

**STEVENAGE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
MINUTES**

Date: Thursday, 24 February 2022

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)
Councillor John Gardner (Stevenage Borough Council)
Tom Pike (Stevenage Borough Council)
Chris Barnes (Stevenage Borough Council)
Lucy King (Stevenage Borough Council)
Annie Piper (Stevenage Borough Council)
Gemma Hannant (Stevenage Borough Council)
Natasha Lee (Stevenage Borough Council)
Clare Fletcher (Stevenage Borough Council)
County Councillor Richard Roberts (Hertfordshire County Council)
Adam Wood (Hertfordshire LEP)
Norman Jennings (Hertfordshire LEP)
Martha Lytton Cobbold (Knebworth House)
Ed Jordan (WENTA)
Claire Dicks (MBDA)
Kasia Averall (Catapult)
Kit Davies (North Hertfordshire College)
Sian Carter (Homes England)
Karen Hillen (BEIS)
Kevin Cowin (Mace)
Greg Westover (Legal & General)
James Latham (Stevenage Bioscience Catalyst)
Sarah Brierley (Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust)
Mary Hartley (East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust)
Jennifer Godwin (East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust)
Hetty Thornton (Historic England)
Julie Newlan (University of Hertfordshire)
Piers Slater (Reef Group)

Start / End Start Time: 10.00am
Time: End Time: 11.52am

1 WELCOME AND CHAIR'S OPENING COMMENTS

The Board Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Board was advised that apologies for absence had been submitted by the following:

Stephen Ward (Catapult) – Kasia Averall substituting
Briege Leahy (Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce)
Patsy Dell (Hertfordshire County Council)
Colin Haigh (Hertfordshire County Council)
Charlotte Blizzard-Welch (Citizens Advice Bureau)
Steve Finlan (The Wine Society)
Keith Ellis (Airbus)
Karen Burness (Airbus)
Duncan Parsley (GlaxoSmithKline)
Will Rohleder (Reef Group)
Richard Whitehead (Aecom)

3 MINUTES - STEVENAGE DEVELOPMENT BOARD - 20 JANUARY 2022

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Stevenage Development Board held on 20 January 2022 be approved as a correct record.

4 CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND OPENNESS

The Board received the latest conflicts of interest list.

5 TOWN DEAL BUSINESS CASES TRANCHE 4

Chris Barnes (SBC Assistant Director: Regeneration) presented the Tranche 4 Town Deal Summary Business Cases for the Garden Square and Diversification of Retail Space; Science, Innovation & Technology Centre (SITEC); and Cycling & Pedestrian Connectivity (including Arts & Heritage Trail) projects.

(1) Garden Square and Diversification of Retail Space Project

Chris advised that this project comprised the delivery of a Garden Square and associated enabling works, as well as facilitating the diversification of retail through a range of activities. The scheme would be part funded by £3.75M from the Towns Fund and required a further £6.25M of match funding from private sector investment from other elements of the SG1 development. The lead organisations would be Mace and SBC, and outline planning permission had been granted as part of the SG1 masterplan.

Chris commented that the proposed scheme was fully consistent with the aims and objectives of the Stevenage Town Investment Plan (TIP). It was a complex business case due to numerous elements, but the key principles were simple, namely

- delivery of the Garden Square (Food & Beverage, informal leisure/culture space) and enabling works, and supporting diversification of Town Centre (activating the existing bus station, shopping centre & car park);

- enabling and enhancing delivery of the Garden Square; increasing the specification to include a water feature and high-quality space; land assembly/demolition enabling works; and
- diversification of Town Centre; activating existing bus apron pre-Garden Square, addressing shopping centre “back entrance” adjacent to the Garden Square & SG1 development.

Chris explained that it was intended to retain some flexibility of spend to support initiatives as they came forward. The potential exposure to traditional retail, and challenges to diversifying, was a key weakness/challenge. It was hoped to maximise the effectiveness of private investment, by enabling faster delivery with less risk, and by ‘filling in the gaps’ – similar to pedestrian/cycling links between new developments. There would also be a need to ensure any investment relating to privately owned assets was subsidy-control compliant and that the Accountable Body retained sufficient security.

Chris recommended that the Business Case be endorsed.

The Board debated the Business Case, during which Chris confirmed that the initial works to the existing bus station apron would be of a temporary measure, until such time as other elements of the SG1 development were in place. However, as this was likely to take a number of years, the temporary surface to the bus station apron would consist of good quality materials.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Garden Square and Diversification of Retail Space Project Business Case be endorsed and recommended to the Accountable Body (Stevenage Borough Council) for approval and noting that funding relating to Garden Square delivery (Mace) and shopping centre entrance/car park (Waxy Ltd.) would be subject to Accountable Body Agreement and legal sign-off as appropriate.

(2) Science, Innovation and Technology Centre (SITEC) Project

Chris advised that this project comprised the delivery of a new skills centre to support residents in obtaining higher skills levels/qualifications, and bridging the gap between further and higher education. The scheme would be part funded by £5M from the Towns Fund and required a further £6.25M of match funding, uncommitted at this stage. The lead organisations would be a Stakeholder Group to include North Hertfordshire College, the University of Hertfordshire, Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, Hertfordshire County Council, Stevenage Borough Council, and business representatives. Planning permission would be required when site was chosen.

Chris commented that the proposed scheme was fully consistent with the aims and objectives of the Stevenage Town Investment Plan (TIP). It was very much a strategic outline business case, and was at a more conceptual stage than most of the previous TIP projects. There was still a depth of work that was required to be undertaken to inform the strategic case and options. However, the potential benefits that could be delivered, and the close alignment of the project to the TIP, justified allowing more time for the project to emerge.

Chris explained that the strategic outline case looked primarily at delivering the project via two options – either on the current North Hertfordshire College campus or on a standalone site, for which a site-search would be required. It was therefore crucial that a robust governance model was put in place for driving the project forward over the next 6-12 months.

Chris recommended that the Business Case be endorsed.

The Board debated the Business Case and the following points were made:

- a number of Board Members were excited about the project, as the building would be a catalyst for transformation. What happened inside the building would be of paramount importance, as that would be all about people and skills development, thereby lifting ambitions and aspirations. There was a compelling business case for the project to be developed over the medium term;
- the full Business Case would need to include information regarding the number of learners, operating costs etc. Early indications showed that the project was viable. Some weighting criteria would need to be established over the coming months to evaluate site selection;
- it would be helpful if the University of Hertfordshire and all Further Education colleges across Hertfordshire could provide a county-wide endorsement and justification for the SITEC;
- it was good to see that skills in the health sector was referenced in the Business Case, as such skills would be needed for the future workforce. It would be especially important that the site was accessible for health professionals working at the Lister Hospital;
- the SITEC should not stand alone, but should utilise and complement the education and skills projects already in existence, such as company apprenticeship schemes;
- the endorsement of the University of Hertfordshire was noted. There was already close working between the University and North Herts College, and it was hoped that an expansion of that work through the SITEC would help to raise aspirations;
- the project would rely on cohesion between all of the partners in the Stakeholder Group, including the business sector. There would need to be a balance between the requirements of Government-funded skills initiatives and the needs of the business sector in an increasingly uncertain skills development landscape; and
- the aspirations of the Stevenage Bioscience Catalyst and Catapult for skills development, which should only be enhanced through the SITEC, were acknowledged.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Science, Innovation and Technology Centre (SITEC) Project Business Case be endorsed and recommended to the Accountable Body (Stevenage Borough Council) for approval and noting that project governance would be established and a Full Business Case would be developed over the next 9 months.

(3) Cycling & Pedestrian Connectivity (including Arts & Heritage Trail) Project

Chris advised that this project comprised the delivery of pedestrian/cycling connectivity initiatives, as well as integrating a Heritage Trail celebrating existing and new artworks/assets. The scheme would be part funded by £3.75M from the Towns Fund and required a further £3.5M of match funding, through a mixture of the private and public sectors. The lead organisations would be Stevenage Borough Council and Hertfordshire County Council (HCC).

Chris commented that the proposed scheme was fully consistent with the aims and objectives of the Stevenage Town Investment Plan (TIP). It aimed to enhance walking and cycling connections in key locations, and in delivering a complimentary heritage trail to celebrate the Stevenage's art & cultural assets. There was a strong policy basis for the interventions, through Stevenage as a Sustainable Travel Town and Stevenage Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan.

Chris explained that a Town Centre emerging masterplan for connectivity had been developed, with stakeholder engagement. A number of opportunities had been identified, with a series of quick wins to be delivered early in the programme. The Team would be looking to utilise the funding to deliver exemplars and to stimulate private investment.

Chris recommended that the Business Case be endorsed.

The Board debated the Business Case and the following points were made:

- it would be important that the cycling connections should link up with the cycleway improvements proposed as part of the Gunnelswood Road project;
- consideration should be given, as one of the "quick wins", to the establishment of a cycle hire scheme;
- steps should be taken to ensure the width of the new cyclepaths would be compliant with latest Government guidelines on cycleways;
- it was hoped that the Arts Trail would be co-created in conjunction with the community;
- costs permitting, an option should be considered to improve cycleway linkages to the Lister Hospital;
- the possibility of applying to the Department of Transport for approval of an e-scooter pilot scheme should be explored; and
- the opportunity to commence the enhancement of the cycleway network in the town and beyond was welcomed, and with this in mind, County Councillor Richard Roberts was requested to ask HCC to give serious consideration to further improvements to other areas of the Stevenage cycleway network.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Cycling & Pedestrian Connectivity (including Arts & Heritage Trail) Project Business Case be endorsed and recommended to the Accountable Body (Stevenage Borough Council) for approval and noting that further engagement on the scheme would be carried out with key stakeholders and the public.

[At this juncture, the Board Chair thanked the SBC Regeneration Team for their sterling efforts in producing the nine Town Investment Plan business cases on time, in readiness for submission to the Department of Levelling Up, Communities and Housing. He further thanked Councillor Sharon Taylor (SBC Leader), Matt Partridge (SBC Chief Executive) and Tom Pike (SBC Strategic Director), together with Board Members, for their assistance and support in this regard.]

6 REGENERATION PROGRAMME UPDATE

Gemma Hannant (SBC Regeneration Major Projects Officer) gave a presentation providing a progress update on Stevenage Town Centre Regeneration.

As an overview, Gemma advised that good progress was being made across the Regeneration Programme, with some key milestones achieved over the past month. However, rising construction costs and a limited labour supply continued to cause pressure for future projects.

Bus Interchange Project: practical completion should be within the next few weeks, with an official opening in May 2022. Board Members would be invited to an event to celebrate its completion.

Queensway North Project: full practical completion had been achieved on 9 February 2022. 65 out of 100 apartments had been let, with a high level of ongoing enquiries. 3 offices and 3 retail spaces were vacant, but were being actively marketed.

SG1 Project Enabling: Plot A (Swingate) – soft strip works had been completed and asbestos removal had commenced. The design for the new site hoardings (updated from the Bus Interchange hoardings) was being installed. Plot K (Southgate) – demolition of the former Police Station was complete, and contractors were progressing with the demolition of the garages site. The Team were working on a hoarding design for when the site was cleared and a permanent hoarding line was in place.

Railway Station Multi-Storey Car Park (MSCP): the SBC Executive had approved the final scheme. The Team was working with Huber and consultants to finalise the construction contract. It was hoped that works would start on site as early as May 2022, with a 40-50 week construction programme. Communications were being developed to advise Station users of alternative parking arrangements during the construction period.

Autolus (Marshgate) Project: the scheme was progressing well and was slightly ahead of schedule.

7 COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

Natasha Lee (SBC Regeneration Communications Officer) gave a presentation providing a progress update on Communications.

Natasha referred to communications and marketing for 2022/23, with regard to the

objective “share the story of the regeneration as change is delivered on the ground”. This would include:

- narrating the regeneration story for local people, with tangible benefits;
- demonstrating progress on the ground;
- positioning the Towns Fund projects as a key driver for enabling regeneration;
- raising the national and regional profile; and
- presenting a story of engagement and collaboration.

The Board supported Natasha’s wish to establish a Communications Sub-Group, involving the various communications leads from partner organisations. It was important that this Sub-Group could deal swiftly with any misinformation about the Regeneration Programme that appeared on social media channels.

Natasha drew attention to the themes of key pillars of regeneration to share the past and shape the future, which were Town Centre diversification; Transport and connectivity; Sustainability; Arts and culture; Businesses; Leisure; and Local jobs and economy.

A Board Member felt that the Local jobs and economy pillar should make more explicit reference to the “skills” element.

8 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(1) Levelling Up White Paper

Tom Pike (SBC Strategic Director) drew attention to the Government’s 12 Levelling Up Missions. For the Development Board, there were 3 areas of direct support or opportunity, namely:

- The UK Shared Prosperity Fund – Guidance was expected in the Spring, with allocations to be made available to district-level authorities for regeneration, skills and similar;
- Levelling Up bid round 2 – Expected to open up for bids from district-level authorities in the Spring. Previous rounds were for bids of up to £20Million and there was an opportunity for a Stevenage bid; and
- High Streets Taskforce – Stevenage had been identified as one of 68 places to benefit from advice and support from this Taskforce.

(2) Stevenage Station Gateway Area

Tom Pike (SBC Strategic Director) reminded the Board that the Stevenage Town Investment Plan highlighted the importance of the Gateway area. £500,000 of Towns Deal funding had been allocated to work on a masterplan for the area, and £6Million had been allocated for land release. Work on the masterplan would be a top priority for the year ahead. This would be supported by some longer-term planning for the land use in the area (the Area Action Plan).

Tom reported that SBC had undertaken consultation with residents and stakeholders on the vision for the area, and over 300 responses had been submitted. There had

been a positive response and support for the ambition to create a thriving area, a sense of arrival, sustainability, culture and heritage. A summary report would be prepared for the Board to share feedback and seek views at a meeting in the Spring.

(3) Stevenage High Street

Councillor Sharon Taylor (SBC) stated that the Council would be holding an open engagement consultation process on 5 and 12 March 2022. This process would be independently facilitated and would provide an opportunity for residents and businesses to present their views regarding the future of the High Street area.

9 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

To be advised – provisionally a date to be agreed in May 2022.