

TOWN CENTRE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP MEETING

THURSDAY 15 JULY 2021

2PM

Held remotely on Zoom

MINUTES

Present:

Accessible Stratford represented by Elizabeth Dixon

BID represented by Lindsey Armstrong

Royal Shakespeare Company represented by Geraldine Collinge (Chair)

Stratford-upon-Avon District Council represented by Cllr J Fradgley and Tony Perks

Shakespeare Birthplace Trust represented by Tim Aucott

Stratford Society represented by John Scampion

Stratford-upon-Avon Town Council represented by Cllr Richard Vos and the Town Clerk, Sarah Summers

Stratford Town Trust represented by Sara Aspley

Town Transport Group represented by Colin Stewart

Warwickshire County Council represented by Aaron Corsi

Advent Communications represented by Adam Dent

Observers: The Mayor, Cllr Kevin Taylor; Cllr Tony Jackson, Tim Sinclair (Warwickshire County Council)

Clerk: Margo Galvin

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from Helen Peters (Shakespeare's England); Stephen Rumble, David Ayton-Hill and Cllr K Rolfe (Warwickshire County Council); Julie Lewis (Stratford District Council) and Sam Jackson (Advent Communications)

Not in attendance: John Stacey (Bell Court)

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed Tim Sinclair as an Observer from Warwickshire County Council and Adam Dent from Advent Communications (standing in for Sam Jackson).

2. Minutes from previous meeting held on 17 June 2021

The minutes from this meeting were noted and accepted.

3. Programme prioritisation discussion update

Colin Stewart presented the Neighbourhood Plan Project Priorities and Ownership Gantt chart that he had created following discussions at the last Strategic Partnership Group (SPG) meeting. This demonstrates the inter-dependencies of several of the projects and will be circulated to Partnership members after the meeting.

John Scampion noted that the Neighbourhood Plan may not include everything the SPG wants to do since it is based on old research and the Town's needs have changed since it was created. One item missing on the plan is the large number of vacant properties in the town centre. A policy/strategy is needed to help ensure that, given the decline in high street shopping, productive ideas are forthcoming to make the town centre attractive. He suggested there should be more residential use of property in the town centre, while recognising the difficulty of regenerating empty buildings.

The Chair agreed that shopping trends have changed. Noting that the SPG and the programme prioritisation exercise under discussion have come out of the Neighbourhood Plan, she asked if it is within the SPG's Terms of Reference to extend projects beyond the Neighbourhood Plan.

The Town Clerk noted that this is a Strategic Partnership for the Town, its work is ongoing and the Neighbourhood Plan will have to be reviewed in time too.

Adam Dent suggested speaking to other BIDs to see how other towns are working on this. There should be some models of good practice.

The Chair noted that Chester has received funding from Historic England and this might be a good example of how to regenerate an historic town.

<p>Action: Lindsey Armstrong agreed to investigate this and come back to the next SPG meeting with further information.</p>
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Aaron Corsi noted that a single project on the Neighbourhood Plan may need several solutions. Ideas might be drawn from other schemes in other areas, and it must all come together in one strategy. Colin Stewart agreed that a strategy is needed before a plan can be shared with potential investors and local people.

Tim Sinclair commented that a clear vision is needed about what makes Stratford different and special. Historically, the town's approach has been tactical. The Chair advised that quite a lot of work has already been done on creating a vision for the town.

Cllr Vos commented that commercial property agents seem optimistic about filling vacant properties in the town centre. The Mayor, Cllr Taylor, commented that, until recently, Stratford had around 50 vacant units and this has now been reduced by around 50%. Some properties, such as the Laura Ashley building, now have planning permission for part retail/part residential projects. Progress is therefore being made and needs to continue.

Cllr Fradgley noted that the County Council had set up a useful series of seminars: 'Warwickshire Future Place Route Map to Prosperity' and asked if they are available online so that the Group can access them. The Chair advised that further information would be sent with the minutes.

Links to two sessions held are below.

Intro Session - <https://youtu.be/kKATA0zAQbY>

Session 2 - : <https://youtu.be/K4KH75Xec5M>

Cllr Vos noted that SPG's job is to try to put in place projects it can manage, influence and control such as the High Street/Bridge Street project that will create the environment people want, whether as businesses, residents or visitors. The Chair agreed that the SPG needs to consider what it can manage and influence and a conversation has been had with David Ayton-Hill (County Council) and Tony Perks (District Council) about their priorities and how we can work together. The SPG should be realistic about the money that both bodies have and how that will be spent over the next few years, as well as the scale/cost of some of the bigger capital projects that are on the plan and when these might happen.

Tony Perks commented that the District Council is not capital rich and that a lot of capital seems to come through quite tight bidding scenarios. These provide the opportunity to bid for cash to deliver a project within a tight timescale. In Stratford this is difficult because projects need to be ready to go at the time of bidding and this requires a co-ordinated, unified approach to delivery, as well as popular support; people in the town need time to get behind such projects. Having a list of packageable priority plans ready would place Stratford in a stronger position when bidding opportunities come up. He noted that the town has been quite successful with winning bids in the past.

The Chair agreed that the town needs to create 'ready-to-go' packages and asked how it might be possible to get projects to a slightly better place. She offered to follow up her conversation with the Arts Council to see if any funding might be available.

Action: Geraldine Collinge to follow up on conversation with the Arts Council
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John Scampion noted that the SPG's job is to persuade potential investors that the town has a vision. The SPG should think more about projects we can

undertake that do not depend on government funding. The Chair noted that some projects will always require funding.

The Town Clerk advised that a Town Council meeting will take place on 27 July. With the Mayor's approval, she has included an agenda item about some CIL money that has been received. She is proposing that the Council reviews its CIL policy because the funds need to be spent more strategically. If Council agrees, the funds could be used to fund further work such as we had done with consultants PJA so that projects can be made ready to go when funding opportunities arise. Unless government funding is available for some projects, they will not happen.

Tim Sinclair acknowledged Cllr Vos's comment regarding undertaking projects over which the SPG has control. A clear vision is needed which should be communicated to residents and the public. This seems to be missing currently. Cllr Vos advised that the SPG has discussed communications previously and is aware this needs addressing. He agreed that the public needs to be brought on board. The SPG's strength is that it represents most of the Stratford-upon-Avon community. The only stakeholders who need to be included now are the public; it is essential to involve them. Adam Dent noted that it took five to six years of PR for Nuneaton to build its profile and receive investment.

Action: The Chair advised that Cllr Toby Lee has agreed to create a map that shows where the work needs to happen and is prepared to do this on Friday 16 July. Colin Stewart, Elizabeth Dixon and Jenny Fradgley agreed to support Cllr Lee in this work which will help the Group decide what goes into the 'vision' brochure being produced by Advent Communications.

The Chair noted that the SPG has done a lot of work on project priorities from a capital perspective. The parking strategy that Stephen Rumble has been working on is ready to share from a 'next steps' perspective; Colin Stewart noted that this is a very good baseline report.

The Chair reiterated that we need to start making the priority projects packageable and proposed that a group be created to work on this and report back to the SPG.

Action: Geraldine Collinge, Colin Stewart and John Scampion agreed to form this group and will meet to discuss the 'packaging' of priority projects.

Action: The Chair and Aaron Corsi also agreed to identify smaller actions to keep things moving.

4. Public engagement programme for the Bridge Street/High Street project

The Chair advised that she had spoken to David Ayton-Hill about project prioritisation and the public engagement programme for Bridge St/High S; this needs to be progressed. The Town Clerk has met with Stephen Rumble and

Annabel Keegan from consultants PJA. She believes that most of the engagement programme will be managed online but there will also be a public exhibition at the Town Hall; it is understood that PJA will assist at the latter.

Colin Stewart expressed concern about holding a consultation without having answers prepared in advance about parking and traffic - two big issues that people are likely to ask about. John Scampion suggested that these issues need to be put in front of the public as soon as possible so that the debate can take place. If this is deferred, discussions may still be taking place when decisions have to be made. He suggested that the consultation should aim to establish if car parking is an issue and then come up with solutions. Cllr Vos acknowledged that the consultation would be difficult and complex and that it will be necessary to agree what is communicated at each stage, perhaps via a series of presentations. The aim should be to bring people into the conversation to keep them informed. The Mayor suggested a phased communication programme, the first phase reconnecting with the Neighbourhood Plan.

Sara Aspley noted that, from her experience with the Riverside project, people will always focus on the things they don't like about a project. It is better to start the engagement process than try to make everything perfect in advance. Tony Perks agreed that the communication process should start sooner rather than later, even if not all the answers are available in advance.

5. Communications plan update

The Chair noted there are currently two pieces of related communications work:

- a. A communications programme to support the Bridge Street/High Street project and help people understand the SPG and what we are here to do. This looks back to the Neighbourhood Plan and is internally focused on strategy.
- b. An externally focused 'vision' brochure that explains the vision for Stratford-upon-Avon for 2030 onwards to encourage investment.

Adam Dent confirmed that in relation to point a. the Town Clerk's recent blog explained how the SPG works. This was circulated to the media on Tuesday 13 July, as well as stakeholder-based platforms. The blog can be accessed on the Coventry & Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership website at: [Find out more about the Stratford Town Centre Strategic Partnership | CWLEP](#). Adam noted the need for constant communication to inform and educate audiences and confirmed that the brochure will be a six-page pdf document, setting out project priorities and messaging.

Action: Geraldine Collinge, Sarah Summers and Adam Dent and Sam Jackson (Advent Communications) to meet to agree a calendar of communications activity.

Actions: SPG members are encouraged to share communications across their social media networks.

The Committee Clerk will post a link to the Town Clerk's blog on the Strategic Partnership Group's page of the Town Council website.

John Scampion noted that a discussion with Stratford MP Nadhim Zahawi might be helpful. Tim Sinclair advised that he had spoken to the MP about the need to focus on the town centre. He is likely to be amenable when his support is required.

Adam Dent advised that Advent Communications works with the Chamber of Commerce who have a South Warwickshire branch that meets on Fridays. Nadhim Zahawi often attends. There could be a future opportunity to present to the Chamber on a day when he will be there. Cllr Vos commented that the SPG is a very powerful and influential force and needs to reach the people, such as the MP, who can influence the public.

The question of livestreaming SPG events was raised as a possible way of making the SPG's work more visible to the public. It was suggested that two meetings a year could be livestreamed. It was agreed that meetings would not be livestreamed while they were more discursive. Cllr Vos suggested creating a series of video blogs on YouTube. These would need to be planned to ensure that messaging was consistent. The Clerk to the Partnership noted that the SPG page on the Town Council website had been made more prominent, making it easier for visitors to find. This page currently contains agendas and minutes but not much else. The Clerk will add more content to this page to make it more informative and engaging.

ACTIONS:

- SPG to agree which meetings should be livestreamed at the August meeting
- SPG Clerk to review and update content on SPG page of STC website

6. AOB

The question of having face-to-face meetings was raised but it was felt that, in view of the current Covid situation, this is not the right time.

The Chair thanked the Group for another fruitful meeting.

7. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Strategic Partnership Group will be on **Thursday 19 August 2021 at 2pm** via Zoom.

The meeting closed at 3.35pm.