

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
STEVENAGE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
(FORMERLY STEVENAGE TOWN FUND BOARD)

MINUTES

Date: Thursday, 19 September 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)
Ishbel Ross (Stevenage Borough Council)
Lucy King (Stevenage Borough Council)
Natasha Lee (Stevenage Borough Council)
Ross Hughes (Stevenage Borough Council)
Gemma Hannant (Stevenage Borough Council)
Dave Wells (Stevenage Borough Council)
Kevin Bonavia MP (Stevenage Constituency)
Charlotte Blizzard-Welch (Citizens Advice Stevenage)
Claire Dicks (MBDA)
Steve Finlan (Wine Society)
Chris Scott (Muse)
Martha Lytton Cobbold (Knebworth House)
Stephen Chown (Vincent and Gorbing)
Mairi Watson (University of Hertfordshire)
Mary Hartley (Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust)
Kit Davies (North Herts College)
Daniel Trindall (Morgan Sindall)
Ben Lee (Beryl)
Ash Trowe (Beryl)
Ed Jordan (WENTA)
Forogh Rahmani (Hertfordshire Growth Board)
Tamim Choudhury (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government)
Norman Jennings (Hertfordshire Futures)
Kevin Cowin (Mace Developments)

Start / End Start Time: 10.00am
Time: End Time: 12.00pm

1 **WELCOME AND CHAIR'S OPENING COMMENTS**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited Kevin Bonavia MP to address the Board.

Kevin Bonavia MP responded with appreciation for the warm welcome. He acknowledged Stevenage's ongoing efforts and expressed his commitment to advocating for the town in Parliament. He emphasised his intent to fully understand the various initiatives taking place in Stevenage to effectively represent it in government.

2 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted by the following:

Clare Fletcher (Stevenage Borough Council)
Councillor Stephen Boulton (Hertfordshire County Council)
Adam Wood (Hertfordshire Futures)
Stephen Ward (Catapult)
John Lewis (AECOM)
Ian Langley (Viavi Solutions)
Will Rohleder (Reef Group)

3 **MINUTES - STEVENAGE DEVELOPMENT BOARD - 23 MAY 2024**

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Stevenage Development Board held on 23 May 2024 be approved as a correct record.

4 **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST AND OPENNESS**

The Board received the latest conflicts of interest list.

5 **STEVENAGE CYCLE HIRE SCHEME - BERYL**

The Board received a presentation from Ben Lee from Beryl Bikes regarding the forthcoming launch of the Stevenage Cycle Hire Scheme.

Ben introduced Beryl as the UK's leading operator of shared sustainable transport, offering pedal bikes, e-bikes, e-cargo bikes, and e-scooters across the country. He advised that Beryl designed and manufactured its own vehicles in the UK and had attracted several partnerships with local councils.

The Board heard of the significant impact of Beryl's services, having facilitated nearly 7 million journeys and saving 729 tonnes of CO2 emissions to date. Ben Lee emphasised the scheme's potential to shift travel behaviour by providing a viable alternative to private car use, noting that around 25% of Beryl journeys had replaced car trips.

The Board were advised that the Stevenage scheme would utilise designated parking bays rather than docking stations, with an app-based system for users to unlock and park bikes. Compliance was enforced through a £10 out-of-bay fee, and Ben reported that over 95% of users adhered to parking regulations. The app also showed bike availability and battery levels for e-bikes, allowing users to plan their journeys conveniently.

The scheme's goal was to ensure that 90% of Stevenage's population was within a five-minute walk from a bay, facilitating a modal shift towards cycling and reducing car dependency. Ben also outlined Beryl's partnerships with businesses, offering discounted memberships and promoting sustainable commuting practices. He concluded with an example of Beryl's work with new developments, funded through Section 106 agreements, which provided residents with access to the bike share system, reducing the need for private car ownership from the outset.

In response to a number of Board Member questions, Ben responded that:

- It would be possible to extend the scheme to Knebworth if there was a business case to support such an extension, though operational concerns regarding redistribution were highlighted.
- Beryl worked with organisations such as the Department for Work and Pensions to offer access to job seekers.
- Beryl continuously analysed out-of-bay data and had the flexibility to expand bays where necessary.
- Education around safe bike usage was a priority for Beryl.
- Beryl worked with Bikeability and provided access to bikes for adults and children participating in the scheme.

Board Members praised the social impact of the scheme and suggested a further discussion at an upcoming Stevenage Industrial Area Board meeting.

The Chair, on behalf of the Board, thanked Ben for his presentation.

6 **STATION GATEWAY MASTERPLAN - MUSE**

The Board received a detailed presentation from Chris Scott from Muse regarding the Station Gateway Masterplan and outlining the development framework.

Chris advised the Board that Muse, part of the Morgan Sindall Group, specialised in placemaking and urban regeneration. They had 40 years of experience and were currently working on multiple projects across the UK, many in partnerships with Local Authorities. Chris informed the Board that Muse's approach was community-focussed, ensuring that developments met local needs and created lasting positive impacts.

The Board were informed that Muse worked closely with the English Cities Fund, which was a partnership between Homes England, Legal & General and Muse. This joint venture supported large-scale urban regeneration with an equity fund of over £200 million and was chaired by Sir Michael Lyons.

The Board heard that Muse was collaborating with Stevenage Borough Council to design the Station Gateway masterplan project, bringing lessons from other successful regeneration projects, such as Salford Central and Stockport Exchange showcasing their approach to transforming industrial and underutilised areas into vibrant, sustainable public spaces with mixed-use developments, public transport improvements, and green initiatives, such as the largest living wall in Europe. Chris

advised that Muse were involved in 38 projects, with 16 currently on site, including over 2,400 homes, nearly 40% of which were affordable.

The Stevenage Station Gateway project aimed to create a new arrival experience, aligning it with the intended SG1 Boulevard. The aspiration is for an enhanced station area experience which would feature entrances on both the east and west sides of the railway tracks, enhancing connectivity between the town centre, the leisure park, and beyond.

The Board heard that Muse emphasised long-term social impact, driven by community engagement, to ensure developments met local needs. Priorities included affordable housing for key workers, cultural and leisure improvements, and economic growth, aligning with Stevenage's transformation goals.

The redevelopment sought to foster a sustainable, inclusive town centre, enhancing public spaces and supporting the town's status as a growing economic hub. Focus areas included quality design, and improving the east-west pedestrian flow across the railway.

Chris concluded with a project timeline, indicating the goal to complete the initial master-planning work in the months ahead. The design finalisation process could take approximately 12 to 18 months, incorporating stakeholder engagement and consultation.

Board Members praised the presentation from Muse and expressed support for the project. They were particularly pleased to hear the commitment to social value and expressed enthusiasm for the approach to community needs.

Councillor Henry, Leader, Stevenage Borough Council emphasised the importance of developing cultural and leisure facilities in Stevenage, confirming the Council's commitment that should a new theatre come forward, it would be built prior to the repurposing of the existing one.

Board Members highlighted the importance of the leisure park to the Town and inquired about maintaining pedestrian routes amidst the existing car parking. In response, Chris acknowledged the significance of integrating pedestrian and cycling routes through it and mentioned collaboration with the owners of the leisure park.

In response to a comment regarding existing art installations, Chris affirmed the need to modernise art installations while honouring historical contributions. The Leader, Stevenage Borough Council added that Cllr Lorraine Rossati, the Council's Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Wellbeing, was actively working with the Council's regeneration team to integrate culture and art into the development plans.

The Chair concluded the discussion by thanking Chris for the presentation and expressed eagerness to work collaboratively to ensure the development benefits local residents and businesses in Stevenage. He welcomed ongoing updates at future meetings.

7 **HERTFORDSHIRE ECONOMY STRATEGY CONSULTATION**

The Board received a presentation from Norman Jennings from Hertfordshire Futures.

Norman introduced Hertfordshire Futures (HF), formerly known as Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, which rebranded in July 2024. HF had been tasked with producing a new economic strategy for Hertfordshire.

The Board heard that the previous Hertfordshire Strategic Economic Plan, developed in 2013 and updated in 2017, had helped to secure around £250 million in funding for various projects, including those in Stevenage. The new economic strategy would cover a longer-term outlook, addressing the county's needs for the next decade and beyond.

Addressing the current economic status, Norman advised the Board that Hertfordshire's economy was valued at approximately £42-43 billion GVA, making it a significant contributor to the national treasury. The county had seen notable growth in key sectors like life sciences, advanced manufacturing, and film and TV, contributing an increase of around £10 billion over the past 7-8 years.

The Board heard of the current challenges faced including issues such as labour and skills shortages, insufficient commercial property availability, and that pockets of deprivation persisted, despite the overall economic growth. The county's east-west connectivity remained problematic, impacting transport and commuting patterns.

Norman advised the Board that the future strategy would address emerging trends such as AI and automation, the impact of an ageing population, climate change adaptation, and broader geopolitical uncertainties.

The Board were informed that HF was currently engaging with a diverse range of stakeholders, including local authorities, businesses, health organisations, and voluntary sectors.

A survey had been launched to gather input from the public and stakeholders, which would inform the development of the draft economic strategy.

The draft strategy would be prepared over the next six weeks, followed by a consultation phase. A final version was expected to be completed in the first quarter of 2025.

The Chair thanked Norman for the informative presentation and encouraged members to save the date for an upcoming event on 24 October, where Hertfordshire Futures would present the economic strategy to independent business owners and local entrepreneurs at Knebworth House.

8 **REGENERATION PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Board received an update on the Regeneration Programme from the Council's Regeneration Team:

- Ishbel Ross, Senior Regeneration Officer
- Ross Hughes, Regeneration Manager
- Dave Wells, Assistant Director, Regeneration
- Lucy King, Regeneration Programme Manager
- Gemma Hannant, Regeneration Manager
- Natasha Lee, Regeneration Marketing and Communications Manager.

Towns Fund Projects

- **Cycling & Pedestrian Connectivity (inc. Arts & Heritage Trail)**

Sish Lane Underpass

Following previous underpass projects, such as Broadhall Way and Monkswood Way, plans were in place to commence work on the Sish Lane underpass based on the theme “Old to New”. This work would enhance the cycling and walking experience, aligning with a broader goal to improve 22 underpasses, with this being the 7th to be completed.

The project involved local street artists painting murals to create high-quality artwork, and formed part of the Arts and Heritage Trail. This trail aimed to showcase the town’s public art and heritage features, supported by signage for wayfinding.

Cycle Hire Scheme

The scheme involved over 40 barrel bays for cycle hire across Stevenage, with line-marked and docked bays. The project remained flexible, with opportunities to add more bays after the launch.

The project connected with public realm improvements, including two new colourful murals in Market Square, along with new pedestrian footpaths, lighting, and greenery to be completed by the end of 2024.

The Leader, Stevenage Borough Council, expressed interest in the size of the cycling network, currently estimated at 45 kilometres but potentially larger, and requested updated data.

Martha Cobbold, Knebworth House, congratulated the team on their progress.

- **Sports & Leisure Hub**

The Stage Two Design Phase began in July 2024, working with Morgan Sindall and architect Faulkner Brown. The new leisure hub would replace the current swimming pool, which would remain open during construction. The leisure hub would include a community café overlooking Town Centre Gardens.

Stage Three of the design, focussed on dimensions and structure, was expected to commence by early November 2024. The team had held productive conversations with Hertfordshire County Council regarding accessibility and infrastructure.

Daniel Trindall, Morgan Sindall, added that building services, civil, and

structural strategies were being finalised. They aimed to present final design plans at the next board meeting.

- **SITEC & Enterprise Centre**

SITEC

There was ongoing collaboration with stakeholders to expand Stevenage's capacity for life sciences and STEM education. This project was anticipated to play a crucial role in supporting the thousands of new jobs expected in the region.

The Chair noted that the project aligned with the Government's investment focus, and asked Kevin Bonavia MP for assistance in advocating for the project. .

Enterprise Centre

Phase One - This involves the refurbishment of office units in Stevenage Town Centre in partnership with Co-Space and UBS. The project had received planning permission and construction was expected to begin in early October 2024, with completion targeted for February 2025. This would support the influx of over 150 new workers, aligning with Stevenage's growing workforce demands.

- **Towns Fund Programme Management**

Summary of programme progress

The Towns Fund programme comprised of nine major projects. Payments from Central Government were provided every six months based on performance reporting. Stevenage was one of only seven towns to receive funding in the last payment window, reflecting the progress made.

- Gunnels Wood Road Infrastructure Project: £1 million allocated, ongoing collaboration with Reef and utilities for project delivery.
- Marshgate Biotech Centre: This was now operational following the completion of the Autolus headquarters in 2023.
- Diversification of Retail: This included the development of the Event Island, managed by the Town Centre Management team, with further enhancements in progress.
- New Towns Heritage Centre: Design was advancing as part of the Public Sector Hub. The Museum Team was actively involved in planning how the space would be used.

Tamim Choudhury, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government asked for milestone updates on the New Towns Heritage Centre. Gemma Hannant, Regeneration Manager, spoke of the complexity of the building and ongoing work with partners such as Mace, and offered more detailed updates at future meetings.

Financial forecast

Some funding have been re-profiled to 2025/26 due to revised delivery timescales. The reallocation was within the programme's flexibility as granted by MHCLG guidance.

The Chair expressed confidence in the Council's management of the funds and the overall progress of the projects and sought the Board's endorsement, which was given with no objections.

- **Communications & Marketing**

- **Past Activities**

Active Travel Campaign: Over the summer, a campaign promoting active travel was run across social media, particularly on Instagram, leveraging the town's strong connectivity to encourage residents to use sustainable transport options.

Beryl Bikes Updates: Communications had been shared with the community ahead of the official launch of the Beryl Bikes scheme.

Market Square: Updates had been provided on operational matters such as car park access, as well as showcasing new urban artworks designed to revitalise the area.

SG1 Updates: Operational updates, such as car park closures, had been shared to facilitate the neighbouring site's development.

- **Current and Future Activities**

Sish Lane Mural and Market Square: Updates would continue to be shared as these projects moved forward, with an unveiling of the newest mural coming soon.

Beryl Bikes Launch Event (30 September): An event was planned for the launch of the Beryl Bikes scheme at Daneshill House, which the Chair, Adrian Hawkins, and all Board Members were invited to attend and engage with Beryl representatives regarding the corporate aspects of the scheme.

Awareness Raising & Events: Plans were in place for upcoming events, including participation in the UK REEF conference in 2025.

Christmas Advent Calendar: Two versions of an advent calendar were being planned—one for Instagram and another for LinkedIn.

- **October Focus**

A communication campaign was underway to reinforce to the community the current regeneration programme. This included highlighting the creation of a vibrant town centre, job opportunities, skills development, and attracting new investors. The goal was to bring attention to the foundational principles of the regeneration programme.

- **Gunnels Wood Road Study**

Due to time constraints, Tom Pike, Strategic Director, Stevenage Borough Council suggested deferring this item. He acknowledged the importance of the Gunnels Wood Road project but offered to circulate the slide deck to Board members and postpone to enable a more detailed discussion at the next meeting.

- **SG1**

Councillor Richard Henry, Leader of Stevenage Borough Council was pleased to report to the Board the positive news that Stevenage Borough Council and Mace were working together to commence the SG1 scheme. Both parties had signed legal documents to allow works to begin on the site in early October 2024.

The Board was advised that the build would take approximately two and a half to three years to complete with residents moving into the homes from 2026.

It was noted that the Swingate Car park would be closed from 7th October for the duration of construction.

9 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was none.

10 **DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

It was noted that the next Board meeting would take place (in person, venue TBC) on the following date:

- Thursday, 21 November 2024 10.00am – 12.00pm

CHAIR