

Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee

Wednesday, 27 March 2024

7.30 pm

Present:

Cllr Shane Mochrie-Cox (Chair)

Cllr Alison Williams (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Rajinder Atwal
 David Beattie
 Gavin Larkins
 Karina O'Malley
 Alan Metcalf
 Frank Wardle

Shazad Ghani Head of Planning
Karen Gingles Committee Services Officer (Minutes)

15. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jordan Meade and Councillor Ejaz Aslam. Councillor Alan Metcalf and Councillor Frank Wardle attended as their substitutes. An apology for absence was also received from Councillor Gurjit Bains.

16. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 21 November 2024 were signed by the Chair.

17. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Shane Mochrie-Cox advised that as outlined in his published declaration of pecuniary interests, he was employed by Kent County Council.

18. Developer Contributions Guide

The Chair introduced the Developer Contributions Guide report. The purpose of the report was to share a further draft of the Developer Contributions Guide for discussion and comment by the Committee. The Chair drew Members attention to appendix 1 of the report, which was a further draft of the Gravesham Borough Council S106 Developer Contributions Strategy and Guide. The purpose of the document was to provide advice and information to applicants and their advisers when their development had given rise to the need for the Council, acting in its role as the Local Planning Authority to secure mitigation, through a s.106 legal agreement or unilateral undertaking. The document would also provide clarity to the local community of the Council's responsibility in this regard.

The Chair addressed each page of the document and invited the Committee to make comment and ask questions:

- In regard to negotiation of a section 106, referred to on page 8 of the document, the Chair highlighted that it was encouraged that discussions were held at the pre-application stage. Members queried if there was an internal negotiation mandate for the section 106 contributions and what the vetting process was for applications received. The Head of Planning advised that if an application was addressed at the pre application stage, S.106 requests may come in from third parties, which planning officers would vet. If an application was delegated to an officer to determine, the officer would vet any requests for section 106 contributions with the requests being signed off by the officer signing off the delegated decision. If an application were to be heard at Planning Committee, Members would sign off the agreement. Members were informed this was outlined in the Constitution.
- It was queried whether requests in relation to S.106 funding were reviewed. The Head of Planned explained that all asks were set out within each Section 106 agreement. The Chair referenced page 10 of the paper, which outlined how requests were monitored. After some discussion the chair added that a small fee could be requested, to ensure the Council obtained the funds once the S.106 was implemented, with a note added to page 10 of the document, gaining more power for negotiation.
- Members attention was drawn to page 12 of the document that set out the variety of contributions that might need to be considered as part of negotiations on planning applications that require a S.106 obligation.
- The Chair highlighted page 17 of the document in respect of KCC requests for S.106 contributions for education and the importance of keeping requests under this sector for use within the borough only. The Head of Planning expressed that the document outlined the clear process on how third parties could obtain funds with assurance of the contributions remaining within the borough. The Chair echoed this, adding that funding must be used for the borough's infrastructure and to meet the needs of the borough's residents with proof of spend being a requirement of the agreement.
- In respect of healthcare provisions outlined on page 20 of the paper, Members used the example of the former St Joseph's Convent Preparatory School redevelopment proposal and noted that a new health care centre had been specified, but it was in fact the amalgamation of two existing centres. The Head of Planning explained that there was a generic contribution for healthcare, however neither the health care nor building in this particular development, were funded by a section 106 agreement. The Chair added that S.106 would be encouraged for the funding of local doctors and GPs within the borough but not that of the NHS nationally.

The Chair expressed that the next stage would be for the Chair to agree any modifications to the document and for the document to be adopted as a strategy by the Council.

The Committee noted the report.

19. Draft Transport Strategy

The Committee were presented with the draft Transport Strategy for discussion and comment. A presentation was provided by the Head of Planning which set out the transport infrastructure in the Borough, identifying key transport issues residents and businesses in the Borough encountered. Members comments were sought to assist the production of a

transport strategy. The presentation can be viewed via the following link: [\(Public Pack\)Draft Transport Strategy - Key Principles - Appendix 1 Agenda Supplement for Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee, 27/03/2024 19:30 \(gravesham.gov.uk\)](#)

The Committee were invited to ask questions and make comment:

- Members raised concern regarding pedestrian safety and whether more pedestrianisation and road crossings could be considered, along with the reduction of pavement parking. The Head of Planning advised that the Government were looking to potentially extend the ban of pavement parking to other areas of the Country, which would cover Kent and Gravesham. Without Government support however, local authorities would have no power to enforce. The Chair agreed that additional powers were required from central Government.
- Members referenced the Transport Strategy's aspiration to improve bus services to the wider urban and rural settings of the borough. It was highlighted how poor the current service was in some rural areas. The Head of Planning agreed and explained that some locations were not considered as financially viable for the operators, meaning that operators chose not to invest in services in some areas. Previously the County Council would assist the operators financially in such situations, however due to the financial position of KCC, funding was being withdrawn. Members were informed that the Council were looking at ways to assist with this issue. The Head of Planning proposed with the Chairs agreement, this matter could be included within the strategy. The Chair agreed.

Committee Members highlighted that in some areas with sparse bus services, residents were opting to use cars. It was noted that along the A227 buses ran once an hour. The increase in cars would not alleviate pavement parking and additional car parking may need to be considered. The Chair observed that where pavement parking bans were operational, a reliable bus service had been important.

- Members highlighted the lack of a cycle route and footpath between Meopham Station and Istead Rise. The Head of Planning updated that the Principal Transport and NSIP Project Manager had commissioned work alongside KCC to consider additional routes and this matter would be considered. The Chair added that this was an important consideration, as this particular stretch of road was dangerous and therefore greatly needed.
- The Committee observed that residents living in close proximity to schools, experienced issues with parking outside their homes. The Chair informed Members there was an online initiative available called 'School Streets' which operated with cameras and those not registered to park could be fined. He went on to say that a long-term solution was required to deal with the issue.
- Members queried whether Gravesham had ever considered a park and ride scheme. The Head of Planning informed the Committee that such a scheme only worked where there was traffic control and in town centres that were car park free. The Chair added that the Council would not be looking to ban cars from the urban areas of the borough and Gravesham did not have the level of transport infrastructure to support this approach. Instead, there was a requirement for all partners to ensure the public transport structure worked well.

- Members noted that using the bus network within the borough for commuting to work was unreliable as it did not always operate on time. Some services currently stopped early, meaning that the return journey home was difficult. The Head of Planning stated that there had been investment by Arriva into the Fastrack service, however this was not the case with the other services in the borough. The new strategy would highlight this and seek to address such issues.

The Chair thanked members for their comments and requested the strategy come back to the Strategic Environment Committee in June for further consideration.

The Committee noted the report.

20. Corporate Performance Report - Q3 2023-24

The Committee were presented with the Corporate Performance Report Q3. The purpose of the report was to provide Members of the Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee with an update against the Performance Management Framework, as introduced within the Council's Corporate Plan, for Quarter Three 2023-24 (October to December 2023).

The Head of Planning drew Members attention to appendix 1 and updated on the key performance Indicators relating to Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee:

- Members were updated that for Q3 the percentage of major planning applications processed on time (PI 19) stood at 80% rather than the previously achieved 100%. This was due to one application being determined outside of the statutory period and without a further agreed extension of time, which was necessitated by the applicant needing to do further work on the application.
- PI 20 sets out the percentage of minor planning applications processed on time. In Q3 this stood at 100%, which was an improvement on Q1 and Q2.
- Members were updated that 2 planning enforcement actions were undertaken during Q3. This included a further enforcement notice served in relation to Fowlers Stone Wood and an enforcement notice being served in relation to Greenacre, Lockyers Hill. Greenacre was currently under appeal with the Planning Inspectorate.
- PI 23 detailed the total net additional homes added to the Council Tax valuation list. Members were informed that the figures reflected the key development sites within the Borough notably Northfleet Embankment East and West (Local Plan Core Strategy allocations), now known as Harbour Village and Cable Wharf. Both continued to deliver completions within the Borough, alongside smaller developments permitted by the Council.

The Committee noted the report.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8:31pm