

Deputy Leader's Statement to Full Council Wednesday 28 June 2017

Update on Sittingbourne Town Centre Scheme

We are now moving into delivery phase with site set up on the big box retail started. The remaining pre-commencement conditions are due to be met by 5th July for the retail site and shortly afterwards on the leisure site means work can begin soon. Completion of the retail will be March 2018. Work on the Multi Storey Car Park is scheduled to begin January 2018 and Leisure April 2018. At the Member briefing earlier this evening you heard about the four phases of highways works. We appreciate that this will cause diversions and disruptions but all is being done to mitigate this and we will communicate ahead of time to all stakeholders and residents. Notwithstanding this, I am excited that the transformation of Sittingbourne Town Centre begins to take shape on the ground.

Update on local plan and local plan review

I am pleased to report that the Planning Inspectorate have formally published the Local Plan Inspector's Final Report on 'Bearing Fruits' and has found the Local Plan 'Sound' subject to the Main Modifications put forward by the Council at the recent examination in public.

The housing target is confirmed as 776 dwellings per annum, although there were attempts by the development industry to get this revised to an even higher level at the second stage Examination in Public.

The Inspector also confirmed all the proposed allocated housing and employment sites, including those proposed by the Council as Main Modifications in 2016 to meet the increased development target. We also managed to defend ourselves against the plethora of additional sites (170 other sites) put forward by landowners and developers.

Additionally, the Plan includes the designation of 126 Local Green Spaces within the Borough.

The suite of development management policies have also been approved with minimal updating as being the framework for determining planning applications. The Inspector's Report and the Inspector's recommendations have been posted on the Council's website ; in addition a version of the Plan incorporating them will be presented to Full Council at its meeting on 26 July with a recommendation for formal adoption. A Member briefing will take place on 13 July prior to Full Council.

Once adopted, we will be in a position of demonstrating a 5.4 year supply of housing sites which should put us in a stronger position to defend against adhoc greenfield sites coming forward, which have not been allocated in the plan.

The Inspector has recommended that the Council also commences an early review of the Plan, which is in line with the recent Housing White paper recommendations; and also to address improved highway infrastructure needs to support development from 2022 onwards.

Heritage Consultancy

As Members are aware we are a Borough with a rich heritage comprising of over 1750 Listed Buildings, 51 Conservation areas and numerous Ancient Scheduled Monuments. I am pleased to announce the Council has commissioned a specialist Heritage Consultancy to produce a Heritage Strategy for the Borough with a focus in the first instance on Sheppey to contribute to the developing heritage led regeneration strategy for the island.

It is intended that this commissioned report will be drafted by the New Year for input by Councillors before it is finalised.

Heritage initiatives

Council Officers continue to work with the Swale Museums Group to support the evolution of the networking group into 'Historic Swale CIO' (Charitable Incorporated Organisation). This will enable collaborative working, ability to fund raise and provide a stronger collective voice for heritage in Swale.

Earlier today (June 28) the Council part funded and hosted a day of training workshops aimed at our heritage groups, this was provided by the SE Museums Development Service and the Heritage Lottery Fund. The theme was 'Proving the Point' – aimed at improving and informing the quality of the business case for projects and funding applications. Swale continues to be a priority area for the HLF and it is hoped that applicants may be more successful with the benefit of today's training.

Our tourism support website www.visit-swale.co.uk is currently undergoing a facelift with officers working with Visit Kent who will host a new web platform. Councillors are encouraged to make tourism and hospitality businesses in their Wards aware of the free online tourism support provided by the Council.

Local Business Support

We continue to support local businesses, and over the coming months are arranging a series of workshops, covering a range of 'live' topics. In 2016 one in five businesses were victims of cybercrime and the recent attack in May which crippled

parts of the NHS are a reminder of this threat. Working with the Kent and Essex Serious Crime Directorate the Council is arranging events to provide local businesses more information about the threat and how they can best protect themselves. The first of these will take place on the 5th July at the Holiday Inn in Sittingbourne.

We are also encouraging our rural enterprises to take advantage of grants that are now available to support growth and new employment, through both the LEADER programmes and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. A quick guide has been produced by the economic development team for distribution and will be shared with Members.

Amicus Horizon now called Optivo

Amicus Horizon and Viridian have merged to form a 44,000-home housing association named it Optivo.

With homes in Kent, London, Sussex and the Midlands, Optivo is now one of the largest UK housing associations with an annual turnover of £306m. This merger strengthens both organisations and allows them to put more funding into building new homes. Optivo plans to build more than 1500 new affordable homes each year up to 2021 by raising £1.5bn of new finance to support its growth programme. As always the development team are actively looking for and negotiating on sites to develop within Swale, and we will see some of these sites coming forward shortly. We have always had an excellent relationship with Amicushorizon, and as there will be few staff changes locally, this will not change - and indeed, services to tenants should remain consistently high.

We look forward to seeing more affordable homes in the borough as a result of this merger.

ArrivaClick

We were pleased to hear that Arriva has chosen to run their new on-demand service, ArrivaClick, in and around Sittingbourne. The new service enables residents to book a minibus journey from an app on their mobile phones. The smart technology then creates a bus journey with other passengers who have booked a similar journey at the same time. The service has the potential to be beneficial for local residents and businesses as it could lead to a reduction in the number of car journeys in the town, a decrease in congestion and air pollution. We're glad that Swale has been chosen for the trial of this new service model particularly as it reflects our own commitment to improving transport connections across the Borough.

Cllr Gerry Lewin
Deputy Council Leader