
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 4 September 2019 from 7.00 - 8.47 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Lloyd Bowen (Chairman), Richard Darby, Steve Davey, Mike Dendor (Vice-Chairman), Tim Gibson, Alastair Gould, James Hall, Carole Jackson, Elliott Jayes, Denise Knights, Lee McCall, Pete Neal and Ken Pugh.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Katherine Bescoby, Charlotte Hudson, Bob Pullen and Dean Radmore.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Cameron Beart, Monique Bonney (Cabinet Member for Economy and Property), Alan Horton, Richard Palmer, Ken Rowles and Sarah Stephen. Richard Blackwell, Huw Evans and Rob Sloper (Spirit of Sittingbourne).

190 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

191 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 3 July 2019 (Minute Nos. 108 – 116) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

In response to a question, the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager clarified that there was nothing in law to prevent a Deputy Cabinet Member from being a member of the Committee.

192 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

193 SITTINGBOURNE TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION UPDATE

The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Economy and Property, the Head of Housing, Economy and Community Services, the Sittingbourne Town Centre Scheme Manager, and representatives from the Spirit of Sittingbourne to the meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Economy and Property advised that the multi-storey car park would be open in a matter of days and welcomed questions from Members.

A summary of the topics raised and answers given are set out below:

- It was confirmed that the permanent design layout provided a bus stop outside of the train station. The temporary stops had been removed.
- Members emphasised the need for greater signage for HGVs and further deterrents to keep HGVs away from the town centre.
- The Cabinet Member expressed reservations regarding the road layout and HGV traffic flows, and invited the Scrutiny Committee to take part in a longer term review, working with partners and taking independent advice. It was suggested this may be a matter for the Swale Joint Transportation Board too.
- Frustration was expressed that Kent Highways were not represented at the meeting. The Chairman shared his disappointment and advised he had contacted the Kent County Council (KCC) Cabinet Member regarding this.
- A Member questioned the provision of spaces for motorbikes and disabled bikes in the Forum, and it was agreed that this would be looked at with the design team. In respect of a concern about parking tickets issued, the Head of Housing, Economy and Community Services agreed to take this back to the Head of Commissioning, Environment and Leisure.
- It was confirmed that the bus stop area was due to open on 14 October 2019, subject to confirmation being received that the Traffic Commissioner had been asked by KCC to approve this. Some amendments had been approved by the operators and KCC to make it more user friendly for passengers and bus operators. The changes were due to take place at the end of September 2019 to coincide with remedial works on St. Michael's Road.
- It was clarified that the initial design of the bus stop area was approved by KCC. The operation of the bus stop was the responsibility of ERITH and ERITH still had 'road manager status' until KCC were completely satisfied and issued a Certificate 1. At that point it would become adopted highway. Some concerns were raised about enforcement until that time.
- In response to questions about the holding area for buses, Members were advised that it was the role of the Traffic Commissioner to register services for bus companies, and so the new stop would need to be re-registered and timetables altered to reflect the new stop.
- In respect of the bays, the Cabinet Member advised that there had been some changes to lengthen some of the bays and there would be illuminated no entry signs. The Sittingbourne Town Centre Scheme Manager agreed to provide information to Members regarding this.
- Clarification was sought regarding the structure and frequency of meetings of the Board. The Head of Housing, Economy and Community Services outlined the governance structure, advising that there was a monthly high level officers group and a quarterly board meeting, but there were frequent discussions between the Cabinet Member and Leader, Senior Officers and

Spirit of Sittingbourne partners. Membership of the Board would be resolved in due course.

- A Member queried whether Board Meetings had been held, and the Sittingbourne Town Centre Scheme Manager apologised for the error in the report.
- Members referred to the answers to questions raised at the last meeting, and asked for this to be provided more promptly in future. The Chairman asked for updates to be given within a week of the meeting and the Cabinet Member suggested that there may, on some occasions, be a need for exempt reports to be made due to commercial sensitivity.
- The Cabinet Member agreed that a copy of the risk register would be circulated.
- In response to a question, Members were given an update on the marketing of the empty units on the retail site which included a variety of methods such as updating the hoardings; updating the website; an e-campaign; attendance at various events; contacting individual retailers and cold-calling.
- In response to a question regarding whether the project was chaotic, the Town Centre Scheme Manager advised that it was a complex project and there were daily challenges, but he would not call it chaotic. It was possible with hindsight to do things differently but that was the same for all projects.
- In respect of the multi-storey car park, the Cabinet Member advised that there had been three instances of vandalism (which had been referred to the police), and she outlined what had been done to improve security which included wire meshing and CCTV, and a security guard. She considered that there needed to be greater scrutiny of specifications in the future and this was a learning point for the Council.
- It was clarified that there would be three payment machines in the multi-story car park (one would be card only), and that the car park would be open during the majority of shopping hours and early evening, but would become 24 hours when the hotel became operational. Users of the car park would pay (at a pay station) prior to exit.
- Members were advised that the snagging items in respect of the Forum car park would be remedied later in September 2019; the anti-ram bollards had been delivered.
- In respect of the block paving outside the train station, Members asked about the snagging issues and were given an update regarding the process to remedy this; the process for the appointment of the approved contractors; and how the works were monitored.
- A Member referred to concerns raised by the taxi trade which included difficulties with the taxi rank and signage; the need for illuminated signs; and

when the taxi rank outside of Wilkinsons would be back in use. He questioned whether responses had been given. The Cabinet Member advised that the layout could be looked at again.

- Clarification was given regarding the signage and the different requirements of Network Rail and KCC. It was confirmed that the taxi rank outside of Wilkinson would be completed by the end of December 2019, but the loading bay would be out of operation until April 2020.
- In response to a question about the cinema, Members were advised that discussions were taking place with planners regarding some changes to the design of the development to reduce the height and to add a stair core.
- Concern was raised regarding the lack of drop-off outside the bus station for elderly and disabled people, and Members were advised that in terms of space there was adequate provision, although the location was in the entrance to the car park rather than directly outside the station. It was possible for disabled and elderly passengers to make arrangements direct for extra assistance. In response to a suggestion that the loading bay could be dual purpose so it could also be used by disabled passengers, it was agreed that this would be explored with Network Rail.
- In respect of the taxi rank, a suggestion was made that the bay could be moved. It was suggested that extra lighting could be provided for the entrance to the taxi bay.
- The Head of Housing, Economy and Community Services undertook to ensure a more detailed response was sent to the taxi trade and this would be copied to Members.
- A Member advised that it was not clear at the entrance to the train station which parts could and could not be used by cyclists, and the Cabinet Member agreed that this would be looked into.
- Questions were raised regarding the roadworks outside of Swale House and the Sittingbourne Town Centre Scheme Manager explained why the works had been extended. He undertook to find out when the works were due to be completed.
- Further comments were made regarding traffic flow in Sittingbourne and the adverse impact of the temporary roadworks, which were not all connected with works on the Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration project. Questions were also asked regarding Dover Street. The Chairman confirmed that these were matters for Kent Highways and he agreed to send a strongly worded letter to Kent Highways regarding this matter.
- In response to a question, the Cabinet Member confirmed that Nandos, Pizza Express, Creams, Light Cinema, Loungers and Travelodge were all confirmed tenants.

The Chairman thanked all those present for attending the meeting.

194 CABINET FORWARD PLAN

The Chairman drew attention to the Forward Plan that had been circulated, and thanked Democratic Services for making changes to the plan as suggested at the last meeting. The Plan was considered page-by-page, and it was noted that there was a duplicate entry for the Warden Bay report. Members considered that the Beach Huts Policy report should be considered this calendar year, and asked that this be raised with the Cabinet Member.

195 URGENT BUSINESS REQUESTS

The Chairman advised of two urgent business requests.

Revised Review Plan

The Chairman invited Councillor Cameron Beart to give an update regarding the revised review plan for Regeneration Schemes (other than Sittingbourne Town Centre), a copy of which was circulated to Members. Councillor Cameron Beart thanked the Policy and Performance Officer for his work on this and outlined the revised focus of the review, which would concentrate on two projects on Sheppey and two in Faversham:

- West Sheppey regeneration;
- Queenborough and Rushenden regeneration;
- Faversham Recreation Ground project; and
- Faversham Creek basin/bridge project.

He also outlined other changes regarding the aim and objectives of the review etc, and suggested if Members were happy, a meeting would be arranged with the relevant Cabinet Member, the Head of Housing, Economy and Community Services and the Director of Regeneration. Part of the work of the task and finish group would also look at other projects in local authorities with similar social economic profiles. Membership of the task and finish group comprised of Councillors Cameron Beart, Steve Davey, Tim Gibson, Pete Neal, Ken Pugh, Benjamin A Martin and Lee McCall.

Members agreed the revised review plan.

Work Programme

Discussion ensued regarding the work programme for future meetings, and whether an additional meeting was required regarding Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration, given the agenda items for meeting on 6 November 2019. The Chairman was also asked to ensure that Kent County Council were invited to attend the meeting.

Chairman

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