

TOWN CENTRE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP PUBLIC MEETING

THURSDAY 14 December 2021 at 2pm

Held remotely on Zoom

MINUTES Pages 1-8

Present:

Accessible Stratford represented by Elizabeth Dixon

Royal Shakespeare Company represented by Geraldine Collinge (Chair)

Shakespeare's England – represented by Helen Peters

Stratford-on-Avon District Council represented by John Careford and Cllr Matt Jennings also attended by Cllr J Fradgley, and Paul Harris

Stratforward BID – represented by the Mayor, Cllr Kevin Taylor pending appointment of new BID manager

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 Tim Sinclair also attended by Stephen Rumble and Cllr Kate Rolfe

Advent Communications represented by Adam Dent

Clerk: Margo Galvin

Members of the public in attendance: Bob Bearman, David Adamson (Stratford Herald - dadamson@stratford-herald.com), Paul Spooner and Jann Tracy.

Apologies for absence:

Apologies were received from John Stacey (Bell Court) and Tim Aucott (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust)

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited guests to raise questions during the meeting if they wished.

2. Minutes and actions from previous meeting held on 25 November 2021

Colin Stewart had requested a correction to be made to the previous minutes (Item 5: Clopton Bridge traffic signalisation project). The Clerk advised that the minutes had been updated and that a point in Item 6 (The Art of Bollards) had also been clarified in the minutes at Elizabeth Dixon's request. The minutes were then approved as an accurate record of the previous meeting.

3. Matters arising

ACTION 1: 21.10.21 – Shop Fronts discussion document - Aaron Corsi and Geraldine Collinge to meet to discuss further. GC advised that she and AC have now set a date to meet in the new year.

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

It was noted that Cllr Taylor and John Stacey are doing some separate work on landlords. Cllr Taylor advised that they have had several meetings about the current level of empty properties and which landlords are working with those, and they will be putting a plan in place for dealing with these in January.

ACTION 3: 21.10.21 – the Chair has not yet contacted Jonathan Smith at Talk Business. ACTION TO BE CARRIED FORWARD.

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. This is part of a longer discussion about how the Partnership can take a more proactive approach to town centre properties and use the Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) and its own priorities document to help make change. ACTION TO BE CARRIED FORWARD AND ADDED TO JANUARY AGENDA.

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. December meeting NOW being held online. It was noted that a full risk assessment is in place for when the Partnership can eventually meet in person. COMPLETE.

New actions from the meeting held on 25 November 2021

ACTION 1: 25.11.2021 - Advent Communications to draft press release regarding the Partnership's support of a funding re-bid in Spring 2022.

The Chair proposed delaying this until after LUF feedback has been received.

ACTION 2: 25.11.2021 - Dave Ayton-Hill to meet with Colin Stewart and Cllr Rolfe before Christmas about the Clopton Bridge traffic signalisation scheme.

A meeting has been arranged for 17 December and the Partnership will receive an update before work starts in February. **COMPLETE.**

ACTION 3: 25.11.2021 - Strategic Partnership members to provide feedback on the parking strategy options to stephenrumble@warwickshire.gov.uk and paul.harris@stratford-dc.gov.uk **by Friday 17th December.**

The Chair noted that Stephen Rumble and Paul Harris had made a useful presentation about the parking strategy and reminded everyone that feedback on this is due by 17 December. **COMPLETE.**

ACTION 4: 25.11.2021 - John Scampion to email Paul Harris with his feedback about the parking strategy document.

John Scampion is preparing a response and will send this after the meeting. He reminded the Partnership that the NDP, includes a project about town centre parking (project no. 9, page 83). He intends to raise this as an aide memoire to everyone within the context of the District Council's strategic approach as he believes this needs to be addressed. **COMPLETE.**

ACTION 5: 25.11.2021 - Advent to draft a press release about the public December meeting of the Strategic Partnership Group at the Town Hall. **COMPLETE.**

ACTION 6: 25.11.2021 - Partnership members to advise the Chair of their subject matter expertise to ensure a positive response can be provided to any questions raised at the December public meeting. **COMPLETE.**

Cllr Vos asked if the Partnership could find out why the LUF bid was unsuccessful. He noted that the Government website indicates that there were proportionately fewer transport and culture projects than regeneration projects submitted and that ministers had agreed to fund all the former submissions that scored >75%. Since Stratford's bid related to transport and culture, it is hard to know why it had been unsuccessful. The Chair advised this would be discussed later in the meeting.

4. Review of progress made by the Strategic Partnership in 2021

The Chair noted that one of the Partnership's great achievements in 2021 had been the positive, fruitful and lively discussions that had taken place across the Partnership organisations. She thanked everyone for their participation and commitment to making the Partnership work.

She reflected on the Partnership's early work on developing a vision for Stratford as a town that will be successful and admired in the future as a place for people to live, work, visit and invest. This vision work had taken the Partnership back to the programme set out in the NDP and led to the identification of several priority projects for the group to focus on. She thanked Colin Stewart for the work he had done on this.

Colin Stewart then provided an overview of work that the Partnership has carried out. This falls into four prime activities:

- 1) Creation of a Strategic Partnership to create a town centre strategy, using the NP as a start point. Following its creation, the Partnership had deployed a 'strategy diamond' tool, often used in business, to consider what sort of town Stratford wants to be, what makes the town different, how the strategy will be achieved, and the timescales and costs involved. A working group was set up to address these questions.
- 2) Identifying the needs of town users and the Stratford 'difference'. The Partnership identified the town's many different users who include residents of

the town and the wider area, visitors (including international), children and young people, retired people, businesses and commuters. All these groups must be considered in terms of how the town can meet their future needs.

It was agreed the Stratford 'difference' comes from the vision, with the town's differentiators being identified as the Shakespeare 'brand', the town's 'user-friendliness' and its riverside setting. In March 2021 the Partnership created a paper which compared its situation with the NP. This showed a good correlation and highlighted various interdependencies, as well as some gaps.

- 3) Identify town centre project priorities and ownership. The Partnership had created a programme of NP projects to identify short and long-term opportunities. These were categorised to see how they might interrelate and fit into a programme of activity for the next 10-15 years.
- 4) Identify Strategic Partnership project priorities. A paper had been produced which identified key projects and the potential benefits and outcomes of these; an example being the revitalisation of the town centre. Detailed activities that would help deliver these projects were identified as part of this work.

All the above are work in progress and will lead to the strategy of the future.

Bridge Street / High Street improvement project

Dave Ayton-Hill provided an update on the Levelling Up Fund bid submitted in summer 2021 to fund improvements to Bridge Street and High Street. The County Council saw this project as a priority bid and it was the only one that it could submit to the LUF as a transport project. The Partnership had worked very quickly to develop a high-level proposal. Unfortunately, the bid was unsuccessful. The County Council is due to meet with the DfT in January to get detailed feedback on where the bid scored well and how it might be adjusted for future funding submissions.

It is thought that one of the bid's weaknesses was that the Bridge Street/ High Street project is not 'shovel ready' and still needs to go through public consultation. It appears that the successful bids were ready to go. The Bridge Street/High Street project will go to public consultation in February, after which the project will be in a much stronger position for future funding opportunities.

Helen Peters noted that Stratford was not in a 'priority' area for funding on this occasion and, therefore, there was always the possibility that the bid would be unsuccessful in the first round. The Chair confirmed that the town was in tier '2' and that successful towns were arguably those that were more in need than Stratford. She noted that the Partnership had done great work with the County Council to develop the bid and expressed thanks to David Ayton-Hill and Stephen Rumble for their work on this.

Cllr Vos confirmed that Stratford was in tier 2 but noted that, according to the Government website, 90% (20) of the accepted bids were tier 2, while 6% (3 bids) were tier 3. According to the Lichfield policy and development consultancy,

transport projects accounted for 30% of the total successful bids. Typically, these included road improvements schemes and interventions that promote cycling and walking. The Stratford project had aimed to do this so it will be interesting to discover where it had fallen short since being a tier 2 bid was not necessarily prohibitive.

Links to the relevant websites are:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/levelling-up-fund-explanatory-note-on-the-assessment-and-decision-making-process>

<https://lichfields.uk/blog/2021/october/29/levelling-up-fund-first-round-reaching-left-behind-places/>

The Chair noted that the Partnership is considering other funding opportunities and will await LUF feedback to learn if a bid can be submitted in round 2.

Cllr Fradgley noted that Stratford was amongst the towns most affected by the pandemic downturn due to its reliance on tourism and theatre. Although the town is not in tier 1 for LUF, there are deprivation arguments to be made about the town's future. The bid was a move to help prevent a further fall into economic difficulties.

Cllr Sinclair noted there was a difference between a perception of need and the reality of need. This needs to be countered in any later bids because funding teams unfamiliar with Stratford will not necessarily understand the challenges the town faces.

Bob Bearman asked for a recap on the public consultation exercise. It was confirmed that this will take place in February and will be led by consultants PJA who created the designs for the Bridge Street/High Street project. PJA have spoken to stakeholders in the town about the scheme as part of their preparation for the consultation. The Chair noted that it will be very important for the Partnership to publicly support the project.

Colin Stewart reiterated the need for Stratford's projects to be 'shovel ready' when applying for funding.

| |
|--|
| <p>ACTION 1: 16.12.2021 – Committee Clerk to send a copy of the bid submission with the minutes from this meeting, together with the links to the Government website. COMPLETE.</p> |
|--|

5. Priorities for the Strategic Partnership in 2022

The public consultation on the Bridge Street /High Street project (scheduled for February) will be an early priority.

The Chair reminded the Partnership that it is important to consider how town centre projects link together and how the Bridge Street/ High Street project, in particular, connects to the parking strategy. It is recognised that there are several interdependencies across projects and the Partnership should take a strategic and holistic view to avoid backing projects that may cause problems later. This should be discussed in more detail in the spring.

Cllr Fradgley noted that there are many county and community projects that the Partnership could draw on as satellite projects. The Chair advised that the Partnership had started to look at other projects, with the help of Cllr Toby Lee. Attention had been diverted onto the bid, but the focus now needs return to projects.

Sara Aspley advised that the Town Trust has a vacant building at the rear of Henley Street. It needs considerable work and the Trust had submitted a bid to the Community Renewal Fund for roof repairs and a community consultation and feasibility study to understand how the building could best benefit the town. It is part of the Trust's endowed estate which means an income must be generated from it. One idea is to create a co-working space for small businesses. The bid was unsuccessful, and the Trust has asked for feedback to understand why. Funding is now being sought elsewhere. It was noted that the District Council is keen to progress this, evolving their Venture House model into a more town-centric space.

John Careford felt the town centre would benefit from a co-working space where local people could come together and work creatively and collaboratively. It has worked well in Leamington, but it does depend on funding. If the Partnership could find a large enough space, a business case could be drafted and progressed. The Chair agreed that a co-working scheme might help to keep young, creative people in the town.

Dave Ayton-Hill noted there may be funding opportunities via the Warwickshire Recovery and Investment Fund (RIF), which includes property and infrastructure. It is a local fund (not a grant), but the Partnership could explore how this might work. Sara Aspley agreed to discuss this further with Dave Ayton-Hill in the new year. Cllr Sinclair asked if there is anything in the RIF to prevent loans to other authorities e.g. could the District Council apply in the context of the Gateway project? Dave Ayton-Hill confirmed this would be possible. The Chair agreed that the Partnership should think about different sources of funding.

Paul Spooner, who advises the government on major town centre and infrastructure projects, referred to the LUF, noting that a bid must fulfil two key criteria: does it meet the fund's objectives, and can the proposed project be delivered? He suggested that the Shared Prosperity Fund might be a better option for funding than round 2 of LUF, noting that the Bridge Street/High Street project is much more than a transport scheme. He recommended investigating all the different funding and investment opportunities and noted that there are several assets in the town centre that could be leveraged for funding purposes. Public and private investment could help make the project happen. He also noted the importance of having an integrated approach across all the local authorities to

show how projects interconnect, and to make the town centre's recovery and long-term sustainability successful. Paul would be very happy to support the Partnership with this.

The Chair suggested that a group from the Partnership meets to discuss this further. The Partnership agreed that it would be helpful to have Paul's input. Cllr Sinclair and Colin Stewart advised they would like to be part of this group. Colin also noted that the town Transport group has produced a paper about an integrated transport plan which will fit well with this. He will share this with the Partnership when the paper has been signed off.

The Chair agreed that a master plan identifying the interrelationships of projects should be a focus for the Partnership in 2022.

The Chair highlighted some smaller Partnership projects that will be taken forward in 2022. These include shop fronts, looking at town centre aesthetics and how community-led projects such as trails and parklets can help make change in the town alongside larger, capital projects.

The bollards project is currently under discussion. This idea was initiated by the Town Clerk who had seen professionally decorated bollards in Winchester, which had generated a lot of interest. Cllr Sinclair had discussed this idea with other county councillors and a working group has been created to consider this in more detail. The group will meet in early January and report back to the Partnership.

The Chair advised that the Partnership is working closely with Advent Communications to agree how best to communicate these activities to the public in an integrated way. She thanked Advent for their work so far.

As there were no questions or any other business, the Chair invited questions and observations from members of the public.

6. Questions from the floor

Jann Tracy asked for the Partnership's thoughts about the proposed South Warwickshire District Council. The Chair advised that, although she was not qualified to speak, she felt that this would be a positive step since it would allow sharing of expertise. Cllr Jennings commented that, from a financial perspective, this needs to happen, noting that it is rare to have the opportunity to build a new council and the proposal would take on all the best points of the current councils.

Cllr Fradgley noted that, if the new council is formed, there will necessarily be a transition period which may have an impact on the Partnership's ability to progress things quickly.

Bob Bearman asked if the Partnership has a working group to look at the major emergencies that are part of life now i.e. Covid, climate change and extinction of wildlife. The Chair advised that, while there is no specific group set up to look at this, these matters should be discussed as part of each Partnership project. Cllr Fradgley noted that at county, district and town council level, every decision

should be passed through the lens of climate change. Cllr Vos noted that climate change is very high on the Town Council's agenda.

The Chair commented that the Partnership may need to formalise how this is addressed in 2022.

Cllr Sinclair advised that the County Council's strategy is to ensure that everything they do must conform to three things: build a strong economy, look after the most vulnerable in society and have a sustainable future. He asked if a similar strategic overlay should be considered for the Partnership. The Chair agreed the Partnership should return to this in the new year when building on its vision work.

Elizabeth Dixon commented this should be extended to ensure that everything the Partnership does meets the requirements of Equality Act. The Chair commented that equity should also be a consideration.

There being no further questions or comments from the public, the Chair concluded the meeting by thanking Partnership members and the Committee Clerk for their work during 2021 and wishing everyone a peaceful Christmas.

*The next meeting of the Strategic Partnership Group will be a public meeting to be held via Zoom on **Thursday 27 January 2022 at 3pm.****

The meeting closed at 3.18pm.

**Please note the later start time for this meeting. Future meetings will revert to a 2pm start.*