
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 3HT on Thursday, 7 June 2018 from 7.00pm - 9.50pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Bobbin, Lloyd Bowen (Chairman), Derek Conway, Mike Dendor (Vice-Chairman), Ken Ingleton, George Samuel, Ben Stokes, Lynd Taylor and Roger Truelove.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Charlotte Hudson, Lyn Newton, Bob Pullen, Dean Radmore and Emma Wiggins.

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

Huw Evans and Richard Blackwell (Spirit of Sittingbourne).

APOLOGIES: Councillors Roger Clark, Mick Galvin and Mike Henderson.

42 FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman drew attention to the fire evacuation procedure.

43 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 18 April 2018 (Minute Nos. 611 – 619) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

44 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

45 CONFIRMATION OF COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Following Annual Council on 16 May 2018, there were four new members on the committee: Councillors Bobbin, Roger Clark, George Samuel and Lynd Taylor. Councillor Lloyd Bowen was appointed as Chairman, and Councillor Mike Dendor as Vice-Chairman. The Chairman welcomed the Committee and reminded them of their role on the Scrutiny Committee.

46 SITTINGBOURNE TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION UPDATE

The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, the Director of Regeneration, the Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration Scheme Manager, and Huw Evans and Richard Blackwell from Spirit of Sittingbourne (SoS), to the meeting. He reminded Members that updates on this item, from the Cabinet Member and officers alternated between verbal and written updates. Members agreed that they were happy to continue with this approach.

The Cabinet Member introduced the update report which included key updates and photographs, which had been tabled. He explained that since the agenda had been published, there were further updates and these could be addressed as the report was considered.

The Chairman reiterated the request for risk register assessment information and a project plan of the scheme. This was noted by the Director of Regeneration.

Members were invited to comment and ask questions on the report.

Construction

The following points were made and responded to by the Cabinet Member, officers and the representatives from SoS.

- The Forum car park did not re-open on 28 May 2018, when would it be re-opened?
- What sort of contamination was present in the top layers of excavation?

The Director of Regeneration advised that the car park was ready, except for finalising the lighting, and so it could re-open in the next couple of weeks at the latest. Permanent lighting was being installed within the next four weeks.

The Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration Scheme Manager explained that the contamination was nothing too alarming. **He agreed to forward further information to the Committee.**

- There must have been a random site investigation, prior to construction?

The Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration Scheme Manager explained that borehole samples had been taken, but these could not fully provide confirmation of ground conditions throughout the site. The remediation measures would be discussed with the Planning Team.

The Director of Regeneration agreed to forward information on costs of the contamination work, and who would bear the costs, to Members.

- Had there been any changes to the Section 278 Agreements, prior to signing them?

The Director of Regeneration explained that the solicitors were in regular dialogue with all parties to clarify what was required.

- There was a lack of connectivity between the Princes Street site and the town, with the Princes Street site being more connected to the retail park, rather than the town, would this change?

The Cabinet Member explained that there were other developments nearby and he expected that people would walk between the sites.

The Member considered that very different retail areas were being created, and that people would not walk between them. He explained that connectivity had been a focus initially on the scheme and he questioned whether the lack of connectivity was good for the town?

The Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration Scheme Manager explained that the configuration of the main square would enable more connectivity to different areas.

- There were two disabled bays in The Forum car park, but there was no step-free access to the toilets, or a signed footway to The Forum.

The Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration Scheme Manager agreed to look into this matter further.

- Connectivity could be improved with a northern exit from the railway station, could talks be had with Network Rail?

The Cabinet Member stated that this could perhaps be considered in the future.

- What were the opening dates of the retail sites?

The Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration Scheme Manager explained the opening dates, as below:

Food Warehouse – 15 May 2018

Home Bargains – 30 June 2018

Costa – beginning of July 2018 (subject to fitting-out being completed)

- And the cinema, hotel and leisure elements?

Huw Evans explained that the Section 278 work had to be completed first, and these units were expected to open one year after the completion of the highway works.

There was some discussion on the housing element of the scheme. Huw Evans explained that this was market-driven. Other aspects of the scheme would be completed first.

Planning

A Member considered that if the housing element was not built, this would undermine the Local Plan, and other sites would become more vulnerable, if the predicted housing numbers did not come forward.

The Director of Regeneration explained that the Council was aware of the housing numbers and the timetable, and explained that the leisure aspect of the scheme would be concentrated on initially. Huw Evans stated that in terms of planning and design, the residential sites were very well advanced, and so could be completed very quickly, once started.

Utility Services

- Were any difficulties with the utility services envisaged in the future in terms of provision of services?

Huw Evans explained that utilities were not an easy part of the development. Richard Blackwell outlined some of the work that had been carried out. The Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration Scheme Manager advised that the asbestos had been now been removed from the multi storey car park site.

Risks

- Why was it only now that the significant risk had been identified?

Huw Evans explained that information passed to Kent County Council (KCC) from SoS, had been looked at by KCC and points of concern had been identified in relation to the modelling of the traffic management. This had meant the risk had to be explained in more detail to KCC, and had resulted in re-modelling of the traffic management.

- Why had KCC not identified this issue sooner?

Huw Evans explained that KCC were extremely busy, and that although he had not agreed with the KCC interpretation of the data, SoS had to 'go with' the higher authority. He apologised for the delay.

The Cabinet Member stated that it was not about blame and explained that KCC had been very helpful. There had been a balance of assurance of the matter from KCC, and the risk of delays from a SBC point of view.

Discussion ensued on the delays to the scheme and a Member suggested that a representative from KCC Highways and Transportation be invited to attend a future meeting.

Huw Evans stated that there were time-sensitive issues, but that it was important to look at the bigger picture, and he acknowledged the work KCC had carried out.

A Member raised concern that this could happen again and that talking to KCC about their processes could help towards preventing delays in the future.

The Cabinet Member advised that it was important to invite the right person, to get an overall picture, rather than just the modelling element.

Communications

- It appeared that SoS had lost interest in the housing element of the scheme, were they interested and when would it happen?

Huw Evans explained that SoS were interested in bringing forward the housing element of the scheme. He stated that the project was designed around all aspects coming forward, and as soon as it was viable, the housing element would come

forward. Utilities and infrastructure were important aspects to enable the housing to be built.

- Could SoS have a Facebook page to publicise progress on the regeneration scheme, with an opportunity for questions to be submitted?
- Were all six restaurant units signed up?

The Director of Regeneration advised that Kevin McKeever (Lowick Communications) had been unable to attend the meeting. She explained that Kevin managed SoS communications with SBC communications, and that she would feedback the Committee's comments. She advised that negotiations were ongoing with other tenants for the restaurant units.

- The SoS website was not updated very often.

Huw Evans advised that this was being worked on.

- There needed to be a communication strategy, using Facebook, Twitter etc.
- Diversion signs needed to be clear and concise, and to include signs to divert road users away from Sittingbourne whilst the works were on-going.
- Needed to look at congestion on Crown Quay Lane.
- How could we ensure that HGVs did not get stuck under the railway bridge?

Huw Evans explained that they wanted as small an amount of disruption as possible. SoS had to submit their proposed signs to KCC for their approval.

Richard Blackwell advised that a contingency plan was being drawn up in relation to the Crown Quay Lane junction, and marshalls would be monitoring the traffic, and to look at alternative routes to be used instead. HGV signage would be installed at key locations, with advice being given to local haulage companies and clearly signed from the A249.

- There were SatNav issues with HGVs.
- Residents wanted to know the alternative routes, where bus pick-up and drop-off stops were.
- It was confident to say works would be completed by the time schools returned in September 2018.

Huw Evans was confident that the works would be complete by this time, and advised that the A2 would not be closed again.

- Would the roads in Sittingbourne cope if there was an accident on the M2, with diversions through Sittingbourne?

Richard Blackwell explained that he had met with Highways England and that no part of the area of road closures formed part of diversions from the M2, and Highways England were happy to display signs on the A249, M2 and M20 to say to avoid Sittingbourne.

- How would taxis get to the station when the road was blocked?

Richard Blackwell explained that the route would be along Milton Road (closed for general road users), and a pick-up/drop-off point would be the new entrance in St. Michael's car park.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, the Director of Regeneration, the Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration Scheme Manager, Huw Evans and Richard Blackwell from SoS for attending the meeting for this item.

Resolved:

(1) That the KCC Cabinet Member be invited to attend the Scrutiny Committee on 29 August 2018, and Members to email their questions, for the Cabinet Member, to the Chairman by 21 June 2018.

47 LEISURE AND TOURISM - UPDATE ON RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, the Head of Economy and Community Services and the Economy and Community Services Manager to the meeting for this item.

The Chairman explained that the Committee had been concerned with the limited progress in implementing the recommendations from this review. He explained that they would work through the updates on the Log of Recommendations (item 7).

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration advised that this was a work in progress. The Head of Economy and Community Services explained that the recommendations formed part of the work programme for the Visitor Economy Framework.

Recommendation 3

In response to a question, the Economy and Community Services Manager explained that a meeting on 13 June 2018 with Visit Kent would be looking at research and development programmes. There would be themed programmed works in the four areas: Sittingbourne, Faversham, Isle of Sheppey, and rural areas. An initial scoping meeting had taken place with Visit Kent, and there were planned campaigns throughout the summer.

Recommendation 4

The Economy and Community Services Manager emphasised the need for coach parking in the Borough, and it was hoped that the coach parking set-up in

Faversham could be replicated on the Isle of Sheppey. A meeting was being held next week to discuss this further.

Recommendation 5

The Economy and Community Services Manager outlined the procedure for organisations to have brown tourist signs implemented. She explained that it was not about promotion or marketing of an event/destination, but a way of safely directing visitors. This would become a legal agreement between the organisation and KCC, and so had to be carried out by the organisation, rather than the Council.

A Member suggested to reduce costs, and signage, that organisations got together and did a joint application. The Economy and Community Services Manager advised that there was a limit of six visitor attractions on one sign.

A Member considered the coastal attractions, particularly on the Isle of Sheppey should be sign-posted. He explained that some of the infrastructure, for example railings etc. let down the otherwise clean beach coast line and he felt this natural attraction could be exploited more. The Economy and Community Services Manager explained that a photographic audit was being carried out to indicate where signage was in the Borough. She praised the officers and residents who had helped clean-up the beaches.

Recommendation 6

In response to a question, the Economy and Community Services Manager explained that organisations needed to contact her so that she could direct them towards culture funding opportunities.

Recommendation 8

The Economy and Community Services Manager explained that an internal cross-working group, including highways and cleansing were looking at budgets to deliver keeping roads clean. Further discussions would be held with Visit Kent in relation to work with Network Rail. The stakeholders group had not yet been set-up.

There was some discussion on the perception that visitors got of areas within the Borough which had overgrown verges and rubbish, and that it looked as though the Borough did not care. Members highlighted that there were often different cutting schedules for areas maintained by KCC, SBC and parish and town councils.

Recommendation 9

In response to a question, the Economy and Community Services Manager was disappointed to hear that there had been very few 'tweets' from Visit Swale, and she explained that she would look into what could be done to enhance this.

At this point, Councillor Ken Ingleton declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of the Community Interest Organisation (CIO), as he was a trustee. He explained that the main reason for an organisation becoming a CIO was so that it could then become a vehicle to apply for grants.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, the Head of Economy and Community Services and the Economy and Community Services Manager for attending the meeting for this item.

Resolved:

(1) That Members advise the Economy and Community Services Manager of any infrastructure repairs/issues around the Borough's coastline.

48 REVIEWS AT FOLLOW-UP STAGE AND LOG OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Policy and Performance Officer introduced the report and suggested that as Councillor Alan Horton had only recently been appointed to be the Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Communities, that the Housing Services item be considered at the next meeting. A Member requested that the letter outlined in recommendation 7 be presented at the meeting.

The Policy and Performance Officer reported that Cabinet's response to the recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee's review of Development Management would be submitted to Cabinet on 11 July 2018.

Resolved:

(1) That the report be noted.

49 OTHER REVIEW PROGRESS REPORTS

Development Management

Members were advised that the Lead Review Member and one of the Task and Finish Group members were now Deputy Cabinet Members and as such were unable to participate in the review.

Discussion ensued on new membership for the review.

Lead review member: Councillor Mike Dendor

Other review members: Councillors Mike Baldock, Monique Bonnney (appointed/co-opted Member), Derek Conway, Mike Henderson and Ken Ingleton.

Regeneration (other than Sittingbourne Town Centre)

Lead review member: Councillor Roger Truelove

Other review members: Councillors Mike Baldock, Lloyd Bowen, Mike Henderson and Ben Stokes.

Members agreed that an interim refresh be provided on both reviews.

Resolved:

(1) That the report be noted.

50 DRAFT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT

The Policy and Performance Officer introduced the report and explained that it would be submitted to Council.

The Chairman welcomed the report and thanked the Policy and Performance Officer for the work that he had done on it.

Resolved:

(1) That the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for 2017/18 be presented to Council.

51 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Policy and Performance Officer outlined the options for reviews in 2018/19, and explained there would be more detail at the next meeting.

Resolved:

(1) That the report be noted.

52 CABINET FORWARD PLAN***Resolved:***

(1) That the report be noted.

53 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