

**ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY
 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
 10 SEPTEMBER 2019**

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR MRS W BOWKETT (CHAIRMAN)

Councillors C R Oxby (Vice-Chairman), Mrs A M Austin, G E Cullen, M A Griggs, A G Hagues, Mrs E J Sneath, C L Strange and Dr M E Thompson

Executive Councillor C J Davie for Economy and Place attended the meeting as an observer

Officers in attendance:-

Steve Blagg (Democratic Services Officer), Andy Brooks (Commissioning Manager (Regeneration Programme)), Justin Brown (Assistant Director Growth), John Coates (Head of Waste), Matthew Harrison (Senior Commissioning Officer - Flood Risk), David Hickman (Head of Environment), Clare Hughes (Principal Commissioning Officer (LEP)), Daniel Steel (Scrutiny Officer) and Simon Wright (Principal Officer (Regeneration))

24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C Matthews and H Spratt.

25 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interests were made at this stage of the meeting.

26 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 9 JULY 2019

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 9 July 2019, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

27 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COUNCILLORS AND LEAD OFFICERS

Executive Councillor C J Davie made the following announcements:-

- Reflecting on the tourism season he stated that every time that he had attended the North Sea Observatory during the summer it was busy, often with queues for the good quality food that was served there. This showed that there was a clear demand for quality premises and quality food and drink. More people were

visiting high quality venues between October and March than during the summer months. He stated that he had spoken to local businesses on the east coast and they had informed him that the summer coastal tourism season had fallen between 15% and 25%.

- The budget's emphasis on the importance of investment in local authorities and in our towns was starting to be properly understood again in Whitehall. Part of the Council's job was to make sure that the commitments made by the Chancellor last week brought a benefit to Lincolnshire, to our businesses and our communities.
- The local labour market was due to be discussed on today's agenda. There were some great career opportunities for young, and not so young, people in our county. The Government's commitment to extra funding for the Further Education sector would help to provide the training that was necessary for people to take advantage of those opportunities.
- One of the many big announcements made by the Government over the past couple of weeks was funding for towns. Holbeach, Grantham, Lincoln, Skegness and Mablethorpe were all in line for substantial government grants if they produced strong bids. There was the opportunity to attract more than £100m to the county, so he would be working with the staff teams and colleagues in the LEP, district councils and in the business community to make sure that as much of these grants could be drawn down as possible. The Government had recognised that places like Lincolnshire needed investment and we would be ready to use that investment effectively.
- The presentation on Lincolnshire's creative industries would be very useful. We needed to make sure that communities within the county had good quality communications infrastructure in place to make the most of the opportunities associated with the creative industries. This was something the Council had been working on through the rural broadband initiative. It was important to recognise the creative industries sector as one which reached into all communities. Many successful creative businesses ran from very small villages. The creative industry liked to collaborate and so creative hubs were a good way of encouraging collaboration. With that in mind, I am delighted that we were a partner with private businesses in the new creative hub that had opened in Thomas Parker House, Lincoln.
- The East Midlands Property Awards took place this week and it was good to see that a wide range of Lincolnshire businesses were being represented at the awards. Next week I would be speaking at a Team Lincolnshire event in Boston where we would be showcasing investment opportunities in their PE21 initiative. Finally, in mid-October we had the Team Lincolnshire in London event which had already sold out, it was well supported by Lincolnshire based investors and their clients who hopefully would see the benefit of investing in Lincolnshire.
- Despite the uncertainty around Westminster at the moment there were plenty of opportunities and strengths for us to build on here in Lincolnshire in the coming months.

In response to a question about the effects of Brexit, Executive Councillor C J Davie stated that the uncertainty caused needed to be resolved as soon as possible as businesses wanted certainty before investment could take place. The public was

demanding that Parliament resolved Brexit as the matter had been debated too long already. He had every confidence that the UK would prosper outside of the EU and Brexit would provide some excellent opportunities.

28 REVIEWING THE DRAFT LINCOLNSHIRE FLOOD RISK & WATER MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Committee considered a report on the draft Joint Lincolnshire Flood Risk and Water Management Strategy 2019-2050 and was asked to review and comment on the Strategy and highlight any additional guidance to officers in advance of formal adoption by the Council.

Officers stated that the Strategy was intended to provide the Council and its partners in the Lincolnshire Flood Risk and Water Management Partnership with a means of outlining their collective aspirations for water risk, water management and future water supply resilience, along with additional economic and social benefits that could be achieved for the county.

Officers stated that the Strategy had been out to public consultation and the timeline was outlined for future consideration of the Strategy. Officers stated that Defra's policy was awaited and that this would be considered when it was published.

Comments by members and the responses of officers included:-

- The role of the Environment Agency and whether it had carried out its responsibilities in connection with the River Steeping. Officers stated that all stakeholders had been involved to deliver specific flood risk maintenance works and a management group was examining future management and resilience of the River Steeping catchment.
- The increased protection of agricultural land was welcomed. Officers stated that there was a need to emphasise this issue as water was important in supporting agriculture and tourism.
- An enquiry was made in connection with funding for Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS). Officers stated that guidance for SuDS was still being prepared.
- SuDS required more maintenance. Local authorities and water companies did not always have the necessary funding for maintenance. Officers agreed that SuDS were not a panacea but were part of a range of options available. Proposals for SuDS to be maintained at a national level were being investigated.
- Parish Councils in the Ancholme Valley were concerned about the clearance of water courses and the role of Internal Drainage Boards in the past in ensuring that these water courses were maintained had been important and welcomed. Officers stated that the management of water courses had been highlighted following the recent flooding in Wainfleet. The Public Sector Cooperation Agreement between the Internal Drainage Boards and the Environment Agency was important in this respect and discussions on this matter were taking place with the Environment Agency.

RESOLVED

That the comments made by members in connection with the Strategy be noted and considered by officers in advance of formal adoption by the County Council.

**29 BUSINESS CENTRES AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PORTFOLIO-
STRATEGY REVIEW, POLICY AND PROCEDURES**

Consideration was given to a report which sought the views of the Committee on whether the criteria currently used to manage the Council's business centres and economic development portfolio was still appropriate. Officers stated that Council's Regeneration Team was to manage the portfolio in such a way that it could support economic prosperity and job growth across Lincolnshire whilst at the same time maximising the net income generated from the portfolio.

Comments by members and the responses of officers included:-

- The number of void units on the Gainsborough Business site was higher. Officers stated that location was a factor together with supply and demand. Flexibility in the implementation of the procedures for letting was required and promotional events were being arranged to attract business.
- It was difficult for a new business to show if it was viable and an example was provided. Officers stated that the commercial viability of new businesses was assessed. A flexible approach was taken for storage applications in the event of low demand. Priority would always be given to those businesses which created employment.
- Officers stated that in those cases where a tenant had failed to maintain a unit there was a need to ensure that the unit was ready to be re-let. Officers stated there was a need to be flexible in the relocation of businesses and hence the need to use the guidelines set out in appendix A of the report.
- Officers stated that they were investigating the use of letting agents to deal with void units.
- Officers were also working with West Lindsey District Council on land for development adding that land had already been sold in Gainsborough for commercial purposes.
- Officers stated that they were examining a new commercial development adjacent to the Eventus building.
- Were free rent periods given to new businesses? Officers stated that rent free periods were negotiated on a case by case basis.
- Were larger premises offered to current tenants? Officers stated that discussions took place with tenants and advice was given about business advisers to contact.

RESOLVED

- (a) That the comments by members be noted.

- (b) That the principles described in the report to allow the Council to effectively manage the portfolio and meet the twin objectives of supporting business growth and maximising rental income, be supported.
- (c) That the proposal for new tenancies to be granted for a maximum of five years, unless there are exceptional business reasons to extend this period, be supported.
- (d) That the current guidance on the use of business centre and industrial units which provides the required objective of maintaining an appropriate tenant mix and a suitable mix of premises for start-up businesses, be supported.

30 CREATIVE INDUSTRIES RESEARCH PROJECT

The Committee received a presentation by Tom Fleming, Creative Consultancy and We Made That and Sukhy Johal, University of Lincoln, in connection with the Creative Lincolnshire research project. The aim of the project was to support the growth of the creative economy across greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership area including the county and the unitary authorities of North East Lincolnshire and North Lincolnshire. The importance of the creative industries was highlighted including its value to the local economy, the replacement of empty retail units on the high Street and the opportunities provided in rural areas. The creative industry sector was not as well established in rural areas compared to urban areas but was growing in Lincolnshire.

Comments by members and the responses by presenters and officers included: –

- The creative economy was welcomed especially in view of the reduction of retail sector on the high street.
- The title of the project needed to reflect the whole of Lincolnshire. The presenters accepted this comment and that the links between the various hubs and the rest of Lincolnshire should be acknowledged.
- Connectivity and communication needed to be improved in the Boston area and many Boston residents did not appreciate how much heritage was in their area. The presenters stated that Lincoln University together with the Arts Council was developing a programme to help Boston celebrate the Mayflower anniversary in 2020. Investment by Freshlincs, the Environment Agency and the Arts Council to provide a major programme of arts work was also being investigated.
- Lincolnshire was a sparsely populated and rural county and government funding for public transport was essential.

The Executive Councillor stated that he supported the creative economy and emphasised the importance of ensuring that the IT infrastructure was in place.

The Chairman thanked the presenters for their presentation adding that Lincolnshire needed to take the initiative on the project.

RESOLVED

That the presentation be welcomed, the comments by members be noted and considered in the research programme.

31 LINCOLNSHIRE UTILITY STRATEGY-NEXT STEPS

The Committee considered a report in connection with the progress of the Lincolnshire Utility Strategy. Officers stated that progress against each of the elements detailed in the strategy was good. The effect of zero carbon and reductions in the use of energy were highlighted and these were now considered in all new developments.

Comments by members and the responses of officers included:-

- Packaging was an issue in some supermarkets. Officers explained how industry was tackling this issue including a levy paid into a fund to reduce the use of packaging. More was being done by industry to address the issue of hard to recycle packaging rather than send it abroad. Bottle deposit schemes were being developed and while there was an up-front charge this could be claimed back. The Government was also examining the location of recycling facilities to where people lived to prevent people having to travel long distances.
- Officers stated that the issue of packaging would be raised at the Food Conference. It was noted that North Kesteven District Council had introduced new procedures for the collection of clean paper and cardboard.
- Officers stated that supermarkets reacted to consumer demand. It was important for the County Council to provide the appropriate recycling facilities for customers.

RESOLVED

- (a) That the performance against each of the elements of the strategy as summarised in paragraphs 3.1 and 3.6, of the report, be noted.
- (b) That officers produce a clear methodology for prioritising different aspects within the strategy as detailed in paragraph 4.5 of the report.
- (c) That utilities, sustainability and packaging be raised at a meeting of the Lincolnshire Enterprise Partnership's Food Board and a conference be held on the issues at a suitable time.

32 GREATER LINCOLNSHIRE'S EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (ERDF)

Consideration was given to a report in connection with the European Regional Development Programme (ERDF) bids that were currently being developed by the Council. Officers stated that the bidding process was guaranteed irrespective of Brexit. Officers stated that the bids had been based on priorities, followed on from consideration by members and the necessity to provide match funding in the Council's budget.

RESOLVED

That proposed bids for ERDF funding as detailed in the report be supported.

33 ANALYSIS OF THE LOCAL LABOUR MARKET

Consideration was given to a report in connection with an analysis of the local labour market following a request to the Local Enterprise Partnerships by the Department for Education (DfE) to generate a high quality analysis of the local labour market. The first initial findings of the analysis were detailed in the report.

Comments by members and the responses of officers included:-

- The report was welcomed.
- There was a need to recognise the lower cost of living in Lincolnshire. However, it was noted that rents were higher in Boston and required more cheaper rented housing. Officers stated that while the cost of living was lower in Lincolnshire the comments made in connection with Boston needed to be considered in the analysis.
- The provision of more social housing from private developers had proved to be difficult. Officers stated that there was a need to consider how housing was promoted for young people.
- Officers stated that they needed to examine what was preventing people from getting employment.
- It was suggested that state benefits affected a person's resolve to get employment as their income was changed and that this should be investigated. Officers agreed to investigate this matter and report back to the Committee.
- More training was required in the basic skills. Officers stated that additional training in basic skills was being examined.
- More advice on where people should go to receive training was required.
- Sole traders were too small to take on people for training purposes.

RESOLVED

That the report and the comments made by members on the analysis currently underway be noted.

34 ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered and reviewed its Work Programme.

RESOLVED

That the Committee's Work Programme be noted.

The meeting closed at 12.40 pm