

Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee

Monday, 21 June 2021

7.30 pm

Present:

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

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

Wendy Lane Assistant Director (Planning)
Simon Hookway Assistant Director (Communities)
Keith Grimley Senior Economic Development Officer
Ciara Ferguson Committee Services Support Assistant

67. Apologies

No apologies for absence were received.

68. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

69. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee held on Wednesday, 31 March 2021 were signed by the Chair.

70. MaybeTech and Pop Up Business School

The Principal Economic Development Officer provided the Committee with a presentation on two Economic Development updates: MaybeTech “Digital High Street” and Rebel Business School.

The presentation can be viewed on the link below:

<https://democracy.gravesham.gov.uk/documents/b13883/MaybeTech%20and%20Pop%20Up%20Business%20School%20-%20Presentation%20Monday%202021-Jun-2021%2019.30%20Strategic%20Environmen.pdf?T=9>

The following points were raised during discussion on the subject of MaybeTech:

- Following a question on the statistics available to show the usage of the site and transactions as a result of notifications, the Senior Economic Development Officer informed Members that there is a dashboard available for the Council (following investment) which would show all participating retailers and the transactions as a result of the platform by consumers who have registered their bankcard. A retailer will also have access to see where a consumer has spent as a direct consequence of receiving a phone notification, as subsequent transactions can be followed back to the original purchase.
- The Senior Economic Development Officer highlighted that the business listings will be available free of charge to retailers for the first 12 months, this will allow retailers time to build momentum on the platform and retailers are able to leave the platform if it is not successful for them. After the free 12 month trial, the assumed basic price of membership is £420 per year.
- Following a question about case studies of town centres which have used the platform and their success as a result, Nuneaton in Warwickshire was used as an example of an area which has benefited from the platform. The officer will forward Members case studies after the meeting.
- A Member asked what differentiates the platform from a standard community page which lists all retailers within a local area? The Senior Economic Development Officer highlighted that local retailers would benefit from the online traffic that the platform receives. Furthermore, the platform has the ability to collect data from existing social media feeds and websites in order to generate a skeleton page for retailers. The platform offers the ability to collaborate with social media and will enable a wide selection of offers to be redeemed. The platform also offers regular training sessions which are advertised, this would help traders with social media management and how to manoeuvre the platform.
- Following a question on how long MaybeTech had been trading, the Senior Economic Development Officer explained that he would find the exact amount of time and forward it to Members after the meeting.
- Members noted that by signing up and using the platform, consumers are authorising other retailers nearby to send them notifications through their phone.
- There are strict Privacy Agreements in place to restrict access to who can see a consumer's spending habits. Moreover, transactions are anonymised and a consumer's personal data is protected.
- The platform is not restricted to Gravesham residents, a visitor from a different location passing through Gravesham would receive notifications about the offers by local businesses if they were already signed up to the platform.
- The Senior Economic Development Officer explained that the fully funded 12 month trial will start from the date that the trader signs up to the platform.
- The Senior Economic Development Officer highlighted that there are only 16,000 listings available for businesses across the whole of Kent funded by Kent and Medway Growth Hub.

The following points were raised during discussion on the subject of Rebel Business School:

- The Council has provided Rebel Business School with a list of 40 stakeholders considered close to the community, in order to allow Rebel Business School to engage with them by making direct contact and explaining the offer.

The Chair thanked the Senior Economic Development Officer for the presentation and Members noted the information contained in the MaybeTech and Pop Up Business School presentation.

71. Corporate Performance Update: Quarter Four 2020-21

The Assistant Director (Planning) and Assistant Director (Communities) provided the Committee with an update against the Performance Management Framework, as introduced within the council's Corporate Plan, for Quarter Four 2020-21 (January to March).

The Assistant Director (Planning) highlighted the following:

- PI 15 – there was a significant amount of affordable homes delivered during this period, the biggest provider being Cable Wharf. Cable Wharf provides a mixture of Affordable Rent and Shared Ownership homes. Overall, there was a total delivery of 135 new affordable homes during 2020-2021.
- In regards to PI 36, the Planning Department are concerned about the increasing amount of 'Non Major' planning applications as they have been greatly in excess of that of previous years. This is a result of residents having more money due to not being able to go abroad and more residents have been evaluating the functionality of their homes after spending an increased amount of time indoors over the past year.
- In regards to the SPD for residential extensions, the SPD has not formally been issued as there were concerns expressed about the quality of the drawings included in the document. An artist has now been commissioned to produce the drawings in order to make it easier for residents to understand the information included within the document.

The Assistant Director (Communities) highlighted the following:

- The update focuses on the period of January to March 2021 and therefore the statistics do not reflect the relaxation of restrictions, it is anticipated that the footfall in the town centre has increased following the relaxation of restrictions.
- Defrayment of Additional Restrictions Grant has increased to £2 million and a requirement to defray 100% of the allocated ARG has been postponed from 30 June to 30 July. This will give the council extra time to allocate the grant accordingly.
- In relation to PI 34, there continues to be concern over increasing youth unemployment. There is a new Job Centre Campus in the town centre which offers a work coaching service particularly aimed at young people receiving universal credit.

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

- A Member requested an update on the progress of major upcoming developments, the Assistant Director (Planning) informed Members that in regards to Clifton Slipways, the Section 16 has been signed. However, the Planning Department have not received a signal to suggest that physical works are about to commence on site. In relation to the former Maternity Block, the Section 16 has not yet been signed and the form is with the Solicitors of the Applicant, the Planning Department has made contact on multiple occasions to find out what the delay is.
- The borough has not met the target for new affordable homes delivered in order to receive the New Homes Bonus.

- The housing developers will have a local lettings plan in place which will use the council's Housing Register as a key component. The Housing Strategy Development Team work closely with the Housing Department in order to ensure that the lettings plans put in place are secure in order to ensure that the residents of Gravesham benefit from the new affordable homes that are built.
- Members noted that 8 of the affordable homes built are directly council owned houses, these are located at Nansen Road.
- The Assistant Director (Planning) explained that in the 2012 Core Strategy there were assumptions made that Gravesend had an excess of smaller units and did not have enough big units. Since 2012, the retail horizon has changed drastically and there has not yet been additional commissioned technical work as the council feel that the retail market is still significantly influx. A lack of provision of units of a particular type is leading to out-of-centre and edge-of-centre locations becoming more attractive to potential retailers, the new Lidl opening on Coldharbour Road was used as an example.
- The units in the town centre are constructed in a way which makes it difficult to quickly adapt their size or the way they are internally configured or serviced.
- The Senior Economic Development Officer highlighted that some sectors are increasingly struggling to hire staff, the Construction sector in particular are struggling to hire, across the trades and professional disciplines.

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

72. Update on Permitted Development Rights Changes

The Assistant Director (Planning) provided the Committee with a presentation which informed Members about the recent changes to Permitted Development rights. The Government's Permitted Development (PD) rights allow certain building works and changes of use to be carried out without the developer having to make a planning application to the Council.

The presentation can be viewed on the link below:

<https://democracy.gravesham.gov.uk/documents/b13884/Update%20on%20Permitted%20Development%20Right%20Changes%20-%20Presentation%20Monday%202021-Jun-2021%2019.30%20Strategic%20E.pdf?T=9>

Following questions from the Committee; the Assistant Director (Planning) highlighted the following:

- It is not necessary for developers to contact the local planning authority where works are covered by Permitted Development Rights and the following apply: there is no prior approval needed in advance of development; there is no neighbourhood consultation scheme applicable and the PD rights do not require the developer to notify the Council of a change of use.
- Many developers would still apply for the Lawful Development Certificate, in order for definitive confirmation that their project is authorised. Furthermore, the certificate can sometimes assist with Building Control Regulations.
- There is set criteria when distributing a Lawful Development Certificate; if the works meet the applicable criteria, then the certificate is given and neighbour comments cannot be taken into account on this. In the case of prior approval needed in advance

or a neighbour consultation scheme applies, neighbours will get the opportunity to raise issues.

- One disadvantage of PD rights is that the developer is not required to make contributions to affordable housing.

The Chair thanked the Assistant Director (Planning) and noted the Permitted Development Rights Changes update.

Close of Meeting

The meeting ended at 8.50pm