

TOWN CENTRE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP PUBLIC MEETING

THURSDAY 27 January at 3pm

Held remotely on Zoom

MINUTES Pages 1-8

Present:

Accessible Stratford represented by Elizabeth Dixon

Royal Shakespeare Company represented by Geraldine Collinge (Chair)

Shakespeare Birthplace Trust represented by Tim Aucott

Shakespeare's England represented by Helen Peters

Stratford-on-Avon District Council represented by John Careford, also attended by Cllr J Fradgley

Stratforward BID represented by Diane Mansell

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 Dave Ayton-Hill, Aaron Corsi and Cllr Tim Sinclair, also attended by Stephen Rumble and Cllr Kate Rolfe

Advent Communications represented by Sam Jackson

Observers: The Mayor, Cllr Kevin Taylor and Sandeep Mahal (RSC)

Clerk to the Strategic Partnership: Margo Galvin

Apologies for absence:

Apologies were received from John Stacey (Bell Court) and Matt Jennings (Stratford-on-Avon District Council).

- **Welcome and introductions**

The Chair welcomed Diane Mansell, the new BID Manager for Stratford-upon-Avon, and Sandeep Mahal, a Leadership Associate at the RSC, to the meeting.

1. **Minutes and actions from previous meeting held on 14 December 2021**

Sam Jackson from Advent Communications noted that only Adam Dent had attended this meeting. The minutes were then approved as an accurate record of the previous meeting.

2. Matters arising

Feedback from Levelling Up Fund (LUF) bid

Dave Ayton-Hill reported that he had met with the Department for Transport (DfT) who had provided verbal feedback on the WCC bid; it was noted that the DfT are not providing written feedback or scores on submissions. Feedback was mostly positive, with the DfT commenting that the bid was a good strategic fit for the LUF and clearly demonstrated the town's need, demand and interest in the project. Some further modelling would be helpful, as would a stronger demonstration of local support for the project; the planned public consultation will hopefully provide this. Overall, the impression gained from the feedback was that, with some further work on the bid, there is no reason for not re-submitting in round two in the spring. This is testament to the everyone's hard work.

John Scampion noted that the bid submission had included a sentence about how the project would contribute to the regeneration of the wider region. He suggested this statement could be strengthened in the next bid. Dave Ayton-Hill agreed that a stronger point could be made about how highway improvements in the town connect to its future prosperity and that of the wider area.

John Careford noted that culture and tourism is at the forefront of the West Midlands Combined Authority's (WMCA) agenda, and that we need to be promoting Stratford-upon-Avon as the shop window of the region from a tourism perspective. This could also be added to strengthen the bid.

Colin Stewart asked if the DfT feedback had provided any advice about how 'shovel ready' the project needed to be. Dave Ayton-Hill replied that there was no specific advice, but it was clear that any future bids would need to demonstrate the project's readiness to proceed.

Elizabeth Dixon noted that the WMCA do not mention Stratford in their communications and, geographically, do not extend beyond Solihull. The Chair commented that Stratford is an associate, non-constituent member of the authority and, as such, receives limited privileges. Helen Peters noted that Stratford feeds into the WMCA via the West Midlands Growth Company.

Public consultation update

Stephen Rumble advised that the consultation preparation is progressing and the proposed timescale for launching it to the public is late February. This should be confirmed w/c 31st January.

Diane Mansell requested that the BID be consulted on this. Stephen Rumble advised he would be happy to meet with her. The Chair noted it was important that BID members are happy with the proposal ahead of consultation.

Cllr Fradgley advised that, at a County meeting earlier in the day, it was noted that a county-wide consultation had only generated 700 responses out of a possible 500k. There had been a lot of criticism about this. It was noted that a

great deal of effort would be required to get people to participate in the Bridge Street/High Street consultation.

3. Clopton Bridge traffic project

Dave Ayton-Hill advised that a group of Partnership members had met before Christmas to discuss any changes that could be made to this project. Robust discussions had taken place about the project and what can/cannot be done within the confines of the agreement in place. The meeting generated a position statement from the County Council. Further questions had been raised after the meeting to which the Town Transport Group responded. This response had been circulated to the Strategic Partnership members with the agenda papers for today's meeting.

Cllr Vos asked for reassurance that the largest of HGVs would be able to turn right onto the bridge from Tiddington Road and that the listed gazebo at the end of the bridge would not be removed. Stephen Rumble advised the assessments had indicated that large HGVs would be able to make the right turn, albeit by crossing over onto the other side of the road, and that the gazebo will remain untouched.

Colin Stewart noted that the traffic on the bridge is over-capacity, and the main concern is that there will potentially be queues across the bridge at peak times and at other times where there aren't any currently.

John Scampion thanked Colin Stewart for his work on this and noted an apparent discrepancy in the Transport Group report which suggested that without the scheme going ahead journey delays are forecast to increase considerably on the southern side of the bridge. It was noted that this should probably say 'with the scheme going ahead'. Colin Stewart advised he would check this.

Cllr Rolfe asked if traffic would have to stop to allow lorries to enter the bridge. Dave Ayton-Hill advised that this is being looked at. Cllr Rolfe requested that a response to this issue be provided to the group.

The Chair then reflected on how the Strategic Partnership can be more proactive in discussing projects such as Clopton Bridge, given that this project is due to start shortly, and the Partnership only responded in November. She noted the need to bring projects like this to the group earlier to give more time for discussion and response.

4. Transport Plan for Stratford-upon-Avon

Colin Stewart had circulated a paper '*Towards an integrated Transport Plan for Stratford-upon-Avon*' to the Strategic Partnership before the meeting, which the Town Transport Group had approved. The paper suggests that a new approach to transport is required and includes a transport vision. It was noted that that an integrated transport plan is needed, and it should, ideally, be put in place before new housing developments are approved so that areas can be protected, for example by compulsory purchase.

Cllr Fradgley commented that the plan is a significant piece of work, and she will put it forward as part of the Local Transport Plan (LTP). She noted that the time is right to submit ideas as County level. She will meet with Gary Palmer and the LTP working group w/c 31st January. It was noted that Colin Stewart has been invited to attend this meeting as TTG Chair.

It was also noted that transport consultants may need to be engaged to help drive this work forward.

Cllr Vos advised that he had some comments on the document and would forward these to Colin Stewart after the meeting.

Dave Ayton-Hill noted his support for an integrated approach that linked the different transport elements to the parking strategy and the new South Warwickshire local plan. This will require the County and District Councils meeting to agree how plans should merge. It will be essential to share information.

Stephen Rumble commented that there are no simple solutions to the town's ongoing traffic problems. The last transport strategy was written in 2011 and needs to be aligned with the LTP.

Cllr Sinclair agreed that there are no easy solutions. Taking the failure of Park and Ride as an example, he noted that schemes such as this should be designed for people (not traffic) and the objective should be to get people to use them.

Colin Stewart commented that '*Towards an integrated Transport Plan for Stratford-upon-Avon*' talks about designing for people. He noted that, historically, projects were designed for cars. Transport options now need to be integrated, with incentives provided for using public transport.

John Scampion asked how an integrated plan will come about and who will take the lead in bringing all the parties together. He noted that however it is done, commercial interests in the town should be represented, along with those of residents.

Sara Aspley commented that any plan needs to have one big intervention that forces a change in thinking. Otherwise, nothing will be achieved.

John Careford noted the importance of considering Stratford in relation to other towns. The decisions made about the town centre may be influenced by projects at the edge of the town and beyond. He noted that Leamington has set up a transformation board which is working to deliver change and transformation. This will inform the local plan and LTP.

The Chair then asked if Partnership members felt they could support the vision set out in '*Towards an integrated Transport Plan for Stratford-upon-Avon*'.

Sara Aspley commented that the overall premise is something that the Strategic Partnership could support. It would be useful to prioritise the 'achievable' actions suggested in the paper.

Cllr Fradgley commented that the vision is the first step. It is about to go into discussion at County level and, hopefully, at District level. It is hoped that this will identify actions that can be implemented quickly as well as items that will form part of medium and long-term plans.

Helen Peters advised that she agreed with the vision and suggested that it could include electric vehicles being provided at hubs for people to use. Colin Stewart advised against getting too focused on detail at this point. The priority is to decide what is needed. The document is the first step on a journey that might result in a 30-year plan.

The Chair thanked Colin Stewart for the document and invited Strategic Partnership members to send any feedback direct to Colin. This matter will be kept as a 'live' item for future Partnership meetings.

ACTION 1: 27.01.2022 – Committee Clerk to bring forward the Transport Plan for Stratford-upon-Avon on future agendas.

5. Bollards project update

Cllr Sinclair advised that he had attended a meeting with Matt Jennings, Rachel Sharpe Creative Placemaking Manager at the RSC and Elizabeth Dixon on 7th January, from which a set of actions had been developed and circulated to Strategic Partnership members. A second meeting is planned for 4th February.

Rather than discuss the project further at this meeting, Cllr Sinclair proposed that work should continue as planned, unless Strategic Partnership members had any objections, and the working group should report back to future meetings.

John Scampion advised that he had not seen the actions document. The Committee Clerk will forward it to him and Diane Mansell. Cllr Sinclair and Diane Mansell will meet separately to discuss the project in more detail.

ACTION 2: 27.01.2022 – **Committee Clerk** to email John Scampion and Diane Mansell with a copy of the bollards/street furniture action plan.

6. Shop fronts

Aaron Corsi provided a brief history of this project which had started as a document called '*Shop Front Schemes*' in September 2021. The document had since grown and all the ideas, actions and solutions that went into it pulled into the 'Revitalising the town centre' framework and identified as a strategic priority for the Partnership. The next step is to look at sub-priorities and agree which

Partnership organisations should work together to formulate an action plan for 2022.

The Chair commented that the paper should be properly considered by Strategic Partnership member organisations before the February meeting for further conversation.

ACTION 3: 27.01.2022 – ALL to review the document '*STSP Strategic Priority Revitalising the Town Centre*', discuss with their respective organisations, identify anything that is missing and provide feedback to Aaron Corsi.

Cllr Fradgley noted that some years ago the Stratford Society had had conversations with Colin Davies, a London-based architect who came to the Stratford Society on several occasions to talk about street scene and town centres. He agreed to work with the Society and helped progress the Shop Fronts Scheme. She will send Aaron Corsi further information.

Elizabeth Dixon noted that she had been involved in this scheme through her involvement with the NDP and Accessible Stratford. She advised that many shops had received grants from the District Council to change their shop fronts.

7. Stratford vacant units

Cllr Taylor provided a summary of the paper that he and John Stacey had produced in December about vacant units in the town and circulated to the Partnership. At that time, there were 28 vacant units, including two long-term vacancies (Debenhams and BHS). The BHS owners are currently working with the District Council to get listed building consent to start essential repairs to the Bridge Street fascia. They wish to pursue their planning application for the proposed hotel and hope to start building work in 2022. There are now around 20 unoccupied town centre properties, although some are now under offer. Cllr Taylor and John Stacey will continue to investigate the remaining vacant units and will report back to the Strategic Partnership.

Cllr Sinclair thanked Cllr Taylor and John Stacey for their work on this. He also noted Cllr Taylor's social media activity in promoting the town. He asked what more the Partnership can do to help fill some of the vacant units.

The Chair felt the Partnership should help bring landlords together to discuss the changes that are needed in the town in relation to vacant units. Individual buildings could be the focus of future blogs and articles to help communicate positive stories and build local understanding of the town's property portfolio.

Sara Aspley advised that two vacant Town Trust units were missing from Cllr Taylor/John Stacey's document: the former printers and the cycle store at the rear of Henley Street. Although these are town centre properties, they are unsuitable for retail as there is no passing trade. However, they could play an important role in helping to revitalise the town centre. She advised that, as landlords, the Town Trust is very alert to its property portfolio and does not have

many empty units. She noted the importance of getting landlords together to understand their different objectives. Cllr Taylor advised that he will add the two properties to the document and circulate an updated version to Partnership members.

Diane Mansell noted that this information is very useful from a BID perspective as many people get in touch seeking vacant properties. She suggested promoting the vacant properties via the BID's website, which is currently being revamped.

Tim Aucott added that the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust had two vacant units as listed in the document: the former Edinburgh Woollen Mill store and a smaller unit used as a pop-up shop. Neither of these are ready to release and it may be some time before they are.

John Careford noted the excellent work done by Cllr Taylor and John Stacey on the vacant retail units. He advised that the WMCA has established a group of experts to act as a 'task force' that will provide advice and guidance in respect of the future of high streets and town centres. If the Strategic Partnership wants to meet the task force, it will need a clear idea of how the task force can help. The Chair suggested that this needs to be brainstormed separately and John Careford advised he would email the Partnership requesting ideas to bring back to the February meeting.

ACTION 4: 27.01.2022 – John Careford to email Strategic Partnership members w/c 31st January for ideas on how the Partnership can engage with the WMCA town centre task force.

8. Communications

Sam Jackson had met with Stephen Rumble and Dave Ayton-Hill, and he confirmed that the County Council will lead on the Bridge Street/High Street consultation and associated communications. It was agreed that the message from the Strategic Partnership will be that it supports the consultation and encourages people in Stratford to get involved.

Communications around the Transport Plan will be developed further down the line. There is also the potential to run blogs and articles around the vacant units when there is progress to report.

The Chair proposed holding another Communications meeting before the February Strategic Partnership meeting and for Communications to be covered as a Matter Arising in February.

ACTION 5: 27.01.2022 – Advent Communications, Geraldine Collinge and the Committee Clerk to meet to discuss communications planning and report back at the February Strategic Partnership meeting.

9. Any Other Business

The Chair noted that several good meetings had taken place outside the main Strategic Partnership meeting. She advised that she will meet with Paul Spooner (who attended the public meeting in December) to discuss a potential investment workshop and will provide an update to the Partnership at the February meeting.

The Chair noted that she and a small group of Partnership members would be meeting with Nadhim Zahawi on 28th January.

Closing the meeting, she thanked everyone for their thoughtful papers which will provide the Strategic Partnership with valuable structure for the months ahead.

*The next meeting of the Strategic Partnership Group will be on
Thursday 24 February at 2pm on Zoom.*

The meeting closed at 4.38pm.