

TOWN CENTRE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP MEETING

THURSDAY 21 October 2021 at 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-on-Avon District Council represented by John Careford, Cllr J Fradgley and Matt Jennings

Stratford Society represented by John Scampion

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

Stratforward BID represented by the Mayor, Cllr K Taylor

Town Transport Group – represented by Colin Stewart

Warwickshire County Council represented by David Ayton-Hill, Cllr Kate Rolfe, Tim Sinclair and Aaron Corsi.

Advent Communications represented by Adam Dent and Sam Jackson

PJA represented by Annabel Keegan and Ryan Walters

Observers: Cllr Tony Jackson

Clerk: Margo Galvin

Apologies for absence:

Apologies were received from Tim Aucott (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust), Sara Aspley (Stratford Town Trust) and Stephen Rumble (Warwickshire County Council).

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed Matt Jennings Leisure, Tourism and Culture Portfolio Holder (District Council), Annabel Keegan and Ryan Walters from PJA, and Cllr Tony Jackson as observer.

2. Minutes from previous meeting held on 23 September 2021

The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the previous meeting.

3. Update on actions from the meeting held on 23 September 2021

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 and has voting rights - COMPLETE.

It was noted that Matt Jennings would have the vote for District Council councillors.

Action 2: 23.09.21 - The Committee Clerk to make meeting actions clearer in the minutes to avoid confusion - COMPLETE

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 – ONGOING.

- It was noted that footfall will be a useful conversation to have within the Partnership. John Stacey advised he would be happy to pick this up with the BID marketing contact between now and Christmas if helpful. Dave Ayton-Hill advised that he would be happy to share the pedestrian monitoring equipment used when the road space reallocation measures were put in place, plus the data gathered, to help this this. Aaron Corsi advised that the county also have access to the Wi-Fi footfall counters in Stratford which could support conversations. The Chair suggested this should be reviewed early in the new year.
- Helen Peters confirmed that the new BID manager has been appointed and a public announcement is due in November.

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

Dave Ayton-Hill advised that he was unaware of any issues. Kate Rolfe advised she had stated at the last meeting that the website was hard to navigate. The Chair noted that this may not be fixable in the short-term and should be flagged for future consideration.

Action 5: 23.09.21 - Sara Aspley to send John Myatt contact details of Churches Together – subsequently advised that this action is COMPLETE.

Action 6: 23.09.21 - Committee Clerk to circulate the PJA consultation briefing document after the meeting - COMPLETE. Strategic Partnership members to comment on this using tracked changes or via email ASAP – COMPLETE.

Action 7: 23.09.21 - Committee Clerk to send out notes on Communications strategy and plan to the Partnership with the minutes. This needs to be considered further - **ONGONG**.

Action 8: 23.09.21 - Strategic Partnership members to let Geraldine Collinge know if they have any ideas to help resolve the Communications resourcing issue - ONGOING

4. Bridge St / High St project programme update – Annabel Keegan (Associate Director, PJA)

PJA have had positive meetings with several key stakeholders and made some minor modifications to the designs to reflect feedback. Materials for the public consultation on Saturday 27 and Monday 29 November are being developed/reviewed, along with a set of questions to be published on the AskWarwickshire portal. Paper copies of the questions will be available for people without internet access. A draft copy of the materials will be circulated to the Partnership for review.

The Chair advised that, at the last meeting, it was noted the consultation materials should be used flexibly for maximum visibility since not everyone would be able to access them via the internet. Annabel Keegan advised that PJA are preparing a series of six pop-up banners that can be displayed in the Debenhams window. These will include details for people to provide feedback. John Stacey advised he can help promote the consultation through his public consultation contacts. John and Annabel will pick this up offline.

Dave Ayton-Hill had been advised that the results of the Levelling Up Fund submission will be announced as part of the Autumn public spending review. He noted that if funding is not agreed the tactics for the Bridge Street/High Street project may need to be reconsidered. The consultation will still go ahead if the bid is unsuccessful.

5. Shop fronts – discussion document

In response to a paper drafted by the Chair and Aaron Corsi, a discussion took place on Town Centre shop fronts; the objective being to help the Partnership understand how it can start creating solutions, including quick wins, to the issue of vacant retail units.

Tim Sinclair had investigated the idea, highlighted in the discussion paper, of bringing landlords and other stakeholders together to get a sense of their objectives. He noted that the advice is to involve landlords in the success of retail units e.g., agree with them how rentals could perhaps be reduced at the outset. He felt the document was missing the idea of conducting a survey amongst residents to understand what outlets they would like to see in the town. It is important to understand the market and connect this with retailers and other shareholders. Actions should be generated from market insight. The Chair agreed that this piece of work should be data-led and noted that the pedestrian footfall data referred to earlier would be useful here.

Adam Dent noted, that from a PR point of view, bringing landlords together will be key. He urged caution when developing survey questions as respondents will always ask for the impossible e.g., a Harrods in Coventry. Helen Peters noted that residents may have one point of view and town visitors another. It will be important to ask local independents who their customers are.

Cllr Fradgley advised that, from her experience of talking to residents, they all want independent shops in the town. There may be opportunities in the future for small independent businesses requiring small units to come into the town and it will therefore be important to look at maximising the flexibility of retail units. Cllr Rolfe agreed and noted that, although people often ask for outlets such as greengrocers, they then do not use them.

Cllr Vos noted that many retailers in the town have long-term contracts and are unlikely to invest in changes that the Partnership thinks are right if these don't fit in with their plans. New retailers are coming into the High Street all the time and few properties are currently vacant. By April 2022 it is likely that there will be virtually no empty properties, except for BHS. The Mayor, Cllr Taylor advised that around 30 new businesses have moved into the town since the end of lockdown, of which around 20 are independents. It is likely that the 20 remaining units will be occupied quickly.

John Stacey noted that some of the established retail names are starting to enquire about premises, meaning the larger empty units will start to get repurposed. If the Partnership can understand the needs of the town's key occupants (Council, education, cultural etc.) this might help with some of the more problematic larger spaces. There needs to be a greater acceptance that landlords should be more flexible over shorter leases. The more the Partnership can support landlords with information about shop front schemes and grant funds, the better.

It was noted that the Partnership should concentrate on work it can influence e.g., street furniture. Matt Jennings commented that while the Partnership can try to influence things, organisations will only come to Stratford if there is a profit to be made. Market forces dictate what happens in towns, so it is important to be realistic about what the group can achieve. The Chair noted that there are several charities based in the town which are not profit-driven. She added that if the Partnership decided to emulate Coventry and submit a bid for some work in shop windows, the RSC and, possibly, SBT could take this forward with the Stratford BID.

John Careford agreed that the town does not want vacant shop units. The District Council has a lot of data about retail units in the town that can support the Partnership's work. He noted that the District Council is considering how to encourage the conversion of first floor space above shops to residential use. Government rules have changed about accommodating residents on the ground floor which could have a negative impact on the high street. He noted that the reasons many shops are empty is that they are listed buildings and business rates are not payable, so it is not in many landlords' interests to find an occupier.

Adam Dent asked how soon landlords could be brought together if the Partnership agreed this was a good idea. The Chair responded it would likely be early 2022. Adam commented that this would be a positive PR message.

Cllr Vos noted that, at one of the Partnership's early meetings, he had mentioned the idea of Stratford being a destination and talked about 'animation' i.e., having

street entertainment in the town such as live music, mini Shakespeare 'happenings', the piano bike man etc. He felt more could be done to make a visit to Stratford a real 'experience' and to generate a feeling of excitement around the town. While this does not relate to retail, the more activities of this type there are in the town, the more of a USP can be created. The Partnership can influence this.

Agreeing with Cllr Vos, Cllr Fradgley advised that any street entertainment would need to be carefully thought through. She noted that the town will see more residents moving into the centre of the town, with the potential for noise to increase. She has received many complaints from Waterside residents about amplification, so any entertainment needs to be of high quality and well controlled.

Aaron Corsi noted that the discussion document had been very helpful in prompting ideas. He has noted members' comments and will identify priorities.

ACTION 1: 21.10.21 – Aaron Corsi to identify where the discussion document matches with existing strategy and to identify priorities, with the aim of having an action plan for December/January. Aaron Corsi and Geraldine Collinge to discuss further outside the meeting.

John Stacey suggested the Partnership make a quick start on coordinating all the information about vacant units and volunteered to work on this. Cllr Taylor advised that Tim Cox has all the property data, and this could be worked on over the winter.

John Careford advised that, pre-Covid, he attended meetings with a group of agents organised via the BID. Cllr Taylor noted that there hasn't been a meeting for a while, and it may be necessary to wait for the new BID manager to be in post before anything further can be arranged with agents. Adam Dent recommended involving someone from outside Stratford (e.g., Leamington) to get the wider/external viewpoint.

ACTION 2: 21.10.21 - John Careford to find out if there is an existing agents' network that the Partnership can tap into.

Aaron Corsi noted that Bill Wareing was key in finding properties for the art installations at the Leamington LytFestival in May this year and would probably be happy to help with something similar in Stratford.

Elizabeth Dixon advised that Jonathan Smith from Talk Business used to run a retail group pre-Covid.

ACTION 3: 21.10.21 - Geraldine Collinge to contact Jonathan Smith at Talk Business.

It was noted that some of the larger vacant units would repurpose well for educational users, and this should be factored into any conversations with landlords.

6. Communications plan update – Adam Dent

Adam Dent advised that Advent Communications have recently drafted and distributed the Bell Court press release and Geraldine Collinge's blog. They now have most of the Partnership organisations' communications contacts. They have contacted Chris Burton, landlord at the Garrick, to discuss his support for improving Bridge Street/High Street and are chasing Simon Ford of York's Café on the same topic. Press releases will follow.

Advent can help with developing a strategic communications plan and key messages that should be consistently communicated by the Partnership. Alternatively, they could help to set out general communications principles and a plan of activity. The strategic plan would be a bigger piece of work, with associated costs. Therefore, the Partnership needs to agree what it wants. The Committee Clerk's communications planning notes, issued with the September minutes, should form the basis of further discussions on this topic.

ACTION 4: 21.10.21 - Adam Dent to meet with Geraldine Collinge and Margo Galvin to discuss communications planning next steps.

Cllr Vos noted that the news item about the Bridge Street/High Street consultation, published on the Town Council website, had been received very positively by the public. If regular pieces like this can be published and shared by Partnership members on a drip-feed basis, this will help to keep people informed and involved with the group's work.

7. Programme update – Geraldine Collinge

The Chair noted that many of the items discussed by the Partnership are aspirational and she would like to progress things so they can be actioned. With the Levelling Up Fund results likely to be announced week commencing 25 October 2021, things will become clearer and the Partnership will be able to develop a better idea of what it wants to do and say about Stratford.

Colin Stewart advised that he had been in touch with the Chair about the prospectus/brochure that is being developed with Advent Communications and the current planning application for the Arden Street/Greenhill corner. He noted that the Neighbourhood Plan describes this area as an environmental improvement area where improvements could be made for pedestrians and cyclists. This site is potentially one of the only places that could provide such improvements. There are also the local walking infrastructure plan, transport plan and other policies. He asked if these policies are sufficient to protect some of the sites that would be valuable to the town in the future. He suggested that if the prospectus were accelerated, it could be used by the District Council, Town Councils and others to protect such sites as Greenhill St and ensure the Partnership delivers against long-term aspirations.

Cllr Fradgley noted that the Arden Street/Greenhill Street corner currently has planning approval for the construction of apartments. A revised application for the

site had been discussed by the Town Council on 19 October 2021. Cases such as this one make it difficult for the Partnership to achieve some of its goals.

Cllr Rolfe stated that Greenhill Street is the Partnership's next aspiration and suggested talking to the developer to see what Section 106 agreements and CIL money could be obtained from them to help improve the junction. It is important to have this conversation, otherwise what is developed may not fit the Partnership's vision. John Careford advised that the conversation should be initiated by the Town Council with support from the Partnership. The Ward Councillor (Jason Fotjik) should be involved. Cllr Rolfe noted that this area sits within her County Ward.

ACTION 5: 21.10.21 - Geraldine Collinge and Colin Stewart to contact the Ward Councillor to initiate a conversation with the Arden St/Greenhill St developer regarding 106 and CIL money.

Cllr Vos noted that the recent news item on the Town Centre website: [Public soon to have their say on plans to improve Stratford Town Centre streets \(stratford-tc.gov.uk\)](https://www.stratford-tc.gov.uk/news/public-soon-to-have-their-say-on-plans-to-improve-stratford-town-centre-streets) had been shared on several town centre social spaces and been very well received. If regular news items like this about the Bridge Street/High Street consultation can be published, it will help to set the scene and generate interest. Adam Dent agreed that a drip-drip approach is needed to develop public awareness and interest and encouraged members to share this kind of news across their own communication channels.

The Committee Clerk advised that the Partnership page on the Town Council website has been updated and continues to be work in progress. Feedback is welcome from Partnership members.

8. December face-to-face meeting at the Town Hall – 16th December 2021

The Chair asked for thoughts on how the Partnership should present itself to the public at the December meeting, noting that the event will need to be planned and organised in good time.

The Town Clerk asked for clarity around the meeting's purpose: is it to involve the local community or is to enable the public to witness a meeting of the Strategic Partnership? She advised that the maintenance programme at the Town Hall is currently running one week behind and the scaffolding is due to come down on 12th December. The public would be able to come into the Town Hall, although it would not be vented as much as the Partnership might like.

Tim Sinclair commented he understood the meeting's purpose was to give the public a sense of who the Partnership are and what it has achieved on projects such as Bridge Street/High Street. He noted that the public are likely to want to speak to the Partnership and therefore the meeting should facilitate a conversation to allow them to give their views.

The Chair noted that, if Winter Plan B comes into force, the December meeting will not be a face-to-face event. Adam Dent advised that if the meeting had to be

held virtually, it should be as good as a face-to-face event, which would be more challenging to organise. Tim Sinclair agreed the event should set the tone and spirit of the Partnership's being and be a creative, engaging experience for the public. Cllr Vos added that it should create a feeling of confidence and positive action.

ACTION 6: 21.10.21 - Geraldine Collinge to follow up with Partnership members on how a successful online meeting might be held in December if Winter Plan B is enforced.

9. AOB

8.1 Partnership meeting dates 2022

The Committee Clerk will liaise with the Chair about meeting dates for 2022. It is likely these will continue to take place on Thursday afternoons.

8.2. December public meeting

There was still some confusion about the purpose and style of the December meeting at the Town Hall, as well as its target audience. The Chair reminded the group that members of the public had previously asked to access the meeting and, therefore, it needs to be run as a positive public event. The objective is to enable the public to see the town's stakeholders working together in a 'live' environment.

Tim Sinclair suggested drawing on Partnership and other local organisations' resources to help make the meeting lively and engaging e.g., RSC, SBT, colleges.

Adam Dent advised against using Zoom for the meeting if the government's Winter Plan B is enforced, and suggested Livestreaming instead. He can provide the contact details of a company he has worked with to help with this.

It was generally agreed that the November public consultation meeting at the Town Hall should have a visual/entertainment element to it. The event will be a prime opportunity to get local people talking about the Partnership. Some of the people attending the consultation event may then be tempted to attend the Partnership's public meeting in December.

ACTION 7: 21.10.21 - Partnership members to send their ideas for the public meeting format to Geraldine Collinge and Sarah Summers ASAP.

*The next meeting of the Strategic Partnership Group will be on
Thursday 25 November 2021 at 2pm via Zoom.*

The meeting closed at 3.36pm.