

**STEVENAGE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
MINUTES**

Date: Thursday, 2 December 2021

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)
Dave Wells (Stevenage Borough Council)
Lucy King (Stevenage Borough Council)
Annie Piper (Stevenage Borough Council)
Patsy Dell (Hertfordshire County Council)
Adam Wood (Hertfordshire LEP)
Norman Jennings (Hertfordshire LEP)
Mary Sykes (Herts Chamber of Commerce)
Martha Lytton Cobbold (Knebworth House)
Charlotte Blizzard-Welch (Stevenage Citizens Advice Bureau)
Ed Jordan (WENTA)
Kasia Averall (Catapult)
Kit Davies (North Hertfordshire College)
Steve Finlan (The Wine Society)
Sian Carter (Homes England)
Greg Westover (Legal & General)
Karen Hillen (BEIS)
Karen Burness (Airbus)
Kevin Cowin (MACE)
James Latham (Stevenage Bioscience Catalyst)
Mary Hartley (East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust)
Hetty Thornton (Historic England)
Julie Newlan (University of Hertfordshire)
Richard Whitehead (Aecom)

Start / End Start Time: 10.00am
Time: End Time: 11.42am

1 WELCOME AND CHAIR'S OPENING COMMENTS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially those Board members who were attending for the first time.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

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

County Councillor Richard Roberts (Hertfordshire County Council)
Briege Leahy (Herts Chamber of Commerce) – Mary Sykes substituting
Stephen Ward (Catapult) – Kasia Averall substituting
Claire Dicks (MBDA)
Keith Ellis (Airbus) – Karen Burness substituting
Julie Newlan (University of Hertfordshire)
Will Rohleder (Reef Group)
Duncan Parsley (GlaxoSmithKline)

3 MINUTES - STEVENAGE DEVELOPMENT BOARD - 14 OCTOBER 2021

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Stevenage Development Board held on 14 October 2021 be approved as a correct record.

4 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST AND OPENNESS

The Board received the latest conflicts of interest list.

5 TOWN DEAL BUSINESS CASES - TRANCHE 2

By way of introduction, Chris Barnes (SBC Assistant Director: Regeneration) advised that the Tranche 1 Town Deal Business Cases for the Gunnels Wood Road Infrastructure project and Marshgate Biotech Centre project had been approved by the Accountable Body (Stevenage Borough Council's Executive) on 17 November 2021. These Business Cases would be submitted to Department for Levelling Up, Communities and Housing's Towns Fund Team in the near future.

Chris then presented the Tranche 2 Town Deal summary Business Cases for the Enterprise Centre and Station Gateway projects, both of which had been subject to an Officer sift and consideration by an Assurance Panel.

(1) Enterprise Centre Project

Chris advised that this project aimed to generate employment space of circa 57,000 square feet in the Town Centre, adjacent to the Queensway North development. The scheme would be part funded by £4M from the Towns Fund, and required a further £8M of uncommitted match funding, including from the private sector. The lead organisations would be Reef, supported by SBC and Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership. The site was currently in private ownership, but Reef/UBS had an option agreement.

Chris commented that the proposed scheme was fully consistent with the aims and objectives of the Stevenage Town Investment Plan (TIP), as the current concept was life science sector focussed, and enabled greater interface between Stevenage's technology business cluster and the town centre, making it more visible and creating

activity in the town.

Chris explained that the project was at an earlier stage than many of the other TIP schemes and, due to the funding gap, approval would be conditional (ie. no funding drawdown would take place until the business case was updated over the months ahead). A workshop would be required with specialist legal advice on a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) entity, Accountable Body Agreement and subsidy. A virtual road map would be prepared up to project delivery. An emphasis would be placed on the market opportunity for this scheme, as viability tests had shown residential use or mixed commercial use to be less viable.

Chris recommended that the Business Case be endorsed in principle, with conditions, and the understanding that the Board would be updated when the conditions had been met.

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

- the project was seen as a positive contribution to the growing Stevenage life sciences cluster, which was the third largest cell and gene therapy cluster in the world and the largest in Europe. All other cities in the Top 12 were in the USA. Companies now looking to set up life sciences in the UK were asking for Oxford, Cambridge or Stevenage;
- the town centre location complemented the existing out of town life sciences facilities;
- the scheme was complex due to the level of investment required, but was an opportunity to raise aspirations in the town. If delivered well, with good social space, the scheme could provide a positive cultural and social impact;
- the Business Case should make reference to the Skills Bill currently going through Parliament, which it was hoped would strengthen links between educational skills agendas and business/industry;
- the location of the Enterprise Centre would assist in breaking down the physical divide between the Gunnels Wood industrial area to the west of the railway line and the largely residential nature of Stevenage to the east of the railway line; and
- it was hoped that the Centre's location would provide a positive impact on the night-time economy of the town.

In response to a query regarding a mention of housing outputs in the Business Case, Chris advised that he would double check this and amend as appropriate, as there were no direct housing outputs arising from the scheme.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Enterprise Centre Project Business Case be endorsed in principle, with conditions, and recommended to the Accountable Body (Stevenage Borough Council) for approval.

(2) Station Gateway Project

Chris advised that this project was for the delivery of a Multi-Storey Car Park (MSCP) as part of a sustainable transport interchange on the Stevenage North railway car park. The project was being led by SBC and was funded through £6.5M

from the Towns Fund and £3.5M direct match funding from SBC and Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership. The land was owned by SBC and the match funding/investment element would be subject to a separate business plan to be considered by the decision making committees of SBC. The project was fully consistent with the Stevenage Town Investment Plan and was a key first phase to progress the wider Stevenage Gateway scheme without prejudicing the Area Action Plan process.

Chris recommended that the Business Case be endorsed, in the knowledge that funding would be made available when all match funding approvals were in place.

Discussion arose as to improving the physical connection between Gunnels Wood Road and the Town Centre via the Station Gateway. Chris explained that this would not be achieved through this project, but that it was hoped that improvements could be made in the future, in conjunction with Legal & General (the owners of the Leisure Park). Greg Westover (Legal & General) provided an update, and that there would need to be consideration as to how this would integrate with the wider Station Gateway project, including potential improvements to the public realm links between the town centre and Gunnels Wood Road area.

Other points made by the Board included:

- in terms of wider outcomes, it was hoped that community use and tree planting could provide economic and environmental benefits to the area;
- the quality of design of the MSCP was very important, as it needed to look attractive as well as being functional;
- it was pleasing that the design would incorporate future increased capacity for electric vehicle charging and cycle parking, although it was recognised that the majority initial use would be for the parking of fossil fuel powered vehicles; and
- it was acknowledged that complementary improvements to Stevenage Railway Station would be required at some point in the future to provide a welcoming aspect for visitors to the town through the Gateway area.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Station Gateway Project Business Case be endorsed, and recommended to the Accountable Body (Stevenage Borough Council) for approval.

6 TOWN DEAL BUSINESS CASES TRANCHES 3 AND 4 - UPDATE ON SECOND HALF OF PROJECTS

Annie Piper (SBC Regeneration Programme Manager) updated the Board on Tranches 3 and 4 of the Stevenage Town Deal Business Cases, as follows:

Leisure Facility project: the feasibility had been completed, with costings, business plan and accommodation schedule. A draft Business Plan and Business Case had been produced. Engagement had been conducted with over 1,200 people about current activity levels and what they would like to see in the future.

New Town Heritage Centre: engagement sessions had been held with over 40 attendees and a report had been produced capturing the feedback. Officers were

working closely with Mace to continue feasibility works as part of the Civic Hub acceleration work, including costs and an indicative accommodation schedule. A draft Business Plan and Business Case were currently in production.

Science, Innovation and Technology Centre: the scope and scale of the curriculum had been completed, as had the draft spatial requirements. A site options appraisal was ongoing, and the Board's Skills Sub-Group was to meet before Christmas to review options.

Diversification of Retail (Garden Square): Officers were working with Mace on possible options to accentuate the design of Garden Square to include a possible water future. Architects had been appointed for the design of the remaining bus apron area when this was removed.

Cycling, Pedestrian and Heritage Trail: there had been engagement with key cycling community groups and a draft scoping document had been produced. A draft Cycling Masterplan had also been produced, as well as a design for a proposed heritage plaque.

The Team was thanked for keeping pace with a very challenging programme for the production and approval of the Town Investment Programme projects. It was noted that a primary focus in the New Year would be on communicating details of the various projects to the public, and responding to questions raised on the various social media forums operating within the town. Enhanced communications could also include the use of live imagery on current construction projects, increased video content and QR codes.

7 REGENERATION PROGRAMME UPDATE

Chris Barnes (SBC Assistant Director: Regeneration) gave a presentation providing a progress update on Stevenage Town Centre Regeneration.

As an overview, Chris advised that since the last Board meeting works had commenced on two additional sites. The projects in design/feasibility stage would be likely to be affected by increased price of materials and supply chain risks. There had been strong stakeholder support across the town, and the aim was to capitalise on current momentum with strong communications and marketing messages over the coming months.

Bus Interchange Project: the ancillary building and canopy works were now in advanced/final stages and the external cladding had been completed. New paved public areas were shortly to be completed. Highway works were on track, with completion due in early February 2022. Works on a new pedestrian connection between the Leisure Centre and Mecca Bingo were underway and scheduled for completion before Christmas.

Queensway North Project: as of 26 November 2021, 26 residences had been occupied, with 39 leases completed. There had been a 50% conversion rate of viewings to bookings. Practical completion of Block C was expected within the next few weeks. Communications work was planned with a number of the new tenants.

There were 3 remaining commercial vacancies.

SG1 Project Enabling: Plot A (Swingate) – the car park had been closed as archaeological survey works had begun. The internal strip out of Swingate House was due to commence in December 2021, with demolition starting in the New Year. Due to its prominent location, the demolition was generating more public interest than previous ones. Plot K (Southgate) – demolition works were well underway. This had included demolition of the former Police Station (the crest on that building was retrieved and returned to Hertfordshire Constabulary). The plan was to move on to demolition of the garage block once the current set of works were completed.

Marshgate/Autolus Project: the sale had been completed and works had commenced on site. The existing car park had been removed and preparatory groundworks were close to completion. Piling was due to commence on 6 December 2021. A live feed of the construction site was available for viewing.

In relation to the archaeological dig on the Swingate Car Park, Board members felt that this was an excellent opportunity to communicate this to the public, as well as providing a chance for the community and young people to get involved seeing it in action or even assisting with the excavation. It was confirmed that a record of anything significant discovered during the excavation would be made public and provided to Historic England.

8 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Richard Whitehead (Aecom) commented on the fantastic progress that had been made on the whole package of Town Centre improvements, both on existing projects and those in the pipeline. He once again emphasised the importance of robust and regular communication with the public to ensure that they were kept up to date with the progress on developments.

9 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was noted that future Board meetings would take place on the following dates:

- Thursday, 20th January 2022: 10.00am – 12.00pm
- Thursday, 24th February 2022: 10.00am – 12.00pm