

Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee

Wednesday, 31 March 2021

7.30 pm

Present:

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

Councillors: Harold Craske
Brian Francis
Baljit Hayre
Leslie Hills
Leslie Hoskins
Bob Lane
Emma Morley
Jordan Meade

Wendy Lane	Assistant Director (Planning)
Simon Hookway	Assistant Director (Communities)
Tony Chadwick	Principal Transport & NSIP Project Manager
Keith Grimley	Principal Economic Development Officer
Stewart McDonald	Technical Services Support Officer
Lauren Wallis	Committee Services Officer (minutes)

59. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Alan Ridgers and Cllr Jordan Meade attended as his substitute.

60. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

61. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet Committee held on Tuesday, 16 February 2021 were signed by the Chair.

62. London Resort Update - Report and Presentation

The Principal Transport & NSIP Project Manager introduced the report and gave a presentation that provided the Committee with an update in respect of the current position with the London Resort Development Consent Order (DCO) application and noted the current timetables of other major infrastructure projects. The presentation can be viewed via the link set out below:

<https://democracy.gravesham.gov.uk/documents/b13465/Item%205%20-%20London%20Resort%20Update%20-%20Presentation%20Wednesday%2031-Mar-2021%2019.30%20Strategic%20Environment%20Ca.pdf?T=9>

The following points were raised during discussion on this subject:

- Following a question on the key positive and negative impacts in Gravesham of the London Resort, the officer undertook to send a detailed answer to Members following the meeting if there were any questions that could not be answered immediately given the complex nature of the proposal.
- There would be pedestrian access to the site via George and Dragon (Pilgrims Way). It was noted that staff would have other access options and the public could use the footpaths to/from the Ferry Terminal even if they did not intend to visit London Resort.
- It was highlighted that there was no public pedestrian access to the site via Northfleet High Street despite that fact that this approach might have helped the regeneration of this area (staff would be able to enter via Lower Range Road). However, the main pedestrian access to the site was up A226 Galley Hill, Swanscombe which was not a pleasant walk and covered quite a long distance.
- It was noted that the Council had submitted an initial response to the Planning Inspectorate and the officer confirmed that this had included highlighting the transport implications and the impact on the surrounding road network including staff using local roads etc. London Resort had submitted transport modelling which Kent County Council and Highways England considered to be lacking in detail.
- The Committee was advised that the best way to think of application was as if it were an outline planning application. Most of the Resort lay within the area of responsibility for Development Management by Ebbsfleet Development Corporation (EDC), and when the EDC was disbanded, Gravesham and Dartford Borough Council would take over the lead. Until this time the Borough Councils would mainly act as consultees.
- Members also noted that there was a possible noise disturbance impact in relation to the Tilbury Ferry Terminal for Gravesend residents who lived on the Kent side of the river.
- The officer highlighted the ability of London Resort DCO to disapply certain aspects related to potential impacts and much remained unknown at this early stage.
- Members noted that the Borough Council was promoting the use of local businesses during construction of the site and there would be opportunities for businesses to submit tenders. However, there were also some specialist construction works to be undertaken which were not possible to locally source. The Principal Economic Development Officer added that London Resort was prepared to work with the Borough Council on the supply chain approach and there would also be Meet the Buyer events which had worked well in the past.
- Following a question with regard to effects of the London Resort development on the newly designated and greatly expanded Swanscombe Peninsula Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). It was explained that this was a case of the classic tension between nature conservation and economic development, which would be resolved by the Secretary of State in making a decision on the DCO. Much would depend on the nature of the compensation and mitigation package that was offered.
- The issue of parking on local roads was raised as parking was already at a premium. Members were advised that a strategy on parking had been produced by the applicant and the documents were with the Development Consent Order Application. The application assumed a maximum of 10,000 spaces on the site (including Tilbury) together with the use of public transport – buses, trains and ferries. The CPZ had been considered, but this was ultimately in the control of local authorities. It was noted that there was nothing in the document with regard to the enhancement of Northfleet railway station.

- Following a question on funding, the Chair noted that this detail was not yet available although it was good to see the scheme moving forward. He advised that there would be a further Member Briefing on this subject once more information became available.
- The need for construction workers for the London Resort would overlap with the Lower Thames Crossing and questions had been raised with regard to staff accommodation and how staff would travel to the sites. There had been talk by London Resort of using cruise ships moored on the Thames as temporary accommodation. It was also hoped to use the river as a means of transporting construction materials.

The Assistant Director (Planning) advised that when the Planning Inspectorate published the initial Representations the Committee would receive a link to these documents.

Resolved that the report be noted.

63. Skills and Employment Update - Presentation

The Principal Economic Development Officer and the Assistant Director (Communities) provided the Committee with a presentation on an update on skills and employment which can be accessed via the link below:

<https://democracy.gravesham.gov.uk/documents/b13469/Item%206%20-%20Employment%20Skills%20Update%20-%20Presentation%20Wednesday%2031-Mar-2021%2019.30%20Strategic%20Environm.pdf?T=9>

The following points were raised during discussion on this subject:

- Following a comment from the Chair on the use of acronyms, the Principal Economic Development Officer explained the following:
NEET – Not in Education, Employment or Training
SME – Small and Medium Enterprises (of which there were approximately 250)
SEND – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
- An issue was raised in that the presentation mentioned links with Mid Kent College and concern was expressed that North Kent College was missing out. The Committee was advised that Mid and North Kent Colleges had a formal partnership and should a particular training requirement such as construction be needed both colleges would focus on the issue.
- In relation to apprenticeships in construction skills, Members were advised that both North and Mid Kent Colleges had a strong construction focus. However, the Principal Economic Development Officer undertook to look into this in more detail given that the relationship with Mid Kent College had been referenced by the Executive Director of the Lower Thames Crossing project in discussion with a Borough Councillor.
- A comment was made regarding Apprenticeship take up locally, having improved recently.
- Following a question from a Member about the availability of financial assistance with the costs of gaining CSCS cards, for job seekers looking for work in the construction sector, the Principal Economic Development Officer undertook to look into this matter and to email the information to Committee members. The officer added that there

were funds available via Work Coaches and also through the Job Centre but it depended on the status of the applicant.

- The Chair felt that a Construction Skills Academy was an excellent idea as was the physical focus on advice and support and it would be great to see it located in Gravesham. The officer advised that it was an objective and every stakeholder had identified this as a potential requirement given the scale of demand for construction skills associated with the numerous major infrastructure and other projects due to take place in North Kent. However, most colleges were reluctant to take on an additional site. A good starting point would be if the Borough Council could identify a site but the question of who would create a business case, build the academy, manage it etc would need to be resolved. The officer explained that the North Kent Skills Group had recently discussed putting together a two page proposal to excite interest in a potential Construction Academy, in an effort to start a conversation about the prospects for such a facility.
- A comment was made that there was fragmented provision across the Borough and a holistic approach was required to connect all the pieces to enable the Council to build on what was already available.
- A comment was made on the need for the Borough Council to be a conduit of communication with regard to all aspects and officers were asked to explore how to become more critical in communicating change and with targeting local school sixth forms.
- The Chair considered that Members should also play a role and asked them to give some thought on how everything that had been discussed could be factored into the Economic Stimulus Policy as it was a unique opportunity to assist the Borough following the pandemic with regard to communication.
- The Principal Economic Development Officer undertook to share details of the school engagement contact with the Committee.
- Disappointment was expressed in the scope of the Lower Thames Crossing project to involve young people of the Borough in that they only intended to liaise with a couple of local schools.
- The Senior Economic Development Officer explained that the Lower Thames Crossing team had a dedicated Schools Engagement contact and had produced a detailed schools engagement plan earlier in the year, a copy of which had been provided to the Council and did appear to take on board some earlier critical feedback from Members. Given the priority for schools engagement in relation to skills, which had been expressed by Members previously, some focus had been given to this.
- The Chair suggested that representatives of North Kent College and Lower Thames Crossing be invited to a future meeting of the Committee to talk about how they are priming local young people to be involved in major projects in the Borough.

Resolved that the report be noted.

64. Local Plan Consultation Verbal Update

The Assistant Director (Planning) advised that the Planning Manager (Policy) had tendered his apologies for absence for family reasons.

The Committee was advised that the team was continuing to work through the representations and were going back to representors, where applicable, to ensure that the

database underpinning the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) was up to date. For example, numerous incidents of checking owners, agents and land proposers contact details etc and who they were representing, land ownership etc. In addition, a number of queries had been received with regard to the expansion of existing sites and clarification of those sites considered through the SHLAA.

The team was also commissioning additional studies including the following:

- Gravesham Green and Blue Infrastructure Study
- Local Housing Needs Assessment
- Transport Study
- Workforce/ Employment Needs Study

In addition, the following work was in the pipeline:

- Travellers – updating the needs position and identification of potential sites
- Masterplanning to underpin the site allocations at Meopham, Higham and Istead Rise.

A question was raised in relation to how the Green Belt Boundary Review and Local Green Space Allocation related to the consideration of additional land for development. The Assistant Director (Planning) explained that Part 1 and Part 2 of the Strategic Green Belt Boundary reviews had been published as part of the Regulation 18 stage 1 and Regulation 18 stage 2 consultations. The Green Belt Study Part 2 work identified and assessed land parcels and considered the potential harm to Green Belt purposes.

Resolved that the update be noted.

65. Strategic Environment Covid Update Report

The Chair expressed his delight with how the Council had coped during the pandemic and asked about changes that had or would come about as a result of lessons learned during this time.

The Assistant Director (Planning) highlighted a change in Planning Self Service as it had been recognised the residents and businesses wanted instant access to planning applications and advice. The pandemic had made this accessibility more important as some residents had not been comfortable about leaving their homes. The service had received a high number of phone calls in the run up to Christmas and a rota of two officers a day to be present in the Civic had been in place for a number of months since the start of the first lockdown. However, due to Government Guidance to work at home wherever possible, officers had no choice but to divert to the Customer Contact Centre, as a result of the post Christmas lockdown, due to the lack of lines available for diversion on the Council's telephony system. Business mobiles had been issued to Planning Enforcement officers. There was now also increased pressure on the team to do GIS work. Records were still card based so the service was looking to the IT team to move records over to a GIS based service.

The Assistant Director (Communities) advised that the key lesson had been for the service to capitalise on information from businesses particularly micro businesses as this information revealed a great deal about how the economy of the Borough functioned.

The following points were raised during discussion on this subject:

- A comment was made about the need for business mobiles for all officers and that this had only happened in March 2021. Whilst all the hard work of officers during the pandemic was applauded, communications during this time for Members trying to contact officers by telephone had been terrible. In addition, the Customer Contact Centre did not know who was in and who was not and a schedule of officers in the building should have been prepared. The Chair responded that whilst he shared the Councillor's frustration but the speed needed to respond to the pandemic had to be recognised and lessons had since been learned.
- Following a request with regard to the Denton Masterplan, the Chair assured the Committee that information would be supplied to all Members as soon as it became available.
- Following a question on whether officers would be rota'd to work at the Civic Centre two to three days a week, the Assistant Director (Planning) advised that since March 2020 two members of staff had been rota'd to be in the office to answer telephones. However, as previously mentioned, after Christmas all officers had to work at home where possible. The current Roadmap to Recovery stated that people should continue to work at home where possible and whilst officers continued to be happy to combine working from home and working in the office, the Council's approach had to be compatible with Government Guidance.

Resolved the report be noted.

66. Chair's Announcement

The Chair advised that Kevin Burbidge, Director (Planning & Development) was retiring today after 33 years at the Council. The Chair thanked the Director for all his help and hard work and wished him a happy retirement.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 9.29 pm