

**ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE  
16 APRIL 2024**

**PRESENT: COUNCILLOR I D CARRINGTON (CHAIRMAN)**

Councillors M A Griggs (Vice-Chairman), Mrs A M Austin, A J Baxter, K H Cooke, I G Fleetwood, A G Hagues, H Spratt, G J Taylor, L Wootten and S Bunney

Councillors: attended the meeting as observers

Officers in attendance:-

Justin Brown (Assistant Director Growth), Kiara Chatziioannou (Scrutiny Officer), Nicole Hilton (Assistant Director - Communities), Marianne Marshall (Communications) (Strategic Communications Lead), Chris Miller (Head of Environment), Mary Powell (Commissioning Manager (Tourism)) and Vanessa Strange (Head of Infrastructure Investment)

**64 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS**

It was reported that, under Regulation 13 of the Local Government Committee and Political Groups Regulation 1990, Councillor S Bunney replaced Councillor M Boles for this meeting only.

**65 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

No interests were declared at this point in proceedings.

**66 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 27 FEBRUARY 2024**

**RESOLVED**

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 27 February 2024 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**67 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COUNCILLORS AND LEAD OFFICERS**

The Chairman made the following announcements on behalf of the Executive Councillor for Economic Development, Environment, and Planning:

- The Lincolnshire Forum for Agriculture and Horticulture had been reinstated and its first meeting was scheduled in May 2024.
- Team Lincolnshire (TL) was hosting a variety of agri-tech and agri-food events in order to connect local businesses and facilitate automation opportunities in the sector.
- The Council would be represented by the Executive Councillor at the UK Real Estate Investment & Infrastructure Forum (REiIF) event in Leeds where he planned to promote business opportunities in Lincolnshire to external investors.
- The majority of civil engineering works involved in the Sutton Bridge scheme had concluded, and public realm activities were expected to be completed before a celebration event in June.
- Preparatory work was underway in partnership with East Lindsey District Council in regard to the expansion of the Horncastle Industrial Estate, and the Economic Development Team was working to bring devolution capital funding projects forward for an early delivery.

Members noted the announcements, and raised the following matters in response:

- Questions were raised regarding the membership process and arrangements for the Lincolnshire Forum for Agriculture and Horticulture; the Head of Infrastructure Investment explained the Forum held open meetings although membership was primarily targeted at the agricultural sector. The National Farmers Union (NFU), and the conclusions drawn from the Scrutiny Panel on Agricultural Sector Support helped to inform the membership which included active farmers, young people working in the sector, landowners, and innovative business owners. It was expected that a report on the progress of the Forum would be considered by the Committee in Autumn.
- It was requested that information relating to the Lincolnshire Forum for Agriculture and Horticulture was shared with Councillors. The Head of Infrastructure Investment agreed to share details, and advised that work was ongoing with the Communications Team to ensure the Forum was heavily promoted across Lincolnshire.
- Members questioned the objectives of the Forum and highlighted the importance of ensuring the work of the NFU was not duplicated. The Head of Infrastructure Investment assured that the Forum would seek to avoid duplication. This was supported by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) who managed a national network of agricultural fora and managed the agenda content for meetings to ensure that work was complimentary, not duplicative. These considerations would be included in the report that the Committee would consider later in the year.

*[Note: Cllr L Wootten joined the meeting at 10:15am]*

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Environment which provided an introduction to the East Atlantic Flying Way Heritage Site Bid. It was reported that the government invited nominations for inclusion on the list of the World Heritage Sites every ten years, and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) was leading the proposal for the East Coast Wetlands, otherwise known as the East Coast Flyway, to be recognised as a World Heritage Site by initially bidding for inclusion on the tentative list.

The areas in Lincolnshire that would be considered as part of the World Heritage Site was the collection of existing Special Protection Areas designated by the European Union, and was illustrated on page 18 of the report.

The general criteria required the site to hold cultural or natural significance, or a combination of both, and it was reported that the East Coast Flyway held natural significance as one of the eight major migratory routes for birds in the East Atlantic Flyway. Potential Heritage Sites were assessed on whether it held Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). The East Coast Flyway was deemed to hold OUV due to the biodiversity it facilitated.

It was noted that the recognition of the East Coast Flyway as a World Heritage Site would be beneficial for Lincolnshire in terms of eco-tourism/green tourism, increased funding for infrastructure and investment on the East Coast, and adherence to national biodiversity obligations.

During consideration of this item, the following matters were noted:

- It was reported that the two main Flyway locations in Lincolnshire were at the Wash and the Humber Estuary, and it was clarified that migratory corridors would not be included.
- It was noted that the Flyway achieving World Heritage status would not provide any additional legal powers to protect the birds.
- Members expressed concern that areas close to the Flyway used air space for flight training, or had multiple pylons, wind turbines and flood defences that may endanger the birds. The Head of Environment clarified that the bid for World Heritage Status was a recognition of the pre-existing migratory route adopted by birds that occurred already despite these obstacles. The powers from the existing EU-designated Special Protection Areas would persist, and managed realignment works and coastal adaption which added more wetlands near Donna Nook would also contribute to enhanced biodiversity.
- The potential funding accessible to Lincolnshire given a successful bid was not currently known, although it was suggested that funding could be accessed via the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Members emphasised the importance of adequate tourism infrastructure following a successful bid as it would attract eco-tourists. The Head of Environment accepted that if the claim was successful, the Council would develop existing green tourism projects to accommodate a potential increase of visitors.

- The timescales of the claim and the selection process depended on the government; it was reported the tentative list of World Heritage Sites was reviewed every two years, and the East Coast Flyway was currently at the first stage, although the Head of Environment advised that anecdotal evidence suggested that signs were encouraging that the East Coast Flyway would be included in the tentative list.
- It was questioned whether the bid for the Flyway could extend to other locations on migratory route; the Head of Environment informed Members that the East Coast Flyway was part of the larger Atlantic Flyway where there were already two World Heritage Sites in the West Coast of Africa and the North Sea.
- If successful, the Council and RSPB would work closely to analyse the management of other World Heritage Sites.
- A delicate balance was required between protecting the migratory route and ensuring infrastructure could support additional tourism that would be attracted to Lincolnshire following a successful bid. The Head of Environment informed the Committee that ensuring this balance was already part of the RSPB's work on the East Coast of Lincolnshire. The Council would ensure that local business owners were informed on developments, as well making clear additional tourism would be from birds so it was imperative for their business that they were not disturbed.
- Members asked whether there were any anticipated challenges during the nomination period; the Head of Environment noted that evidencing that the site held OUV would be a significant undertaking, however he assured that signs were encouraging so far.

#### RESOLVED

- 1) That the Committee endorses the report
- 2) That the Committee recommends to the Executive Councillor for Environment, Economy & Planning that the County Council supports the proposal to add the East Coast Flyway to the UK Tentative List of World Heritage Sites.
- 3) That the Committee recommends that assistance, to the project leads, government, and other relevant agencies, is given by officers of the County Council as and when appropriate.

#### 69 STRATEGIC PLAN OBJECTIVES FOR THE VISITOR ECONOMY IN LINCOLNSHIRE

Consideration was given to a report from the Place & Investment Manager and the Assistant Director - Growth which outlined the Strategic Plan Objectives to support the visitor economy in Lincolnshire. The Committee was informed that the Plan comprised of three interconnected objectives: business support, product development, and enhancing the visitlincolnshire.com website.

Research undertaken by the Economic Development (ED) Team had indicated that there were multiple types of attractions in Lincolnshire that were generally popular among

tourists, however they were unaware that they could be found in Lincolnshire which highlighted the importance of promoting the County.

The Council continued to work with District Council colleagues and Destination Lincolnshire, which operated the County Council's social media. Work was underway to establish a website analytics group to examine the site's traffic and it was anticipated that the information collected by District Councils would also feed into this data.

During consideration of this item, the following matters were reported:

- Members welcomed the progress outlined in the report and the efforts made by the ED Team to attract tourists and empower Lincolnshire's visitor economy.
- It was suggested that the training and workshops offered as part of the business support offer may be inaccessible to micro-business owners who do not have capacity to close their business to attend. The Place & Investment Manager acknowledged the Committee that the tourist industry in Lincolnshire was characterised by small/micro-businesses, which was considered a strength. She acknowledged that smaller businesses may have difficulty finding availability to attend sessions which was why one-to-one bespoke support was provided by the Growth Manager – Visitor Economy.
- Members raised questions regarding the content of the training sessions and workshops that were ran as part of the strategic plan; the Place & Investment Manager highlighted that a number of Workshops were held about the Kings Coastal Path. Training also addressed topics such as future-planning and connectivity.
- Members recommended that more could be done to attract tourists to churches across Lincolnshire; the Place & Investment Manager agreed that church tourism was vital to the visitor economy, and the ED Team was working to develop multiple themed walks, one of which could be church-themed.
- The ED Team planned to create itineraries on the Visit Lincolnshire website as part of a growth area for 2024 to inform days out for families.
- A substantial number of tourists returned to Lincolnshire which was considered both a strength and weakness of Lincolnshire's tourism offer.
- It was suggested that larger-scale events posed excellent opportunities for the visitor economy; particularly the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Boston, Massachusetts in 2030 which was supported by many in Lincolnshire given its namesake. The Place & Investment Manager highlighted that anniversaries were a key focus of the Team, and agreed that the event should be celebrated in Lincolnshire. Irish and Italians were a key demographic in Boston in the US, thus it was important to target approaches towards these groups, however it was also noted that these demographics were passionate about their ancestry, and would welcome involvement with an event which connected to Boston, Lincolnshire.
- Members suggested the focus on 'Power of three' which was defined as 'city, coast and countryside' was a limiting strategy. The Place & Investment Manager informed

the Committee that the strategy was adopted in 2015-16 following research which indicated that visitors were confused as the Lincolnshire tourism offer was overly broad. It was noted that despite the prioritisation of the 'Power of Three', a wide range of work was being undertaken on other types of specific tourism, such as Market Towns and set jetting.

- Place & Investment Manager accepted the suggestion from Members that the product development priorities for 2024 outlined on page 22 of the report did not fit well into the website strategy in Appendix A.
- Members questioned how success was measured within the tourist sector by the ED team. It was advised that the click-through to booking statistics were the most accurate indicator of performance as it suggested that the content on the Visit Lincolnshire website encouraged prospective visitors to make a booking. Members welcomed the click-through rate of 19.3% on the Visit Lincolnshire website given the national average was 4.7%. It was further suggested whether click-through to booking should be a key performance indicator (KPI) which was considered and monitored via scrutiny on a quarterly. The Place & Investment Manager noted this may be challenging to acquire information from district councils, however businesses were good at communicating and agreed to assess the matter.
- Members sought clarification on the theme of 'segmentation' outlined in the report; they were informed that it specifically referred to the product development objective and was considered as key to the success of the visitor economy, particularly in regards to 'segmented' products that empowered specialist tourist groups such as walkers, cyclists and bird watchers.
- Following the Covid-19 pandemic it was difficult to predict tourist behaviour and preferences, and international tourism had not returned to pre-pandemic levels.

#### RESOLVED

- 1) That the satisfaction of the Committee be noted regarding the current progress of the Visit Lincolnshire Team and website
- 2) That the 2024/25 development plan and priorities as outlined in the report be noted.
- 3) That the Committee endorses the strategy for visitlincolnshire.com
- 4) That comments made by the Committee be taken under consideration by relevant officers and the portfolio holder.

[note: Councillor S Bunney left the meeting at 11:04am]

#### 70 THEDDLETHORPE GEOLOGICAL DISPOSAL FACILITY WORKING GROUP - 6-MONTHLY UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report from the Assistant Director – Growth, which provided a biannual update on the progress on the progress of the Theddlethorpe Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) Working Group. The Senior Adviser for Energy Opportunities – Infrastructure

Investment was also in attendance for this item. It was reported that Councillor M Hill OBE represented the County Council on the Working Group, and the Council's membership did not indicate support of the GDF. Three key developments were reported:

- Firstly, the Community Visioning Programme for Mablethorpe, Withern and Theddlethorpe was established and sought to develop the evidence base of strategic infrastructure investments required from government if the GDF development went ahead. The key themes of the programme included place, economy, environment, and education. The Programme Team was established in the County Council to ensure oversight, and that infrastructure requirements were accurately analysed.
- Secondly, Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) had undertaken a community opinion survey comprising of 250 respondents, and Members were directed to page 37 of the report where the findings were listed. It was summarised that respondents generally would welcome more information on safety considerations, impacts on house prices and more generally, the overall impact the GDF would have on the community.
- Thirdly, the Council continued to liaise with STEP fusion as they implemented their siting programme in West Burton, Nottinghamshire to learn good practice for the Theddlethorpe site. It was reported that STEP fusion's engagement had led to strategic work with education providers to promote relevant skills in the community to encourage employment at the GDF. Transport analysis and work on business supply chain had also been undertaken as part of the engagement activity which would be advantageous to replicate in Theddlethorpe.

The Assistant Director – Growth gave assurance that the progress of the Working Group and the development as a whole was positive.

[note: Councillor K Cooke left the meeting at 11:15am]

During consideration of the report, the following matters were noted:

- Some concern was expressed in regard to the emotive impact of the word 'nuclear' when raised with residents, and that they may misunderstand that it posed a significant threat. It was agreed that this demonstrated the importance of sufficient communication to provide assurance and accurate information to residents.
- There were around 20 similar GDFs being developed, and it was imperative lessons were learned and adopted at Theddlethorpe.
- The Council was looking for manufacturing plants and engineering businesses to support the Theddlethorpe development. The Assistant Director – Growth assured this would be analysed, as well as the associated opportunities for the manufacturing sector in Lincolnshire. Members welcomed the active pursuit of modular nuclear reactor programmes.
- The community survey was welcomed by the Committee, and it was subsequently questioned how the Council could support NWS to ensure residents were fully informed. It was noted that the government policy for siting GDFs placed

responsibility to inform on organisations, in this case, NWS as the developers, and the community partnerships in each area, not the Local Authority. Additionally, the Council contacted NWS on a monthly basis to communicate its expectations and was active in the community partnership where it maintained membership on the working group. It was paramount to ensure technical knowledge was communicated and held by the County Council at the working group to ensure it played a strong scrutinising role on the group.

- Some Members were sympathetic to residents who did not want nuclear waste near their homes, but acknowledged it was theoretically safe due to heavy monitoring and regulation.
- The community partnership was comprised of local community representatives, business representatives, and residents; membership was determined via open allocation process.
- It was the aim of the partnership to ensure suitable information was shared with residents to inform a community vote in 2027 as to whether the development would go ahead.
- It was highlighted that the survey hosted by NWS was one of many engagement exercises; it was also noted that surveys had also been developed by those who opposed developments which reduced the likelihood of bias from any particular group running a survey.
- Members emphasised that it was vital that any nuclear material was managed with the utmost care and responsibility to ensure materials were adequately stabilised and stored.
- The Chairman encouraged Members to research Geological Disposal Facility in Finland (Onkalo Spent Nuclear Fuel Repository).
- Government policy stated that two sites were proposed for a GDF site which would eventually be narrowed down to a single site, and a binary and binding public vote would determine whether developments continued. Members subsequently questioned the process if both communities at the proposed sites declined developments and were informed this would be a matter for national government to consider.
- The Assistant Director – Growth informed Members that the government had proposed a number of sites for the development of a GDF at South Copeland, Mid Copeland and East Lincolnshire; South Copeland formed a working group but it disbanded without explanation, although government policy on GDF siting gave power for any relevant principal local authority to form and disband community partnerships. It was assured this would not occur at the Theddlethorpe WG due to the Council's neutrality and membership on the working group.
- It was questioned whether the Council was monitoring the use of its staff and resources to aid the GDF development. It was noted that the Council recorded the time and priority spent, and a planning agreement had stated that the Council would be fully funded for direct costs associated with the GDF. It was assured that the



Council was working to keep costs at a minimum and continued to explore infrastructure opportunities to continue to attract investment.

- The Committee requested updates on the development and Working Group where appropriate,

#### RESOLVED

- 1) That the satisfaction of the Committee be noted in relation to the update provided from the ongoing engagement with the Theddlethorpe Community Partnership
- 2) That the Committee's comments be taken under consideration by relevant officers when planning future engagement and participation in activities undertaken by the Partnership.
- 3) That the Committee requests an update on progress be submitted in six months.

#### 71 ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to a report from the Scrutiny Officer which enabled the Committee to comment on the content of its work programme for the coming year to ensure that scrutiny activity was focused where it could be of greatest benefit.

It was reported that no additions or amendments had been made to the Work Programme since its publication on 8 April 2024, and Officers were invited to liaise with the Scrutiny Officer if they wished for any reports to be timetabled.

During consideration of the report, the following matters were noted:

- It was requested by Members that the '*Climate Change Impact*' report listed under 'items to be programmed' on page 44 of the report was considered at an upcoming meeting soon.
- It was suggested that a report on the carbon usage of the Council was also scheduled, although it was clarified that the Head of Environment reported this data annually as a standing item.

#### RESOLVED

- 1) That the Committee approves the existing work programme as detailed in pages 41-46 of the agenda.

The meeting closed at 12.00 pm