

## Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee

Monday, 20 June 2022

7.30pm

### Present:

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

Councillors: Harold Craske  
Dakota Dibben  
Brian Francis  
Nirmal Khabra  
Leslie Hills  
Bob Lane  
Emma Morley  
Leslie Hoskins

Simon Hookway Assistant Director (Communities)  
Tony Chadwick Principal Transport and NSIP Project Manager  
Jackie Denton Customer Services Manager (Minutes)

In attendance: Ben Coleman (Project Director), P J Associates  
Rebecca Jones (Project Manager), P J Associates

### 103. Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Shazad Ghani.

### 104. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee held on Wednesday, 30 March 2022 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

### 105. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

### 106. Gravesham Local Cycling and Walking Implementation Plan

The Committee were provided with a presentation from consultants P J Associates (PJA) which gave an overview of the Local Cycling and Walking Implementation Plan (LCWIP) process. Members had an opportunity during the meeting to input their ideas and issues at the start of the plan preparation process.

The full presentation can be accessed through the following link:

[https://democracy.gravesham.gov.uk/documents/b16673/Supplementary\\_Presentation\\_-\\_LCWIP\\_Monday\\_20-Jun-2022\\_19.30\\_Strategic\\_Environment\\_Cabinet\\_Committ.pdf?T=9](https://democracy.gravesham.gov.uk/documents/b16673/Supplementary_Presentation_-_LCWIP_Monday_20-Jun-2022_19.30_Strategic_Environment_Cabinet_Committ.pdf?T=9)

In 2017 the Department for Transport (DfT) developed the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) process to help government identify a pipeline of schemes that could be realised in future through capital funding to local authorities. PJA assisted with this and are also helping with the refresh of the LCWIP guidance with the DfT, identifying opportunities to update and expand the guidance which should be complete by late 2022.

LCWIPs provide a long-term approach to developing local cycling and walking networks usually over a 10 year period. LCWIPs are intended to assist local authorities identify prioritised cycling and walking infrastructure improvements, ensure consideration is given to cycling and walking within both local planning and transport policies and strategies and make the case for future funding.

Following a tour of the borough last week consultants will now engage with a whole range of interested parties including walking groups, cycling groups and Parish Councils across the borough. The programme will end in August/September. The timeline is determined by the Department for Transport (via KCC) funding.

There are 6 stages to the project and we are currently in the preliminary Stages 1/2. Key at this stage is data collection, hearing ideas, looking at what is going on in the borough, understanding the demand for walking and cycling activity and to understand wider movement trends in Gravesham. Stages 3 and 4 are network planning, identifying preferred cycling network and core walking routes using audit tools. Stages 5 and 6 are prioritising improvements to enable development of a phased programme for investment and integrating outputs into the final LCWIP report.

Following the presentation and questions from Members the following was highlighted:

- We need to take our local heritage on board when looking at routes
- We need to knit together what we currently have with our aspirations to improve connectivity along the borough
- We need complimentary routes
- although the bulk of the demand is in the urban area it is a strategy for the whole Borough
- This process will highlight issues of connectivity (or lack of)
- Stage 6 is implementing the results of the agreed strategy, so not part of the commission, which will require endorsement from KCC as the Transport Authority.
- Designs will champion best practice so routes such as the canal don't become more sanitised
- In terms of risk of delivery, public rights of way is something that will need to be flagged up
- Parishes have a role in the detail for their areas
- Many people want to get into the rural area for cycling/walking so it should be an important element
- PJA are aware the landscape of each authority is very different and with the Lower Thames Crossing and London Resort projects we will need to work through those developments and work with what we know and schemes going on already around Ebbsfleet to make sure that it is compatible
- There was a lack of consultation and joined-up thinking on the cycle lane in the town centre which hasn't been a success. We need to ensure there is consultation with other agencies such as schools, the Thames & Medway Canal Association and local councillors who all know their area better.

- Important that Members help to shape the future for Gravesham. As a borough we are unique and we need to look at better connectivity across the whole borough, rural and urban

### **107. Corporate Performance Update: Quarter Four 2021-22**

The Assistant Director (Communities) provided the Committee with an update against the Performance Management Framework, as introduced within the council's Corporate Plan, for Quarter Four 2021-22 (January to March 2022).

#### **The Assistant Director (Communities) gave the following update and responded to Member questions:**

PI 28 – % rate of vacant town centre retail properties: Vacancy rates continue to improve slowly but not yet back to pre-pandemic levels. Take up of the smaller units has been strong but it is the larger units creating the problem. Many of the units in town have been sub-divided as there is no longer a requirement for large floor space.

The national vacancy rate in town centres is just over 14% whereas we currently stand at 10.7% so we are doing better than some towns such as Dartford or Chatham but in terms of footfall it varies depending on the diverse mix and how many people are living in town centres.

A lot of work is being done to put properties into a marketable state, works include residential use above and this will contribute to more people living within the town centre. On the leisure side, the Panic Room continues to expand and innovate. They have their new axe throwing and laser games in part of the former BHS. Changes are happening and there is now a mix of retail, business and leisure with a solicitor and gym in the St. George's Centre. We rely on the businesses coming forward recognising those opportunities. Business rates are immovable but agents will negotiate on rents.

PI 29 – Average weekly town centre footfall: This remains a concern due to changing shopping habits. With the big players like Marks & Spencer and Debenhams no longer in the town centre that has an impact on footfall. For many years we have held out against Bluewater but since the pandemic Bluewater is also suffering. Retail parks on the edge of town which are cheaper and have free parking are doing better.

Economic profile: By the end of this quarter the council had allocated 100% of the remaining top-up business grants to support a number of people who wanted to adapt their business post Covid, some leisure, some training and construction skills.

PI 32 - % net gain in active business: promoting a borough open for business with a focus on retaining existing businesses and encouraging new start-ups, increase the level and range of business investment to drive economic growth. Gravesham does well on small start-up businesses compared to other areas and the survival rates seem to be good.

Improving economic conditions: Working with partner agencies to develop a package of measures that support local enterprises and deliver a workforce with the skills needed by modern business. Proposals for a new school at Cable Wharf and an extension to Rosherville Academy, lots of investment taking place. The council have won an award this week for taking on 34 placements through the Kickstart scheme. The scheme will come to

an end in the next quarter and the council will bring a report to Committee on the number of those who we were able to help into training and employment.

PI 35 - % of major planning applications processed on time: Members agreed this was a good outcome. Members felt there were sites blighting the borough where they have received approval but not developed the sites within a reasonable timescale. There are very little levers to ensure sites are developed once approved.

**Action: The Principal Transport and NSIP Project Manager to relay back to the Assistant Director (Planning) concerns about approved but un-developed sites and whether the Section 215 Notice can be used to improve the look of the sites. Tom Reynolds (Assistant Director, Strategic Regeneration) to be asked to provide some clarity on the implementation plan for the borough.**

Members noted the information in the report.

### **108. Local Plan – Timetable & Risks**

The Principal Transport and NSIP Project Manager gave an update on the Local Plan timetable and risks on behalf of the Service Manager (Planning).

The Local Development Scheme adopted prior to the pandemic, set out that the emerging Local Plan would be submitted for examination to the Planning Inspectorate in early 2021. As Members will be aware the Regulation 18 Stage 2 consultation in late 2020 pushed the submission date back to late 2021. As reported to Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee in June 2020, the Regulation 18 Stage 2 consultation was not undertaken by officers at the start of 2020, as work was outstanding from consultants. Progress on the Regulation 18 Stage 2 emerging Local Plan was subsequently delayed as a result of COVID-19.

Colleagues in Planning Policy have been working on the three strands of the emerging Local Plan, these being:

- Local Plan Core Strategy Partial Review
- Site Allocations Document
- Development Management Policies Document

Unfortunately, the pandemic and Brexit resulted in significant delays being encountered in terms of the production and finalisation of the Kent County Council Highways model, the highways model needs to be utilised to inform the Partial Review and Site Allocations Document.

Whilst KCC have prioritised GBC's use of the model, some initial work has shown that the model requires greater validation against the local road network. This means that further traffic counts have to be commissioned, these are scheduled to take place from late June to mid-July. This data will be utilised to improve the accuracy of the highways model within Gravesham, which is needed to have more meaningful engagement with both KCC Highways and National Highways.

The initial modelling has also shown that development within Gravesham will have an impact upon the Strategic Road Network from at least the M25/Dartford Crossing to Bluebell Hill. National Highways have concerns that the impact could be greater than shown as well as

further afield. As such National Highways may also require further traffic counts / modelling of specific junctions on the strategic road network, in addition to the modelling undertaken using the Kent Highways model. Due to the school holidays if further counts are needed, these cannot take place until after schools have returned from the summer break i.e. September 2022, due to DfT guidelines.

Due to the significant uncertainties at present, it is not possible to provide Members with a clear timetable for when the Regulation 19 consultation can be taken to Full Council and undertaken. The transport work moving forward will be an iterative process dependent on the outcomes of various work undertaken and discussions amongst parties i.e. GBC, KCC and National Highways. Officers are continuing to work with KCC Highways and National Highways to expedite matters, in order to ensure the Regulation 19 consultation is brought before Members at the earliest opportunity.

The following points were highlighted:

Concern was expressed over the slow rate of progress and a lack of feedback. The Local Plan needs a robust evidence base.

- Members expressed disappointment that the transport modelling work was proving a constraint on the Local Plan Strategy
- that said need to avoid a Local Plan that is found unsound based on the traffic modelling
- We need a Local Plan this year for this borough. The risk is that there will be development where we don't want it

**Action: The Principal Transport and NSIP Project Manager to feed back to the Service Manager (Planning) that Members are disappointed at the rate of the traffic modelling. Pressure is needed on KCC to produce an agreed model that local authorities can use as a planning tool to move forward more smoothly.**

**The Service Manager (Planning Policy) and the Assistant Director (Planning) to arrange a meeting to brief Members on the issues.**

Members noted the update.

### **Close of meeting**

The meeting ended at 21:40pm.