

**STEVENAGE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
MINUTES**

Date: Thursday, 29 February 2024

Time: 10.00am

Place: Virtual (via Zoom)

Present: Adrian Hawkins (Independent Chair)
Councillor Richard Henry (Stevenage Borough Council)
Councillor Jeannette Thomas (Stevenage Borough Council)
Matt Partridge (Stevenage Borough Council)
Tom Pike (Stevenage Borough Council)
Dave Wells (Stevenage Borough Council)
Annie Piper (Stevenage Borough Council)
Lucy King (Stevenage Borough Council)
Gemma Hannant (Stevenage Borough Council)
Natasha Lee (Stevenage Borough Council)
Ishbel Brierley (Stevenage Borough Council)
Daryl Jedowski (Stevenage Borough Council)
Ross Hughes (Stevenage Borough Council)
County Councillor Stephen Boulton (Hertfordshire County Council)
Forogh Ramani (Hertfordshire Growth Board)
Adam Wood (Hertfordshire LEP)
Norman Jennings (Hertfordshire LEP)
Donna Schultz (Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce)
Martha Lytton Cobbold (Knebworth House)
Charlotte Blizzard-Welch (Citizens Advice Bureau)
Jennifer Condon (WENTA)
Stephen Ward (Catapult)
Claire Dicks (MBDA)
Sian Carter (Homes England)
Kit Davies (North Herts College)
Steve Finlan (The Wine Society)
Greg Wilkinson (DLUHC)
Greg Westover (Legal and General)
Karen Burness (Airbus)
Dave Mudd (Stevenage Bioscience Catalyst)
John Lewis (Aecom)
Duncan Parsley (GlaxoSmithKline)
Daniel Trindall (Morgan Sindall)
Kate Asante (University of Hertfordshire)
Chris Scott (Muse)
Chris Le May (Mace Developments)
Isaac Prats (Arup)
Sarah Kersey (MBDA)
John Allen (MBDA)

Start / End Start Time: 10.00am
Time: End Time: 12.15pm

1 WELCOME AND CHAIR'S OPENING COMMENTS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially those attending for the first time.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted by the following:

Councillor Richard Roberts (Hertfordshire County Council) – Councillor Stephen Boulton substituting
Clare Fletcher (Stevenage Borough Council)
Ed Jordan (WENTA) – Jennifer Condon substituting
Gary Chamberlain (Morgan Sindall)
Tamim Choudhury (DLUHC)
Mairi Watson (University of Hertfordshire) – Kate Asante substituting
Sarah Brierley (Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust)
Mary Hartley (Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust)
Ian Langley (Viavi Solutions)
Will Rohleder (REEF Group)
Kevin Cowin (Mace)

3 MINUTES - STEVENAGE DEVELOPMENT BOARD - 16 NOVEMBER 2023

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Stevenage Development Board held on 16 November 2023 be approved as a correct record

4 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST AND OPENNESS

The Board received the latest conflicts of interest list.

5 MBDA UPDATE

Sarah Kersey (MBDA Site Manager) gave an update on the plans for redevelopment of the MBDA site on Gunnels Wood Road.

Sarah explained that MBDA had been located in Stevenage for 60 years. 2,945 employees occupied the site, of which 256 were early careers staff. MBDA had a 2024 recruitment target of a further 416 employees, and was investing over £100Million in site improvements over the next 5 years.

Sarah advised that there were currently 23 buildings on the site. She showed visuals for new environmental facilities planned between 2025 and 2027, as well as future plans for centres of excellence.

It was noted that work was ongoing with the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust to improve biodiversity on the MBDA site.

It was further noted that the University of Hertfordshire had a new business growth space for engineering/science students, and it was hoped that discussions could take place regarding the feeding of talent in this growth into MBDA. Claire Dicks

(MBDS) agreed to discuss this with Kate Asante (University of Hertfordshire) outside of the meeting.

6 STEVENAGE SKILLS

Norman Jennings (Hertfordshire LEP) introduced the item by reminding the Board that it had always had a positive focus on supporting the skills agenda in Stevenage, with the ambition of realising the aspirations of local people to benefit from the employment opportunities offered by the many businesses in Stevenage.

Norman referred to the Stevenage Works Partnership (including representatives from SBC, North Herts College, Job Centre Plus and the Department of Works & Pensions) which had been set up to drive forward the skills agenda. He referred to some of the highlights in this regard, including Generation Stevenage; the Stevenage Town Investment Plan/Towns Fund; Community Renewal Fund; UK Shared Prosperity Fund; the STEM Discovery Centre at Airbus; Mission 44; and the SITEC Phase 1 development at North Herts College.

Daryl Jedowski (SBC Co-operative Neighbourhoods Programme Manager) then gave a presentation of the Stevenage Works Skills Framework, highlighting the opportunities, ambitions and challenges, together with the response of stakeholders in building on the once in a generation regeneration activities to establish Stevenage as a centre of excellence in skills, with a focus on STEM careers for young people.

Daryl advised that the next steps were for the Framework to be considered by SBC's Environment & Economy Select Committee in late March 2024, and thereafter consolidating and aligning resources to move forward to Phase 2 of the Framework process, which would expand on the breadth and depth of interventions in Phase 1, including the development of proposals for further funding allocation to create superb local opportunities.

Councillor Richard Henry (SBC Leader) commented that the Skills Framework had been supported unanimously at a recent SBC Executive meeting, which demonstrated the importance that the Council placed on the development of young people in Stevenage. He thanked the Chair of the Stevenage Development Board, Adrian Hawkins OBE, for his input and support at this meeting. He added that the encouragement of young people to take an interest in STEM careers also featured significantly in the Council's recently approved Corporate Plan.

It was noted that the voluntary/community sector was seen as a key partner in the social inclusion process, and should also be encouraged to engage in employment opportunities in the town. The importance of careers other than those in STEM industries was also mentioned, as was the need to communicate the Framework to the public effectively, thereby helping to enable Phase 1 to be as successful as possible. Board Members provided positive and supportive comments to endorse the Framework.

7 GUNNELS WOOD ROAD

Tom Pike (SBC Strategic Director) reminded the Board about the Gunnels Wood 2040 Vision project, aimed at creating an ambitious vision setting out how this significant employment area should be enhanced as a state of the art, walkable, climate resilient and thriving innovation and employment hub.

Tom stated that the Gunnels Wood area was the “engine room” of Stevenage’s economy, containing over 250 companies, with 20,000 jobs, and a diverse mix of businesses, including global companies in defence, communications, healthcare and engineering, with a growing demand for life sciences.

Tom referred to key projects relating to the transformation of the Gunnels Wood Road area, including the relocation of HCC staff to a new hub at Farnham House / Robertson House, the expansion of the GSK campus (with 5,000 new jobs), and the creation of a new “Space Catalyst” at Airbus.

Tom advised that the Baseline Study was now complete, which had concluded that strong growth and proactive investment was positively impacting the area, but that there were key challenges in sustaining growth and retaining investment, especially in the need to improve local connectivity. Objectives would include putting skills first; providing attractive and sustainable places; providing a greener and richer local environment; creating connections; and celebrating the heritage, culture and innovation in Gunnels Wood.

Tom drew attention to proposed actions and interventions outlined in the Study, under the heading of Innovation; Connection; and Sustainability. He stated that the next step was for the Study to be shared with the Stevenage Industrial Area Board (SIAB), prior to wider engagement with businesses in June/July 2024, following which the top 10 actions would be developed and supported via the Stevenage Development Board.

Councillor Richard Henry (SBC Leader) hoped that the Study would pay regard to the possibility of improving cycling and walking access across Junction 7 of the A1(M).

Martha Lytton-Cobbold (Knebworth House) considered that reference should be made in the transport links section of the Study document to the National Express service available at the Bus Station for transportation to Luton Airport.

Board Members provided positive and supportive feedback to the work completed so far, and that the approach aligned with earlier feedback shared with local businesses. Claire Dicks (MBDA) indicated that she would convene a meeting of the Stevenage Industrial Area Board (SIAB) to incorporate any final comments into the document. Tom offered further meetings with any Board Members if that would be beneficial.

At this juncture, the Board Chair referred to the “Stevenage: A Catalyst for Good” event to be held at 11.30am on Thursday, 7 March 2024 at Knebworth House. He invited all Board Members and looked forward to seeing as many of them as possible at the event.

8 SITEC AND ENTERPRISE CENTRE

Tom Pike (SBC Strategic Director) introduced the item by drawing attention to the local skills challenge, with lower than County average median annual earnings in Stevenage and lower than County average pupil attainment. To help redress this imbalance, the Town Investment Plan ambition was for a brand new, purpose-built Enterprise Centre in the Town Centre, in order to provide Level 3, 4 and 5 courses in

science, technology, engineering and health subjects and a range of apprenticeship opportunities.

Tom advised that the proposed location of this facility had changed, and that partners were exploring an option to locate it in the Town Square, adjacent to the Co-Space building.

Kit Davies (North Herts College) advised that the building would be for courses relating to new Engineering, Construction and inter-related Sustainable Technologies, and would be Phase 2 of the SITEC project (Phase 1 being already located on the College site). It would accommodate 400-500 full time students on study programmes and T-levels; 50-70 students on HE level programmes; 100-150 apprentices on day-release programmes; and hundreds of adult learners on remote/part-time/evening learning. It would employ circa 50 staff in lecturing, technician and student support roles.

Kit showed some CGI visuals as to how the internal layout of the facility might look, including classroom, workshop and laboratory images. He reminded the Board that SITEC Phase 1 was open, with additional funding secured, providing a variety of facilities such as a GMP laboratory, VR Room, Immersive Suite, Healthcare suites, employer zone, and hi-spec Digital workshops.

Tom Pike advised that the College had secured £6.4Million of capital funding to upgrade facilities, to be spent by 31 March 2026 (restrictions including that the funding could not be used to purchase land nor pay for a rental). The Enterprise Centre in the Town Deal was unable to be delivered on the originally planned site. It was estimated that the cost could be up to £15.4Million for the Centre, although construction inflation costs had risen by 20% between 2021 and 2024. The SBC Regeneration Team and North Herts College were currently working with architects and consultants regarding a scheme for the new site, as well as engaging with potential funders. Chris Le May (Mace) also spoke to indicated that Mace were interested in exploring this option linked to the SG1 scheme.

Tom presented a series of recommendations to the Board, and it was **RESOLVED:**

1. That a plan be developed for the first phase, together with an overall business case (potential to create the first phase of the Enterprise Centre, creating 150 jobs, and at a cost of circa £1.5Million).
2. That North Herts College be invited to bid for local funding from the Hertfordshire LEP and other sources.
3. That central engagement take place with the Department for Education regarding potential further funding bids, and a senior stakeholder meeting be convened to make the case for additional funding.
4. That, in respect of design and market engagement, construction organisations be engaged to consider any further scheme efficiencies, designs or solutions.
5. That, in respect of industry collaboration, North Herts College be requested to hold sector engagement consultations in key portfolio areas to further inform and develop curriculum and infrastructure requirements.

9 SG1 MACE UPDATE

Chris Le May (Mace) provided an update on the SG1 Scheme, and commented that final demolition, levelling and piling works had commenced on Plot A (the former Swingate House site). Contracts were being finalised and pre-commencement planning conditions were being progressed.

It was confirmed that communications regarding the commencement of the Plot A project would be circulated in the next few weeks.

10 TOWNS FUND PROGRAMME UPDATE

Ishbel Brierley (SBC Regeneration Officer) gave an update on the Cycling and Pedestrian Connectivity project within the Towns Fund Programme. She commented that the proposal would include delivering an Arts and Heritage Trail; linking developments in the town centre by improving public realm connections; making improvements to 5Km of the Cycle network; and making improvements to 22 underpasses (including murals, improved lighting etc.).

Ishbel explained that the key workstreams and their budgets were Public Realm Connections (£1Million); Cycling Improvements and Infrastructure (£1.15Million); and Arts and Heritage Trail (£1.35Million). It was noted that the Cycling Improvements and Infrastructure element included the Stevenage Cycle Hire Scheme.

In answer to a question, it was confirmed that the location of the docking stations for cycles, and potential sponsorship opportunities, would be discussed with local businesses.

It was **RESOLVED** that the prioritisation of the Cycling and Connectivity project pot, including the progression of the Cycle Hire scheme, be approved.

Annie Piper (SBC Regeneration Manager) then gave a presentation on spend performance to date on the Towns Fund Programme. She requested Board endorsement to a spend re-profiling recommendation.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Towns Fund underspend from 2023/24 be moved to 2025/26, and it be noted that distinct pressures remained on the Enterprise Centre, SITEC and Diversification of Retail projects for 2024/25.

Lucy King (SBC Assistant Programme Manager) explained how Towns Fund Project Adjustment Requests (PARs) worked. There were two routes, namely Delegated (which allowed for changes to outputs and re-allocation of project funding up to 30%) and Standard (over the above delegation, but requiring DLUHC approval within 20 working days). A PAR Form must be submitted for either route. She provided some examples to the Board.

Lucy commented that a PAR Form would be required for the Enterprise Centre project, and that this required the endorsement of the Board. She reminded the Board that it had supported recommendations relating to the progression of the Enterprise Centre Scheme earlier in the meeting (See Minute 8) above.

It was **RESOLVED** that authorisation be given for the submission of a Project Adjustment Requests (PAR) Form for the Enterprise Centre project, regarding the change in location, with full details of the PAR being circulated for comment prior to submission.

11 **COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING UPDATE**

Natasha Lee (SBC Regeneration Marketing & Communications Manager) advised that communications work ahead of the Pre-election period on 15 March 2024 would include SG1 – early works; Sports and Leisure Survey results; Arts and Culture Murals Survey; updated the Stevenage Even Better Website with a focus on Skills and Life Sciences; the submission of Award applications; and the continuation of School and University visits.

12 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

(1) Annie Piper (SBC Regeneration Manager)

The Chair announced that Annie Piper (SBC Regeneration Manager) would be leaving the Council for pastures new on 8 March 2024. He thanked Annie for her superb work over the past few years in helping to develop the Town Investment Plan, and he wished her every success for the future.

(2) Duncan Parsley (GlaxoSmithKlein)

The Chair advised that this would also be Duncan Parsley's last meeting, as he was soon to be leaving GlaxoSmithKlein. He thanked Duncan for his support to the Board and wished him well for the future.

(3) Charity Abseil

Kit Davies (North Herts College) advised that, on 23 March 2024, he would be abseiling off the Lister Hospital to raise money for the Sunshine appeal for the Hospital's Intensive Care Unit, to enable a rooftop space to be created for critically ill patients. He provided details of his Just Giving Page and asked Board Members to sponsor him for the event.

13 **DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

It was noted that future Board meetings would take place (virtually via Zoom) on the following dates:

- Thursday, 23rd May 2024: 10.00am - 12.00pm
- Thursday, 11th July 2024: 10.00am - 12.00pm
- Thursday, 19th September 2023: 10.00am – 12.00pm
- Thursday, 21st November 2023: 10.00am – 12.00pm