

## STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

### ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 22 September 2020

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Virtual (via Zoom)

**Present:** Councillors: Michael Downing (Chair), Adam Mitchell CC (Vice-Chair), Doug Bainbridge, Sandra Barr, Stephen Booth, Adrian Brown, Jody Hanafin, Maureen McKay and Loraine Rossati

**Start / End** Start Time: 6.00pm

**Time:** End Time: 7.10pm

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors David Cullen and Simon Speller. Councillor Stephen Booth apologised for lateness.

There were no declarations of interest.

#### 2 **MINUTES - 10 MARCH 2020**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Environment & Economy Select Committee meeting held on 10 March 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### 3 **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Chair informed Members that the Committee would work with the Planning and Development Committee when considering crosscutting scrutiny studies and policy development. In response to a question, the Scrutiny Officer clarified that there was a small amount of money available for scrutiny work each year. The scrutiny budget would ordinarily be announced at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's annual report to Council.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Terms of Reference for the Select Committee, as agreed at the Annual Council meeting on 20 May 2020 be noted.

#### 4 **WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21**

The Select Committee considered its draft Work Programme for 2020/21. The Scrutiny Officer highlighted the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the work programme. Members were advised that individual items could be raised at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and directed to the Select Committee for consideration as one-off items. The Scrutiny Officer informed Members that there was scope for a combination of formal and informal meetings.

The following observations were made in respect of the Work Programme:

**Local Neighbourhood Centres** - Members had carried out site visits to selected neighbourhoods. It was agreed that further site visits would not add much value to the review but that lessons from site visits could inform the Cooperative Neighbourhoods approach. Members were advised to collate notes from meetings between Communities & Neighbourhoods Officers and Ward Members as documentary evidence for the review. It was noted that officers got a better understanding of issues in neighbourhoods through regular communication with Ward Members.

The Scrutiny Officer reported that he was in discussions with Assistant Director (Housing Development) regarding arrangements for a Committee briefing on regeneration plans for Neighbourhood Centres, update on Kenilworth Close Scheme, the Oval and future regeneration projects.

**Climate Emergency Strategy Action Plan** – Scrutiny of the Council’s Climate Emergency Strategy Action Plan would be the Committee’s major project for the next two years. The Chair highlighted the importance of tackling Climate Change and the urgency of reviewing the Council’s Climate Emergency Strategy Action Plan. Strategic Director (TP) confirmed that the draft Climate Change Strategy was approved at the September Executive meeting, to be followed by a Citizen’s Panel to review the draft strategy and action plan. The Strategic Director advised the Committee to consider focussing on one Climate Emergency theme at a time or selecting a few key areas to review. Members and Officers highlighted the importance of engaging Members of the Executive. Members stressed the importance of having up-to-date climate change data for the review. The Chair informed the Committee that he would take part in future meetings of the Implementation Group that would be created to help drive and monitor progress made against the Climate Change Action Plan.

**Impact of Covid-19** – A review of the impact of Covid-19 on economic development in Stevenage was considered to be urgent. The pandemic had a significant impact on finances of the Council, businesses and residents. Strategic Director (TP) confirmed that the Council received economic data pertaining to Covid19 from a variety of sources including the Department for Work and Pension, SBC Housing & Investment, CA Stevenage, Herts LEP and the Council-commissioned survey on the impact of Covid-19 on local businesses.

**Update on the 2016 Business Technology Centre Review** – to remain on the Work Programme.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the Select Committee’s Work Programme for 2020/21 be updated, as outlined above
2. That the Scrutiny Officer drafts a scoping document for scrutiny of the impact of Covid-19 on economic development in Stevenage and the Council’s

response

3. That the Scrutiny Officer presents the scoping document to Members at the November Committee meeting
4. That the Scrutiny Officer updates the Committee on arrangements for the briefing with Assistant Director (Housing Development)

## 5 **NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRES REVIEW**

The Committee received updates on the review of Neighbourhood Centres. Officers commented on the following issues that were identified at February 2020 site visits and the meeting in March:

### **Oaks Cross**

**Fly-tipping** – regular inspection regime was in place

**Planter Trees** – Ongoing discussions involving Ward Members and the SBC Arboriculture & Conservation Manager. An oak tree was scheduled to be planted this autumn in one of the empty planting areas at the front of the shops.

**Possible substance abuse** – Neighbourhoods wardens and Police to be advised to monitor the situation

**Exterior wall paint on flats/shops** – A Member confirmed that graffiti on the walls was not malicious. Course of action regarding the wall paint to be determined after ownership of the area in question had been established. Councillor Barr undertook to provide Councillor Bainbridge and other councillors with contact details of a reputable Stevenage graffiti artist. However, a simple repainting of the wall in one colour may suffice and be a lot cheaper than commissioning an artist.

### **St Nicholas**

**Security Fence** – It was acknowledged that the security fence was unsightly but it was serving its purpose. No updates relating to plans to improve the appearance of the fence were available

**Concrete Planters and notice board** – Planters and a notice board had been installed. Plans were in place to replace some of the slabs around the new planters, which had become damaged with paint spillages, and the Assistant Director, Stevenage Direct Services agreed to action this. Ward Members commended Community Development Officers, the local Neighbourhood Warden and other SBC officers who worked with resident groups to improve the area. A Member complimented the charity Waste Not Want Not for its plant nursery service. Members highlighted the challenges of carrying out volunteer work on community projects while ensuring Covid-security.

### **Oval**

**Planting area near the underpass** – Bulb planting was due to start imminently

**New signage and mural** – The Arts and Cultural Development Officer was working with local groups and young people for possible art projects near the Oval and St Nicholas neighbourhood centres. Members expressed concerns that they had not been consulted on the art project and that previously-identified mural designs were no longer under consideration.

**Dangerous damaged steps** – Members were worried that HCC appeared not to

consider the repairs a priority. Officers confirmed that consultations with HCC were in progress, and that HCC had now engaged with their contractor, Ringway, to investigate the area to see what measures could be taken to repair the broken steps

**Bedwell**

**Deep clean and renewal of paintwork** – SDS carried out an inspection on 4 September 2020. A programme of works to remove weeds, gum and paint stains was now in place, and the matter of the peeling paint on the car park railings had been raised with HCC to investigate

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the updates be noted
2. That Communities & Neighbourhoods officers liaise with Ward Members regarding new signage and murals in Martins Wood and St Nicholas

**6 URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

**7 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

**8 URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

**CHAIR**