

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

STEVENAGE DEVELOPMENT BOARD (FORMERLY STEVENAGE TOWN FUND BOARD) MINUTES

Date: Thursday, 6 March 2025
Time: 2.00pm

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

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised that he had agreed to accept additional items relating to the Guinness Trust Development and the Government's Devolution Plans and Local Government Reorganisation to be taken at the meeting.

2 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted by the following:

Clare Fletcher – Stevenage Borough Council
Councillor Richard Roberts – Herts County Council
Martha Lytton Cobbold – Knebworth House
Ed Jordan – WENTA
Claire Dicks – MBDA
Steve Finlan – The Wine Society
Keith Ellis – Airbus
Samuel Attack – Stevenage Bioscience Catalyst
Mairi Watson – University of Hertfordshire
Ian Langley – Viavi Solutions
Piers Slater – Reef Group
Will Rohleder – Reef Group

3 **MINUTES - 21 NOVEMBER 2024**

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Stevenage Development Board held on 21 November 2024 be approved as a correct record.

4 **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST AND OPENNESS**

The Board received the latest conflicts of interest list.

5 **SG1 - PHASE 1A UPDATE**

Guinness Partnership Trust

The Chair welcomed Julian Howarth and Denise Mulligan from the Guinness Partnership Trust to the meeting.

An update was given in relation to the redevelopment of the Matalan Site. In partnership with Lovells Construction, Phase 1 of the construction had now been completed and had delivered 143 affordable shared ownership and social rent properties which had been viewed at an opening ceremony in the previous week.

In relation to Phase 2 of the development, the Board was advised that there were viability issues for the scheme as projected sales prices for the units were less than what was required for the scheme to be worthwhile. Options were currently being considered by the Trust including a potential reduction in the tallest building and separating the scheme into smaller packages. Julian advised that he would welcome Board Members views on the issue.

It was suggested that due to the proximity to the site of the Station Gateway Project, there could be a possibility to link the two schemes. Further conversations would be required between the partners following the meeting to see if there could be a viable way forward. The Chair advised that he was looking forward to seeing how these conversations progressed at a future meeting.

SG1 Phase 1A Update

Kevin Cowin from Mace gave an update on the development on the site of the former Swingate House. He advised that the development would deliver 261 new homes and a ground floor café unit.

The Board were advised that the piling had now been completed on site and the tower crane would be arriving later this month. The car park was now being used as the site compound which was secured by hoarding with local artwork by Junction 7 on display. The access road (spur road) located between the site and acting to the entrance to the car park had also been closed and had moved slightly as part of the works.

The Board was pleased to hear that Mace was an industry leader on local employment and apprenticeships. Most site workers lived locally and collaboration with the Stevenage Works team had identified apprenticeships, school involvement and other community work.

The Chair thanked Kevin for his update.

6 TOWNS FUND PROJECT PROGRESS - STATION GATEWAY

Chris Scott from Muse gave a presentation to the Board on the Stevenage Gateway Masterplan.

The Board was reminded that the Stevenage Station Gateway project aimed to create a new arrival experience, aligning it with the intended SG1 Boulevard. The aspiration was 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 long-term social impact of the scheme was to create a vibrant, inclusive

community at the heart of the town centre. A local needs analysis had been undertaken driven by community engagement relating to the people, the place and the prosperity of the area. Priorities included affordable housing for key workers, cultural and leisure improvements, and economic growth, aligning with Stevenage's transformation goals. Chris advised that he would be happy to share the detailed findings of the analysis with any Board Member who expressed an interest.

It was noted that the project aligned with conversations that were ongoing between MUSE and Legal and General, the owners of the Leisure Park which had begun in relation to the Masterplan. Chris advised that the design finalisation process could take approximately 12 to 18 months, incorporating stakeholder engagement and consultation.

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 TOWNS FUND PROJECT PROGRESS - ARTS AND HERITAGE TRAIL

The Board received a presentation from Ishbel Ross, Regeneration Officer SBC regarding the Arts and Heritage Trail which was being developed in conjunction with Landmark and Allen Scott Landscape Architecture.

Ishbel recapped the programme and advised that the concept would be developed with final designs and locations completed by the end of May and a phased launch from July 2025. The concept design was underway and included:

- Brand Development;
- Family of signage and wayfinding inventions;
- Website development;
- Trail spatial planning;
- Potential intervention locations.

In relation to the Underpass Artwork Development, Ishbel advised that the deadline for artist submissions was 7 March which would be followed by an evaluation of submissions and signing of contracts. Design development and community engagement would take place from March to May with installation between June and September 2025.

8 TOWNS FUND PROJECT PROGRESS - SPORTS AND LEISURE CENTRE

The Board received a presentation from Ross Hughes, Regeneration Manager, SBC, regarding the current position with the development of the new Sports and Leisure Centre development.

Ross advised that authorisation was being sought from the Council's Cabinet to submit planning and carry out enabling works. Following approval, submission of the planning application would take place in April. It was noted that construction of the Leisure Centre would begin in November 2025 with full completion by December

2027.

In response to a question regarding the consultation process, Ross confirmed that a comprehensive programme of consultation had been undertaken at various venues including the Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre Gym Reception, Stevenage Swimming Centre, Westgate Shopping Centre and included consultation with user groups such as local swimming clubs.

The Chair thanked Ross for his update.

9 **TOWNS FUND PROJECT PROGRESS - ENTERPRISE CENTRE PHASE 1**

Ross Hughes updated the Board on the work undertaken in relation to Enterprise Centre Phase 1.

He reminded members that Co-Space had moved into 25 Town Square in 2021, bringing in 300 new jobs to Stevenage and activating key town centre frontage and bringing in companies such as UBS.

Ross advised that £2million of Towns Fund monies had been used to design and develop a new co-working space expanding into the Town Square Chambers which had been vacant and in disrepair for some time. Work had begun in October 2024 and completed in February 2025, with over 150 new desk spaces and UBS occupying the 1st and 2nd floor of the revamped space.

The Board were also pleased to note that there had been contact with a number of interested parties regarding occupation of the former McDonalds building.

The Chair thanked Ross for his update.

10 **TOWNS FUND GOVERNANCE - PROJECT ADJUSTMENT REQUEST**

Lucy King, Regeneration Programme Manager SBC, reminded the Board of the Project Adjustment Requests (PAR) process. She advised that PAR's needed to be approved by the Town Deal Board, Section 151 Officer and spent and delivered by March 2026.

Lucy advised that the projects relating to SITEC Phase 1 and the Enterprise Centre had been successfully delivered. PAR was now required for Phase 2 (a) and phase 2 (b) for SITEC in relation to:

- Change of locations;
- Combining remaining funds to deliver as one; and
- Amending and enhancing outputs.

The Chair was keen to ensure that the need for a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) had been considered as part of the PAR process.

The Board **RESOLVED** that the Project Adjustment Requests be approved.

11 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Devolution/Local Government Reorganisation

Councillor Richard Henry, Leader of the Council and Tom Pike, Strategic Director SBC reported to the Board on the Government's Devolution White Paper and outlined the Council's position and actions in response to it.

The Board was informed that as part of its plans for devolution, the Government had announced a programme of local government reorganisation that would replace all two-tier county and district/borough councils and small or failing unitaries with new unitary councils. These larger unitary structures would then join to form part of the Strategic Authorities. The new unitaries would need to be of a size to achieve efficiencies and improve capacities.

Tom set out the indicative timetable that the Government had set for Hertfordshire including 28 November 2025 for the full proposal from Hertfordshire to be submitted to Government and April 2028 for the Vesting day for the new Unitary Council.

The Board was advised that the ten District & Borough Councils and HCC were working together to develop a common evidence base. It was noted that to support the submission process, Stevenage Borough Council had established its own Cabinet Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution and Officer Working Groups, which met weekly.

The Chair thanked Tom for his report and looked forward to further updates at future meetings of the Board.

12 **DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

Thursday 8th May 2025 – 2.00pm – Zoom
Thursday 10th July 2025 – 10.00am – Zoom
Thursday 25th September – 10.00am – Zoom
Thursday 20th November – 10.00am – Cromwell Hotel

CHAIR