
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 11 October 2017 from 7.00pm - 8.47pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Andy Booth (Chairman), Lloyd Bowen (Vice-Chairman), Derek Conway, Mike Dendor, Mick Galvin, June Garrad, Mike Henderson, Lesley Ingham, Ken Ingleton, Nigel Kay, Samuel Koffie-Williams, Ben Stokes and Roger Truelove.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Peter Binnie, Huw Evans (Quinn Estates) Jo Millard, Bob Pullen, Dean Radmore and Emma Wiggins.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Cameron Beart, Mike Cosgrove (Cabinet Member for Regeneration) and Ghlin Whelan.

265 FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman drew attention to the Fire Evacuation Procedure.

266 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 30 August 2017 (Minute Nos. 175 - 186) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

267 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

268 SITTINGBOURNE TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION UPDATE

The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, the Interim Director of Regeneration, the Special Projects Manager, the Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration Scheme Manager and Huw Evans from Quinn Estates to the meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration reported that there was now physical progress being made and the scheme was moving towards fruition. He invited Members to ask questions.

A Member referred to the second bullet point in Construction on page 2 of the report and asked how far behind programme the scheme was, and when was the anticipated completion? In response, the Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration Scheme Manager said that the kerb line had now been installed on the South side of West Street and he was hopeful that work on Phase I would be completed on time.

In response to a request from a Member, the Special Projects Manager advised that the meeting with Huber took place on 4 October 2017. They were currently considering design drawings, and work on the Multi-Storey Car Park was due to start on site in March 2018 with three months off-site fabrication work and a construction period of 26 weeks. He added that works to the water main diversion as highlighted on page 2 of the report was underway and progress on the roadworks to the west of St. Michael's Road, Sittingbourne would be completed in advance of the start date.

In response to a question from the Chairman, the Special Projects Manager said that Tesco were working well with Swale Borough Council (SBC) and the documentation to approve the moving of the car park entrance was waiting to be signed-off. He added that Network Rail had agreed the land swap with SBC in front of the train station and the completion of the St Michael's Road Car Park would trigger the land swap.

A Member asked that future updates included more detail on specific start and completion dates, and referred to the Development Agreement on page 1 of the report. The Special Projects Manager said that the report was produced two weeks in advance of the Scrutiny Committee meeting and a Quantity Surveyor had now been appointed. He reminded Members that the Development Agreement was split into sections and the next part of the scheme to go unconditional was the Leisure, Hotel and Cinema, with a target date of end of November 2017. Huw Evans from Quinn Estates added that the pre-commencement planning conditions were complex but had all been signed off, and that the Section 106 Agreement had been worded so that some pre-commencement conditions were not required.

A Member acknowledged that the disruption caused by the highway works so far had been tolerable but highlighted the impact of the next phase, which may be more challenging on the public and asked how this would be managed? In response, the Interim Director of Regeneration explained the communication methods that were used to publicise works on Phase I and said that these would be used again. The Interim Director of Regeneration agreed that improvements would be made to the Spirit of Sittingbourne website to facilitate accessing information and stated that Kevin McEveer from Lowick Communications had been engaging effectively with Sittingbourne Retail Association and local businesses. In response to a question from the same Member about any adverse comments reported in the media, the Cabinet Member for Regeneration said there were only a small number of complaints about Phase I, and he would accept praise and criticism.

In response to questions from a Member relating to project control and the main risks or issues involved in the project, the Interim Director of Regeneration advised that there were monthly Key Officer and Internal Officer meetings and bi-monthly Board meetings, as well as regular high level meetings of staff of relevant services within SBC. She went on to say that the main risks were:

- coordinating everything to start the leisure scheme;
- signing the Funding Agreement;
- stopping-up process completion;
- highway issues and

- the land swap involving the land outside the station and St. Michael's Road car park.

She said that the risks continued to fall as the scheme moved forward.

The Chairman referred to KCC Highways' involvement in the scheme. The Interim Director of Regeneration stated that she was aware of the criticism directed at KCC Highways and Transportation by Members at the previous Scrutiny Committee in August 2017 and advised that, on this project, KCC Highways had been very helpful and were aware of deadlines. Huw Evans added that KCC Highways had been very proactive and had assisted with the Section 278 Agreement.

A discussion ensued and the following points were raised by Members:

- Questioned delays to work on site after the initial diversions were set up and who was responsible?;
- suggested more consideration should be given to diversions in the future;
- good to see daily progress on the retail site;
- a visual timescale plan to be provided at future meetings of what stage the scheme was currently at;
- Spirit of Sittingbourne website was out of date, relevant information difficult to find and website should be improved urgently – its focus was promotional but residents and businesses wanted up to date information;
- suggested that a link to the relevant websites should be displayed on the SBC home page to direct residents;
- concerned that the funding agreement would be delayed by Legal Services; and
- clarification sought on how delivery vehicles used St. Michael's Road, Sittingbourne.

In response, the Interim Director of Regeneration explained that the initial changes to the scheme which caused the delayed start were made by Erith Contractors, not KCC. The Special Projects Manager advised that KCC did control the diversions but there would always be tweaks and quick decisions had to be made as issues could not always be predicted. He reminded Members that KCC were experienced in diversions and had reacted quickly to issues.

A Member apologised for his previous criticism of KCC Highways and Transportation and referred to incorrect information he had been provided with.

The Interim Director of Regeneration clarified that SBC were using Pinsent Masons as Legal Services and they were very proactive.

A Member asked if there was a penalty clause if any of the contractors failed to meet the completion dates? Huw Evans explained that there were no specific penalties, but there were procedures in place to explain why there were delays, for example if a design had to be changed. He said that target dates were well ahead. The Special Projects Manager reminded Members that it was illegal to have penalty clauses but confirmed that costs were fixed.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, the Interim Director of Regeneration, the Special Projects Manager, the Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration Scheme Manager and Huw Evans for their attendance and contribution at the meeting.

269 REVIEWS AT FOLLOW-UP STAGE AND LOG OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Policy and Performance Officer introduced the report and highlighted that the Visitor Economy Strategy would be considered by the Policy Development Review Committee (PDRC) on 28 November 2017 and the Housing Services review report was considered by Cabinet on 4 October 2017.

A Member raised concern that the Visitor Economy Strategy was not yet available to view, and the short time between the Strategy being considered at Cabinet and PDRC. A discussion ensued around the process and dates of publishing documents, and the Policy and Performance Officer agreed to clarify and report back*.

A Member was disappointed with Cabinet's response to the Housing Services Review and lack of action whilst another Member pointed out that five of the seven recommendations of the Housing Review were agreed by Cabinet. A Member praised the efforts of the staff in Housing Services in preventing homelessness. Another Member was concerned about the impact the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 would have when it was implemented in November 2017.

Post Meeting Note

*The Policy and Performance Officer provided the Member with an update the day after the meeting.

270 OTHER REVIEW PROGRESS REPORTS

The Chairman advised that a report on the Development Management review would be produced by the end of the calendar year.

271 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

In response to a Member, the Chairman advised that a review of Residents Parking would be included in next year's work programme.

There was a discussion on the priorities on the work programme and whether any items might be discussed at the Policy Development Review Committee. Members agreed that a Task and Finish Group, which would include a Member from each of the three areas of the Borough, would carry out some background work and produce a scoping report, for a Non-Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration review. Councillors Mike Henderson, Nigel Kay, Cameron Beart, Roger Truelove and Lesley Ingham agreed to liaise with the Policy and Performance Officer to produce a scoping report.

272 CABINET FORWARD PLAN

A Member highlighted an error in the date at the bottom of page 15 of the report which should have read **2018** not 2017.

273 URGENT BUSINESS REQUESTS

There were no urgent business requests.

Chairman

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All Minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel