

**STEVENAGE DEVELOPMENT BOARD  
MINUTES**

**Date: Wednesday, 29 July 2020**

**Time: 10.00am**

**Place: Virtual (via Zoom)**

**Present:** Adrian Hawkins (Independent Chair)  
Matt Partridge (Chief Executive, Stevenage Borough Councillor)  
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)  
Dave Wells (Stevenage Borough Council)  
Annie Piper (Stevenage Borough Council)  
Councillor David Williams (Hertfordshire County Council)  
Patsy Dell (Hertfordshire County Council)  
Sarah McLaughlin (Hertfordshire County Council)  
Martha Lytton Cobbold (Knebworth House)  
Kit Davies (North Hertfordshire College)  
Malcolm Evely (Airbus)  
Claire Dicks (MBDA)  
Charlotte Blizzard Welch (Stevenage Citizens Advice Bureau)  
Ed Jordan (WENTA)  
Sarah Brierley (East & North Herts NHS Trust)  
James Latham (Stevenage Bioscience Catalyst)  
Zahid Latif (Catapult)  
Charles Amies (Homes England)  
Greg Westover (Legal & General)  
Simon Russian (Montagu Evans LLP)  
Andrew Fisher (Barton Wilmore)  
Graeme Collinge (Genecon)

**Start / End** Start Time: 10.00am  
**Time:** End Time: 12.05pm

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

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. He limited his opening comments as the Board had a packed agenda for the meeting.

## **2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

The Board was advised that apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Sharon Taylor (Stevenage Borough Council), Sally Ann Forsyth (Stevenage Bioscience Catalyst), Stephen Ward (Catapult), Sharon Brownlow (Catapult), Neville Reyner (Groundwork East), Steve Finlan (Wine Society), Briega Leahy (Herts Chamber of Commerce), Rupert Thacker (Hertfordshire County Council), Duncan Forbes (East & North Herts NHS Trust) and Karen Hillen (BEIS).

## **3 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST AND OPENNESS**

The Board received the latest conflicts of interest list.

## **4 MINUTES - STEVENAGE DEVELOPMENT BOARD - 3 JUNE 2020 / MATTERS ARISING**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Stevenage Development Board held on 3 June 2020 be approved as a correct record.

## **5 JOURNEY SO FAR - LATEST UPDATE**

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

Chris advised that there continued to be good progress across all of the projects in the build and planning stages; efficiencies were increasing as contractors adapted to safe working practices; the commercial market continued to be challenging (both with existing and potential tenants), although some positive progress had been made; and Town Centre footfall had been resilient and had responded well to re-openings, although significantly below pre-Covid-19 levels.

Chris provided updates on the North Block co-work centre scheme; the Town Square public realm project; and the Bus Interchange scheme. In relation to the latter, some enabling/remedial works were taking place, in readiness for commencement of the main contract.

Chris stated that the SG1 scheme was going through the planning process, with the hope that the application would be determined within the next few months. The completion date for the Queensway North project had been slightly delayed to early April 2021.

Chris informed the Board of the Accelerated Town Fund, whereby the Government had made available up to £1Million to towns included in the Town Fund. This funding needed to be spent by 31 March 2021, with the Government encouraging it to be spent on: new/improved parks and open spaces; improvements to town centres, including re-purposing empty shop units; and demolition or site remediation. Clearly, this was challenging around the deliverability of new projects and spend within the stipulated timescale. Hence, a proposal was being formed focussing on enhancing the public realm in Town Square, which in turn would free-up funding for the Garden Square, demolitions and converting existing vacant premises.

Chris concluded by referring to a potential scheme being developed with Reef (the Queensway North developers) for a new Innovation Centre in Marshgate to provide co-working space, office space and meeting space. The joint SBC/Reef team was working through the financial details of the scheme.

In response to questions:

- it was confirmed that the Innovation Centre would be functioning as an education/skills and office space hub, rather than as a bespoke science/technology centre; and
- the effect of Covid-19 had been limited on those schemes already on site. Bigger challenges could be faced regarding future schemes, with a risk of valid financial claims by developers should those contracts be disrupted/delayed by further outbreaks of the virus.

## **6 OVERVIEW OF THE PAST 7 WEEKS' WORK**

The Chair thanked everyone for their work over the past 7 weeks, and advised that the intention was for the production of a strong and rounded Town Investment Plan (TIP) bid. The Board was now at a stage where options/projects could be considered and prioritised.

The Chair considered it to be important that a central theme would be for the benefits of any changes being beneficial to the resident population of Stevenage, who would be most affected by the disruption caused whilst these changes were being implemented. The importance of the heritage of Stevenage as the UK's first New Town should be strongly emphasised. There was an opportunity for a transformational change for the town, which he hoped would be supported through the TIP submission.

The Chair thanked the SBC Regeneration Team for their hard work and dedication in supporting the process. Later in the meeting, the Board would see an ambitious plan and noting the potential to bid for up to £50Million of Town Deal funding that could be considered for Stevenage. The Chair noted that there could also be potential to build on the already successful science and technology businesses in the town.

Andy Fisher (Barton Willmore), assisted by Graeme Collinge (Genecon), provided an update on the TIP. Andy advised that, since the last Board meeting: work had taken place with the thematic leads and technical team to deliver outcomes, objectives and solutions to the challenges faced by Stevenage; further Government guidance had been published; further clarification had been received on the opportunity to bid for up to £50M; and a check and challenge session had taken place with the MHCLG's Town Deal Team.

Andy reminded the Board of the geography of Stevenage, and of the key outcomes and proposed projects within the four thematic work streams of Arts & Culture; Skills & Enterprise; Connectivity; and Regeneration.

In respect of check and challenge, Graeme explained that the MHCLG had established the Towns Hub, and had appointed a consortium including Arup, the Nichols Group, Grant Thornton, FutureGov, Savills and Copper Consultancy to provide consultancy support to the process. A Towns Co-ordinator from Arup had been appointed for the Stevenage TIP (who fulfilled a similar role for 10-12 other Town Deal bids).

Graeme stated that the check and challenge process allowed for the draft TIP document to be evaluated by a “critical friend” prior to submission and created an opportunity for the sharing of best practice. A key Government message was for the development of a “golden thread” for the TIP (through the Vision - Challenges – Outcomes – Objectives – Projects). There should be a strong evidence base; relationship of Stevenage to London should be emphasised; how the TIP responded to Covid-19; how the TIP responded to Clean Growth; project prioritisation; and alignment with wider Government investment/support.

Graeme commented that if the Board wished to bid for £50M then a “national” narrative needed to form part the bid, ie. its impact on areas beyond the boundaries of Stevenage. The check and challenge process had also resulted in the following feedback:

- Evidence on strengths/assets/challenges – more evidence around economic issues / accommodation, skills analysis, trend analysis;
- Specific needs – eg. night time, biotech, the Railway Station;
- More on town centre issues to justify regeneration type projects;
- Why high value jobs not taken by local people;
- Quantify the scale of opportunity – jobs / GVA etc.;
- Justify the spatial concentration of projects and how they inter-related and impacted on the wider town;
- Important to show evidence of consultation with the local community and how this had shaped the proposals;
- Get endorsement from local stakeholders;
- Provide more detail on existing partnerships with the business sector and how these had been reflected in the vision and project selection;
- The TIP would need to set out plans for future engagement; and
- Engage with other areas of Government that may be able to unlock complementary opportunities.

Graeme reported that those conducting the check and challenge process had pointed to the challenges of Economy and Regeneration as being key to the Stevenage TIP.

The Board noted that the check and challenge Frequently Asked Questions stated “in some exceptional circumstances, more than £25M may be considered” and “This will be limited to the most ambitious TIPs”. Projects would need to demonstrate transformational impact for the town, but also for the wider region and nationally. Such proposals would be subject to a wider level of scrutiny around Value for Money and deliverability. Councils would need to demonstrate that they had capacity and capability to deliver the TIP.

Graeme was of the view that, following discussions with BEIS, consideration should be given to submitting a £50M TIP bid.

Andy Fisher advised that the core narrative for the TIP bid should build on the evidence base in place throughout the themes; reflect the requirements from the check and challenge; and press the “regional and national” buttons for the Government, given the opportunity and ambition to bid for £50M. He felt that the Stevenage Town Deal core offered to the Government:

1. Supercharging Stevenage’s national and international business, capturing inward investment, spin-off opportunities, and improving access for local people by upping skills;
2. Levelling up the opportunities for Stevenage residents and raising aspirations in line with those in the rest of Hertfordshire; and
3. A town centre regeneration opportunity that was of such an impact that it excited at the national level.

## **7 INTRODUCTION / VISION FOR STEVENAGE TOWN INVESTMENT PLAN (TIP)**

Chris Barnes (Acting Assistant Director of Regeneration, SBC) referred to the original vision for Stevenage New Town, and considered that many of these values and aspirations continued to apply, in terms of innovation, connectivity and sustainability.

Chris commented that Stevenage’s growth had been strong over the past decade, although estimates suggested that this had fallen back compared with the wider Hertfordshire average. Work ethos was good in Stevenage (higher than both the Hertfordshire and England averages), although entrepreneurship levels were some way behind the Hertfordshire average. Stevenage residents typically had lower levels of higher order skills compared to the wider workforce within the town and filled lower paid occupations, with the high value jobs tending to be taken by a greater proportion of people travelling in from outside the Borough.

Chris further commented on the town’s ageing physical fabric, citing the Railway Station as a prime example in need of modernisation.

Chris referred to the inter-relationship of need in Stevenage between Business, residents and the Town Centre.

Andy Fisher reminded the Board of the vision for the Stevenage TIP, and considered that Stevenage Central would be key for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century New Town, including improvements to the east-west axis to the town, in terms of connectivity. He felt that the SG1, Queensway & Marshgate, and Stevenage Station Gateway projects were important in this regard.

## **8 TOWN INVESTMENT PLAN (TIP) - DRAFT INVESTMENT PLAN**

Graeme Collinge presented a Stevenage TIP projects long-list, with a total estimated cost of over £200M, broken down into potential funding sources. The Town Deal

element was circa £85M, and so it had been necessary to prioritise these into a short-list. This process had been carried out, with a first assessment comprising evidence of need/response to challenge; contribution to Vision, Core Values and Objectives; Wider Strategy Alignment; Deliverability confidence; Scale of match funding; and Economic benefits. A second check had involved an assessment against the national/regional impact and the Covid-19 recovery contribution.

Graeme introduced the short-list, and commented that even if the Stevenage TIP bid was for £50M, this was only a fraction of the estimated £200M required for the long-list of projects. The following schemes were included in the short-list (based on a £50M TIP bid):

- Stevenage Gateway enabling and Rail Station Pre-Development;
- Town Enterprise Centre;
- Cycling & Pedestrian Connectivity Programme, including Heritage Arts Trail;
- Stevenage Technology & Innovation Centre;
- National New Towns Heritage Centre;
- Sports and Leisure Hub at Town Centre Gardens;
- Marshgate – biotech office and key worker housing scheme;
- Digital Infrastructure – hyperfast broadband/acceleration of 5G – Stage 1 feasibility; and
- Gunnels Wood Road infrastructure improvements.

The following comments/questions were raised by Board Members on this item, and Item 7 – Introduction/Visions for Stevenage TIP:

- In respect of jobs for locals, given the national significance of some companies, many demand Level 7 (Masters) educational qualifications, and skilled employees are drawn from far and wide;
- Had the local MP been engaged or contributed to the emerging vision and ambitions?;
- There needed to be a focus on apprenticeship schemes;
- The Health Trust was very interested in supporting skills growth and apprenticeships for its future workforce;
- The improvements to the east-west axis would be important with the potential growth of Stevenage to the west of the A1(M);
- The Voluntary Sector could be invaluable in developing confidence of residents, through volunteering and possible apprenticeships. They would also be integral in bringing residents with the Board on the journey;
- A number of local companies had identified a need to attract local people to a career in their industries through “Generation Stevenage” – however, they required assistance and focus to formalise this drive with all stakeholders. Following debate, the Chair suggested that a discussion on this matter outside of the meeting be led by Andy Fisher, with representatives of MBDA Airbus, GSK, Bioscience Catalyst ;
- Where was the remainder of the Gunnels Wood Road Gyrotory funding expected to come from? There was perhaps some scope for an additional funding source to contribute toward the overall cost of the project;
- It was confirmed that TIP bids for £50M would not be disadvantaged, although

- there would be a need to ensure that the strengths of the a £50M bid would be better than a £25M bid;
- The Stevenage TIP bid should stress the town's importance as part of the London to Cambridge innovation corridor, which was important in economic terms nationally;
  - It was acknowledged that the short-list only contained £3M for skills-related schemes, but it was hoped that this would still be transformative, especially if the Government provided other grant funding;
  - Following on from the MHCLG check and challenge process, the short-listed projects would require further development and refinement, both in terms of narrative/content and cost estimates;
  - The Station Gateway area would require the support of Network Rail and a clear plan;
  - The Arts Centre needed to be in the Town Centre, although the Sports/Leisure hub could be distributed around the town – a question was raised as to how this related to the Leisure Hub, and whether this should take priority;
  - Clarifying the scope and focus of an Arts and Heritage Centre and whether there could be some reduction in cost;
  - Enhanced health and wellbeing could flow through many of the short-listed projects;
  - There was support for additional key worker housing/transport alternatives; and
  - The ambition shown in the short-listed schemes was welcome, and the support of MACE was offered in assisting in confidence building with the Government at the next stage of the process.

Tom Pike (Strategic Director, SBC) commented that the TIP bid needed to work for the totality of the Board. More work was required, particularly in the field of additional funding sources to support the Town Deal bid. A strategy for skills needed to be developed, in order to match local people with opportunities and equip them with skills. The deliverability of the Station Gateway ambition would only be achieved through positive engagement with key stakeholders.

The Chair felt that the short-list of projects was heading in the right direction, and that the team would continue to develop what had been presented. If Members of the Board wished to submit further questions/comments outside of the meeting, he would ensure that they were dealt with by the team.

## **9 NEXT STEPS**

Andy Fisher advised that the next steps regarding the production of a Town Investment Plan were as follows:

1. Refinement and detailing of shortlisted projects.
2. Write up of core narrative.
3. Drafting of first draft Town Investment Plan.
4. Second engagement session with Check and Challenge Group.
5. Ongoing engagement with thematic leads.
6. Consideration of first draft Town Investment Plan by Town Deal Board, ie. Stevenage Development Board.

**10 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

No other business was discussed.

**11 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Chair advised that the next meeting of the Board would be held at 2.00pm on Thursday, 3 September 2020. If required (and provisionally), the meeting after that would take place at 2.00pm on Wednesday, 23 September 2020.