

Cabinet

Monday, 22 March 2021

7.30 pm

Present:

Cllr John Burden (Chair)
Cllr Lee Croxton (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Shane Mochrie-Cox
 Lenny Rolles
 Brian Sangha
 Narinderjit Singh Thandi
 Jenny Wallace

Stuart Bobby Chief Executive
Nick Brown Director (Housing & Operations)
Kevin Burbidge Director (Planning & Development)
Melanie Norris Director (Communities)
Sarah Parfitt Director (Corporate Services)
Lisa Nyon Assistant Director (Corporate Services)
James Larkin Head of Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Services
Shazad Ghani Planning Manager (Policy)
Andy Rayfield Communications Manager
James Bridges Digital Developer (Technical Support)
Ben Clarke Committee & Scrutiny Assistant (Minutes)

85. Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

86. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on Monday, 22 February 2021 were signed by the Chair.

87. Declarations of Interest

Cllr John Burden declared a non-prejudicial interest in item 13 as he was a Director on and the Chair of the Age UK Board. Cllr John Burden agreed to leave the meeting whilst Cabinet discussed the agenda item.

Cllr Lenny Rolles declared a significant interest, in agenda items 12 as he was a Director on and the Chair of the Rosherville Ltd Board as well.

Cllr Lenny Rolles declared a non- prejudicial for item 13 as his wife was a trustee for Age UK. Cllr Rolles agreed to leave the meeting whilst Cabinet discussed the agenda items.

88. Delegated Decisions - Cabinet Members

There were no further decisions for Cabinet to be updated on.

89. Retirement Message for The Director (Planning & Development)

The Chair informed the Cabinet that this meeting was the last Cabinet meeting the Director (Planning & development) would be in attendance for before his upcoming retirement. The Chair thanked the Director (Planning & Development) for his many years of service to the Council and on behalf of all Members, wished him a happy retirement.

The Director (Planning & Development) thanked the Chair for his kind words and informed the Cabinet that it had been a pleasure working with all of them and their predecessor.

90. Housing Delivery Test

The Cabinet were updated on the Housing Delivery Test 2020 measurement for Gravesham published on 19 January 2021, and their approval was sought to publish the Housing Delivery Test Action Plan (Appendix 2).

The Planning Manager (Policy) outlined key points from the report to the Cabinet regarding the:

- Housing Delivery Test Action Plan
- 20% Land Buffer and the Borough's Five-Year Land Supply
- The Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

The Chair praised the well-made report, which clearly set out the complex direction the Government were taking with regard to Planning and Housing Delivery, but he raised several concerns with the Government's approach:

- The power of local people to inform local planning decisions was being removed
- The Government had set housing delivery targets that were entirely unrealistic and would lead to Gravesham Council being penalised; the Council had approved planning permissions for hundreds of dwellings, but developers were land banking and not delivering the permitted housing
- The impact of Covid-19 and the Governments own actions informing developers not to build over the course of the pandemic had not been adequately taken into account
- The Council needed the Government to give local planning authorities such as Gravesham, further powers to ensure developers build the homes that are permitted, including CPO powers and the funding to ensure that the Council can enable delivery of housing units on land that had been banked by developers

The Cabinet fully endorsed the Chairs points and Cllr Shane Mochrie-Cox, Cllr Brian Sangha, Cllr Lenny Rolles and Cllr Jenny Wallace voiced their own concerns with the Government's approach to Planning and Housing targets.

In response to questions, the Planning Manager (Policy) explained that:

- Cabinet's interpretation of 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' was correct; Planning Officers and Members were required to put greater weight on the need for housing development within the Borough when considering planning

applications. There would be instances where other factors such as the NPFF would need to be taken into account, but Members had to consider the need for housing, how much development had or hadn't been brought forward and determine if the benefits outweighed the negative impacts of a development being brought forward

- If the Government determined that officers or Members had not followed Government guidance when making planning decisions, then ultimately, the Planning Inspectorate and Secretary of State would determine applications. In some cases, the Secretary of State has taken over planning applications and issued the planning decision. A recent case occurred in Tonbridge Wells in which the Secretary of State did not object to a business park being built on green belt land and within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which went against the National Planning Policy Framework, due to the economic needs of the area and the weight accorded to this factor.

The Chair advised that a strong message needed to be sent to the Government expressing the Council's concern over unrealistic targets and he would strive to work with the other political parties in order to deliver a successful Housing Delivery Plan and the housing needed by local people.

Resolved that the Cabinet:

- Approved the Housing Delivery Test Action Plan (Appendix 2)
- Gave delegated authority to the Assistant Director (Planning) in consultation with the lead Member for the Strategic Environment to make minor alterations to the document prior to publication.

91. GBC Response to EU Transition period

The Cabinet were provided with an update on the EU Transition period and Gravesham Borough Council's response and activities in relation to this.

The Chief Executive outlined a brief summary of the report to the Cabinet and highlighted key points regarding the:

- Response to the EU Transition Requirements
- Future requirements
- Consideration of GBC's Local Housing Need requirements

The Chair advised that last week a letter was received from Government ministers who were seeking assistance with Housing for those eligible to migrate to the UK from Hong Kong. Some 2.5 million people. The Chair queried if that was a factor that would need to be considered in the future.

The Chief Executive explained that the letter was received just before the Plan went to publication and its impact had been considered; the Chief Executive had consulted with the Planning Manager (Policy) and the Council were not anticipating any material impact on the Local Plan. The only way it would have any effect on the Local Plan was if the levels of migration were vastly different to that seen in previous years prior to Brexit; Members would be kept abreast of any significant changes to the situation with Hong Kong residents.

The Cabinet agreed to note the actions undertaken by the council in preparing for the UK's exit from the EU and to note the future requirements set out in the report.

92. Counter Fraud & Corruption Strategy

The Cabinet's approval was sought to adopt the new Counter Fraud & Corruption Strategy

The Head of Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Services gave a brief overview of the Strategy to the Cabinet and advised that it had been scrutinised and agreed at Finance & Audit Committee on 09 March 2021.

Concern was raised by a Member surrounding the Strategy's effectiveness in detecting any fraudulent activity with regards to the large amount of business grants that had been distributed to thousands of businesses over the course of the pandemic.

The Head of Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Services assured the Cabinet that the Strategy was responsive in terms of reacting to the new grant schemes and a number of his staff had actually been redeployed to deal with checking the grant applications. All of the grants received would have had some sort of fraud prevention work undertaken and the Head of Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Services was confident that the new Strategy was effective enough to combat any fraudulent activity.

The Chair added that training for Members in counter fraud was extremely important and going forward, training for that area would be repeated and built upon with other aspects of Member training.

Resolved that the Cabinet approved the proposed Counter Fraud & Corruption Strategy document presented at Appendix 2.

93. Corporate Risk Register and Risk Management Strategy 2021-22

The Cabinet were informed of the outcomes from Gravesham Borough Council's annual risk identification and analysis exercise and presented with a copy of the draft Corporate Risk Register for 2021-2022.

The Assistant Director (Corporate Services) ran through the report and highlighted key points from the draft Corporate Risk Register 2020-21 and the Risk Management Strategy 2021-2022.

The Cabinet noted the five risks for inclusion of the Corporate Risk Register 2021-22:

1. Ongoing financial viability of the council
2. Changes in national priorities and legislation
3. Organisational capacity/resilience
4. Cyberattack resulting in data breach or corruption of data
5. Investment risk.

The Chair explained that this item had been scrutinised and agreed at Finance & Audit Committee on 09 March 2021 and that it would be submitted to the next Full Council meeting for debate and Member approval.

Resolved that the Cabinet approved the Corporate Risk Register that had been developed for 2021-2022, prior to it being presented to Council.

94. Exclusion

The Chair moved that pursuant to Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 that the public be excluded from any items included in Part B of the agenda because it was likely in view of the nature of business to be transacted that if members of the public were present during those items, there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

95. Rosherville Limited Business Plan

Cllr Lenny Rolles left during discussion of this item.

The Cabinet were presented with the business plan for Rosherville Limited for the period 2021-24 for Cabinet approval.

The Director (Communities) outlined key points from the Rosherville Limited Business Plan 2021-24 and explained the financial implications.

Resolved that the Cabinet approved the business plan for Rosherville Limited at appendix two.

96. Gravesham Court Phase 1

Cllr John Burden and Cllr Lenny Rolles left during discussion of this item.

The Cabinet considered options for development / redevelopment of part of the estate to provide new and replacement housing.

The Director (Planning & Development) informed the Cabinet of Phase 1 and Phase 2 and what each phase would encompass; a decision was not being asked to be agreed at this stage and a report would be brought back to the Cabinet in due course.

Members of the Cabinet were supportive of the redevelopment plans laid out in the report but stressed the importance of engaging with the local Community and the Ward Councillors throughout the whole process. Members were also keen to keep a facility for Age UK in the area if it was possible in the new redevelopment.

In response to Member questions, the Director (Planning & Development) explained that:

- As part of the consultation process, the residents would be communicated with regards to the parking situation and the loss of some parking spaces during phase 1. Parking at other developments and in the wider area would be considered for the future
- Any developments brought forward would be subject to planning controls; the supplementary planning document would be utilised for development in the Town Centre as well as the developments that the private sector wouldn't bring forward

Resolved that the Cabinet authorised officers to undertake further investigations and design work in respect of Phase 1 (including the variant to incorporate an Age UK facility if feasible), reporting back with a feasibility assessment prior to progressing the scheme further, with further design work also being undertaken in respect of Phase 2.

97. Land at the junction of Ordnance Road and Milton Place

The Director (Housing & Operations) and Deputy Chief Executive left prior to discussion of this item.

The Cabinet were provided with an update in respect of the work undertaken with the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation (EDC) to produce a development brief for the above land and were asked to consider the acquisition of land from the EDC to enable a comprehensive housing development to be brought forward by the Council.

The Director (Planning & Development) outlined key points from the points including the benefits of converting the Gordon Lodge into a Café and the opportunities for increased sheltered housing.

Members of the Cabinet were supportive of the proposal and voiced their approval for:

- The conversion of the Gordon Lodge which should decrease the high levels of anti-social behaviour whilst retaining the lodge's heritage
- The plans would build further housing which would increase the Council's housing stock and provide vital housing for people in Gravesend
- The development would generate more income for businesses within the Town Centre as the development was only a short walk from the Town

The Chair explained to the Cabinet that the recommendation advised the decision would move forward in due course with the Deputy Leader, not the Leader; the reason for that being that the Leader was on the board of the EDC which would be an indirect non-prejudicial interest.

The Chair added that the planning application was due to be submitted to Planning Committee following the normal process which if approved, would allow the Council to purchase the site, develop housing schemes and provide affordable housing including sheltered housing with agreement from the EDC which would benefit the over 55's. In turn, that would release housing in other areas of Gravesham for families to move into and the Council could use increased amounts of right to buy receipts.

Resolved that the Cabinet:

- Noted the outcome of work producing the Development Brief (with the associated stakeholder engagement)
- Supported the acquisition of the EDC land, utilising funds held within the land acquisitions budget, and authorise the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Deputy Leader of the Executive and appropriate officers, to finalise the price and legal documentation to enable this and bring forward a scheme for the site's

development, which would be the subject of a further report prior to seeking planning permission

- Authorised the Director (Communities) to progress the development of a scheme to convert the Gordon Lodge into a café (or other appropriate facility) to support users of the skatepark and wider area and to provide natural surveillance of the area. Once developed, the scheme to be brought back to Members for approval of details and the necessary budgetary provision.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 20:43pm.