

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Thursday, 10 March 2022

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Lin Martin-Haugh (Chair), Philip Bibby CC (Vice Chair), Myla Arceno, Stephen Booth, Adrian Brown, Michael Downing, Alex Farquharson, Chris Howells, Wendy Kerby, Sarah Mead, Robin Parker CC, Claire Parris, Loraine Rossati and Simon Speller.

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 6.46pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no apologies and no declarations of interest.

2 PART I DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

2. Towns Fund Business Case – Garden Square and Diversification of Retail Space

The following comments and questions were raised which the Assistant Director Regeneration responded to:

- The first phase of the project although temporary would be in place for 2 to 5 years. Public consultation was currently underway to gather as wide a range of ideas as possible for the first phase with the idea to introduce the types of leisure and cultural activities in the Garden Square that would be there once the programme had been fully delivered;
- The bus shelters could potentially be used for temporary art exhibitions in the early stages if they were structurally suitable and in an appropriate condition. Ideas were being sought through the consultation;
- Communications would ensure that it was clear to the public that this was the first phase and temporary only;
- Maintenance works had been carried out to the trees in the current bus station area but there was no proposal to remove them as part of this project;
- In relation to the questionnaire, in order for the consultation to be meaningful, schools and other organisations should be consulted to ensure all age groups were represented. Officers advised that this initial consultation had gone to a wide range of groups and organisations and around 220 responses had been received to date. A

further consultation would be carried out after the election on the design concepts following consideration of the responses;

- The majority of the land for the Garden Square project was owned by and would be the responsibility of Stevenage Borough Council;
- Officers advised that improvements were to be made to the access to the Westgate Multi Storey Car Park;
- Members suggested that an area for an elevated space for speakers or performances would be welcomed.

3. Towns Fund Business Case – Science Innovation and Technology Centre (SITEC)

The following comments/questions were raised which the Assistant Director Regeneration responded to:

- In terms of the location of the SITEC, officers confirmed that it was originally envisaged to be a town centre facility, although there was a suggestion to have an extension to the existing College site. The Development Board was considering the option of a standalone site and location for the Centre;
- The Centre was essential to the Town in order to grow the Town's own talent. However, it was important to note the importance of not just high level but also the lower level of engineers which were desperately needed to fill the skill shortage at this level. Officers agreed that there was a skill shortage at level 3 and above and there was also a significant difference between the earnings of those living in Stevenage and those working in Stevenage;
- In relation to the commercial sustainability, officers advised that a full business model would be required as part of the Full Business Case. The initial work showed that the facility would be viable and would include a mix of educational levels. Viability would be tight and would be considered fully as part of the next stage of the project also;
- It was noted that this would be a facility for adult learners as well as students and would serve the North Herts area although there would be an obvious advantage for Stevenage residents due to the location;
- In terms of improving the aspirations of the Town, it was agreed that it was important for these opportunities to be seen by as many people in Stevenage as possible and local students would be encouraged to take advantage of the Centre;
- Members agreed that it should be made clear that the centre was for the use of females as well as males as the numbers of females in the area of STEM employment was still under represented.

4. Towns Fund Business Case – Cycling and Pedestrian Connectivity (Including Arts and Heritage Trail)

The following comments/questions were raised which the Assistant Director Regeneration responded to:

- In relation to the map, the heritage trail seemed to be narrowly concentrated around the town centre and into the Old Town. It was suggested that the boundary should be widened and the sub-regional context should be considered. Officers advised that due to the scale of funding, additional funding was being looked at from both public funds and private developments to take this forward;
- Officers agreed that it was still important to note that there was a recognition that private car journeys still had a part to play although it would be essential to look at reducing the carbon footprint where possible;
- Officers agreed to look into a previous report into cycling connectivity and the cycling network to see if there were any learning points from the 2009 report.

3 URGENT PART I DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

None.

4 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

5 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Not required.

6 PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

None.

7 URGENT PART II DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

None.

8 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

CHAIR