

Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee

Monday, 23 September 2024

19:30pm

Present:

Cllr Shane Mochrie-Cox (Chair)

Councillors: Ejaz Aslam
Rajinder Atwal
Gurjit Kaur Bains
David Beattie
Jo Hart
Baljit Hayre
Gavin Larkins
Jordan Meade

Shazad Ghani Head of Planning
Kath Donald Strategic Manager, Community Safety Unit
Richard Hart Team Leader (Development Management)
Ben Clarke Committee Services Officer (Minutes)

73. Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Alison Williams (Vice-Chair). Cllr Jo Hart substituted.

74. Declarations of Interest

Cllrs Larkins, Hayre, Atwal, Aslam and Meade all declared an interest in item 5 as they lived in conservation areas.

Cllr Meade declared an interest in item 6 as he was a KCC Cllr for Gravesend East.

75. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee held on Monday, 17 June 2024 were signed by the Chair.

76. Conservation Areas

The Team Leader (Development Management) delivered a presentation to the Committee on Conservation Areas in Gravesham; the presentation had been published as a supplementary and was available through the below link:

- <https://democracy.gravesham.gov.uk/documents/b21165/Supplementary%20Pack%20relating%20to%20agenda%20items%205%206%20and%207%20Monday%2023-Sep-2024%2019.30%20Strategic%20Environ.pdf?T=9>

The Chair thanked the Team Leader (Development Management) for the presentation and advised the Committee that all the work outlined was building towards the creation of a

Conservation Strategy and a Local List which had been requested by Members at a previous Committee.

Following the presentation, the Head of Planning and the Team Leader (Development Management) fielded questions from the Committee and explained that:

- Rear buildings and the rules that applied to them in conservation areas depended on the committee development rights restrictions and how visible the rear building was from a public vantage point. If the outbuilding was sited in an area with minimal public visibility, then it would have less of an impact to the area and the rules would be different compared to a building that was immediately visible to the public. Article four restrictions also had to be considered for each site
- During the process for reviewing conservation areas, the team would look at boundary lines for each area and carry out assessments to determine if they were performing their functions efficiently. If the outcome of a review determined that the lines needed editing or removing entirely then Cabinet had the power to edit or remove the conservation designation. That process was encompassed in 'next step 2' of the presentation - Review and update Conservation Area Appraisals (urban area first)
- The Head of Planning acknowledged that Members wanted the process, for residents living in conservation areas applying for changes, simplified and existing planning rules laid out in a clear and understandable way; he agreed to look into it. The Chair agreed that some of the public guidance for planning applications in conservation areas also belonged in the Local Validation List as well as the Conservation Strategy; that kept a consistent approach to the messaging to the public

The Chair thanked Member for the discussion and points raised; they would be fed into the process of creating the Conservation Strategy which would be done in tandem with updating the Local Validation List.

Members noted the information in the presentation.

77. Transport Strategy

The Head of Planning provided the Committee with a further draft of the draft Transport Strategy for discussion; Members comments from the previous meeting had been incorporate into the Strategy and further comments were sought for the final draft before the Chair signed off the document.

The Head of Planning guided Members through the Strategy page by page and Members highlighted the following:

- Page 25 – Strategic Vision and Aim – the Committee suggested that Transport for Southeast be included within the paragraph as they had a key role in delivering infrastructure in the Borough. The Chair agreed that the suggestion be reflected in the Strategy
- Page 26 – The Chair made it clear the Council wanted the ferry service to Tillbury restored as it was a valuable service for the residents of Gravesham and Essex
- Page 29 – The Council were united with Gravesham and Dartford residents to see Galley Hill Road reopened as soon as possible. The Chair reiterated the Councils long term opposition to the Lower Thames Crossing development in Gravesham

- Page 30/31 – The Committee asked that wording be added to the document under ‘Road’ aims and objectives regarding pavement parking being detrimental to elderly people/wheelchair users/pushchairs, safe parking around schools during drop off and pick up time, providing safe ways for children to cross roads and combatting vehicles speeding around schools. The Chair added that some of the issues would have to be dealt with by the Highway Authority and the Police, but it was right for the Council to raise those issues. The Head of Planning advised that some of the points were already reflected in the ‘Walking and Cycling’ section, but he was happy to add and expand on those points in the ‘Road’ section.
- Working with partners such as Kent Police and Kent County Council Highways to ensure a sound and safe parking offer was provided in the Borough, was a combination of the national policy approach to parking as well as local planning policy requirements. The Committee reminded officers of the importance of reflecting local planning policies as residents had raised concerns about recent developments not having enough parking
- The Committee asked that wording be included around the danger of speeding and that the Council was looking to actively counter speeding in the Borough through different initiatives and working with external partners. The Chair agreed that a clause referencing the danger of speeding and schemes to mitigate speeding should be added to the road safety section
- The Committee asked that wording be added that the Council encouraged community transport in order to support those who couldn’t use public transport due to illness or frailty. The Chair advised that it was businesses who provided community transport, but wording should be added stating that the Council welcomed community transport schemes
- The Committee asked that a section be included on river transport; the Head of Planning apologised as some of the report was missing. A section on river transport would be included in the final draft stating that the Council was encouraging its partners to enhance and maintain the Tillbury Ferry service to Essex regardless of the form it took. A separate section would be included on the Uber Boats offer
- The Chair advised that the wording on page 24 concerning lobbying Government for legislative changes to enable the Council to have more powers and resources devolved, to deliver a safe and sustainable transport system was purposefully vague. This was to allow the Council to be open and receptive to Government response; the Chair did not want the Council to miss opportunities for the Borough by being too specific. The Chair noted that having devolved powers to enforce pavement parking and create ‘red routes’ would be beneficial to the Borough
- The Head of Planning advised that a response was being drafted, which would include comments made at tonight’s meeting, to KCCs local plan transport 5 consultation

The Chair stated that a definitive set of outcomes would be added to the Strategy following consideration of Member comments and final review; the Chair agreed to circulate a final draft to Members with a list of outcomes included outside of the meeting.

The Chair thanked Members for their comments, and it was agreed to be signed off subject to the above amendments and circulation of an action plan.

78. Local Validation Checklist

The Head of Planning provided the Committee with a consultation version of the Local Validation List review; Members previous comments had been incorporated into the document and a review had been undertaken by Officers with a revised draft of the List of Local Validation requirements being attached at appendix one. Prior to the public consultation on the revised list being released Members were invited to make comments.

The Head of Planning stated that there had been a number of key changes made to the List:

- Introduction of the requirement for biodiversity net gain; the impact of that requirement sat within the equality section
- National changes made by the Government to fire safety have been included
- Local changes that stemmed from the Design Code for Gravesham have been included

The Head of Planning fielded questions from Members and explained that:

- Within the document, the building plans were covered under planning regulations instead of building control regulations; the Head of Planning agreed to provide wording that explained some of the technical terminology in the document. The Chair added that wording could also be added that defined clearly what was classified as building work. The Head of Planning acknowledged that the Government had defined building works under the Building Regulation Act 2010 but what the Government defined as building control wasn't the same definition used for Planning; the relevant planning regulation was taken from the Act and added to this document. The Head of Planning agreed to circulate the glossary of terms prior to consultation
- Further details on what 'Ramsar' was, and the associated fees could be added to the document; the Head of Planning advised Members that it would be high level information. With regards to fees for planning applications, all of the necessary information was available on the website but due to their nature, they could change frequently which was why it was best to direct the public to the planning portal which was kept up to date
- As outlined by the Chair, a visual chart and illustrative examples would be created that outlined important information regarding planning application requirements, how to submit an application, differences between major and minor developments, accessing pre app advice and other information that pertained to the planning application process. Once the document was finalised, the Head of Planning agreed to create a one page guide for a specific type of planning application if Members felt it needed summarising however it wouldn't be suitable for all types of planning applications
- The difference between a major and minor planning application was that a major application was defined by central government as any application involving 10 or more residential units, dwellings on a site with an area of 0.5 hectares or more, 1,000 sq. m or more of new commercial floorspace or sites with an area of more than 1 hectare. The Chair asked that the definition be added to the front of the document
- The team always encouraged anyone thinking of submitting a planning application to apply for pre-application advice as it was vital when understanding the needs of the development. The Team Leader (Development Management) agreed to add further details around the benefits of pre-application advice, add a link to the Councils website page and move it to the top of the document. The Head of Planning added

that a compliance checklist had been incorporated into the Design for Gravesham document which allowed developers to go through a checklist to see if they met the necessary requirements. A visual guide was also included at the start of the guide; that was the approach that would be infused into this document

- An exercise was currently being undertaken in conjunction with the Digital Team to make accessing the planning pages on the Councils website easier for the public as well as simplifying the terminology and processes
- Further work on communicating the importance of pre-application advice would be undertaken; the Head of Planning agreed to clearly highlight the difference between applying for planning permission and receiving permission from building control. Members noted that every decision notice issued by the Planning Department already held wording stating that building control was a different permission which had to be applied for separately
- It was the duty of whoever was renting or occupying land under whatever agreement to seek the relevant planning permissions from the Council for planning permission even if the land was owned by the Council

The Chair thanked Members for their comments and advised that the next step was the document to go out to consultation subject to the above amendments.

79. Corporate Performance Report: Q1 2024-25

The Committee was provided with a report that updated them against the Performance Management Framework, as introduced within the council's Corporate Plan, for Quarter One 2024-25 (April to June 2024).

Appendix One to the report provided Members with a complete overview of the council's performance against the Corporate Plan for Quarter One 2024-25, covering the period April to June 2024.

The Committee considered each performance indicator in turn and highlighted the following:-

- In relation to PI 20 – The Committee raised concern and sought assurances regarding the 13.5% drop in 'minor' planning applications (five out of thirty one) being processed in time compared to last year; it was understood that resources needed to be allocated to 'major' planning applications but it shouldn't come at the expense of minor application which could have a dementia impact on local families and businesses. The Head of Planning explained that the decrease was due to unique circumstances; the largest planning application the Council had ever dealt with was submitted during the last year and several officers and to be assigned to the project. It did have a slight detrimental impact to the service, but it was predicted to be a one off occurrence, however the situation would be monitored. Following further Member concern about the risk of the Councils financial position being risked due to failure to heed the non-determination deadlines, the Head of Planning assured Members that the team monitored the deadlines to ensure that the Council would not be impacted. In reality, if larger planning applications that required increasing amounts of officer time kept being received over a long period, then additional staff would need to be hired to accommodate the extra workload. The Chair echoed the Head of Planning assurances and agreed that if a trend of large planning applications was seen then conversations on additional resources for the team would be had.

- The Chair explained that on some planning applications statutory consultees were not responding in time for the deadlines; the Council were obliged to consult with them and dutifully waited for responses however if they did not respond by the deadline then planning applications would be moved forward based on the information the Council had at that time
- In relation to PI 23 – The Committee raised concern about the fall in the number of net dwellings compared to last year; the Head of Planning explained that progress had been slow on development which was related to the economy and the cost of living crisis. It was like a continued decline would be seen in the number of homes completed in quarter two. The Chair noted the figures and stated that the Council could give planning permission for development but couldn't force the developers to start building

Members noted the report.

80. Corporate Register of Partnership

The Committee were provided with information of the council's involvement in partnerships that were within the remit of the committee.

The Strategic Manager, Community Safety Unit, gave Members a brief overview of the current partnerships that most directly related to the work of the Strategic Environment Committee which were as follows:

- Gravesham Community Safety Partnership
- G-Safe Business Crime Reduction Initiative

Appendix one to the report provided a detailed breakdown of the partnership entries specifically in relation to the Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee.

The Chair praised the Strategic Policy Manager and the CSU team for all their hard work over the years and asked that the Committees thanks be passed down to the team.

The Chair noted that the partnership with South Thames Gateway Building Control should be included in the report and asked that it be submitted to a future Committee meeting for consideration. The Head of Planning acknowledged the omission and agreed to the Chairs request.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 20:46pm.