

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 17 September 2021

**Statement from: Councillor C J Davie, Executive Councillor for
Economic Development, Environment and Planning**

Growth

We are currently seeing significant changes to global markets, notably as a result of Covid-19, and to local economic conditions. These changes are seen most keenly in supply chain difficulties – whether that is increasing material prices, long lead-in times, or recruitment difficulties. These are global problems, but we are doing what we can to soften the impact in Lincolnshire. And in recent days studies have started to indicate that businesses are starting to feel more confident again. In this statement I will describe what we are doing to support the economy during these difficult times – investing in economic infrastructure to help businesses to locate in Lincolnshire and to grow, providing training and career advice to reduce hard to fill vacancies, and providing direct support to businesses.

Economic infrastructure

Rapid progress continues at the South Lincolnshire Food Enterprise Zone near Holbeach. The roads on the 15-acre phase 1 of the scheme were completed in May, and reinforcement works to provide electricity to phase 1 are on target for completion by the end of the year.

The Council's new Cluster Hub building, funded by the Government's Getting Building Fund, which is focused on economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, is also under construction and due for completion in Spring 2022. This will provide a high quality business and collaboration space for small and start-up businesses working in the agri-tech sector and related businesses in the food supply chain, and will be the flagship of the development.

Alongside this, the University of Lincoln's national Food Centre of Excellence was completed in February and is now welcoming students. Construction of its new Institute of Technology is underway and due to open in November. The University is planning a grand opening of both buildings, as well as a Ministerial visit to celebrate.

In March the Council made history by jointly purchasing, and now jointly owning with South Holland District Council, an additional 27 acres to form phase 2 of the development; this is the Council's first joint land purchase and the significant scale of the now enlarged development will give confidence to investors, with evidence of this already being seen.

Also in March the marketing launch took place – South Lincolnshire FEZ, at the heart of the UK Food Valley – and this and the work of the appointed agents has met with unprecedented success; as of this month 10 of the 12 plots on phase 1 are either sold, at Heads of Terms stage or with strong interest, and there is also already strong interest in 3 on phase 2.

In East Lindsey, the Skegness Countryside Business Park extension completed in May, and will provide a much needed opportunity for employers in sectors which will help to diversify the coastal economy to expand. Agents have been appointed to promote this scheme to

local developers and small businesses, and the sale of one plot is nearing completion, which will lead to the construction of a number of small commercial units.

Nearby in Huttoft, the new Boatshed Beach Café is scheduled to open in October, for the tourism shoulder season, which will help to raise the quality of our tourism offer.

In Boston Borough, the Pilgrim Fathers installation at Scotia Creek was unveiled in early July, and will form part of the 400-year Pilgrim Fathers celebrations, delayed from 2020 due to the coronavirus.

Over in South Kesteven, the design and construction programme is being finalised to spatially reconfigure the Eventus business centre in Market Deeping, to provide grow-on space and adapt to small businesses' new ways of working, and this will provide a test bed for new forms of business accommodation, which could be developed elsewhere.

Across the county, we continue to support our small business tenants, which total around 140, in our 5 business centres and many industrial units. The recent resilience of local businesses has been amazing, and the occupancy levels in some of our business centres have grown to above pre-Covid-19 levels.

Economic development

Skills

My colleague Cllr Patricia Bradwell and I are part of a Joint Commissioning Board along with the Chairman of the LEP and its Skills Advisory Panel, the Department of Work and Pensions, and the Federation of Lincolnshire Colleges. This Board provides the vehicle for a strategic partnership which supports the skills and employment sector in Lincolnshire. We have recently provided match funding to establish a Career Hub which will give all schools in Lincolnshire, including schools for students with special educational needs, a careers mentor from the local business community. These mentors will be able to help the schools to enthuse young people about the careers available to them in Lincolnshire. The Board has also recently commissioned a major social media campaign which provides information to young people, and we have been able to support the LEP's online jobs fairs which tell job seekers about the job opportunities available to them now. The online job fairs are an important part of tackling the immediate problems of hard to fill vacancies that I mentioned earlier in this statement. One of the Board's next priorities is to establish and promote retraining programmes for people whose period of furlough is coming to an end.

One of the Board's next priorities is to establish and promote retraining programmes for people whose period of furlough is coming to an end. Latest figures show that that is 14,800 people in Lincolnshire, or 5% of the workforce. We expect most of these people to be absorbed into the labour market rather than to become unemployed, but promoting the right on-the-job retraining opportunities to them will help them to have a secure job into the future.

Place and Investment

The drive to entice further investment into the region has been accelerated by a series of investment propositions that have been developed in partnership with all our local authority partners and stakeholders. These include Agrifood, Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing and Low Carbon Energy & Industry. Logistics, Visitor Economy and Defence propositions are currently in development with further propositions planned for Health & Lifesciences, Digital Technology and a brochure on Place. These propositions showcase the region's offer – comparing us with the UK and neighbouring regions, telling investors about our skilled workforce and the outstanding R&D capabilities located across the whole of Greater Lincolnshire. They are already proving to be invaluable in our talks with investors.

Since April 2021 we have received 25 inward investment enquiries with 14 being from foreign investors and 11 from the UK. They are from a diverse range of sectors with 18 being from the Agrifood sector. We are currently working with the wider team on a large number of enquiries in relation to the South Lincolnshire Food Enterprise Zone at Holbeach. Since showcasing our region's High Potential Opportunity for Automation in the Food Processing sector to the Department for International Trade's global network in May 2021, we are also now attracting at least 2 enquiries per week from food related automation and robotics.

Visitor Economy

Work on delivering the recommendations of the Tourism Commission, under the themes of Investment, Skills, Product Development and Marketing, is progressing well since they were agreed in February 2021. These themes have been developed to support the sector's recovery and future growth. The new www.visitlincolnshire.com website was launched in March and is going from strength to strength. The site is now receiving around 20,000 visits per month and the average conversion rate is currently around 15% which provides a strong indication that the website is performing well. Everything leads to and from the website including our marketing effort.

A Green Tourism toolkit is in development and advisory support continues to be provided to new and existing visitor economy businesses via the Growth Hub's dedicated adviser, Gill Harvey. Digital skills within the Visitor Economy are not as good as we would like, so dedicated online support and guidance is being produced and hosted on the Business section of the www.visitlincolnshire.com and www.businesslincolnshire.com websites which will include video masterclasses and downloadable worksheets and toolkits. Within Product Development we are majoring on 6 areas: Cycling, Walking, Heritage, Natural Coast, Generation Alpha and Business Tourism; all are progressing well.

The Business Lincolnshire Growth Hub

The team have had a busy start to the year. In Quarter 1, 619 businesses have been supported, which is due to a good uptake of the business support services offered through the Business Lincolnshire Growth Hub and also the successful delivery of the Lincolnshire County Council grants including the Business Recovery Fund grant, Digital Voucher Scheme and the Invest for the Future Grant which were developed to support the recovery and restart of businesses post Covid.

There continues to be Growth Hub Adviser provision across the county as well as a packed business events calendar and we are pleased to say there has been a measured return to face to face client visits, with some clients actively requesting a return to in-person meetings. In terms of new support offers, the highly successful national Peer Networks programme has launched for a second round.

There is an opportunity for businesses to work with like-minded business leaders to tackle common business issues by joining one of twenty Peer Networks which will be delivered over the course of the rest of this financial year. There are sector specific networks for Visitor Economy, Health and Care, Manufacturing, Agriculture, Horticulture, Charities and Rural businesses, as well as some general and High Growth networks.

As a result of the support provided in Quarter 1, 170 jobs were safeguarded, particularly as a result of uptake by businesses of the Business Recovery Fund grants as well as the Digital Voucher Scheme which have both been highly successful. These schemes have been vital for businesses in surviving and recovering after the effects of Covid-19. Through the support provided by the Growth Hub Advisers, and even against such a difficult economic backdrop, there has also been good growth in new jobs created with 88.34 new jobs evidenced between April and June. The Growth Hub Advisers are continuing to see good jobs growth potential within many businesses, and there is an expectation that our quarter by quarter targets will continue to be met as the economy gradually re-opens throughout the rest of the year.

Finally on business, we are coming to the end of the Council's programme to assist small businesses during the Covid period, especially those who had not been able to receive government support. We launched the programme in March and as we come to the end of the programme I am delighted to say that we have assisted close to 900 businesses. 358 businesses have received essential finance to keep them going through the toughest times that our economy has experienced in recent decades, 65 have received support to adapt their premises and operations for a post pandemic future, 398 have been helped to invest in the vital digital technology for the future, and 46 have been helped to grow quickly. A final 46 business projects are under assessment. Within 6 months we have made a real and practical difference in our local business community and that is something that the Council can be very proud of. There is a clear countywide coverage of the programme, and once the final payments have been processed I will share a detailed breakdown with all members of the Council.

Planning

The Planning and Regulation Committee returned to meeting face to face in July but with some of the measures put in place for virtual Committee meetings being retained. New technology has enabled speakers to appear 'virtually' and the meetings can now be viewed on line.

This will make it easier for those interested in the outcome of planning meetings to participate from the comfort of their homes rather than travelling to Lincoln which will encourage more residents to get involved in the planning process.

The Planning Applications team has now implanted charging for pre-planning application advice.

The Historic Places team continue to provide advice on archaeology for planning decisions to 3 Districts in Lincolnshire and 2 in Nottinghamshire. The cost of this service is recovered through commercial contract and opportunities for providing this service on a commercial basis is being explored with other councils.

Inns on the Edge

Following all the publicity around the time we were advertising for the post, work on the project has now started. It is early days but we are getting lots of really good engagement – including from a number of national bodies who are really keen on the project. The project is covering the 52 parishes of the coastal strip from Grimsby to Boston and will culminate with an exhibition at the North Sea Observatory and also in Lincoln next summer.

Extensive Urban Survey

As part of a national programme being funded by Historic England, we are undertaking a survey of the 30 historic towns of Greater Lincolnshire. The idea is to understand how each town has developed and how we can read the history in the townscape as it looks today. The towns of Lincolnshire are hugely varied. We hope the evidence we produce will feed into local plans and inward investment opportunities for new economic and social development.

Infrastructure Investment

Local Plan

Central Lincolnshire covers the combined area of the City of Lincoln, West Lindsey and North Kesteven and the joint Local Plan provides the strategic framework through which local planning decisions are taken within each locality. Initially adopted in 2017, the Local Plan is now being revised as part of a systematic review to ensure it remains current and consistent with both the latest national guidelines and local circumstances. The consultation on the Draft Central Lincolnshire Local Plan ran for 8 weeks from 30 June to 24 August 2021. This was the first opportunity to view and comment on the new Local Plan which is proposed to replace the Local Plan adopted in 2017. This consultation followed on from the Issues and Options consultation undertaken in June and July 2019. The Plan addresses a range of issues such as climate change, housing, employment, shopping and more. The consultation welcomed any views and comments on any of the draft policies, supporting text, or maps throughout the document and any associated evidence. Whilst the Local Plan will remain familiar, retaining broadly the same vision and objectives, there have been some policy changes/updates together with structural changes to the document to aid navigation of the policies, which will mean it looks quite different. We have responded strongly to the consultation, reinforcing the Council's recent resolution over clean energy and our opposition to onshore wind turbines.

Key policy changes include:

- Climate change: Following a mandate from Central Lincolnshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee members to pursue a Carbon Neutral Local Plan, a number of climate change policies have been included to help deliver this, including a requirement for net-zero-carbon homes and a framework for considering renewable energy infrastructure.
- Retail: In recognition of some of the challenges facing retail, the Draft Local Plan seeks to protect more local retail centres in rural areas; in the face of uncertainty in both the industry and from national policy changes allowing shops to change use without the need for planning permission.
- Housing: Reflecting the Government's new housing needs methodology and the Central Lincolnshire's housing and economic needs assessment evidence, the housing requirement of the Plan has been reduced from 1,540 homes each year under the 2017 Local Plan to between 1,060 and 1,325 homes each year in the new plan, meeting the overall requirement of 29,150 dwellings across the plan period from 2018 to 2040.

RAF Scampton

A new draft policy, designed to safeguard the future of RAF Scampton once the site has been decommissioned, has been included. It highlights RAF Scampton as an 'opportunity area' and requiring a masterplan prior to any major development. The policy aims to provide a framework which will enhance and protect the area whilst remaining adaptive and responsive to future decisions on the decommission and disposal of the base.

Funding

LEADER

Live delivery on contracted activity of the 4 LEADER Programmes in Lincolnshire is nearing an end with resources focusing on final claims and post payment monitoring as is the contractual obligation of the accountable body. This will evidence the impact of the programme including the number of jobs the grant investment has created.

In recent weeks, a further opportunity to access £1.1m of LEADER grant has arisen to support 19 projects in the county. To qualify for inclusion, the projects had to already be known to the Local Action Groups or the LEADER Managers. Many of these projects were submitted as part of the 2020 LEADER Summer Call and due to timings could not meet the tight turnaround. This time around the projects will have longer to access the funding and to develop quality projects. Contracting is expected to be completed by the turn of the year and successful applicants will then have until the autumn of 2022 to deliver and claim their grant.

UK Community Renewal Fund (UKCRF)

The Council as the Lead Authority submitted a bid for £9m to MHCLG in June. If successful, the UKCRF programme will support business, employment, skills and place based activity in priority areas of Boston, Lincoln and East Lindsey but benefits will be delivered across all parts of the county. The programme appears to be heavily oversubscribed nationally and decisions have been significantly delayed so scenario planning is underway to assess what and how activity could be delivered if reduced funding is offered and how that might inform

local aspirations going forward. Key ambitions in the UKCRF bid were around developing the green economy, supporting net zero, reinvigorating the high street and market towns, driving digital skills and digital inclusion and supporting key sectors – including agri-food, the visitor economy, creative industries and driving entrepreneurship in the county.

Coastal Communities Fund (CCF)

Work continues to deliver at pace to maximise the impact of the remaining balance of the £370k funding awarded to the county. This includes the development of leisure/green skills and training activities. Further, the National Coastal Tourism Academy has been commissioned to undertake specific research into the coastal Visitor Economy to develop robust data and evidence to support future aspirations, investment and skills participation along the Lincolnshire coast and to help understand the unique set of needs and opportunities that the coastal economy presents – including its demography, environment and its seasonality.

Other coastal activity continues including the Coastal Communities Alliance and on-going work with the APPG, One Coast and the Coastal Developers Forum to drive the best opportunities for inclusive growth in the Lincolnshire coastal economy, raise productivity and to position the coast to benefit from the government's Levelling up agenda.

Communities

Flood Management

I am pleased to be able to report that the flood alleviation scheme to protect 53 homes in Digby has been completed, and we have also commenced a trial scheme this year to explore the potential to help householders access property level flood resilience measures where they can take such action for themselves. The Council supported the Environment Agency earlier this year to complete dredging works on the River Steeping and the Steeping Relief Channel, and is continuing to work with our partners to plan for longer term measures in the wider catchment to help reduce pressure on specific locations in the event of future extended periods of high rainfall and elevated river levels.

In connection with looking ahead to address future issues, the Council has been successful in submitting an expression of interest for £7.5m funding from the Government's Flood and Coastal Resilience and Innovation Programme. Addressing the issue of groundwater flooding, the county's proposal is to work with North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire Councils to develop new ways of tackling one of the more difficult sources of flood risk to manage. Members will recall that a number of places across Greater Lincolnshire have recently experienced issues with very high water levels and groundwater flooding, and I am very pleased to be able to announce that in response, the Council will be leading this project as one of twenty five innovation pilots.

In developing new approaches to this problem, we will be working with other parts of the country, and subsequently helping to promote solutions nationally. We will be creating a detailed plan for the programme over the course of this year, and intend to submit our outline business case in time to commence delivery in the next financial year. Officers will

keep members updated through regular reports to scrutiny committees and through this forum too.

Staying with the theme of future adaptation, we continue to work closely with our partners in the Environment Agency and other bodies to ensure that our policies for coastal Lincolnshire provide a solid foundation for prosperity and recovery from the setbacks of Covid, while being responsible and making sure that we adapt to the ongoing impacts of climate change – particularly future sea level rise. We wish to ensure that coastal prosperity develops in a way that works with, rather than against, natural processes and ensures that our coastal communities become more resilient over time. For this reason we have begun work to fully assess the future impacts and opportunities that will come from climate change in coastal Lincolnshire, and establish a clear adaptation strategy to ensure that genuinely sustainable growth underpins the future prosperity of Lincolnshire's coastal communities.

Sustainability

The Council's first draft Green Masterplan has been completed and is currently being refined and developed along with its action plan. We anticipate bringing forward the final version of the Plan for approval in February next year.

As well as demonstrating how the Council will meet its commitment to net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, the Plan will also outline key areas of service delivery and partnership working that will contribute to this target, as well as providing a framework to work with and support our partner authorities to meet their own commitments in this area.

The Council is already on track to meet its carbon reduction targets for 2023, set out in the Carbon Management Plan in 2019, and this will form a core on-going activity through the Green Masterplan. Other activities will include encouraging green community initiatives, improving energy efficiency, reducing the use of plastics and improving recycling and waste management practices.

In addition, the development of the Green Masterplan has now been brought into alignment with the Council's transformation programme, strengthening our ability to embed sustainable working as a principle across all our priority activities, in line with our commitment to reach net carbon neutrality by 2050 at the latest. I would like to make members aware that the Council will be hosting a Lincolnshire Climate Summit in October of this year at the EPIC Centre. This event will bring together a wide range of national figures and local communities and businesses in the run up to COP26, to learn from good practice around the country and to build on and develop leading examples of good practice already here in Lincolnshire.

Natural Environment and Countryside

Also looking forwards, Members will undoubtedly be aware that the Environment Bill continues to make its way through Parliament and is expected to become law towards the end of the year. Among the provisions in the bill is the creation of Nature Recovery

Networks across the country – essentially local strategies for nature, likely to be at county level. In anticipation of this, the Government has very recently issued a consultation document preparing the way for the new arrangements. We will be engaging closely with this, and with the implementation of Nature Recovery Networks with our partners over the coming months and years.

To ensure that the environment service can continue to engage and lead on this complex and changing agenda, we are making some important changes to the teams, improving their capacity to deliver environmental benefits and restructuring the flood risk team to make better use of our resources and to improve liaison with elected members, the public and with services across the Council and our partners. In doing this, we are seeking to implement the One Council approach to service delivery, while maintaining an absolute focus on delivery of the Council's corporate priorities.

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