

Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee

Monday, 10 October 2022

7.30 pm

Present:

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

Councillors: Harold Craske
Dakota Dibben
Ejaz Aslam
Baljit Hayre
Nirmal Khabra
Leslie Hills
Bob Lane
Emma Morley
Leslie Hoskins

Wendy Lane Assistant Director (Planning)
Tom Reynolds Assistant Director (Strategic Regeneration)
Keith Grimley Senior Economic Development Officer
Jackie Denton Customer Services Manager (Minutes)

109. Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Brian Francis and was substituted by Cllr Baljit Hayre.

110. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee held on Monday, 20 June 2022 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

111. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

112. 2021 Census Update

The Committee were provided with a presentation from the Assistant Director (Planning).

The full presentation can be accessed through the following link:

[\(Public Pack\)Supplementary Presentations Agenda Supplement for Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee, 10/10/2022 19:30](#)

The Census took place on the 21 March 2021 and it is mandatory to complete. It takes place every 10 years so the previous Census was completed in 2011. We are very fortunate to

have some 2021 data already and it is giving us initial findings. The Government will be publishing lots of information and there will be the option for bespoke information to be produced.

- There were 59,597,300 people living in England and Wales on 21 March 2021, over 3.5m more than in 2011 (6.3% increase)
- The region with the highest increase was the East of England. South-East was quite high, with the lowest in Wales
- The East grew by 8.3% or 488,000
- The North-East grew by 1%
- In Gravesham there was a 5.1% increase in population from 101,700 to 106,900 which is a modest increase compared to places like Maidstone. In Gravesham we have more people in the younger age group of 25-39. There has been an increase of 13% in people aged 65 years and over, an increase of 2.5% in people aged 15-64 and an increase of 6.9% in children aged under 15 years. It is good news as people are living longer
- Dartford and Thurrock increased significantly by around 20% and 11.6% whilst others such as Medway saw an increase of 6% and Sevenoaks 4.9%
- There are areas of population falls, generally in more expensive areas with an older population such as New Forest at -0.4% and Gosport -0.9%
- Maidstone has the most households and this has increased. Gravesham is at the bottom in terms of overall number of households 41,700 compared to Maidstone at 71,200. There may still be overcrowding. Dartford has seen the biggest increase in households at 14%, Gravesham 3.2% increase.

The Census informs our understanding of the community and how best to target our services to address local needs and feeds into the Corporate and Local Plans. It enables us to lobby government and partner agencies for better support with bids.

Following the presentation the Assistant Director (Planning) responded to questions as follows:

- What are we doing as a borough council to campaign to make sure our housing targets are representative of the population growth?
Back in 2012 when the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy was being produced, the requirement was that you had to evidence what your assessed need level was. We used the latest population projections and set out a target and included that within the submission version of the Core Strategy. At that time migration was static, with flows in and out of the Borough being about even and this meant that our growth was primarily based on natural change. Developers considered that our figure was too low and we had to explain to The Planning Inspectorate why there was so many different figures and we explained that this was due to different migration assumptions (at that time the Office of National Statistics had just released new migration data showing positive migration flows into the Borough). Government decided that local authorities are spending all their time fighting with house builders

on what the housing level is and it brought in the standard methodology. Since this came in, Gravesham's figures have been increasing every year and we have moved from a figure of at least 363 per year to a figure of 733. Part of that is because previous government said it isn't just about looking at current figures but you have to look at 30 years of under supply and to look to address that

- As a council what action have we taken to try and get ONS or government to understand this is an unrealistic target? What are we doing as a borough to challenge these methodologies?

Regarding targets, if the technical evidence based work such as transport modelling shows we are unable to meet the development level we would try to justify a level of development that is achievable and deliverable. Green Belt is harder because it is a constraint but you have the ability to amend via the Local Plan process. Overall most area population is 5% less than it was expected to be in the previous projection. In Summer 2020, the Government consulted on changing the standard method for assessing local housing need and Gravesham was one of the few areas in Kent that would benefit from that change in approach.

- It will be interesting to see the movement in salaries, as Gravesham is a bit on the low side and also educational attainment is on the low side and we should have a target to keep up with the average.
- In the 2021 Census there was a question about highest level of qualification for adults in the household and so we will be interested to see this information when it is published. There was also a question on income but this was discretionary so we aren't sure if the information that will be available in due course will be helpful. It was discretionary because they felt if it was mandatory people would refuse to complete the form.
- Phase 3 of the Census will enable you to look at area level where people go and come from. The origin and destination information is very difficult to analyse and present, and hence why it will be one of the last pieces of information to be published.
- Gravesham's population went up by 5% but the number of households went up less, Simple question – what is a household and why the difference in the increase between population and household?

Unfortunately, this is not a simple question. A "household" can be one person living alone or a group of people, who may be related or not, living at the same address who share facilities. A household can consist of a single family, more than one family or no families in the case of a group of unrelated people. Historically, the number of people in a household has been decreasing over time, but this has not been the case recently. We are assuming that affordability is part of the reason with households being prevented from forming. Care needs can also be a reason as people are also living longer but may have ill health and so move in with family.

- The Community Profile is completed by the Policy Team and there will be a refresh in due course.

Members noted the presentation.

113. Strategic Regeneration Update

The Assistant Director (Strategic Regeneration) provided the Committee with an update on strategic regeneration in the borough.

The full presentation can be accessed through the following link:

[\(Public Pack\)Supplementary Presentations Agenda Supplement for Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee, 10/10/2022 19:30](#)

The aim of this presentation is to give a sense of the range of strategic and regeneration activities that have been undertaken or are in progress. It sets out activity in Delivery, Strategy and Vision.

Gravesham has 11km of riverfront. The Thames is a vital part of the DNA of Gravesham – it's past, present and future. It is a big part of the future of the regeneration plans. Brownfield regeneration is key in the plan (Corporate Plan vision objective), delivering housing and employment opportunities.

The Charter - delivering 242 homes in the heart of the town centre and is a catalyst to stimulate the economy. Target completion 2023. A tender process for the Management Provider has been undertaken.

The Former Police Station site which has been vacant for several years went to planning committee in September 2022 for 75 later living homes, target start on site late 2022.

Former Maternity Block - Strawberry Star – target start on site 2023.

St George's Square – creating a new civic and cultural hub and new homes. As part of the Levelling Up Fund Round 2 bid, 30 letters of support were secured from regional and local stakeholders.

Albion Waterside – potential to unlock delivery of 1500 riverside homes and 4500sq.m. of riverside commercial space.

Since February (first presentation to Committee), economic conditions have made regeneration/development even more difficult. To counter this, regular dialogue with key stakeholders is maintained, relationships with potential strategic partners are being strengthened and funding bids have been made.

Importance of Community and Place led regeneration noted. Update provided on Ward Walks with Members and offer made by ADSR to Members for future Ward Walks.

Design for Gravesham – ITT issued August 2022 - 923 views on Linked-in, 39 expressions of interest and 11 tenders returned. Evaluation of tenders progressing and interview process to be convened.

Understanding Gravesham's unique heritage, character and identity is key. Gravesham has many opportunities but is in much need of levelling up with a low wage, low skill and low economy and areas of high crime, deprivation and health inequalities. Clarity of and co-

production of the vision is important. How do we co-produce the 21st vision – we are finding ways for the community to help shape this vision.

We are working to put Gravesham on the map, we have produced videos which showcase the place and what it is to be proud to be Gravesham. We will also be attending a number of regional events with speaking opportunities and will be attending the Thames Estuary Conference in November.

Next Steps:

- On-going progress on key regeneration projects
- Continue to strengthen relationships with strategic partners
- On-going ward walks and community engagement
- Development of Design for Gravesham
- Develop a holistic regeneration strategy for Gravesham Riverside
- Continue to promote the borough

Following the presentation the Assistant Director (Strategic Regeneration) commented as follows:

- Each individual site requires a bespoke approach:

The former Police Station is moving forward with a new developer with a track record for delivery.

Clifton Slipway – we have on-going discussions with developers to try to bring this scheme forward

It is trying to find the right people to work with us and pulling on the levers we have. We have as much opportunity here as there is in Dartford and Medway. Medway has had significant public investment. Regeneration takes time, it is not solved overnight and yet despite the challenges a number of sites are moving forward

- The new government administration has new emerging ideas and that may have possibilities
- Homes England has a strategic, place-led approach, they are a government body and are well placed to assist - we have had discussions around Albion Waterside. Homes England have been to Gravesend and visited the regeneration projects and fortnightly meetings are taking place with them.
- The increase in interest rates will put even more pressure on projects coming forward, making them more challenging to deliver. The Former Police Station, Strawberry Star (the old maternity block) and the old cinema site are coming forward despite challenges. Churchill Homes have now put hoarding/signage up.
- In terms of money, neighbouring councils have had significant investment. We continue to strengthen relationships with national, regional and local stakeholders and put Gravesham on the map!

Members noted the presentation and thanked the team for all the work that is being done on regeneration.

114. Digital infrastructure - Session 1

The Senior Economic Development Officer gave an overview of what is currently happening with the Digital infrastructure.

The full presentation can be accessed through the following link:

[\(Public Pack\)Supplementary Presentations Agenda Supplement for Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee, 10/10/2022 19:30](#)

The main initiative is around high-speed connectivity. There are three parts:

- Commercial roll-out – there are lots of new companies rolling out connectivity quickly. That work is being privately funded
- Work that KCC is taking forward which is taking longer to resolve
- The Broadband voucher scheme - There has been a voucher scheme for 10 years. Residents can come together to take advantage. There are concerns around connectivity, speed, dealing with large amounts of data. It is primarily focused on rural areas where they don't get commercial roll-out because there aren't enough properties. There are a number of criteria to access the vouchers. It depends on where your speeds are currently to what level of support you get. Business and residents and community groups can bid for the scheme. There does have to be a contribution but if there is a larger contribution it becomes more affordable. There are a number of organisations who can help with applications.

There are now more options for the consumer as there are a lot less well-known but quite active new providers. The role for central and local government is being on the front foot of when new development comes on the table to make sure they are compliant and for social housing it is about acting responsibly and proactively making sure fibre is plugged in to our developments. It is a legal agreement that allows transit over our land to plug in fibre. There is more onus on landlords to respond in a timely way. It doesn't require investment from us other than clarity about how we will engage with residents, making sure they have access to everything that Broadband brings with it.

Following the presentation the Senior Economic Development Officer responded to questions as follows:

- By the end of the year it is hoped to bring a paper to Committee setting out information on where we have providers and where more information can be found
- Generally speaking, there is a concentration of Fibre in the urban areas owing to economies of scale. Discussions are taking place with a company providing open access where they are putting their own ducts in. If the council engage with them now they can plan their roll-out most effectively, particularly for our social housing stock and multiple dwelling units which require access over our land. The more we engage with commercial roll-outs, the more areas locally will benefit from additional infrastructure and improved broadband services.

- A question was raised about the viability of schemes in more remote rural areas, even allowing for financial support through Broadband voucher schemes. In response, there was an undertaking to circulate details of the latest government-backed Gigabit voucher scheme which it is hoped will address some of these issues. While not always practical, community schemes where trenches or other basic works are carried out by local volunteers, were also mentioned as aiding viability by reducing direct installation costs of cabling and other infrastructure.
- Kent County Council were hoping to be the beneficiaries of a procurement exercise being undertaken by BEIS in connection with the wider Project Gigabit initiative but so far this has proved unsuccessful

Members noted the update.

115. Dropped Kerb/Driveway Draft

The Assistant Director (Planning) provided the Committee with a presentation on the Dropped Kerb/Driveway draft.

The full presentation can be accessed through the following link:

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Since preparing our draft, Kent County Council (KCC) have published their guidance and there are some questions around components that are now different, for example, they now seem to be supporting parallel parking - KCC have always resisted this but they seem to have changed their position. Our Highways Development Management Engineer has gone back to them for clarity.

The Highways Act requires a dropped kerb if you are going to park on the front of your property but KCC doesn't enforce that very much. It is an offence as the pavement has not been strengthened. It is to allow vehicles to cross pavements in a safe and legal manner. There is a greater demand due to the increased car ownership, lack of on-street parking, EV charging etc.

We advise customers to look at KCC's guidance first because if you don't meet their criteria you are wasting your time contacting us. There are 17 points including next to a road junction, near a bus stop etc. KCC needs to have a copy of the planning permission or our written authority that planning permission is not needed. Key is whether it is a classified road, a road maintained by the Highways Authority. Is it within a designated area, is it a non-classified public highway, does it have to cross a highway verge or would it harm a tree, is it related to another piece of framework, are they requiring engineering works.

If planning permission is required, the applicant will require permission from the owner. If they are not the sole owner then they will need to serve a Notice. They may also need to obtain landlord consent. If it needs planning permission we will look at how the application complies with legislation and local planning policies.

Issues we don't consider:

- Applicant's personal circumstances
- Private rights and covenants
- Boundary disputes, ownership matters
- Other legislation such as Party Walls

If they can't get off your drive that is a Police matter as obstruction, but if you can't get on your drive that is a private matter.

In London Boroughs they have By-laws that say explicitly you are not to park on footpaths and you will get an automatic fine if you do. We don't have that in Kent but if you go right across it, it is an offence. It is a highway issue

It was agreed that once the draft document has been updated with KCC's changes, it will be circulated to Members for comment before going out to public consultation.

Members noted the presentation.

116. Corporate Register of Partnership - July 2022

The Assistant Director (Planning) informed Members of the council's involvement in partnerships that are within the remit of this committee.

There is only one partnership directly related to this Committee and that is the North-West Kent Countryside Partnership. The council does not provide Core Funding to this partnership.

Members noted the report.

117. Q1 2022-23 Corporate Performance Report

The Assistant Director (Planning) provided the Committee with an update against the Performance Management Framework, as introduced within the council's Corporate Plan, for Q1 (April to June 2022).

PI 33 and PI 34: % rate of resident unemployment and % rate of youth unemployment. Unemployment (4.1%) and youth unemployment (6.2%) has continued to fall at a time when vacancy levels within many sectors remained high.

The Kickstart programme has benefitted 8 young people who were offered permanent employment within the council. The council is also expanding its apprenticeships and provided a wide range of work experience opportunities for 17 young people during this quarter.

Members congratulated officers involved with the Kickstart programme. Local government is about improving the quality of life for local people and Members are really encouraged by this. Youth unemployment falling is something to be commended.

Members noted the information in the report

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm