



TOWN CENTRE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP MEETING

Thursday 16 July 2026

2:00pm – 3.10pm

Held online via Teams

Present:

Accessible Stratford represented by Elizabeth Dixon

Stratford BID represented by Aaron Corsi

Shakespeare Birthplace Trust represented by Richard Paterson

Stratford-on-Avon District Council represented by Councillors Cowcher, Fradgley and Grocott

John Careford, Ali Chafekar, John Tonge

Stratford-upon-Avon Town Council represented by Councillor Vos,
Caroline Nash (Vice Chair)

Stratford Town Transport represent by Colin Stewart

Stratford Town Trust represented by Matthew Poole

Warwickshire County Council represented by Councillors Albon and Rolfe
Catherine Marks and Aoife O’Gorman

Apologies: John Stacey (Bell Court), Manuela Perteghella MP, Jacqui O’Hanlon and Sam George (Royal Shakespeare Company), Rachel North (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust), Darren Tosh (Shakespeare’s England), John Scampion (Stratford Society).

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Vice-Chair opened the meeting and noted apologies received.

2. Approval of the minutes of the meeting held on 21 May 2026

The minutes were approved.

3. Matters Arising and Action Points

No additional matters were raised beyond those scheduled on the agenda.

4. South Warwickshire Local Plan

JC reported that the South Warwickshire Local Plan had been approved for consultation by both Stratford and Warwick Councils. The Regulation 19 consultation would run for 7

weeks from the following Tuesday until 8 September 2026 and would test whether the plan was consistent with national policy, effective, justified and deliverable.

JC reported that the key challenge remained deliverability due to viability, rising costs and infrastructure constraints. He stressed the need to submit the Local Plan by the end of the year to avoid an estimated two-year delay under the new planning system. He outlined the main growth areas around Stratford, including Stratford 1 and 2 to the south (around 2,700 homes and a new secondary school), Stratford 3 to the west of Shottery, employment land at the airfield, the proposed western bypass and the retained Canal Quarter allocation.

CS raised concerns that the safeguarded bypass route was longer and more costly than the original option. JC noted this and confirmed changes could be considered after consultation if supported by evidence during the consultation process.

Members discussed the public engagement. It was confirmed consultation material would be available online, in libraries and at district council offices and drop-in sessions would be arranged.

Action: JC to share the drop-in dates

5. Strategic Partnership Working Group – Final Report

CN presented the update on the revised governance arrangements for the Partnership, thanking those who had been involved in the Working Group and finalising the report. She advised that the revised governance proposals had been endorsed by partners, Stratford-on-Avon District Council and Warwickshire County Council. The Town Council had also welcomed the new arrangements and had agreed in principle to explore Community Infrastructure Levy funding for a temporary project officer.

CS reminded members that the final structure merged the Town Centre Evolution and Vibe themes, reducing the number of delivery groups from five to four. Following a query on the final governance diagram it was confirmed the corrected governance structure would be circulated with the minutes.

AC noted that one the Town Centre Evolution, Great Vibe, Fun Place delivery group would oversee a significant proportion of the partnership's projects. It was noted that this could be reviewed in future, if required.

CM asked whether WCC could be represented on the Town Centre Evolution group. This was confirmed and noted also that delivery group membership would remain flexible and that partner organisations would nominate appropriate representatives as implementation progressed.

Action CN to follow up

6. Pedestrianisation of High Street

AO'G updated the group on the project. She confirmed that PJA Civil Engineering Ltd had been appointed to prepare the design work and noted that they had previously worked on the Bridge Street/High Street proposals for the levelling-up bid, so already understood Stratford's constraints and opportunities.

PJA had been asked to prepare two designs: a shorter-term scheme deliverable within 12 to 18 months using measures such as barriers and street furniture, and a longer-term design allowing time to secure future funding for more substantial changes, potentially including roadway and paving works.

An initial meeting had already taken place and that a site meeting was scheduled for the following week with representatives from the local authorities, BID and Accessible Stratford. Broader stakeholder meetings would then follow so wider partnership members could comment on the emerging designs. If the programme remained on track, initial concepts would be available by the end of September and final designs in December. CM added that stakeholder engagement would need to align with the new governance structure.

7. High Street Vacancies

JT reported that the latest vacancy monitoring showed a generally stable picture, with a recent audit suggesting a slight improvement. He explained that a revised monitoring methodology had temporarily increased reported vacancy rates and that the figures would be refined once first-floor properties were excluded.

Henley Street remained fully occupied and while Greenhill Street had improved, recent vacancies could affect the next report. Bell Court vacancies were largely attributable to redevelopment, and it was proposed introducing a separate redevelopment category. Members supported this approach, recognising that redevelopment reflected investment rather than decline.

Following a question about coverage of other streets it was confirmed that they were monitored but that reporting focused on the primary shopping area.

Members discussed High Street Rental Auctions and the potential for future government funding. JT advised that a report was being prepared but that funding details remained uncertain. He also noted that the powers had limitations and would not apply to some key vacant properties, including the former BHS building.

CM suggested the powers could still be useful in encouraging engagement with landlords, and this was agreed as the preferred first step. CS highlighted the importance of progress on the former BHS site.

8. UK Town of Culture 2028

CN reported that we had not been shortlisted for UK Town of Culture 2028. While disappointing, she noted that 398 applications had competed for just 15 places and said the work undertaken by partners would continue to inform the town's Arts and Culture Strategy.

AC encouraged the partnership to maintain momentum, emphasising that Stratford already had a clear long-term cultural vision independent of the competition.

MP asked whether any detailed feedback had been provided and suggested the partnership should seek fuller feedback to strengthen future bids and continue to make a robust, evidence-based case for investment, highlighting Stratford's significant contribution to the UK economy.

Action: CN to write to DCLG

8. Arts and Culture Strategy

AC updated the group on the Strategy. The working group had met the previous month and would shortly meet again. A draft delivery plan linked to the 10-year strategy was in circulation and would be refined over the next month before the wider stakeholder network reconvened in October. That wider group, made up of around 50 to 60 organisations, would then focus on monitoring and delivery.

9. Stratford BID

AC reported that the BID Wardens had completed their first year, recovering over £15,000 of stolen stock while helping to improve business security. He also highlighted the success of the Motor Festival, which attracted around 68,000–69,000 visitors, with planning now underway for the Food Festival in September.

The BID's focus was shifting from increasing visitor numbers to encouraging longer stays and boosting the evening economy through initiatives such as food festival wristbands, enhanced marketing and work on a night-time economy strategy.

He also noted signs of changing visitor demographics, including more international tour groups, and advised that around 10 new businesses were expected to open in the town.

Members discussed the impact of the recent hot weather, with mixed views on its effect on trade, while noting that hotel occupancy remained strong and that day visits continued to outnumber overnight stays.

10. Town Transport

CS highlighted the four transport priorities. He stressed that the western bypass remained essential to the town's long-term transport strategy, supporting freight movement, pedestrianisation, public transport and the wider Local Plan.

He emphasised the need to secure the right route and infrastructure at the right time, expressing concern that the safeguarded route differed from the original preferred option and could become prohibitively expensive and called for a dedicated public consultation on the bypass, separate from the Local Plan consultation, to allow residents to consider route options and provide informed feedback.

He also urged continued safeguarding of disused railway corridors for future transport and active travel use.

Finally, he reported that improvements to the Birmingham Road active travel scheme were still expected and encouraged support for future walking and cycling funding opportunities to help deliver long-standing transport projects.

11. Any Other Business

The Partnership acknowledged the Local Government Reorganisation announcement, following the Government's announcement that Warwickshire would be divided into two unitary authorities, with the proposed South Warwickshire Council comprising the current Warwick and Stratford-on-Avon districts. She advised that the Chief Executive of Stratford-on-Avon District Council had circulated a further update and that a joint statement had now been issued by the six Warwickshire councils. The statement confirmed that significant work remained before the new arrangements could be implemented, including further detail on governance, service delivery, implementation timescales and transitional arrangements.

12. Date of Next Meeting - TBC