

## Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee

Tuesday, 4 February 2020

7.30 pm

### Present:

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

Cllrs: Harold Craske  
Dakota Dibben  
Brian Francis  
Baljit Hayre  
Jordan Meade  
Emma Morley  
Alan Ridgers  
Frank Wardle

Also in attendance: Cllr Ejaz Aslam, Cllr Lee Croxton, Cllr Leslie Hills

Wendy Lane	Assistant Director (Planning)
Simon Hookway	Assistant Director (Communities)
Tony Chadwick	Principal Transport and NSIP Project Manager
Richard McEllistrum	Planning Manager (Development Management)
Chris Wakeford	Committee Services Officer (Scrutiny) (Minutes)

### 21. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Bob Lane and Cllr Les Hoskins. Cllr Jordan Meade and Cllr Frank Wardle attended as their respective substitutes.

### 22. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting Tuesday, 19 November 2019 were signed by the Chair.

### 23. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

### 24. Presentation on feedback received to Local List of Validation Requirements for Planning applications consultation

The Committee received a presentation from the Planning Manager (Development Management) on feedback received on the Local List of Validation Requirements for Planning applications consultation. The presentation can be viewed here:

<http://democracy.gravesham.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=444&MId=3244&Ver=4>

The Planning Manager (Development Management) and Assistant Director (Planning) fielded questions from the Committee and highlighted the following:

- The new changes will be monitored and will be included within Planning Performance report which is due to come back to the Committee on a regular 6 months' cycle.
- In response to a question about updating the requirements, Members were advised that the Local List of Validation Requirements for planning applications is tied to lots of different requirements but its main core is statutory / National Planning Policy Framework. If there are very significant changes then another consultation may be required but it's quite rare to hold regular consultations on these matters. Guidance requires that it is updated at least every 2 years.
- There will be one or two simple bite-sized guide to help members of the public to better understand the requirements i.e. a householder guide.
- The Planning Department has been successful in appointing new staff including; an Service Manager (Development Management) and 3 new Senior Officers.

The Committee welcomed the Local List of Validation Requirements for Planning applications and a smarter way of working for the Planning Department that should see the number of invalid Planning applications reduce.

The Committee noted the presentation and that the Portfolio Holder will review the final version and adoption timetable in preparation to go live on 1 April 2020.

## **25. Verbal update on Highway England's Lower Thames Crossing project**

The Principal Transport and NSIP Project Manager provided a verbal update on Highway England's Lower Thames Crossing project that included the following presentation:  
<http://democracy.gravesham.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=444&MId=3244&Ver=4>

The Principal Transport and NSIP Project Manager fielded questions from the Committee and highlighted the following:

- All Members will be invited to attend a presentation from Highways England on 27 February 2020.
- Further information is required to fully understand the impact of the Lower Thames crossing on ancient woodland / heritage assets. Contact will be made with the Woodland Trust to get their views.
- The hydrological implications of the Lower Thames Crossing are not yet fully understood; but discussions are underway with Natural England.
- The change from 3 lanes down to 2 southbound from M25 to A13 was noted along with only 2 lanes on A2 through A2/LTC junction
- It is not clear how much development has been included in the transport modelling to produce a reasonable worst case for Environmental Assessment as well as Treasury (Green Book) requirements
- Short term spoil storage is proposed at the north end of Thong Lane. There may also be the opportunity to make the Blue Lake in Northfleet shallower.

- There is no new information on air quality or noise at the moment.
- Design standards are used when considering the safety of roads etc.
- Discussions on tunnel safety are underway between emergency services and Highways England
- The Council is exploring the adequacy of the environmental information to date to allow consultees to take an informed view of the implications of the scheme

Members expressed their concern over the lack of information from Highways England and the small window of consultation.

The Committee agreed that:

- The Principal Transport and NSIP Project Manager should provide all Members with a briefing note that highlights the key issues / concerns with the latest Lower Thames Crossing consultation that Members can take with them into the community.
- In preparation for the Member briefing from Highways England on 27 February 2020; the Principal Transport and NSIP Project Manager should forward the following concerns of the Committee to Highways England so Highways England are prepared to respond to this concerns at the briefing:
  - The consultation period is woefully tight given the lack of information / uncertainties that are hampering the Council's ability to evaluate and respond adequately.
  - Environmental impact: air quality / mitigation measures. How and when do Highways England propose to tackle this issue?
  - Traffic modelling: this appears to be a major weakness. Incorrectly scoping the scale of vehicle movements and thereby reducing the size of the motorway will have a huge impact that may need correcting (widening) in the future.
  - Ramsar site protection and ancient woodland / heritage protection - how will Highways England engage with the Council and other organisations on these matters?
  - Public Transport does not appear to have been considered – how will Highways England engage on this issue?

The Principal Transport and NSIP Project Manager advised Members to come and see him if they had any further issues on this subject.

**Note:** Cllr Lee Croxton spoke with the leave of the Chair on this item

## **26. Briefing on Gravesham Borough Council's submitted response to Transport for the South East Draft Transport Strategy**

The Principal Transport and NSIP Project Manager provided a brief summary of the Transport for South East Draft Transport Strategy, the Borough Councils response and the long term issues to be addressed. Please view the presentation here:

<http://democracy.gravesham.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=444&MId=3244&Ver=4>

The Principal Transport and NSIP Project Manager highlighted the Gravesham response:

- The current lack of a clear mechanism to integrate Local Plans and the draft Transport Strategy
- The strength and urgency needed to tackle the issues of air quality and decarbonisation
- Lack of clarity on how the draft Strategy can effectively be used to prioritise projects including reviewing those that are not being currently implemented
- The degree of influence over other bodies such as the LEP's, Highways England, Network Rail and Central Government to ensure implementation
- The Thames is not treated as a transport corridor in its own right
- The draft strategy supports the Lower Thames Crossing, which this Council opposes, but it does not address it as a strategic corridor or explicitly include it in the Strategic Environmental Assessment

Members raised the following concerns / comments:

- The Thames should be a designated transport corridor
- This has implications for Gravesham's Local Plan
- The consequences of the Lower Thames Crossing need to be considered:
  - It won't resolve the pollution issue at Dartford
  - If there are no improvements at Dartford following the completion of the Lower Thames Crossing; another bridge / tunnel may be needed at Dartford.
  - There will be an impact on the rural areas (Meopham, Culverstone etc) and these areas need highways improvements to cope with the increase in traffic etc.

The Assistant Director (Planning) explained that the Gravesham response had been agreed with the Chair before submission and suggested that the minutes of tonight's meeting could also be shared with Transport for South East so that they were aware of Members concerns and comments.

**Note:** Cllr Leslie Hills spoke with the leave of the Chair on this item

## **27. Corporate Performance Update - Quarter Three 2019-20**

The Assistant Director (Planning) and Assistant Director (Communities) presented the Members of Strategic Environment Committee with an update against the Performance Management Framework, as introduced within the council's Corporate Plan, for Quarter Three 2019-20 (October to December 2019).

The Assistant Director (Planning) highlighted the following:

- Planning Policy: In November 2019, MHCLG published table 122 "Net additional dwellings by local authority district, England, 2001-02 to 2018-19". In Gravesham there were 292 net additions for 2018- 2019.
- In the year to date our housing association partners delivered 25 new build shared ownership homes which were a mix of 2 and 3 bed houses and 2 bed apartments

delivered on Phase 2b of Springhead by Moat. The homes are subject to a nomination agreement to ensure that applicants with a local connection are prioritised.

- % of 'Non-Major' planning applications processed on time has improved from 61% to 77%. The public and Members are seeing improvements and a positive culture is forming.

The Assistant Director (Communities) highlighted the following:

- A vibrant local economy is a priority in the Corporate Plan. The town centre has seen a drop in footfall (9% over the last three quarters) which is a concern.
- The progress with the Reef development will be key to more people working in, visiting and shopping in the Town Centre.
- Decisions around future public health services will also contribute to people coming into the town.
- The council made its case to the Government's Future High Street Fund in 2019. The bid was unsuccessful, albeit the council continues make progress in working up key elements of its case to increase residential and to broaden the mix of reasons to come into the town centre.
- Telling our story (the Borough's story) – the council is doing more work on that, as recommended by the LGA Peer review.
- Business Growth figures are not in report because this is done on an annual basis.
- Next year's Business Award launch which will take place in March and will raise the profile of small businesses.
- There is a lot of debate around skills and training. The Council is at the forefront with number of apprentices, but needs to make progress with local training providers in respect of raising skills.

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

- Footfall is measured by a single camera outside McDonalds. St George's Centre also counts footfall and the Council can work with them.
- The Council doesn't have the capability to monitor the footfall in parks, riverside areas etc.
- The Council has around 17 apprentices and provides work experience opportunities. Further work can be done with key employers in the borough.
- There is another raft of guidance from the government on Brexit for businesses. The Council is communicating this guidance to local businesses.
- Business Rates are set nationally but the Council is looking at what flexibilities there are at a local level.
- There are lots of innovative solutions out there for windows / doors in conservation areas as set out in the technical guide which is currently out for consultation. The Council has created a quick guide on this matter that is available on its website and this was given to Members in hard copy at Cllr Sangha's behest.

The Committee noted the Corporate Performance Update - Quarter Three 2019-20.

## **28. Corporate Register of Partnerships and Shared Working Arrangements**

The Assistant Director (Planning) informed members of the Strategic Environment Committee of the council's involvement in partnerships that fall within the remit of the committee.

The current partnerships that most directly relate to the work of the Strategic Environment Committee are as follows:

- Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership
- North West Kent Countryside Partnership

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

- The Council does fund the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership. The Member representatives are chosen at Annual Council.
- The Council used to fund the North West Kent Countryside Partnership but currently don't as it isn't statutory. The partnership can be a more cost effective option as it uses volunteers.

The Committee noted the Corporate Register of Partnerships and Shared Working Arrangements that fall within the remit of the committee.

### **Close of meeting**

The meeting ended at 9.51 pm