

Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee

Tuesday, 17 September 2019

7.30 pm

Present:

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

Councillors: Derek Ashenden
Harold Craske
Brian Francis
Gary Harding
Baljit Hayre

Note: Cllr Sarah Gow was also in attendance.

Wendy Lane	Assistant Director (Planning)
Tony Chadwick	Principal Transport and NSIP Project Manager
Shazad Ghani	Planning Manager (Policy)
Richard McEllistrum	Interim Planning Manager (Development Management)
Carlie Simmonds	Committee Services Manager

8. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Conrad Broadley and Bob Lane.

9. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 June 2019 were signed by the Chair.

10. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Harold Craske declared an interest in agenda item 5 (Lower Thames Crossing Presentation) in that he was one of the Council's representatives on the North Kent Marshes Internal Drainage Board. The Board was currently investigating the impact that the Lower Thames Crossing will have on Ramsar/Special Protection Areas.

11. Lower Thames Crossing Presentation

The Committee received a presentation on the 'Lower Thames Crossing' by the Principal Transport and NSIP Project Manager.

The presentation can be viewed here:-

<https://democracy.gravesham.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=444&MId=3242&Ver=4>

The Principal Transport and SCIP Project Manager highlighted the following:-

- the statutory consultation finished in December 2018 and the Council submitted its response which was agreed at the Full Council on 18 December 2018;
- the Council was currently waiting on more detailed information from Highways England on those responses that they had received from the residents of Gravesham. Broadly, the supportive comments were from further afield whilst the objections were clustered close to the alignment;
- if there were significant design changes over the statutory consultation scheme Highways England may carry out a further targeted consultation in due course;
- Geophysical investigations had commenced and data will also be used from the studies undertaken when the A2 was widened and HS1 built;
- the tunnels will be bored from Thurrock so much of the spoil will be removed from the North however there will still be a significant volume in Gravesham which continues to be a major concern;
- construction is due to take place between 2021-2027 with the completed scheme opening in 2027;
- the proposed road works include a variety of complex junctions. The primary purpose being to join A2/M2 with M25 in Essex. The Council had expressed concern regarding the impact of the proposed A2 junction on local flows at Marling Cross junction and lack of detail on the impact to traffic flow during construction;
- the red line on the map that formed part of the statutory consultation highlighted those properties that will be compulsory purchased. The Council was now required to declare any properties within 200m of the red line boundary when undertaking land searches;
- the Council expressed concern regarding Ramsar/Special Protection Areas and the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AoNB);
- there was a lack of information regarding the charging regime however the Council had requested that residents of Gravesham receive the same discount as those in Dartford and Thurrock which should apply to both crossings and start from commencement of construction; and
- the Principal Transport and NSIP Project Manager stated that the Council would need to give consideration to what measures will be required to mitigate the impact and what compensation will be required if those measures cannot be mitigated.

The Committee highlighted the following:-

- with regard to the targeted consultation, all Members will need to be involved and it would be beneficial for Members to receive a further briefing from Highways England;
- consideration needs to be given to accommodation for the construction workers on the project;
- as there will also be local skills and training opportunities, contact should be made with local schools, colleges etc. to offer safety advice and to explore the creation of apprenticeships. During the construction phase, Highways England should require its contractors to use local labour wherever possible;
- with regard to mitigation/compensation, consideration needs to be given to minimising the disruption to traffic flow i.e. limiting when construction activity will be undertaken possibly at night/during school holidays and advance warning of alternative routes will need to be advertised from the onset. Concern was expressed regarding the disruption that had been caused from recent weekend works which was insignificant compared with the scale that will be happening during the construction phase;

- concern was expressed regarding air quality during the construction phase. Highways England had proposed to plant rows of trees at the end of the construction period however opportunities should be explored to plant trees earlier in the construction process. In London, lung function tests were being undertaken on local residents and it was suggested that this approach should be undertaken in Gravesham pre, during and after the construction period. A collaboration could take place with local universities;
- consideration needs to be given to public transport particularly for schools and cross river links;
- the Council should give consideration to undertaking its own surveys/polls with local residents and businesses to ensure that it receives all relevant feedback to underpin the responses to Highways England.

The Committee agreed that, as Gravesham would be the most affected by the Lower Thames Crossing, it was essential that the views of its residents and businesses were heard. All Members were responsible for representing their constituents therefore it was important that all three political parties work together to put the views of the residents and businesses at the 'heart of the Council's thinking' as the project moves forward. The Council needs to become a strong unified voice to ensure that issues such as investment in improving the local road network, design of the A2 junction, protection of the environment and more research on the impact of the Crossing on people's health continues to be top priorities. The Council will endeavour to keep residents well informed on progress of the Lower Thames Crossing.

The Chair advised that he would inform the Leader and the Cabinet of the above discussions and would also liaise with the Communications Team to request that there be a press release on the Council becoming a strong unified voice regarding the Lower Thames Crossing.

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

12. Development Management - Draft Local Validation List

The Committee received a presentation on 'Draft Local Validation List – What is it?' by the Interim Planning Manager (Development Management).

The presentation can be viewed here:-

<https://democracy.gravesham.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=444&MId=3242&Ver=4>

The Planning Manager (Development Management) informed the Committee that Gravesham Borough Council had not previously used or published a Local Validation List. The purpose of the list was to enable the Local Planning Authority to define what minimum information would be necessary to ensure that applications adequately describe the impact of the proposed development, in order to better enable decision makers and interested persons to understand the implications of that development and whether it would be in accordance with or contrary to planning policy and other material considerations.

Not having a local list had resulted in delays in the processing of planning applications and, in some instances, if inadequate information had been provided, then applications may have been refused as their impact could not be properly assessed.

To meet the Government's requirement as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework, the Interim Planning Manager (Development Management) drew Member's attention to the draft Local Validation List for Gravesham attached at appendix two of the report. The draft list had been compiled having regard to the format of the local lists of neighbouring Boroughs and Medway Council, in the interests of aiming for consistency, as far as achievable, with requirements in this part of the County.

The intention will be to commence a 6 week public consultation exercise using INOVEM, through the Gravesham website, social media and through direct email correspondence with users of the Planning (Development Management) service subject to GDPR considerations.

Following consideration of any responses received and any necessary modifications, a final Local List and accompanying bite size guidance will be adopted and published on the Council's website and kept under review by Officers on at least a biennial basis.

The Committee considered the report and highlighted the following:-

- the Committee supported the idea of liaising with those agents that regularly submit applications to request their views on an appropriate timescale for the Local List to be introduced. The list could also be presented to those agents for their views prior to consultation;
- as a majority of applications were submitted online, the Committee supported the idea of the agent/applicant having to complete a checklist (with tick boxes) prior to submission. It was also suggested that, when the list is published on the website, a popup box be introduced to highlight the new requirements;
- consideration needs to be given to those who are not computer literate/unable to access this information online. The Committee stated that there must continue to be face-to-face support. The Committee took the opportunity to commend the incredible level of support provided by the Customer Services Team to members of the public on all aspects of the Council.

The Committee thanked the Interim Planning Manager (Development Management) for an informative presentation and for the work that had been undertaken to date.

13. Future High Streets Fund

Further to minute 7 (18.06.2019), the Committee was informed that the Council had submitted a Phase 1 expression of interest to the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for Future High Street Funding for Gravesend Town Centre in March 2019. In July 2019, the Government announced a shortlist of 50 town centres which would go through to Phase 2 and Gravesend was not included in that list.

Further to this, the Government announced in August that it would expand the funding to an additional 50 town centres. Again, disappointingly, Gravesend was not included.

The Committee was informed that it had been a very competitive round of funding, with over 300 town centres submitting expressions of interest. To date, the MHCLG had not provided feedback on individual submissions. A letter had been sent to the Deputy Director Infrastructure and Regeneration, MHCLG, to express the Council's disappointment at the outcome of the first round of funding. An invitation was also extended to the Deputy Director to visit Gravesend Town Centre to see the significant opportunities that exist to do so much more to revive the Town.

The Assistant Director (Planning) advised that the Council remained committed to taking forward the potential transformational investments which underpinned its expression of interest for Future High Street Funding and will therefore explore other funding opportunities. The MHCLG announced that a further round of Future High Street Funding will open next year and that unsuccessful town centres be encouraged to resubmit.

The Prime Minister also announced on 30 July 2019 that there would be a £3.6 billion Towns Fund to support an initial 100 'left behind towns' to support with improved transport and broadband connectivity. There was no application process for that Fund. On 6 September 2019, the Government announced the 100 towns that will benefit from this fund. Again, Gravesend was not successful.

The Chair advised that he had written to the Member of Parliament for Gravesham, Mr Adam Holloway to request that he pursues any available feedback from MHCLG in relation to Gravesham's unsuccessful bid for Future High Street Funding.

The Chair advised that a report on the creation of a Town Centre Strategy/Partnership will be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

The Committee thanked all those officers that had been involved in producing an excellent bid.

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

The Chair invited Members and Officers to suggest agenda items for the next meeting of the Committee on 19 November 2019.

The Assistant Director (Planning) advised that a report on planning performance will be submitted to the next meeting.

The Committee requested that guidance on windows and doors within Conservation Areas be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee for consideration.

The Assistant Director (Planning) advised that draft guidance was being produced and could be submitted to a future meeting for consideration prior to consultation. A decision will need to be made on whether the guidance should be statutory or advisory.

To prevent delaying the consultation process, the Committee agreed that the initial draft be considered and signed off by the Chair of the Regulatory Board, Cllr Lauren Sullivan. During the consultation process, all Members be sent a copy for consideration and comment. Following consideration of any responses received and any necessary amendments, the final version be signed off by the Cabinet Member for Strategic Environment, Cllr Brian Sangha.

The Assistant Director (Planning) advised that there will be an article in the Spring edition of 'Your Borough' on protecting heritage buildings.

Close of Meeting

The meeting ended at 9.25pm