

Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee

Tuesday, 15 February 2022

7.30 pm

Present:

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

Councillors: Harold Craske
Dakota Dibben
Brian Francis
Baljit Hayre
Leslie Hoskins
Bob Lane
Emma Morley
Diane Morton

Please note: Cllr Jordan Meade was also in attendance.

Simon Hookway	Assistant Director (Communities)
Tom Reynolds	Assistant Director (Strategic Regeneration)
Anita Tysoe	Service Manager, Town Centre & Cultural Services
Keith Grimley	Senior Economic Development Officer
Chris Wakeford	Committee Services Officer – Scrutiny (Minutes)

89. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Leslie Hills; Cllr Diane Morton attended as his substitute.

90. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee held on Thursday, 9 December 2021 were signed by the Chair

91. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

92. Strategic Regeneration Presentation

The Committee received a Strategic Regeneration presentation from the Assistant Director (Strategic Regeneration). The presentation can be viewed here:

[\(Public Pack\)Strategic Regeneration Presentation Agenda Supplement for Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee, 15/02/2022 19:30 \(gravesham.gov.uk\)](#)

In response to Members questions, the Assistant Director (Strategic Regeneration) highlighted the following:

- The Strategic Regeneration service has three key pillars: Delivery, Strategy and Vision and Identity. The Assistant Director (Strategic Regeneration) noted that the Strategic Regeneration service can flex to priorities, guided by dialogue with Management and Members.
The key to bringing sites forward is engaging with key developers and understanding their challenges before working together via project plans and a strategic programme to try to overcome the challenges. Visibility for Management has been enhanced through maps and Project Sheets/Plans.
- The Strategic Regeneration service set out a manifesto for place-led, quality and sustainable regeneration. The Council needs to promote what's great about the Borough (e.g. heritage, history, assets, the river and green spaces) and also find a 21st Century vision and identity for Gravesham.
- Partnerships are key. Health partners are of course part of this and infrastructure is too. Holistic Regeneration is about optimising the Economic, Social and Environmental outcomes of projects. Housing delivery doesn't have to just mean *just* homes; it can be co-location/returned assets as well (an example given included the provision of new homes alongside a new sports health and leisure centre).
- The Charter has to be a beacon for regeneration and sustainability and is one part of the vision. Albion Waterside and Clifton Slipways are complicated, long projects that will take some time to deliver. Therefore, this role needs to focus on delivery, strategy and vision in tandem.
- There are lots of opportunities to engage with the young people of Gravesham and the Council has a strong Communities team. Young People currently partake in the Climate Change Advisory Board so this may provide a precedent for how we can engage young people on regeneration. The Assistant Director (Strategic Regeneration) also noted other ways to engage.
- A balanced approach to development that optimises economic, social and environmental outcomes is important.
- A consensus on a manifesto for Gravesham's 21st Century identity is required and the Assistant Director (Strategic Regeneration) will help facilitate this. The Assistant Director (Strategic Regeneration) noted Members comments on what makes Gravesham unique (the Vice-Chair suggested Heritage, Countryside, Connectivity)

The Committee thanked the Assistant Director (Strategic Regeneration) for an informative presentation.

93. Report on activity associated with Welcome Back funding

The Assistant Director (Communities) and Service Manager, Town Centre & Cultural Services updated Committee Members on the Welcome Back Fund (WBF) and associated actions.

The following areas were highlighted to Members:

- The Council was awarded £94k from both the Welcome Back Fund and Reopening of High Streets Successfully fund to be directed towards eligible activities that respond to the medium term impact of Covid on local economies up to 31 March 2021.
- The ways in which the fund can be used include:
 - Boosting the look and feel of High Streets and Neighbourhood shopping centres to make them welcoming
 - Running publicity campaigns and preparing to hold events to boost footfall and encourage people back into the area, thereby supporting local businesses.
 - Installing and refreshing signage and floor markings to encourage social distancing and safety.
 - Improving green spaces on high streets and town centres by planting flowers or removing graffiti
- The fund can only be used for new, temporary, activity. It cannot be used to cover any activity already in place and does not cover capital expenditure, permanent changes or grants to businesses.
- Proposed expenditure must be approved in advance by The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), to ensure it meets the scope of the fund.
- The funding is from the European Regional Development Fund, therefore strict EU procurement requirements must be followed to enable expenditure to be reclaimed in arrears.
- All activity and related expenditure must be completed and defrayed by 31 March 2022.
- During Summer 2021, Gravesham Borough Council engaged The Retail Group to draw up a Town Centre Recovery Plan – a specific requirement of the funding. The work involved an engagement exercise with businesses across the town centre and two outlying Neighbourhood High Streets (for comparative purposes) as well as a range of stakeholders, including Members. The engagement was designed to gather views around what town centres and businesses needed to assist them to recover.
- The findings were included in a final report (attached at Appendix II), which set out recommendations for short, medium and longer term actions. These can broadly be combined into 6 main themes:
 - Vision setting and place shaping – developing the longer term vision for the town centre
 - Branding & Communications – from wayfinding to promoting activities and in the town centre
 - Business engagement – from supporting businesses to adapt their model, to considering “meanwhile use” of vacant premises or reviewing the physical appearance of their premises
 - Data & benchmarking – Understanding the gaps in the market, how interventions are affecting vacancy rates and footfall

- Events – using activities and events to create a reason for people to come to the town, increasing dwell time and potentially spend
 - Street scene & infrastructure – improving the look and feel of the town centre environment and improving physical facilities such as seating
- Using the above information, a further list of proposed expenditure for how the Welcome Back Fund could be utilised was submitted to DLUHC for approval. These include:
 - Communications and public information
 - Business facing awareness raising activities
 - Recruitment of Covid Information Officers
 - Public Realm improvements
 - Events and activities
 - Town Centre Dressing

The Assistant Director (Communities) and Service Manager, Town Centre & Cultural Services fielded questions from the Committee and highlighted the following:

- Assuming that all activities set out in the report are delivered by 31 March 2021, the fund will be spent in full, with a small surplus of around £8k. Members are welcome to submit their ideas on how this surplus could be spent.
- The Assistant Director (Communities) and the Service Manager, Town Centre & Cultural Services noted the following ideas from the Committee:
 - Improved clarity on signage in the Borough
 - More street Markets / Food Markets in the town to increase footfall.
 - Attract more small businesses into the town
 - Engage communities and publicise local events / entertainment in the town (e.g. school / community choirs coupled with shared space outside restaurants and Cafes)
 - Advertise the town at Gravesend train station and the Tilbury Cruise Terminal
- The Assistant Director (Communities) highlighted the recent Light Festival in the town, spearheaded by the Service Manager - Town Centre & Cultural Services, which was very well received. The LED light strips used in alleyways for the festival will remain in the town.
- The Council is keen to work with independent local businesses.
- A planting scheme has been identified by the Council and will be planted by March.
- The Gravesham Tourism App has been developed and promoted. The App takes a number of locations and shows how they would have been in times past (virtual experience via QR codes). The Service Manager, Town Centre & Cultural Services will circulate further details on this matter to the Committee.
- The team at Brookvale Depot are finalising their review of all areas for painting / clean ups and will work through the list. Members are welcome to contact the Service Manager - Town Centre & Cultural Services to flag up any areas that they would like on the list.

The Committee thanked the officers in attendance and noted the report on activity associated with the Welcome Back funding

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8.37 pm