

## Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee

Monday, 22 June 2020

7.30pm

### Present:

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

Cllrs: Harold Craske  
Brian Francis  
Baljit Hayre  
Leslie Hills  
Bob Lane  
Jordan Meade  
Emma Morley  
Alan Ridgers

Kevin Burbidge	Director (Planning & Development)
Wendy Lane	Assistant Director (Planning)
Simon Hookway	Assistant Director (Communities)
Myles Joyce	Service Manager (Development Management)
Keith Grimley	Senior Economic Development Officer
Ben Clarke	Committee & Scrutiny Assistant (Minutes)

### 29. Apologies

An apology of absence was received from Cllr Les Hoskins. Cllr Jordan Meade substituted.

### 30. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting Tuesday, 04 February 2020 were signed by the Chair.

### 31. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest.

### 32. Planning Performance

The Director (Planning & Development) advised that the report was produced at the request of Members and was the second of a regular series intended to be presented every six months to inform Members on current performance in respect of the planning service.

The Director (Planning & Development) highlighted key points from the report on performance information from the teams based within the Planning Service: Development Management, Planning Enforcement and Planning Policy as well as a short update on the Local Plan.

The Director (Planning & Development) and the Service Manager (Development Management) fielded questions from the Committee and explained that:

- The removal of development rights can be requested as a legitimate condition but there has to be a good reason to remove a right such as a change of use that would lead to excessive levels of noise or controlling outbuildings that would result in overdevelopment of their plot of land etc. Gravesham has a very good record of defending appeals and, with the lower case load during lockdown, officers have been able to review more cases that may not have been possible previously and refine use of conditions and grounds of refusal. Graph Figure 6 in the report outlines the percentages of permitted and refused application determinations
- A whole raft of changes have been implemented over the last year or so as the service reviewed the processes in place to help to deal with a backlog of applications. One of the major changes was to review the way applications were processed to be proportionate in time spent to the the Government-set fees. The Planning Team successfully managed to improve the application process while also minimising the amount of work and cost that was needed for each case
- Graph Figure 7 showed that the service was responding to more pre-application submissions than received due to better processes
- Not all major planning applications have to be submitted to the Planning Committee; the Council has delegated powers to deal with certain applications without going to Committee. Some major applications aren't the type of scheme that Members might associate with that term; the application may only be classified as major due to the size of the land area affected, e.g. the construction of a fence around a large field and it would not be submitted to the Committee, unless formally requested by a Member
- It is our adopted practice that Major applications pertaining to key strategic sites will always be submitted to the Planning Committee, irrespective of a Member request
- Deferral of applications isn't always a bad sign as they allow Councillors to request further information on the application, clarification of certain details or to seek further changes which may help the application receive permission
- Deferring applications did not impact the statistics significantly; Graph Figure 2 showed the Applications determined in time or within agreed Extension of Time period (%)
- The service no longer employed any agency staff; the last temporary member of staff was replaced by the Service Manager (Development Management)
- The other vacant posts were filled on a part time basis by experienced Planners who were able to hit the ground running and have been providing valuable expertise
- The previous two Planning Committees were cancelled due to lack of business, rather than due to lockdown, so there shouldn't be a backlog of applications for upcoming Planning Committee meetings. However, the July Planning Committee meeting will have substantially larger agenda as The Charter, Clifton Slipways, M-Block and Fleet Leisure will all be going to Committee

For Members clarity, the Service Manager (Development Management) outlined the three types of planning applications:

**Major**

- 10 or more dwellings / over half a hectare / building(s) exceeds 1000m<sup>2</sup>  
Office / light industrial - 1000+ m<sup>2</sup> / 1+ hectare
- General industrial - 1000+ m<sup>2</sup> / 1+ hectare
- Retail - 1000+ m<sup>2</sup>/ 1+ hectare
- Gypsy/traveller site - 10+ pitches
- Site area exceeds 1 hectare

**Minor**

- 1-9 dwellings (unless floorspace exceeds 1000m<sup>2</sup> / under half a hectare)
- Office / light industrial - up to 999 m<sup>2</sup>/ under 1 hectare
- General industrial - up to 999 m<sup>2</sup>/ under 1 Hectare
- Retail - up to 999 m<sup>2</sup>/ under 1 hectare
- Gypsy/traveller site - 0-9 pitches

**Other**

- Householder applications
- Change of use (no operational development)
- Adverts
- Listed building extensions / alterations
- Listed building demolition
- Application for relevant demolition of an unlisted building within a Conservation Area
- Certificates of Lawfulness (191 and 192)
- Notifications
- Permissions in Principle (PiP) and Technical Detail Consent (TDC)

The Director (Planning & Development) assured the Committee that he would find examples of the different types of applications and circulate them to Members after the meeting.

The Committee made several requests:

- Members of the Committee should meet the new Planning staff after the lockdown to get to know them more personally
- An email needed to be circulated to Members providing clarity on what constituted as a major application, what ones would automatically be brought to the Planning Committee by officers and Members ability to call in any major application

The Director (Planning & Development) advised that he would give some thought to organising a virtual meeting for Members to meet with the new Planning staff and circulate an email outside of the meeting regarding major planning applications. The Director (Planning & Development) added that Members were welcome to contact the relevant planning officer dealing with an application and discuss their views/concerns with them before requesting anything be submitted to the Planning Committee.

The Chair summarised the discussion of the report to the Committee and asked that the Director (Planning Development) include the protocol to call in planning applications to the Planning Committee in his email outside of the meeting.

The Committee gave their thanks to officers for compiling the report and sustaining performance during lockdown.

Members were happy with the six month reporting schedule for the report and noted the information contained within the document.

### **33. Post Covid-19 Recovery for Gravesend Town Centre**

The Committee was presented with a discussion document to assist with Post Covid-19 recovery planning for Gravesend Town Centre.

The Assistant Director (Communities) informed the Committee that a Plan for Town Centre recovery had been created which involved four main approaches, listed in full from pages 31-39 in the report. It was important that the approaches made were similar to other neighbouring local authorities so that there was unity across Kent:

- Actions undertaken during the lock down
- Planning for partial re-opening of the Town Centre
- Celebration/Commemoration events going forward
- Being part of the strategic plans for Kent

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

- Four marshals have been hired on temporary contracts to patrol the Town Centre; they were hired using the funds released by the Government a couple weeks ago to help local authorities reopen their Town Centres. They have been hired for the month but each week there will be a review to see if they are still required; they will help with the initial buzz of the reopening of bars and restaurants
- The Market Team is comprised of several Market operatives whose typical job role was to open up the Market and get it ready for operation. During lockdown the Market was closed so the team were redeployed to complete other tasks such as cleaning and redecorating. For the Markets reopening they installed social distancing measures, a one way system and hand sanitizer stations; they have now resumed their job roles
- Many businesses have taken positive steps towards maintaining social distancing in their stores but feedback will need to be sought from the independent shop community to see how they are faring. The team will build upon the contacts made during lockdown to make sure all the businesses in Gravesend are adequately supported
- No money given by the Government was used to create the knitted rainbows or any of the other creative arts projects. The artistic projects were created to make the Town appear more vibrant and hopefully attract more people to the Town over the coming weeks to help businesses

- The cleaning/replacement of broken paving slabs etc is a KCC function. The decision to implement parking charges from 01 June 2020 followed the approach of other neighbouring local authorities. Parking is within the Leader's portfolio and can be raised with him
- A number of comments were received about the extension of pedestrianisation of New Road affecting deliveries for shops; the Town Centre Manager has been working hard with them to find a suitable solution such as a permit system. Members should inform the Assistant Director (Communities) of any businesses that may need assistance
- A Chatham based company was used to print the infographics signage as that company were able to supply everything that was required in a short amount of time. In the future, the team can look to work with Gravesham based companies
- An event in Gravesham to recognise the hard work from frontline workers and volunteers through the COVID-19 pandemic would be welcome in Gravesham but it isn't deemed suitable to hold such an event in the current climate. An event will definitely be considered for the future when it is safer for larger gatherings

The Chair summarised the discussion of the report.

Members of the Committee thanked the Assistant Director (Communities) for all the teams' hard work and dedication to maintain public safety while also creating a safe environment of the Town Centre to reopen.

### **34. Covid-19 Business Support Response**

The Committee was presented with a briefing report that summarised the recent activity relating to the Council's response to Covid-19, focused on the support given to the local business community including grant assistance.

The Senior Economic Development Officer highlighted key points from the following sections of the report:

- Business Grants
- COVID-19 Business Support Zone and Business Intelligence
- Business Communication
- Kent and Medway Growth Hub
- Direct Assistance
- Finance and Value for Money

The Senior Economic Development Officer fielded questions from the Committee and explained that:

- Business grants were very positively received especially from businesses that missed out on the first tranche and were included in the second tranche under the Discretionary Grant Scheme
- The Discretionary Grant Scheme deadline came to an end last Friday and the first payments should be made in early July
- The team endeavoured to inform businesses if they hadn't been successful in applying for business grants as soon as possible either by telephone or email; the

businesses that were deemed ineligible were worked with to get them into a position to apply under the Discretionary Grant Scheme

- There hasn't an appeal process for the business support grant scheme as businesses were either eligible or not
- The business breakfast communication model can be reviewed to see if it's possible to re-implement it

The Assistant Director (Communities) reinforced the point that the Discretionary Grant Scheme focused on those businesses that fell through the net and didn't fit the criteria for the Small Businesses Grant Scheme. The team was aware of a long list of businesses that were interested in the scheme before it started and they were all contacted to make sure that they had applied correctly. A total of £13.6 million has been dispensed through grants to just over 1100 local businesses.

Members agreed to note the information contained within the report.

### **35. An Economic Development Strategy for Gravesham, 2019 to 2023**

The Committee was provided with a draft economic development strategy report which was written prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Assistant Director (Communities) advised that Appendix Two was the draft Economic Development Strategy which was meant to be brought to the Committee in March 2020 however it was delayed following the lockdown. Appendix Three gave a summary of the seven themes for the draft Strategy and Appendix Four showcased the action plan in Support of the Economic Growth Strategy for Gravesham. Appendix Five unpacked theme 4 and assisted Members in their understanding of the wider actions being taken in respect of enterprise support.

The Assistant Director (Communities) stated that the choice to defer the Strategy until later this year to see what will happen post COVID-19 was discussed but it was decided that it was not worth losing all of the hard work that had already been put into developing it. The report has been submitted to the Committee for discussion to enable the Strategy to move forward. The Assistant Director (Communities) added that once the framework was in place then other partners issuing similar Strategies could be engaged with and influenced; similarly the documents will be fed through Strategic Groups.

The Assistant Director (Communities) highlighted key points from the report regarding:

- Covid-19 Recovery – Economic Themes
- A Draft Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan
- The seven objectives of the draft Economic Development Strategy
- Next Steps for Gravesham

The Chair reminded the Committee that Members first saw the draft Strategy in November 2019 and it had strong links, for the first time, with the Corporate Plan. The Strategy will need to incorporate engagement with businesses post COVID-19 as they will need assistance to move forward.

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

- The team would like to find suitable workspaces which could be let out to people that need a space to work that isn't at the office or at home. Any workface that was found would have to be designed to fit the current situation but it is doable
- Upgrading infrastructure in the more rural areas such as Shorne and Higham has not been considered at this stage but it is something that will be looked into in the future although some existing conflicts will need to be managed first
- The action plan regarding upskilling the local workforce is included in the plan for the whole of the Strategy
- Part of the Council's mind-set moving forward will include encouraging more people to use public transport rather than their own vehicle. Public transport will be taken into consideration as part of any infrastructure reform
- There are opportunities for small businesses to grow within the next few years and the Council will seek to manage the workspaces to allow that growth
- The business support grants helped a lot of small businesses in the rural areas of Gravesham and the Council aimed to raise the profile of them in the future

The discussion also noted that improving the rural economy did not just mean providing superfast broadband, it was also about improving the infrastructure and local road connections leading to rural business areas.

The Assistant Director (Communities) advised that he was happy to take the Strategy forward, with Members approval, but it was recognised that it was only a draft document that would need input from local businesses and stakeholders too.

The Chair summarised the discussion to Members and assured Members that their views would be incorporated into the Strategy.

### **36. Coronavirus: Strategic Environment Cabinet Portfolio Impact**

Members were given an overview of the impact of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic upon the practical delivery of the respective services within the responsible Cabinet portfolio.

The Assistant Director (Planning) informed Members that most of the important points had been covered under item 5 Planning Performance and outlined the following:

- Several legislative changes have been introduced by Government in response to the pandemic. An example given was the time limited (temporary) permitted development right which allowed some businesses to have a 'takeaway' function
- A number of ministerial statements were also made but these weren't necessarily backed up by regulations. Often these asked for local authorities to take more of a flexible approach towards planning controls to support businesses in these challenging times.
- The staff of the Planning Team had been very flexible and often worked different patterns, to juggle child care etc, whilst still ensure that a quality service was keep operating during lockdown
- The service has been reactive to Government changes as they were announced; a good example being site visits which had been maintained throughout the Lockdown at a distance, and had been re-considered once the Government's advice on moving home had changed

The Chair stated that he was hugely impressed with the effort made by the Planning Team to keep the service up and running and the hard work of fellow Members during the lockdown period.

**Close of meeting**

The meeting ended at 9:51pm.