

Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee

Tuesday, 16 February 2021

7.30 pm

Present:

Cllr Brian Sangha (Chair)
Cllr Lauren Sullivan (Vice-Chair)

Cllrs: Harold Craske
Dakota Dibben
Brian Francis
Baljit Hayre
Leslie Hills
Les Hoskins
Bob Lane
Emma Morley

Wendy Lane	Assistant Director (Planning)
Simon Hookway	Assistant Director (Communities)
Keith Grimley	Senior Economic Development Officer
Chris Wakeford	Committee Services Manager (Minutes)
Stewart McDonald	Technical Services Support Officer

53. Apologies

An apology of absence was received from Cllr Alan Ridgers. Cllr Dakota Dibben attended as his substitute.

54. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting Monday, 30 November 2020 were signed by the Chair.

55. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest.

56. Covid Business support & Kickstart update

The Assistant Director (Communities) and Senior Economic Development Officer provided the Committee with a presentation on Covid Business support & a Kickstart update, the presentation can be viewed below:

<https://democracy.gravesham.gov.uk/documents/b13418/Presentation%20-%20Covid%20Business%20support%20Kickstart%20update%20Tuesday%2016-Feb-2021%2019.30%20Strategic%20Envi.pdf?T=9>

Following the presentation, the Assistant Director (Communities) and Senior Economic Development Officer fielded questions from the Committee and highlighted the following:

- In terms on Covid business support; the team have been very mindful of getting things right first time. The application for discretionary funds was carefully designed so it is very clear which fund businesses should be applying for.
- The Council will expend further support funding going forward but will also need to safeguard funding if restrictions are not lifted until June / July.
- The Council will look to do more to assist the transition of businesses as Covid restrictions are lifted.
- The Council will be working in partnership with the DWP and their 'work coaches' who will assess the needs of young people and look at individual cases / circumstances.
- The Council has received a few fraudulent claims for business support. The application process has been designed so it is simple but there is enough disclosure / checks and balances to put off fraudulent claims
- There have been 200 applications for the discretionary scheme to date - 60% were awarded; 40% rejected.
- The Council has advertised business support well. Government announcements create a lot of interest that drives businesses to our website and online applications.
- The criteria for business support focuses on fixed property costs that can be verified; the business needs to be based in the borough /trading in borough and need to have been severely impacted.

The Chair thanked officers for their good work and an informative presentation.

57. Corporate Performance Update: Quarter Three 2020-21

The Assistant Director (Planning) and the Assistant Director (Communities) presented Members of the Strategic Environment Committee with an update against the Performance Management Framework, as introduced within the council's Corporate Plan, for Quarter Three 2020-21 (October to December 2020).

The Assistant Director (Planning) highlighted the following:

- P I 35 - % of 'Major' planning applications processed on time: 100% for Quarter Three.
- PI 35 - % of 'Non-Major' planning applications processed on time: 97% for Quarter Three, an improvement from 61% in Quarter One

The Assistant Director (Planning) provided the Committee with a presentation that highlighted some contextual information on the Corporate Performance Q3 2020-2021 and planning applications, this can be viewed by following the link below:

<https://democracy.gravesham.gov.uk/documents/b13419/Presentation%20-%20Corporate%20Performance%20Plan%20Q3%20Tuesday%2016-Feb-2021%2019.30%20Strategic%20Environment%20Cabi.pdf?T=9>

The Assistant Director (Communities) highlighted the following:

- Town Centre footfall had recovered to 80% of the footfall for the similar period the year before, however a further lockdown announced in November placed additional restrictions on businesses, with the closure of non-essential retail. As a consequence, footfall this quarter reduced to 68% of the previous year and a decline of 20% on Q2. The run-up to Christmas is a key trading time for retail as a consequence the impact on the retail in the Town will have been acutely felt.
- Redevelopment proposals in the Town Centre are moving forward and there is momentum with investment in the area. There has been a lot of work in lockdown to ensure schemes progress.
- Work has also been taking place on an Economic Development Strategy for the borough.

The Assistant Director (Planning) and Assistant Director (Communities) fielded questions from the Committee and highlighted the following:

- The Planning Department are always trying to improve but the recent LGA Peer Challenge provided added momentum. Recent changes include:
 - pre-application payments done on the telephone
 - Refresh planning website pages including information on dropped curbs and windows and doors guidance.
- The Planning Department are now seeing a lot more compliments rather than complaints. Agents and applicants are so much more engaged.
- There are a number of planning applications that do not generate a fee, including:
 - Listed building consent
 - Application for tree works
 - If the application relates to a condition or conditions on an application for Listed Building Consent or planning permission for relevant demolition in a Conservation Area
- Fees are set by the government; the only area the Council have control is on pre-application advice because it's non-statutory.
- Commercial properties: vacancy relates to business rate records. Vacancy figures for the town centre are counted within the streets and town itself so this accounts for the variation. The Council could look at bringing those two figures together.
- Branding: this came out of the Peer Review; we need to demonstrate the message we put to investors (e.g. connectivity to London and opportunities for investment) The attractiveness of Gravesham not being London has come to the fore; Albion Waterside development will be submitted next week which recognises the value of Gravesend.

The Committee thanked officers and noted the Corporate Performance Update for Quarter Three 2020-21.

58. Local Plan consultation - high level update

The Assistant Director (Planning) provided the Committee with a high level update on the Local Plan consultation; the presentation can be viewed below:

<https://democracy.gravesham.gov.uk/documents/b13420/Presentation%20-%20Local%20Plan%20consultation%20-%20high%20level%20update%20Tuesday%2016-Feb-2021%2019.30%20Strategic%20En.pdf?T=9>

The Assistant Director (Planning) fielded questions from the Committee and highlighted the following:

- All the data from the Regulation 18 Stage 2 consultation needs to be pulled together. The Council's key focus is considering each response and the planning issues raised. Other land owners have also come forward and suggested new sites.
- Communication Strategy: this needs to be discussed with members in due course on how they want the Council to engage. The Council wants to make sure it has the best information and ensure residents have their say.
- There will be a two page briefing in Your Borough magazine highlighting some of the issues residents raised in the consultation and what we are doing. There is also a reminder about the London Resort/Lower Thames Crossing and a column explaining the Government's proposed permitted development changes.
- The consultation didn't ask for information on ethnicity but a specific response was received from the cohesion community. The point will be taken on board and consideration given to checking that the Council is getting a representative focus.
- The presentation states that the majority of the responses came from the rural area because of the large amount of letters that were sent in from this area but officers will be mindful of this going forward.
- The Council has decided to proceed with the consultation at this time because Local Plans have to be in place by 2023 and Gravesham has a plan that is more than 5 years old. The Government has been honest about the scale of the challenge (300,000 homes per year) and this is the test GBC are now being challenge against. If GBC do not meet the targets set by government then applications will be allowed that wouldn't normally be acceptable. Plan-making could be taken away from the Council.

The Chair advised the Committee that he was encouraged by the level of response to the consultation.

The Chair also highlighted that last year 1000 units were granted in the urban area and since the Council went out to consultation 4 sites have been identified in the urban area that could deliver 250 units

The Committee thanked the Assistant Director (Planning) and noted the Local Plan consultation - high level update.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 9.22 pm