

# TOWN CENTRE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP MEETING

THURSDAY 23 September 2021

2PM

Held remotely on Zoom

## MINUTES

### Present:

**Accessible Stratford** represented by Elizabeth Dixon

**Bell Court** represented by John Stacey

**Royal Shakespeare Company** represented by Geraldine Collinge (Chair)

**Shakespeare's England** represented by Helen Peters

**Stratford-upon-Avon District Council** represented by John Careford

**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 Cllr Kate Rolfe and Aaron Corsi. Stephen Rumble was unable to join the meeting via Zoom due to connectivity issues.

**Advent Communications** represented by Sam Jackson

**PJA** represented by John Myatt and Jane Overton.

**Observers:** Cllr Tony Jackson and Tim Sinclair (Warwickshire County Council)

**Clerk:** Margo Galvin

### Apologies for absence:

Apologies were received from David Ayton-Hill (Warwickshire County Council); Tim Aucott (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust); Cllr Jenny Fradgley (Stratford District Council) and the Mayor Cllr K Taylor (representing the BID).

### 1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed Tim Sinclair and Cllr Tony Jackson as observers and John Myatt and Jane Overton from PJA.

### 2. Minutes from previous meeting held on 19 August 2021

In relation to the previous meeting's discussion about empty shops, Richard Vos noted that landlords can achieve a reduction in business rates to 20% by allowing charities to promote their activities in their shop windows. The charity gets the space rent free, the shop window is being used, and the landlord pays reduced rates. It is a win-win situation for everyone. It is acknowledged that empty shops are being filled quite quickly in Stratford, but this might still be something to bear in mind. Other towns do this quite successfully. In Stratford, the RSC have run pop up shops and made the most of this discount.

John Careford queried whether Cllr Fradgley formally represents the District Council at the Strategic Partnership meetings. The Chair stated that in the Partnership's original terms of reference one person has one vote, so one Councillor has that representation and Cllr Fradgley has that voting responsibility. The Town Clerk confirmed that one organisation has one vote. However, it has never been formally recognised that Cllr Fradgley represents the District Council, so this needs to be resolved. It was noted that Cllr Fradgley is usually the only District Councillor attending the Partnership meetings.

**ACTION 1: 23.09.21: John Careford and Geraldine Collinge** to check and resolve the issue regarding who officially represents the District Council at Strategic Partnership meetings.

### **3. Update on actions from the meeting held on 19 August 2021**

**John Careford to find out what can be shared about the District Council's Gateway project.** John advised that the Council is still awaiting the outcome of the Levelling Up Fund bid and there is nothing to share yet. Negotiations are at a delicate stage.

**John Stacey to share Bell Court scheme footfall figures.** John has shared these with Lindsey Armstrong (formerly the acting Bid Manager). He noted that footfall within Bell Court is 20-30% up on pre-Covid levels. It would be helpful to understand where people are going within the town: are they spending more time in Bell Court and by the river than in the shops? Will this change in winter? John Stacey will pick up the conversation with the new bid manager so that information can be shared going forward. John Scampion asked if it should be inferred that the increased footfall in Bell Court is not translating into increased spend in the shops? John Stacey noted that the lack of international visitors has resulted in a change in local shopping patterns.

**ACTION 2: 23.09.21 - The Committee Clerk** to make meeting actions clearer in the minutes to avoid confusion.

**ACTION 3: 23.09.21: John Stacey** to discuss footfall trends in the town with the new bid manager when they take up their role in January 2022.

**Each Strategic Partnership member organisation to provide contact details of their Communications representatives to Advent Communications.** Sam

Jackson advised that he had received details from some organisations but needs to chase others for their information.

**Adam Dent to contact Dave Ayton-Hill about consultation dates for the High Street/Bridge Street project.** Sam Jackson advised that Adam has spoken to Dave and Sam has also spoken to Stephen Rumble and produced an update on the Bridge Street and High Street project. This will be reviewed by Cllr Wallace Redford, the Portfolio Holder for Transport & Planning, and the Warwickshire County Council Communications team.

**Geraldine Collinge and Richard Vos** to arrange a follow-up conversation to the Communications meeting on 24 August, which Richard could not attend. This meeting took place.

**Chair and Committee Clerk** to advise the Town Clerk of the date of the face-to-face partnership meeting in the Town Hall. This is confirmed as Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> December.

#### **4. Project programme update (consultation process and timeline) – John Myatt (Associate Director, PJA)**

John made a presentation to the group which covered the Scope of Work completed, Next Steps and Programme Milestones. The presentation will be circulated after the meeting.

*Scope of work:* John noted that the project design had been extended to include Union Street (preserving the Disabled parking bays). It was confirmed that there will still be a pedestrian crossing at the bottom of Bridge Street, given there had been a change to the design at this location to accommodate the bus companies.

*Scope of work - Next steps:* John noted that the scheme is being taken forward collaboratively, with the Partnership as the main group. From a legislative and governance perspective, the County Council will lead the public consultation process and has commissioned PJA to support them in this work; however, it will remain a very collaborative process and the Partnership will be the main port of call. Stephen Rumble needs to take a formal report through to consult in mid-October and, ahead of this, PJA will meet with key stakeholders to discuss any issues/updates to the design that may be required.

*Formal public consultation:* this will take place online and via a face-to-face exhibition. After this a Consultation report will be produced that the County Council will take to cabinet in April 2022 for formal sign off so the scheme can move forward. It was confirmed that under the terms of the Levelling Up Fund, work needs to start in the current financial year. The consultation will be part of this work.

John Myatt advised that April 2022 is the date for taking the consultation findings to Cabinet because there is a formal governance process that must be followed.

It is important that the consultation process is very robust and meets all criteria as there will not be enough time to run it again.

Cllr Vos asked if the public consultation would include exhibition stands, models etc. and if it will be portable e.g. on show in community halls, the Library, Debenhams shop window etc. He noted that local residents will be the most important audience in this consultation, and they should have every opportunity to see the exhibition materials. John Myatt confirmed that the exhibition should be portable and could be both manned and unmanned.

Colin Stewart and Tim Sinclair noted the importance of including provision for cycling in the next round of designs. John Myatt confirmed that cycling was covered in the bid application and that it would be possible to include a dedicated cycle lane in the scheme, although this would result in some loss of pedestrian and highway space. PJA can discuss this further with the Strategic Partnership ahead of the public consultation.

*Programme milestones:* (subject to change). Once approval to consult is gained in mid-October, the consultation process would start in early November. If the Levelling Up Fund decision (due late October/early November) is delayed, or is unsuccessful, the consultation will still happen. The proposed dates for the exhibition at the Town Hall (27<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> November) include a Saturday to attract shoppers and a weekday and an evening. On these dates the exhibition will be staffed. The exhibition could also move around to different locations. There will be an online version accessible via the AskWarwickshire website. Targeted consultations will also take place with key stakeholder groups. At this stage there won't be all the detail about the likely disruption (construction etc.). This information will be included in the full business case once the green light to proceed is achieved and there will be separate consultations with stakeholders. The purpose of the public consultation is to get people's support for the scheme.

It was noted that the AskWarwickshire website is difficult to navigate, and the question was raised about there being another way of accessing the online exhibition. John Myatt replied that other organisations can include the consultation information on their websites and link to the AskWarwickshire website.

**ACTION 4: 23.09.21 - John Myatt to speak to Stephen Rumble about issues with accessing the consultation via the AskWarwickshire website.**

John Myatt noted that one of the key questions that Strategic Partnership members should respond to concerns the key stakeholders who should be consulted with. A list of stakeholders had been included as part of the funding bid but this may not be complete. The Chair noted that local residents appear to be missing from the list and careful thought needs to be given about how to get them on board with the scheme.

It was acknowledged that it would be helpful to consult directly with some of the key businesses in the town (e.g. M&S and Boots) as the proposed street layout may have an impact on how they view the scheme. Sara Apsley suggested that

the churches may also be key stakeholders. These can be reached through the Churches Together organisation.

**ACTION 5: 23.09.2021 Sara Aspley to send John Myatt contact details of Churches Together.**

It was agreed that Foundation House and Venture House would be good venues for the 'portable' exhibition, along with supermarkets.

The exhibitions will be publicised to raise awareness of the proposed scheme and to encourage people to attend and find out more.

*Strategy brief* – John Myatt shared the strategy briefing document with the Partnership. This will be published on the Council website alongside the consultation so that people can see what has happened in the scheme so far. It will be in an accessible format for everyone to read. Strategic Partnership members were asked to provide feedback on this to include any points that may have been missed.

**ACTION 6: 23.09.21 - Committee Clerk to circulate the briefing document after the meeting and Strategic Partnership members to comment on this using tracked changes or via email ASAP.**

John Myatt advised that the consultation materials will be shared with Partnership members for comment. He also confirmed that he would be happy to have one-to-one discussions with them on specific issues and to meet with key stakeholders such as M&S and Boots prior to the consultation.

It was noted that WCC Partnership members cannot access Zoom from Council offices and the app has been removed from Council laptops.

## **5. Communications plan update**

At the last meeting, the importance of communications had been discussed. The Chair noted that this is a very broad issue and that Advent Communications had only been tasked with undertaking a small part of this work i.e. specific deliverables such as drafting/placing news updates in the media and writing the High Street/Bridge Street brochure. An overall communication plan is needed that would cover all communications activity and stakeholder engagement. This is currently a gap in the Partnership's current capacity that should be acknowledged.

John Scampion noted that he had spoken to the Committee Clerk about the Strategic Partnership's website presence. Currently, information about the Partnership is hosted on the Town Council website, but more information is needed to get across the Partnership's work. The Committee Clerk advised that an overall communications plan is needed before the Partnership's web presence can be increased. Whatever is published on the website must be consistent with the brochure, news updates and social media. Otherwise, there is a risk of mixed messages being communicated. A communications strategy and plan are

required so that all communications can be co-ordinated and there is clear ownership of what is happening and when.

**ACTION 7: 23.09.21 – Committee Clerk** to send out notes on Communications gaps to the Partnership with the minutes.

**ACTION 8: 23.09.21 – Strategic Partnership members** to let Geraldine Collinge know if they have any ideas to help resolve the Communications issue.

Sam Jackson advised that Advent Communication could provide additional communications support and he will discuss this with Adam Dent when he returns from leave. It was suggested that Advent could submit a proposal to help identify what work needs to be done and what resources need to be brought in.

### **Communications update - Advent Communications (Sam Jackson)**

Geraldine Collinge's blog has been completed and distributed to the Coventry and Warwick LEP website. It is also hoped to place this in the Herald and Coventry Observer. This will also be published on the Town Council website. A media release about Bell Court quoting John Stacey has also been distributed to local media.

Advent have drafted an update on the Bridge Street/High Street project, and this will be distributed pending approval by Cllr Wallace Redford.

Sam Jackson noted that the Partnership's feedback on the consultation brief will be incorporated into any future communications. There needs to be a careful approach to communication to manage people's expectations.

The Chair advised that there is a desire for the Bridge Street/High Street project to go ahead if the current funding bid is unsuccessful, but the County Council would probably not wish to put this in writing currently.

The Town Clerk advised that previous releases about the funding bid had stated that if the bid was unsuccessful this time round, we would continue to submit funding proposals until successful. This is a positive statement to use.

Work continues on developing the brochure. Advent Communications had met with Geraldine Collinge to discuss the brochure's structure and it was noted that this needs to show a balance between the short-term tactical projects that the Partnership can deliver, as well as the longer-term projects that would appeal more to investors. The latter need to be agreed and further information is required from the Partnership to take the brochure forward.

**ACTION 9: 23.09.21 – Geraldine Collinge to follow up with Advent Communications.**

It was noted that The Gateway project cannot be discussed currently but should be included in the brochure. The Chair confirmed this is linked to the project priorities. The brochure will not appear until after the results of the funding bid are announced when a decision will be reached about funding the Gateway project. There is some sensitivity around the purchase of the land.

John Careford confirmed that the concept of the Gateway project is no secret – it is a new attraction to celebrate Shakespeare. Details of the project cannot be communicated until the funding decision has been made.

## **6. AOB**

The Chair advised that she has drafted a document about possible Town Centre plans and has shared this with a couple of people who have provided feedback. She will bring this to the next meeting and share with Advent Communications.

The Chair noted the Rainbow Crossing idea that Sara Aspley had previously shared with the Partnership. These are pedestrian crossings making a statement of inclusion. The Town Clerk had been advised by the County Council that these are illegal, although she had seen them in Leamington. She had contacted Stephen Rumble who was not aware of the Leamington crossing. This is something that may be discussed at a future Partnership meeting. Elizabeth Dixon advised that Rainbow Crossings are very difficult for people with visual impairments to use.

<p><b>Action 10: 23.09.21 - Geraldine Collinge</b> to discuss timings of agenda items with the Committee Clerk to ensure Strategic Partnership meetings end on time.</p>
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## **7. Date of next meeting**

The next meeting of the Strategic Partnership Group will be on **Thursday 21 October 2021 at 2pm** via Zoom.

*The meeting closed at 3.35pm.*