash Ahmed if any update information is available? ✓

Issue	Who's effected?	Who identified to address this/provide data and interview? (whether they are internal SBC or external partner)	What evidence/data can they provide?	Meeting interview/ evidence received date: Link to Committee meeting where evidence/interview was undertaken:	Meeting scheduled for date: If complete sign off in table:	Action & date required
Page 16		applications coming through ; Ash could too in terms of market interest in housing developments (part of the economy)	shops & businesses as well as TC Regeneration. Old Town Business Group – Mena has contact Independent retailer to Old Town High Street (into the smaller business unit that was part of Waitrose)	Planning Development Manager, James Chettleburgh to 13 September meeting (see Appendix B)	13 September 2021	
Impact on Town Investment Plan	All residents/ workforce/ businesses	Annie Piper / Chris Barnes (or Adam W, as he has been in the team) can provide.	Data from Chris Barnes	13 January 2021 – Link	Await the update report on Regeneration to the Executive on	Chair agreed that the Committee could wait for the planned update to the

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Page 17		This gives a medium to long-term stimulus to the economy. A huge effort and vital for the longer-term, connected with the town centre regeneration work			15 September for further detail.	Executive later in September for this update.
Impact on Recovery Plan	All residents/ workforce/ businesses		As well as the online recovery plan, we also have a four page short summary we can share with the Committee	13 January 2021 - Link	Complete at January meeting	
What is being offered as on the ground support	All residents/ workforce/ businesses	I would suggest via Adam and Mena, we get a bit of information about what HOP (Herts	Links in the agenda to HOP and short summary	13 January 2021 - Link	Complete at January meeting	

Issue	Who's effected?	Who identified to address this/provide data and interview? (whether they are internal SBC or external partner)	What evidence/data can they provide?	Meeting interview/ evidence received date: Link to Committee meeting where evidence/interview was undertaken:	Meeting scheduled for date: If complete sign off in table:	Action & date required
Page 18		Opportunities Portal) does. Ultimately, this is meant to give the on the ground support across the county, that I think some of the Members are eager to see so it is worth checking to see what the offer is and then helping inform on whether there is a further gap				
Job Centre Plus (JCP)		SBC -Through Mena – who is doing some work on an Economic Taskforce – I'd suggest some focus on what the current	Mena to provide data		13 September 2021	SW to check with the Business Relationship Manager, Mena Caldbeck if the information is now

Issue	Who's effected?	Who identified to address this/provide data and interview? (whether they are internal SBC or external partner)	What evidence/data can they provide?	Meeting interview/ evidence received date: Link to Committee meeting where evidence/interview was undertaken:	Meeting scheduled for date: If complete sign off in table:	Action & date required
Page 19		market is like, number of advertisements, the Kickstart scheme etc.				available?
Grants	All Businesses	SBC - Through Clare F we can get a grant tracker. Fundamentally the R&B have been pulling up trees to set up whole new schemes to support businesses to stay alive	Updated Tracker information from Clare Fletcher.	13 January 2021 – Link	Update 13 September 2021	SW to check with the Clare Fletcher if any update information is available?
External research:		Stephen, worth reading material from bodies such as Centre for Cities on the effects and phasing recovery	SW to provide summary of data available – UK Unemployment Rate Dec 2020	13 January 2021 – Link	Complete at 13 September meeting	Gareth Wall provided links to information on the Economic Impact of Covid-19 from: The Office for National Statistics

Issue	Who's effected?	Who identified to address this/provide data and interview? (whether they are internal SBC or external partner)	What evidence/data can they provide?	Meeting interview/ evidence received date: Link to Committee meeting where evidence/interview was undertaken:	Meeting scheduled for date: If complete sign off in table:	Action & date required
Page 12						ONS The treasury and the Bank of England
CITB (Construction Industry Training Board) / Stevenage Works		SBC - Through Chris Barnes we can point to things we're put in place / are putting in place	Training and Apprenticeships available – bridging the gap	13 January 2021 – Link	Complete at January meeting	
Cooperative Economy Charter:		SBC Paul Cheeseman (Communities) to provide the summary scope / action plan of planned work	Paul Cheeseman to provide data	13 January 2021 - Link	Complete at January meeting	
Lloyd Briscoe Exec Portfolio Holder Econ, Enterprise &		SBC	To respond to questions on what the Council and its partners are doing to	13 January 2021 – Link & Minutes (see Appendix C with revised	Complete at 13 September meeting Verbal update from	SW to approach Cllr Briscoe for an update on the questions /responses given ✓

Issue	Who's effected?	Who identified to address this/provide data and interview? (whether they are internal SBC or external partner)	What evidence/data can they provide?	Meeting interview/ evidence received date: Link to Committee meeting where evidence/interview was undertaken:	Meeting scheduled for date: If complete sign off in table:	Action & date required
Transport			support those effected.	questions for informal interview session Friday 10 September)	informal session on Fri 10 September to 13 September meeting.	
The Leader			To respond to questions on what the Council and its partners are doing to provide support.	13 January 2021 – Link & Minutes (see Appendix C with revised questions for informal interview session Friday 10 September)	Complete at 13 September meeting Verbal update from informal session on Fri 10 September to 13 September meeting.	SW to approach the Leader for an update on the questions /responses given ✓

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Generation Stevenage: opportunities for young people

I welcome the work of the Stevenage Borough Council's Environment and Economy Select Committee, to review and understand the economic impact of Covid on the town and what this might mean for the future.

As the independent Chair of the Stevenage Development Board, it is my pleasure and privilege to work alongside deeply committed community leaders, businesses, investors and public sector partners such as Stevenage Borough Council, the Hertfordshire County Council and the Hertfordshire LEP to attract funding for the town and provide outstanding opportunities for businesses, residents and young people. This is always important but is brought into even sharper focus post Covid as you will see here,

https://www.hopinto.co.uk/media/1769/impact-of-covid-19-on-young-people_report.pdf

My experience includes my post as Deputy Chair of the Herts LEP and for the past 6 years, Chair of the Skills and Employment Board of the Herts LEP.

The Stevenage Development Board was set up in 2020, meeting for the first time in March 2020, just days before the first national lockdown took effect. My appointment enabled the release of £19m in Growth Deal Funds. These times have been extraordinary and exceptional for us all to work collectively, but we have managed this task well. Since our formation, we have worked to inform a vision for the future, through the Stevenage Town Investment Plan, and we have secured the second highest national funding allocation, of all the Town Deals, at £37.5m. See a copy of our Plan for an Even Better Stevenage [here](#)

Within this, we support the work of the Council and many partners to regenerate the town centre, while also creating opportunity for local people a requirement of the Governments funding obligation. This includes, for example, funding that can help bring forward more jobs in the Gunnels Wood Road area, a new Science and Technology facility (SCITECH) and 8 other projects to revitalise the town and an intention to support local business by creating 500 learner spaces for STEM focused learners in the local area. This arrangement directly supports the Governments agenda for "Levelling Up" a specific requirement in Stevenage by comparison to the rest of Hertfordshire.

Furthermore, the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise and the Hertfordshire County Council have refreshed and updated the "Hertfordshire Skills Strategy" see <https://www.hertfordshirelep.com/media/maflpk3y/hertfordshire-local-skills-report-2021.pdf> to help tackle the barriers that exist to great skills and job opportunities, and to make the most of the careers that are available in Stevenage now and those that can be forged in Stevenage and beyond in the future, ensuring brighter life time opportunities for residents as Life Science, Advanced Engineering, Space Technology, Social, Nursing and Medical care and Construction job opportunities develop.

We have worked across the Stevenage Development Board and the various business representatives to make sure opportunities for young people is at the heart of our efforts, including support to the Generation Stevenage event.

On 1 December 2020, Generation Stevenage brought together Stevenage's world-class employers to showcase the exciting career opportunities available to young people across science, technology, engineering, math's (STEM) and healthcare. Several hundred young people from Stevenage and the nearby towns joined an online forum to hear directly from employers MBDA, GSK, Airbus, NHS, Cell

and Gene Therapy Catapult and Stevenage Bioscience Catalyst on what it is like to work within their sectors. The session gave the opportunity

- To listen to the work of these cutting-edge businesses
- To hear from graduate employees and apprentices on their experience of working at the above organisations and their own personal career pathways
- To learn more about the skills you need to succeed and how you can apply for local jobs and apprenticeships

In Stevenage we benefit greatly from a legacy of innovation and showing a way forward for the next generation, is paramount in our thinking for developing a Town and industry that can provide real opportunity to its residents.

Further support is also available thanks to Hertfordshire LEP's "Hertfordshire Opportunities Portal", HOP at www.hopinto.co.uk, which signposts to all available opportunities. Powered by the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, students, employers, residents, wishing to upskill, are now able to HOP into all the resources they need to make informed career decisions, including:

- career path options
- employment opportunities
- apprenticeships and work experience
- skills development and professional qualification programmes
- how to start your own business

I look forward to continuing our working with the Borough Council and other partners as we embrace the opportunities ahead of us and make a real difference for the town, its residents, and all local employers.

Adrian Hawkins OBE
Independent Chair
Stevenage Development Board

1. Covid-19 Impact on Planning.

- 1.1 The global pandemic still remains a major issue to all those who are involved in the planning and construction industries. The full impact this pandemic will have on planning will not be known for some time, even though restrictions have been fully lifted in England. A report by the Planning Portal in April 2020 undertook market analysis and when we entered Lockdown from 23rd March 2020, there was a 20% drop in planning applications across the Country. However, as restrictions were being lifted, construction sites started to re-open from May 2020 along with suppliers and merchants supporting the construction industry with increased levels of deliveries. Construction sites have become more flexible in their working hours to ensure there is a productive operation in place combined with putting in measures to be Covid secure.
- 1.2 Since construction sites have re-opened across the country and have remained open since (even during the most recent lockdowns and Covid-19 restrictions), confidence has increased in the construction and planning industry. The Planning Portal in their most recent report (July 2021)ⁱ identified that the deficit in applications throughout lockdown has more than recovered during the summer months and seeing uptick in 2021. In terms of a comparison between June 2020 and June 2021, there was a 17% increase and between May 2020 and May 2021, there was a 52% increase in applications. The swell in applications during the summer and through to this year, as we have also seen in Stevenage, is down to pent up demand in the system due to the respective lockdowns. It is anticipated that applications will start to level off and we will start to see a more usual trend. Figure 1 shows the trend in planning application numbers across the country from 2016 to 2021.

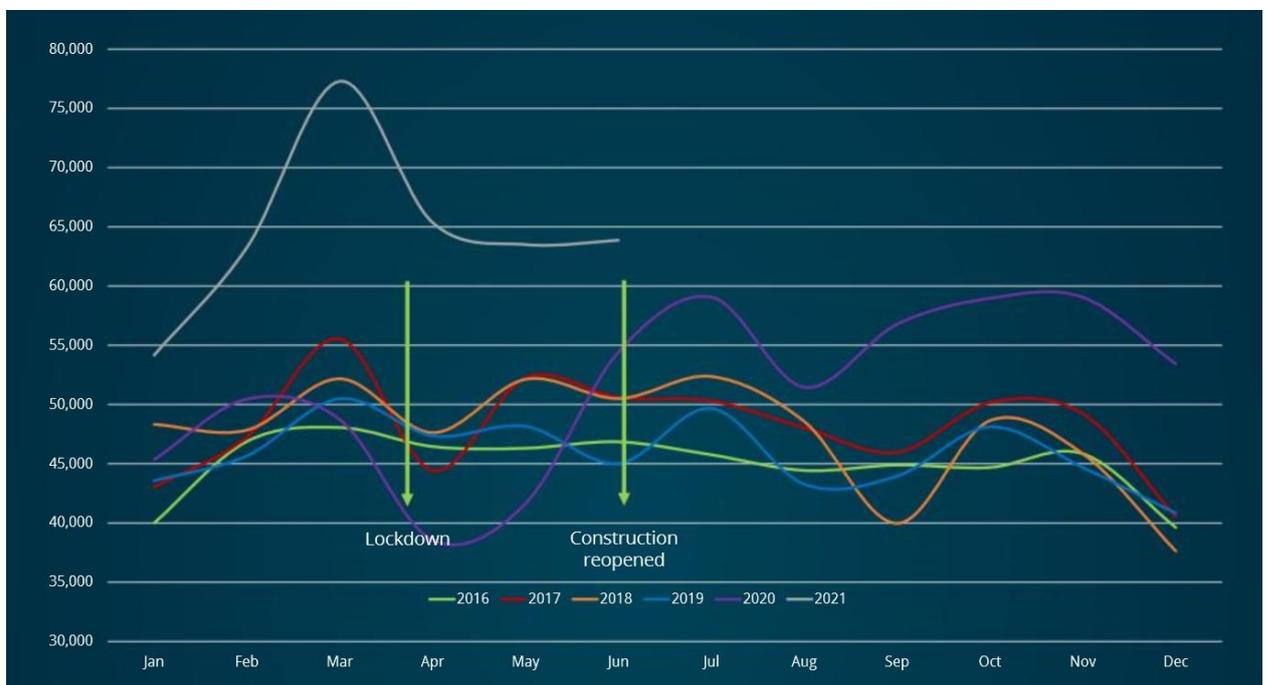


Figure 1:- Application numbers in England and Wales (Source:- Planning Portal 2021).

- 1.3 Turning to Stevenage, since January 2009, the Planning Department has seen a steady increase in the number of planning applications which has been received. As shown in Figure 2, the Council was had on average 35 planning applications a month in 2009. However, by July 2021, the Planning Department had approximately 67 planning applications a month. The most recent data from Technical Support that in July of this year, the

department had 60 planning applications which is a drop of a high of 85 planning applications in May this year. This is an increase from 2020 where in May, the department had 41 applications but a similar number of applications in July 2020. This is where the Council started to see an influx of applications since the lifting of the first lockdown. Notwithstanding this, the application numbers are still up from pre-pandemic levels. This is a sign that there is confidence in terms of investment in the Borough.

- 1.4 Looking at the impact of the first lockdown, between March 2020 and June 2020 during lockdown, the Council had a total of 146 applications. However, in the same period in 2019, there were a total of 175 applications. As such, the department did see a reduction of 29 applications or 16%. However, when we entered the Second Lockdown in November, the Council had 74 applications; this is an increase of 24 applications from the same month in 2019. The Council was also receiving very similar numbers of applications over the summer months to those received in 2019. Moving forward, between January 2021 and March 2021 when restrictions were beginning to be lifted, the Council had received 188 applications. This is an increase from the 164 received in January to March 2020, an increase of 13%. This reflects the trend identified by the Planning Portal where the deficit of applications has more than recovered. In fact, as set out above, the Department is receiving more applications than it did at the same time last year.
- 1.5 It does need to be caveated that the stats include all application types including applications not completed due to being withdrawn, not proceeded with and invalids in each months figures, but are included as they are still being worked on by the Technical Support Team. However, it is important to note even when an application is invalid, or it has been withdrawn, it has still been worked on by either the Technical Support Team and / or officers.

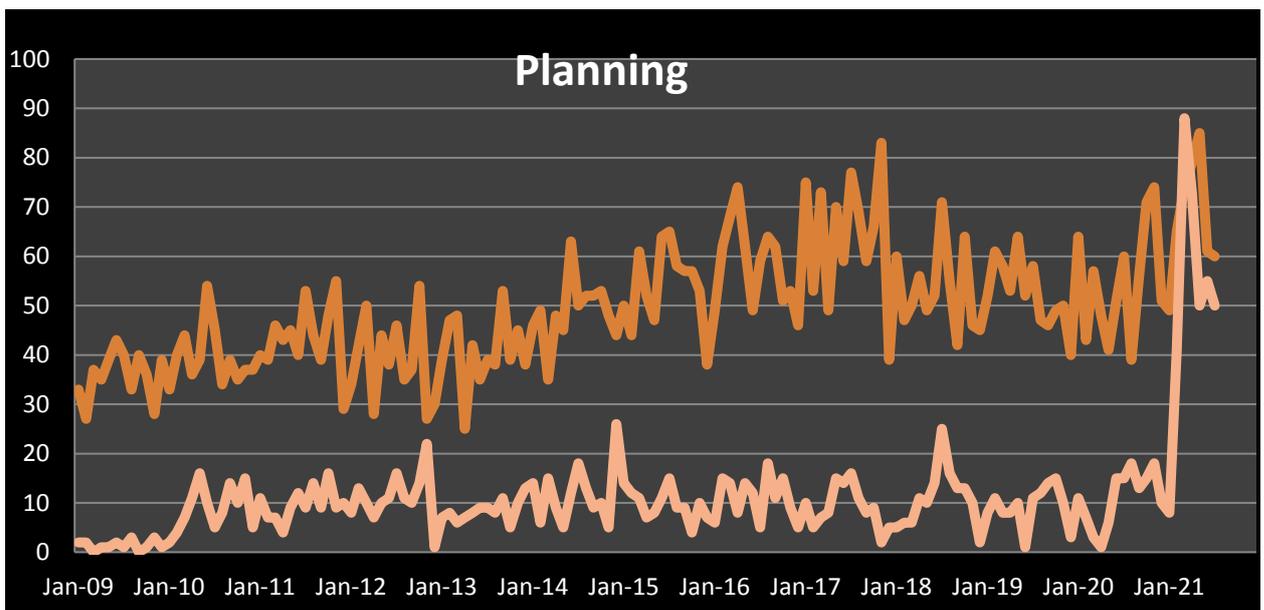


Figure 2:- Applications received between January 2009 to July 2021 (Source- Technical Support).

- 1.6 In terms of pre-application submissions to the planning department, the number of applications which have been submitted have also increased since the last financial year (2020/2021). Between April 2020 to March 2021, the Council received a total of 59 pre-applications which included 19 Majors, 30 Minors, 8 householders and 2 other. These are set out in more detail in Figure 3. This is an increase on the pre-applications which had been received in the financial year April 2019 and March 2020 as detailed in Figure 4. For reference, between April 2019 and March 2020, the Council received a total of 45 pre-applications which included 9 Majors, 26 Minors, 9 householders and 1 other. As such, there

has been an increase in pre-application submissions from 2019/20 by approximately 23%, especially in Major pre-application submissions which have increased by 53%.

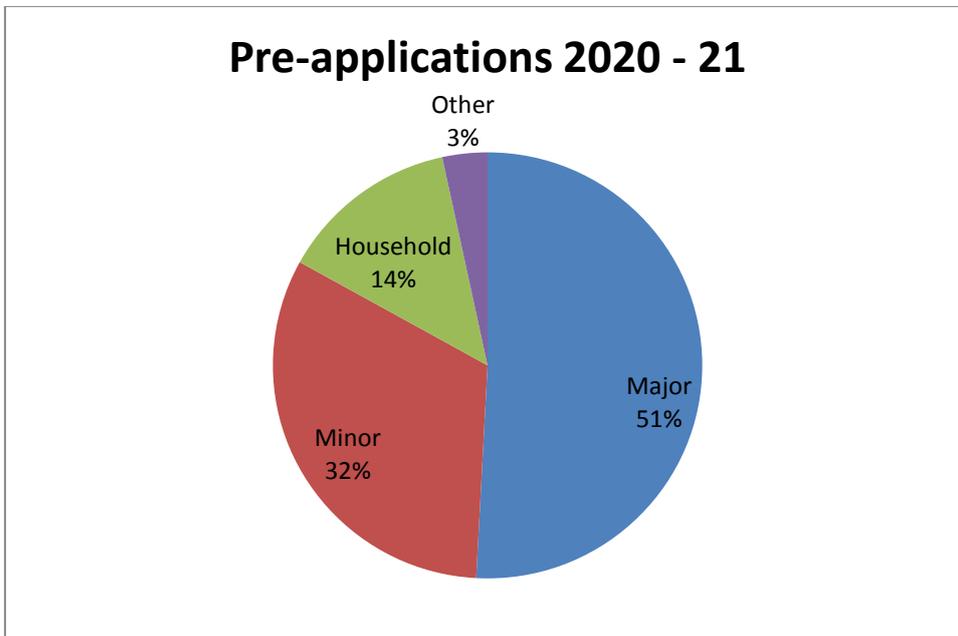


Figure 3:- Pre-applications received between April 2020 and March 2021.

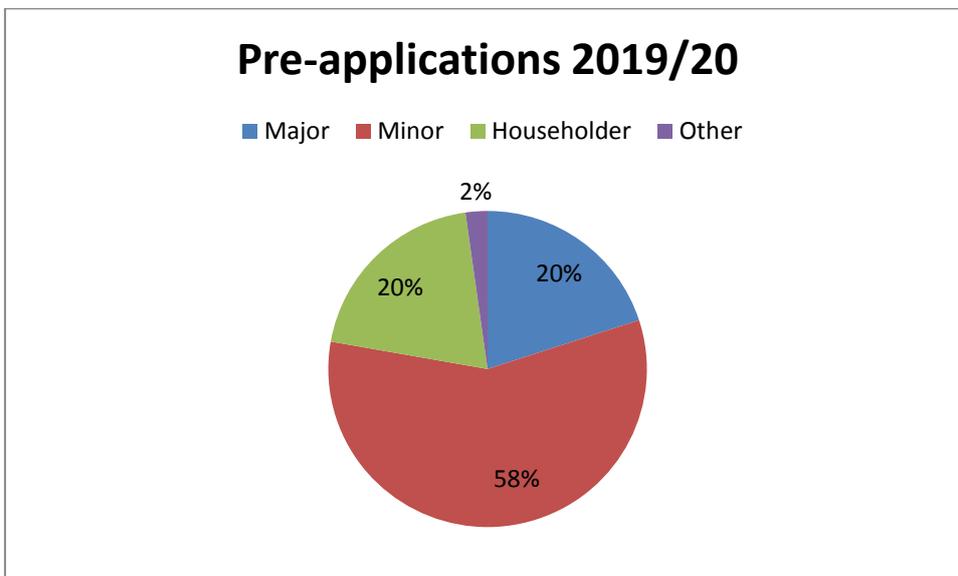
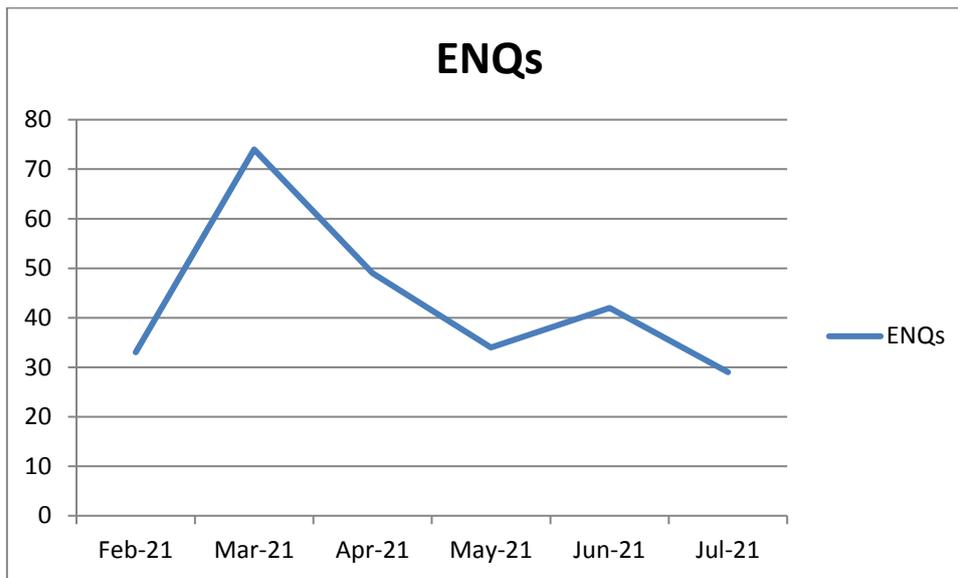


Figure 4:- Pre-applications received between April 2019 and March 2020.

- 1.7 As previously advised and as detailed in the data, the Council did notice a reduction of planning applications during the first lockdown. However, it is evident that confidence has returned and is continuing to grow in the planning and construction industry where applications quickly recovered in the summer months and appear to now be stabilising. Furthermore, the department is also starting to see more planning applications and pre-applications being made to the Council. The department has previously dealt with the large scale regeneration project known as SG1 as well as the large scale residential scheme at North Stevenage. In addition, the Council in just over the last year has determined major projects at John Henry Newman Secondary School, Former BHS at 7 The Forum, The Biopharma development at Marshgate Car Park as well as the reserved matters application for the mixed use residential and commercial development on the Matalan site.

- 1.8 The Council also has a number of Major applications which are currently in the planning Department for determination. The applications which have been received for 2021 are as follows:-
- Roebuck Retail Park (21/00754/FPM) – Conversion of existing units, creation of a new self-storage unit and flexible employment uses;
 - Junction 7 of the A1(M) (21/00536/FPM) – Construction of an Electric Vehicle Charging Station;
 - Land West of North Road (21/00529/FPM) – Construction of a new employment site;
 - Arriva Bus Depot (21/00431/FPM) – Alterations and improvements to the existing bus depot for Arriva;
 - Land West of Stevenage (21/00356/FPM) – Construction of up to 1500 new homes, new employment site, primary school and associated facilities;
 - Land to the South of Norton Road (21/00071/FPM) – Creation of new employment units.
- 1.9 Turning to the applications themselves, it is important to note that not all application submissions are equal. This is because Major Planning applications, including applications such as the Town Centre Regeneration Project (Planning Reference:- 19/00743/FPM) and North Stevenage (Planning Reference:- 17/00862/FPM) along with North West Stevenage (21/00529/FPM) and West Stevenage (21/00356/FPM) can be very resource intensive at officer level.
- 1.10 Furthermore, the 53% increase in the number of pre-application Majors along with the increase in Minors (majority of which are for new dwellings) will have a significant impact on workload for the team. This is because a number of these Major pre-applications are likely to follow through to the planning application stage in the coming year. Therefore, such applications will need to be planned for when being managed by the Planning Department (including the Technical Support Team when they validate the applications) as well as have implications on the Planning Committee in terms of its workload as well. However, these applications will also generate additional fee income into the Council. But, these fees will not only need to cover officer time, they will also need to cover the costs of any consultants the department needs to appoint when determining such applications.
- 1.11 Further to the above, the Government, which published its White Paper on Planning Reform last year, has introduced the Planning Bill which seeks to completely overhaul the existing planning system. The Government also introduced a number of sweeping changes to planning legislation such as new permitted development rights through to a new Use Classes Order as well as publishing a new National Planning Policy Framework which came into force in July 2021. In addition, Central Government continues to emphasise that applications must be determined within the statutory timeframes (8 weeks, 13 weeks and 16 weeks). If these are not met in these strict timeframes, they have recommended the planning fee is returned in full to the applicant. It must be noted that the current rule is to refund the planning fee if an application takes more than 26 weeks under the “Planning Guarantee” unless otherwise agreed in writing with the developer. Moreover, it also puts pressure on the Technical Support Team to turn around validations in an expedient timeframe so that officers do not lose too much time in processing and determining application. Therefore, it is equally important they are properly resourced to handle the increase and management of planning applications coming through.
- 1.12 Since February 2021, the Department now also records general enquiries it receives from the General Public. These can range from seeking advice to extending their property, running a business from home through to authorised planning uses of commercial premises. Figure 5 shows the number of Enquiries (ENQs) the department receives. As shown in the data, the number of enquiries are normally quite high earlier in the year (February 21 to March 21) as people look to start construction work in the summer. As a consequence, a

number of these enquiries may also translate to planning applications being submitted to the department for its determination.



- 1.13 In addition, the department is also responsible for undertaking enforcement investigations to determine whether or not a breach in planning control has occurred. In the financial year April 2020 to March 2021, the department received 79 enforcement reports to investigate. In the financial 2019/20, there were 74 enforcement reports and in the financial year 2018/19, there were 76 enforcement reports. What this data shows is that the department also continued to receive a similar level of enforcement reports during the pandemic as it did before the pandemic hit.
- 1.14 The overall data shows that the department, despite the pandemic which resulted in a drop in applications, has since recovered and continues to receive a number of planning applications, especially Major planning applications. Furthermore, the department has also seen an increase in pre-application requests, especially for Major developments along with general enquiries. In addition, the department also continues to investigate enforcement reports which have remained at the same level for the last 3 financial year of which, some of these investigations can be resource intensive as well. Notwithstanding this, the evidence demonstrates that the department has not been significantly hit by the Covid-19 pandemic and that there is a sign of people willing to invest in the town and that there is continued confidence in the construction delivery. As such, these applications, if approved by the Council, will continue to help aid the town in terms of its post Covid-19 recovery.

Report Author – James Chettleburgh

ⁱ https://issuu.com/planning.portal/docs/planning_market_insight_report_july_2021?fr=sZDEyZjMzMjI1MjY

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Appendix C

Follow up questions with the Leader and Executive Portfolio Holder for, Economy, Enterprise and Transport, Cllr Lloyd Briscoe

As part of its review of the economic impact of Covid-19 the E&E Select Committee has stated that they wish to invite the Leader and Councillor Briscoe to revisit the issues and questions touched upon when they were interviewed in January 2021. The following questions are based on the responses provided and discussion at the time:

- (i) What is the economic position of the Council now (Summer 2021) due to Covid-19?
- (ii) In terms of those who had been labelled as “low skilled” in academic qualifications but potentially “highly skilled” in other ways, what work has WENTA and the BTC been doing to address this cohort (it was identified that both WENTA and BTC would be addressing this)?
- (iii) What progress has the Community Reassurance Cell had with drawing up its action plan to address the effects of the pandemic on a number of groups including the low income, the young, people with disabilities and BAME communities?
- (iv) When the E&E Select Committee met with you in January it was acknowledged about the work that various departments at the Council such as Revenue and Benefits and Planning & Regulation, Business Support are doing in terms of business support with access to government grants and advice and the work of Environmental Health to support retail and with contact tracing, and Communities officers as Covid-19 Marshals, and various SBC officers as Vaccine Centre Marshals, not to mention all of the flexibility and work that many Members and officers are doing to tackle the pandemic and support our community. Is it possible to say how many officers are still directly engaged in front line duties supporting the Council’s response to the pandemic?
- (v) Members were concerned back in January about the potentially high numbers of redundancies that could be seen in Hertfordshire as a result of the pandemic, can you share the latest figures for redundancies now that the furlough scheme is coming to an end and how confident are you about the future direction of the local economy in Stevenage?
- (vi) In terms of supporting our local business community what can the Council and its partners do to make Stevenage a business friendly destination? And is there anything that the Council and its partners can do to help create employment?
- (vii) What lessons have been learnt about the Council's ability to respond to events like this, particularly given that there is potential for pandemics to become a recurring feature of life in the future? Are you still confident about the Council’s long term resilience to keep responding to the Covid-19 pandemic as it stretches into two years?

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