

Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee

Wednesday, 30 March 2022

7.30 pm

Present:

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

Councillors: Harold Craske
Dakota Dibben
Brian Francis
Leslie Hills
Bob Lane
Nirmal Khabra
Jordan Meade
Tony Rana

Note: Councillors: were also in attendance

94. Apologies for Absence

Apologies of absence were received from Cllr Leslie Hoskins, Cllr Baljit Hayre and Cllr Morley. Cllr Jordan Meade, Cllr Tony Rana and Cllr Khabra acted as respective substitutes.

95. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee held on Tuesday, 15 February 2022 were signed by the Chair.

96. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Khabra declared an interest as he was a local taxi driver for the Borough.

Cllr Meade declared an interest as he sat on the People & Places Board which was part of the Local Government Association.

97. Design for Gravesham

The Committee were provided with a presentation on 'Design for Gravesham' from the Assistant Director (Strategic Regeneration).

The presentation had been published and could be accessed through the below link:

- [\(Public Pack\)Supplementary - Presentations Agenda Supplement for Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee, 30/03/2022 19:30 \(gravesham.gov.uk\)](#)

Following the presentation, the Assistant Director (Strategic Regeneration) fielded questions from Members and explained that:

- There were a few different examples of other local authorities ‘Design Codes’ and the Assistant Director (Strategic Regeneration) offered to meet with individual Members and go through those different codes with them. The Assistant Director (Strategic Registrations) advised that his background meant he had a good understanding of what was considered an exemplar ‘Design Code’ and he had an appreciation of what was valued in terms of quality and use
- Community engagement is vital and the next steps are set out as part of this presentation. Stakeholders, Residents would be listened to, engaged with and discussions would be had about what they want to see delivered in the Borough which would ultimately feed into the Strategy and broader regeneration agenda.
- The Assistant Director (Strategic Regeneration) advised that there are ambitious plans for community engagement which would start with one to one meetings with groups such as stakeholders, education partners, residents, faith groups and parishes etc. Strategic Regeneration are working in dialogue with the Communities team on this. Those initial conversations would help develop a pathway forward for regeneration in Gravesham and lead the way for a more developed, full rounded approach to regeneration in the Borough in the long term
- Part of the community engagement plan was also for Members to be fully engaged with; the Assistant Director (Strategic Regeneration) offered Ward Members a chance to meet to tour their wards to listen to their views and discuss potential initiatives/regeneration
- The Assistant Director (Strategic Regeneration) shared the regeneration email: regeneration@gravesham.gov.uk
- The Assistant Director (Strategic Regeneration) agreed with the Committees view that the river was an important aspect of Gravesham’s heritage and acknowledged that the river went through many parts of the Borough and required further support in wards such as Higham, not just Northfleet and Gravesend
- Regeneration was not without its challenges such as the recovery of the town centre and meeting housing targets, but the Assistant Director (Strategic Regeneration) explained that he was ready to have open discussions with Members regarding the challenges and any proposed solutions
- The code was still in its very early creation and Members comments were only being sought during this meeting; in the future there could be further Member briefings to update on next steps/progress. The community engagement planned will help shape the procurement process to find a suitable external partner to develop Design for Gravesham. Finding a suitable external partner was critical and the procurement process would lead into the evaluation and choosing of a partner, which would then lead to the development of the ‘Design Code’ itself. A consultation process and agreement would be sought from this Committee and Cabinet as part of establishing the code as planning policy.
- The Assistant Director (Strategic Regeneration) wanted the code in place as soon as practically possible, but it was unlikely that it would be in place by the end of 2022; it was essential that there was enough time to engage the Community/Members, procure a suitable partner, develop the code, consult and then seek appropriate approval to adopt the code as planning policy.

The Chair explained that other local authorities around the country had bucked the trend of high street retail losses and lack of regeneration; the Chair was hopeful that the proposed 'Design Code' would enable Gravesham to follow best practices and have a community driven regeneration plan in place.

The Chair thanked the Assistant Director (Strategic Regeneration) for an informative presentation.

98. Transport Update

The Committee were provided with a presentation regarding transport in the Borough from the Principal Transport and NSIP Project Manager.

The presentation had been published and could be accessed through the below link:

- [\(Public Pack\)Supplementary - Presentations Agenda Supplement for Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee, 30/03/2022 19:30 \(gravesham.gov.uk\)](#)

The Chair informed the Principal Transport and NSIP Project Manager that she was previously unaware of the issue at Stonebridge Road proposal and would discuss the matter with him after the meeting.

Following the presentation, the Principal Transport and NSIP Project Manager and the Assistant Director (Planning) fielded questions and comments from Members and explained that:

- Principal Transport and NSIP Project Manager explained the current consultation by KCC in relation to cuts in bus services. For Gravesham these were the Gravesend to New Ash Green route on Sunday's only and the specialist Kent Karrier dial a ride service
- The operational date for the switch over of Fastrack buses to electric buses was 2023, just going out to tender; no other bus routes were planned to be switched to electric. Electric vehicle charging points for buses will be installed at Garrick Street as part of the enhancement work carried out there. Until the electric bus is selected the form of the charging point will not be known as the manufacturers use different systems
- Bath Street was being considered as another potential area for a bus lane, but no operational time scale has yet been released; the design of the bus lane would take local taxis needs into consideration
- The Government recently announced a Electrical Vehicle strategy aimed at increasing the amount of national car charging points to over 30,000. The Strategy placed an obligation on responsible transport authorities, which is KCC for Kent , to develop a strategy for on street charging points which came with a number of challenges due to external power supply placement and specific requirements for safe installation The Principal Transport and NSIP Project Manager agreed that it was important to ensure proper maintenance of existing cycling/walking routes such as the route along Gravesend canal rather than creating new routes and advised that maintenance would form part of the engagement process
- As part of the Local Cycling and Walking Implementation Plan (LCWIP), Members views were being sought on what they would like to see consulted on, where

maintenance was required and schemes that should be implemented so that they could form part of the draft strategy prior to public consultation in the autumn. An update from the consultants, when appointed, would be brought back to the Committee meeting in June 2022

- The Principal Transport and NSIP Project Manager advised that the Council had not put in a bid to the Department of Transport to host the new headquarters for British Rail although Tonbridge had put in a bid; it was likely that the headquarters would be placed somewhere in the north of the country
- The Assistant Director (Planning) attended the Garrick Street bus hub meetings and it had been confirmed that only buses and cyclists would be able to use the bus gate; historically, taxis had never been allowed to use bus gates across the country. In terms of rules, nothing was changing, the only thing that was changing was enforcement of the bus gate through the installation of an ANPR camera
- The Garrick Street Bus Hub had taken longer than indicated to complete due to an issue with accessing specific materials such as granite. As part of the scheme, a self-contained toilet facility, part funded by the Council, was built however there was never any intention to add additional shops. The existing row of shops down from the Somerset Arms remained in place
- The Principal Transport and NSIP Project Manager was unaware when the ANPR camera would be installed as the Council were not involved in the KCC scheme
- The Principal Transport and NSIP Project Manager acknowledged Members concerns over the changes being made to the A289 for the proposed development at Hoo in Medway and raised the possibility of further issues at Higham Station if the proposed rail scheme failed
- The last information the Principal Transport and NSIP Project Manager had received regarding the Eurostar at Ebbsfleet was that it would not stop at Ebbsfleet again until at least 2024
- Officers had suggested to KCC a footpath as part of an Active Travel 2 bid to Department of Transport should be made between Ince Rise and Meopham. This had been looked at in the past including a consultation conducted with residents however nothing came to fruition. The issue with KCC was that when they receive the money to create such footpaths, cycleways or bus lanes, they are outsourced the designing of schemes to an external consultant which meant that there was no initial consulting with residents to see what the residents actually needed. The Principal Transport and NSIP Project Manager agreed to communicate to KCC that the footpath was needed, and residents should be engaged with prior to any design work being carried out. Members were also advised that for phase three of the active travel talks, KCC Cllr Bryan Sweetland was the best person to contact
- Officers from the Council emailed KCC whenever information was held on certain schemes that would aid KCC in the development of those schemes; for example, consultation responses that the Council received would be given to KCC if they helped develop schemes that KCC were already working on or had plans to visit in the future
- The closure of Athboy Road was to enable equipment and vehicles to be stored while the interchange works were completed. As the works were nearing completion, Athboy Road should soon reopen but the Principal Transport and NSIP Project Manager agreed to look into the matter
- The Assistant Director (Planning) had previously raised concerns regarding construction noise at Tilbury and sought agreement on mechanisms to mitigate the levels of noise. Those mechanisms were not supported by Thurrock Council, on appeal the examining authority determined that they would side with Thurrock

Councils decision. If Members wanted the issue progressed further then it could be raised with the Port of Tilbury directly as well as raised with the Port of Health Authority

Cllr Meade asked that the Assistant Director (Planning) contact the Port of Tilbury as well as the Port of Health Authority as work noises could be heard on Windmill Hill from 4am onwards, disturbing local residents. Cllr Meade agreed to collate evidence to be submitted to the two authorities.

With regard to the closure of Athboy Road, Cllr Meade suggested that as the equipment was largely stored in the road, the pavement could be reopened to allow residents, especially those with mobility issues, to use the road to get to the train station. The Assistant Director (Planning) agreed to email Annette Bonner, the project lead for the interchange project, regarding the suggestion and further stress the importance of the shortcut for residents.

In response to the issue of taxis not being allowed to drive through the bus gate, the Chair advised that a letter was being sent from the Gravesham Joint Transportation Board requesting that the decision be examined. The Principal Transport and NSIP Project Manager agreed to look into how the policy was made at KCC and if Gravesham Council could have any input on the decision.

In response to concern raised by a Member regarding upkeep of public footpaths, Cllr Meade advised that he had encountered similar issues when walking his dog and assured Members that he would keep up the pressure on the relevant KCC Cabinet Member to reopen closed footpaths and give existing ones the maintenance they required, especially along the Saxon Shore Way.

The Chair thanked the Principal Transport and NSIP Project Manager for an informative presentation.

99. Enforcement Strategy Publication Version

The Committee were provided with the Planning Enforcement Strategy for Gravesham 2022 and the Assistant Director (Planning) sought comments from Members.

The Assistant Director (Planning) advised that the Strategy took into account Members comments made on an earlier draft at the December 2021 Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee meeting. The document had been sent to Digital Team to make it 100% accessible and following any additional Member comments it would be signed off in due course by the Portfolio Holder and published on the Councils website.

Members made the following suggestions to the Strategy:

- There were a multitude of complex legal terms in the document which members of the public and Members may find hard to understand; a short glossary of terms should be added to the Strategy and published to the website alongside the Strategy as well as links to definitions of certain terminology
- Section 16 referenced violence towards officers but that paragraph should be amended to include violence towards Members as well. In addition, the paragraph should link to the Councils corporate policies that advise what would happen if

someone committed violence towards an officer/Member and the consequences of those actions

- The Strategy needed to be more widely publicised to the public rather than just published on the website as well as shared to the Councils planning agent forum

In response to the suggestions, the Assistant Director (Planning) explained that:

- Use of technical terms had been flagged by Members previously and Officers had tried to be much clearer about what terms meant and the different stages in the strategy so that people wouldn't be misled. The intention was that an FAQ document would be created and published alongside the Strategy on the Councils website; the FAQ document would hopefully answer all of the public's questions and explain any confusing aspects of the Strategy. The Assistant Director (Planning) noted the suggestion to provide links to definitions of certain terminology
- The Assistant Director was happy for the paragraph to be extended to Members as well; violence towards Members had been discussed previously especially around Planning Committee and Members addresses being published when they submitted planning applications to the Committee. Legal had been contacted to see what measures could be implemented to better protect officers and Members during the planning process. The Assistant Director (Planning) advised that she would need to check if links could be used to the corporate policy documents as it could cause accessibility issues on the document, but the Strategy could definitely reference the policy
- The Assistant Director (Planning) advised that the Strategy would be 100% accessible and would be advertised on all Council social media platforms as well as the website. In addition, a section of the upcoming 'Your Borough' magazine had been allocated to the advertisement of the Strategy and notification of the new Strategy would be attached to the bottom of all Planning Officers emails which were regularly sent to applicants/agents. The Strategy would also be promoted to local legal firms that dealt with conveyancing so all parties would be aware of the Strategy

Cllr Craske raised concern over the format of the Strategy and the difficulty it caused trying to read the Strategy on an iPad screen.

Cllr Hills and Cllr Lane were happy with the document but raised concerns that any planning enforcement would be implemented as there were a number of sites such as the Battle of Britain and the Old Gurdwara which had fallen into disrepair but hadn't received any enforcement action.

The Chair explained that the Battle of Britain site owners had been served repeated section 215 notices which ordered the occupants to clear away all of the rubble and tidy up the site within a set time period. The Chair advised that the document paired well with the aforementioned 'Design Code' and was a very proactive document which set out the Council's intentions with regards to planning enforcement and set out the rules that agents/applicants needed to follow. The Chair informed the Committee of examples of recent planning enforcement actions that led to convictions in the courts.

The Assistant Director added that the Council went further than what the Government expected of them with regards to Planning Enforcement; for example, the Council always sought retrospective planning applications on sites that had built without planning permission which didn't always go the right way with the Planning Inspector.

The Assistant Director (Planning) explained that the Planning Team prided itself on the low number of cases that had required formal action as formal action was expensive and took a significant amount of time to process. The Planning Team received a much better response rate on retroactive applications than if enforcement was pursued.

To better show the Planning Teams performance, the Assistant Director (Planning) explained that the team were looking at creating a different pack of performance indicators which showed Members how many cases had been opened but weren't considered breaches and how successful the team had been in closing cases. There were some issues with the IDOX software which made it difficult to report on those performance statistics, but the team would work with Members and officers to formalise those indicators in the future. The Assistant Director (Planning) summed up that generally, the Planning Team closed as many cases as were open, of which there were a lot of open cases.

The Chair thanked the Committee for their comments.

100. Q3 2021-22 Corporate Performance Report

The Committee was presented with an update against the Performance Management Framework, as introduced within the council's Corporate Plan, for Quarter Three 2021-22 (October to December 2021).

The Assistant Director (Communities) directed Members to appendix two to the report and provided Members with a statistical overview of the Council's performance against each performance indicator for quarter two.

The Assistant Director (Communities) and the Assistant Director (Planning) fielded questions and explained that:

- Information held on the amount of social Council houses the Council had in stock fell under the Housing Portfolio, but the Assistant Director (Communities) agreed to raise it with the Director (Housing) and circulate the figures to Members outside of the meeting; it was thought to be below 6000 houses due to the 'right to buy' scheme
- As the matter also fell under the Housing Portfolio, the Assistant Director (Communities) agreed to talk to the Director (Housing) to see if there were any delays in the Council's own programme of delivering affordable and social housing schemes and circulate a response to Members outside of the meeting
- The Assistant Director (Communities) agreed with Members that it was a shame that shops/cafes weren't open later during the Lights Festival in Town which attracted thousands of people. The Economic Development Team would do more to communicate with high street shops/cafes when certain large Council events were scheduled in order to ask them to stay open later to provide service to large crowds
- The Council were ambitious in taking on so many applicants for the Kickstart Scheme particular with hybrid working arrangements in place, but managers worked very hard with their placements. Each young person was treated as an individual and this required time and there were some challenges with a few of the Kickstarters who were not 'work ready'. Eleven dropped out of the scheme and the Council learnt a lot from the reasons for this.. The responsibilities for the Scheme came to an end on 31 March, but there would still be placements in place until June. During the next few months managers would work with them to try and find permanent positions for them in the Council work force or, working with their Work Coaches to find positions in the

wider economy. If a Kickstarter was unable to get any job then they would go back onto Universal Credit and look for a job placement through the Job Centre. The Assistant Director (Communities) advised Members that the employer could only do so much to get young people 'job ready' but the Council could also look to work with the Job Centre to increase self-confidence and improve young people's mental health

- With regards to the Government's Levelling Up agenda, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to be allocated to lower tier authorities was due to replace the European Programmes and Government have asked for Investment Plans to be prepared to respond to local needs in respect of business, jobs and skills related issues. The Assistant Director (Communities) advised that there was a significant amount of work to be completed around Levelling Up including working with external partners before the Council's investment plan had to be submitted in Summer 2022

The Chair thanked the officers for a detailed report.

101. Any other business which by reason of special circumstances the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency.

102. Exclusion

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at Time Not Specified