



**ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE
14 SEPTEMBER 2021**

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR R WOOTTEN (CHAIRMAN)

Councillors M A Griggs (Vice-Chairman), M D Boles, I D Carrington, I G Fleetwood, H Spratt, L Wootten, T R Ashton, Mrs J Brockway, K J Clarke and R J Cleaver

Councillors C J Davie attended the meeting as an observer via Teams.

Officers in attendance:-

Justin Brown (Assistant Director Growth), Kiara Chatzioannou (Scrutiny Officer), Robert Close (Democratic Services Officer), Andy Gutherson (Executive Director Place), David Hickman (Head of Environment) and Chris Miller (Environmental Services Team Leader (Countryside Services))

Officers in attendance Via Teams:-

Dan Clayton (Sustainability Manager - Environment) and Mike Reed (Head of Waste)

14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A J Baxter, A G Hagues, G J Taylor, and Mrs J E Killey. It was reported that, under Regulation 13 of the Local Government Committee and Political Groups) Regulation 1990, Councillors R J Cleaver, Mrs J Brockway, T R Ashton, and K Clarke were replacing Councillors A J Baxter, A G Hagues, G J Taylor, and Mrs J E Killey respectively for this meeting only.

It was reported that, under Regulation 13 of the Local Government Committee and Political Groups) Regulation 1990, Councillor H Spratt was replacing Councillors A P Maughan until further notice.

15 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest received.

16 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 13TH JULY, 2021

That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2021 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

17 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COUNCILLORS AND LEAD OFFICERS

Councillor Davie, Executive Councillor for Economic Development, Environment and Planning explained there were problems across all sectors resulting from the cost of materials, supply chains, and labour shortages. Some projects had become unviable or completion dates had increased considerably. The Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy's (BEIS) 'All Work' material price index saw an increase of 20.1 per cent in the year to July 2021. National and local builders, contractors and developers were highlighting issues with Members including material availability and costs, which remained fluid with lack of certainty on cost or delivery. Some of these shortages and delivery delays could impact on the Council's work and officers were monitoring this carefully. Feedback from the Council's Growth Hub Advisers indicated businesses were challenged by supply chain delivery schedules, prices and recruitment. Officers continued to share business experience with the civil service.

Vacancy rates remained high, particularly in transport, logistics, and warehouse sectors which currently had the highest level of vacancies; 329 per cent of the February 2020 average.

The visitor economy businesses were reporting a hugely busy summer and positive booking levels going forward despite staff shortages. There had also been an increase in travel journalists wanting to visit the county. Requests had come through the new Visit Lincolnshire website and the efforts of the Council's PR consultant. The Tourism Commission delivery money enabled the Council to have a PR ground handling service with Visit Lincoln.

The Net Zero agenda was being raised more frequently from businesses across sectors needing to make investments in order to meet targets. There was growing interest from businesses in the Council's Climate Change Summit on 13 October 2021 and COP26 in November 2021.

Businesses could access one to one specialist support through the Growth Hub's Resource Efficiency Adviser and the Business Lincolnshire website. Numerous business focussed events were to be held through September, October and November, including a visit from the Carbon battle bus to Lincoln on 27 September 2021.

115 projects supported through the Rural Business Grant had received their first payments and a significant number had claimed and completed their projects.

Work on the coast continued with the on-going delivery of the Coastal Communities Fund programme, the appointment of the National Coastal Tourism Academy and the launch of research into careers and business skills.

A series of investment propositions were being developed in partnership with the Council's local partners and stakeholders to encourage further investment into the region. The investment propositions included Logistics, Agrifood, Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing, and Low Carbon Energy and Industry.

Further propositions were in development for Visitor Economy and Defence in Health & Life sciences, Digital Technology and a Place brochure.

40 foreign and 13 domestic inward investment enquiries had been received since April 2021 from a diverse range of sectors. A number of enquiries from food related automation and robotics companies had been received since the region's High Potential Opportunity for Automation in the Food Processing sector was displayed in May 2021.

18 INVITATION TO JOIN A GEOLOGICAL DISPOSAL FACILITY WORKING GROUP IN EASTERN LINCOLNSHIRE

Consideration was given to a report from the Assistant Director – Growth on the invitation from Radioactive Waste Management (RWM) to LCC to join a working group to further explore whether the former Theddlethorpe Gas Terminal site was an appropriate location for a geological disposal facility (GDF). Joining the working group does not necessarily suggest that the Council necessarily supported or objected to the proposal, nor did the Working Group have the power to ultimately decide whether to locate the in Lincolnshire. The local community would undertake a test of support, to consider if they would like to host the facility. The geology of eastern Lincolnshire initially suggested suitability for this facility. The site of the terminal is owned by the National Grid and the Council has been advocating to them that it should continue to be used as an asset the Lincolnshire. Other commercial entities were interested in the site other than RWM. The aim of the project, led by RWM, is to dispose of the UK's nuclear waste underground safely and permanently. RWM has indicated that this facility could create over 1,000 construction jobs, then hundreds of further technical and skilled permanent jobs. In addition, the proposed facility is predicted to result in infrastructure investment in the area. The working group and if it is formed the subsequent community partnership is part of a defined Government process intent on establishing the facts of the scheme, advising on infrastructure, setting development grants and establishing a community vision. East Lindsey businesses would likely benefit from increased infrastructure. Youth unemployment in the area is high and employment opportunities outside of the tourism industry are limited. The Community Partnership, if formed, would be responsible for the right of withdrawal from the programme and for the process of undertaking a test of public support.

The Chairman invited Mr Ken Smith to address the Committee in his capacity as spokesperson for the campaign group in opposition to GDF. The uncertainty the project could generate was of concern to Mr Smith and the campaign group. Mr Smith said that the east of England geological survey revealed coal deposits below the site and that RWM's

guidelines precluded GDFs to be established close to other sources of energy because of the danger to future generations. The campaign group is concerned that the GDF risked being drilled through if future generations sought access to the coal. Mr Smith continued that he had read government guidelines that indicated that GDFs should not be located in areas which had previously been used to drill for fossil fuels due to the change in water flow. The proposed site was believed by the campaign group to have been subject to fossil fuel drilling previously. These issues suggested that the site would be considered a final option if all alternative sites had been exhausted. If the Council were to join the working group, it was feared by the campaign group that it may appear indicative of the possibility of a GDF in Lincolnshire. Mr Smith continued that reports of cancelled property sales had been received from estate agencies and that the potential of a GDF could create uncertainty which was unpopular with local business. The leisure industry generated over £700 million for the East Lindsey economy per annum. The campaign group is worried that businesses were unlikely to invest if a GDF was introduced. While RWM sought to assure that the GDF was safe, which may be true, public perception wasn't supportive of nuclear energy. The campaign group felt that this could have a significant impact on the viability of the tourism economy, particularly if eventually the GDF was located elsewhere which would mean that any concerns that the campaign group had raised would have led to an unnecessary stalling of investment.

The Committee considered the report, and during the discussion the following comments were noted:-

- Members emphasised on the importance of being part of the discussions of this Working Group, which would likely going ahead regardless of whether the Council participated in these or not, which enabled the Council to influence and help shape the outcomes through lateral sharing of knowledge and information. The report made clear points on the benefits of the proposed project, nevertheless, further engagement with the process on the Council's part would ensure that risks and potential issues were also being known and understood. Membership to this working group, further, allowed for subtleties and nuances, as these would emerge, as well as fear and uncertainties felt in the local community, to be seen and acknowledged. This was also an opportunity to engage with and support the local community that was being consulted on whether they wanted to have this facility in their local area.
- Members observed that the proposed project could potentially address issues around deprivation in East Lindsey and Boston areas however, recognised it was ultimately up to the residents to determine the merits of the proposal in the future. Therefore, it was clarified that Members took no view on supporting the plans for the facility going ahead, rather, took a role to ensure that the local communities had access to information and knowledge for a fair, balanced and fully informed decision to be made.
- It was acknowledged that, regardless of the decision to join the working group, there were factors such as the geology of the local area that remained unchanged, the requirement for long-term storage of nuclear waste remained present and the

discussions around this project were still going ahead in spite of the decisions of the Council on joining the working group, however, Lincolnshire was not having a voice and residents taking the decision were not having the Council's support. Members agreed that it was in the Council's and the community's best interest for the former to have had a seat around the table, being thus able to access information and influence decisions.

- The process being undertaken by RWM was clearly prescribed and well defined by the Government in documents attached to the report. This document specifically described the location of the community as District Council level Wards in which the following were located:
 - proposed surface development;
 - associated development;
 - transport links;
 - direct physical impacts.

Information being availed directly to the public was an important part of the Terms of Reference (TOR) of any working group; detailed account of how TOR was being shaped was also included in the aforementioned document. The impact analysis attached to the report ensured that the Council was able to introduce mitigations where the above requirements were not being met. Equally, where members of the working group established gaps in the TOR, they were able to request additions to be considered at the early meetings of the working group. The process also recognised the importance of listening to the views of the community from the outset.

- In the interest of maintaining high levels of transparency, it was agreed that TOR, agreed by the working group, as well as on-going information about progress of the working group's remit, was fed back to this Committee and more widely.
- In other parts of the country Parish, Town Councils and local relevant bodies were included in such working groups whereas in this paper, only the Council and East Lindsey District Council were mentioned as participants. Assurance was given that it was being asked of the Executive to consider that the Council's position echoed the view that Parish, Town Councils, and local relevant bodies were part of the working group on this occasion.

RESOLVED

1. Upon a vote, a majority for the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee agreed to support the recommendations to the Executive as detailed in the report.
2. That the comments listed above be passed on to the Executive in relation to this item.

19 SERVICE LEVEL PERFORMANCE REPORTING AGAINST THE PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK 2021 - 2022 - QUARTER 1

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Economic Development, the Head of Environment and the Head of Waste updating the Committee on the Tier 2 Service Level Performance measures for 2021/22 Quarter 1 for Economy, Flooding and Waste.

The target for businesses support had been substantially exceeded, in large part, due to the Covid-19 business recovery grant which was currently delivering final payments. Some applicants were choosing not to accept the grant as a result of their material and supply costs increasing to the point that their business opportunities were no longer viable. The Council was currently behind on its target of approved funding bids due to delays in approvals from Government, for example, the Council had expected to receive a response from the Community Renewal Fund bid by the end of July 2021, but was still sat unresolved. However, the funding applications made by the Council remained in line with expected targets.

In the first quarter of the 2021/22 financial year, there were only three incidents of flooding that required a formal investigation. It was acknowledged the year had been particularly dry so far. Significant flooding issues in 2019/2020 resulted in a backlog of flooding investigations awaiting completion.

Booking systems had been introduced at Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs), resulting in less material being recycled. In addition, Covid-19 restrictions resulted in reduced separation rates. The overall recycling rate was consequently slightly lower than the expected target. While the expected target hadn't been met, it was felt that, with the current system, the target deficit could have been greater. As of 1 September 2021, the booking system had been removed; therefore, greater recycling take up was expected. Curb side recycling rates were also lower than anticipated; this was believed to be a result of reduced recycling opportunities from working from home arrangements. The projected requirements for overall tonnage per household were being met.

The Committee considered the report, and during the discussion the following comments were noted:-

- Observing that the external funding attracted to Lincolnshire had seen a significant reduction from 2017, Members sought further clarity on the decrease. It was advised that funding was dependant on which funding programmes were in operation by Government at any time. 2017 saw a significant spike in Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and regeneration funding for example. Previous consideration was given to the production of a profile to identify the funding bids versus criteria. The levelling up white paper, expected October 2021, should enable the Council continue to produce a funding profile.

- Members asked why the Council struggled to successfully bid for funding, particularly when district Councils had recently seen some success. It was advised that the council did not struggle to bid for funding, there were examples of successful bids, but some of the regeneration funding had moved to different routes that county councils were unable to bid for. Government had recently changed the way funding was distributed from LEPs, which the Council was previously very successful at, to scheme such as High Street Funding and Towns Funding, which were targeted at District Councils. The Community Renewal Fund was anticipated to translate to a Shared Prosperity Fund, which would be bid for by County Councils.
- The appreciation of the village of Ancaster was passed onto officers for their work in relation to recent flash flooding.
- Noting that Section 19 reporting only took into account water which had entered dwellings, not garages, sheds or out buildings, Members felt that further data collection would be useful to list near misses. It was advised that officers had recently began to collect 'near miss' data, in addition to the legally required Section 19 statistics, to inform future flood risk planning. Members and residents were encouraged to report all incidents of flooding to the Council.
- Members asked what further could be done to encourage residents to recycle. Officers were very mindful of the importance of encouraging recycling, with a number of campaigns currently in operation. A separate paper and card bin to reduce contamination had recently been rolled out and a team was currently analysing material to better establish contaminate patterns.
- Seeking further detail, Members asked if any feedback had been received regarding the removal in booking restrictions for HWRCs and if further information could be provided on the general operation of HWRCs. Little feedback had been received since booking restrictions had been removed, however it was noted, comments were previously raised on social media complaining of increased waiting times resulting from booking restrictions. Further detail surrounding 'peak times' would be needed to rely on an accurate picture to service users. Changes to operating hours had been reviewed, as a consequence, operation now extended to five days rather than seven and four days. To increase all sites to seven days wouldn't be financially viable across the board. In addition, the availability of staff wasn't currently sufficient to facilitate a seven day service.
- Members asked what 'all sources' extended to as referenced within the household waste statistics. It was advised that 'all sources' included all forms of municipal waste, particularly curb side, fly tipping and HWRC.
- The Committee were advised that a number of stories circulated the press complaining of extensive fly tipping; however the actual rates of fly tipping appear to have been exaggerated.
- Noting the facility for black bin waste to be used in energy to waste facilities, Members questioned the quantities that were disposed of in this manner. It was advised approximately 20 – 25 per cent of household waste was used to fuel energy to waste facilities.

RESOLVED

That the report and comments be noted.

20 DRAFT LINCOLNSHIRE EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS STRATEGY 2021-23

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Economic Development on work undertaken to date to develop the draft Lincolnshire Employment and Skills Strategy and Work Plan for 2021-23. Lincolnshire skills and employment issues resulted from a significant number of vacancies, change in job role expectation, the rural geography of the county and the lack of larger employers. Government spent approximately £40 million a year on skills in Lincolnshire, while the Council had a budget of £250,000 allocated to skills. The Employment and Skills Strategy therefore sought to compliment the offer from Government, rather than provide an alternative. A number of issues had been considered, including digital learning facilities, transport links and job matching schemes. These options were ultimately dismissed as alternative provisions were in place. The Council, in partnership with the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership, therefore sought better collaboration between colleges, vocational training providers, schools, and commissioners of funding to ensure shared intelligence, development of a Graduate Retention Plan aligned to further and higher education, an increased apprenticeship drive and an expanded Enterprise Advisor Network.

The Committee considered the report, and during the discussion the following comments were noted:-

- Members asked if university graduates were typically leaving the county for employment opportunities elsewhere. It was advised that it was common in rural counties for students to move away to larger urban areas before typically returning in their early 30s. If the total graduating population could be increased, officers felt confident more graduates would remain in the area.
- Welcoming the consideration given to apprenticeship schemes, Members asked if there was any scope to contractually oblige the Council's partners to train apprentices. The Committee was advised that there were previous examples of apprenticeships being mandated through contracts, and that further work could be done.
- Noting the variation in career focuses for educational providers, Members asked how employment opportunities could be equally promoted across the county. The deficiency in careers promotion was appreciated by officers. Members were advised that those of them who occupied places on school boards were encouraged to stress this message and offered supporting material.
- Observing the shortfall of Level 4 qualifications in Lincolnshire, Members sought clarity on the cause of this. A piece of work would soon be commissioned to investigate, over the next 2 years, the deficiency of Level 4 qualifications. Those currently undertaking level 3 or above would have to self-finance after turning 19. When taking into account the lower salaries typically paid in Lincolnshire, this was a significant contributor to the further education deficit. It was however stressed; the number of those with no qualifications at all had decreased significantly over the past decade.

- Members registered their support of T Level schemes which they felt engaged employers more than traditional Level 3 qualifications, in addition to providing more substantial work experience.
- Referencing the year 1 priority areas, Members asked if there was any provision for those over the age of 25. It was noted that apprenticeship schemes for those over 25 were possible and the first priority area included the facility to support those returning to work after a period of unemployment. Officers agreed in the necessity to support skills and opportunities for those of all ages.

RESOLVED

That the report be endorsed, and comments as recorded be taken into account.

21 ENGLAND COAST PATH PROGRESS

Consideration was given to a report from the Team Leader - Countryside Services updating the Committee on the progress of the establishment, and future management, of the England Coast Path in Lincolnshire. The England Coast Path (ECP) would be an extension of the original open access land. A trail would be established within the coastal margin to create a national trail known as the ECP. Lincolnshire contained 4 stretches:

- Hunstanton to Sutton Bridge;
- Sutton Bridge to Skegness;
- Skegness to Mablethorpe;
- Mablethorpe to Humber Bridge.

Only Sutton Bridge to Skegness was currently open with the other 3 stretches in the penultimate phase of development. Once open, the Council would take on the management of the ECP through partnerships with North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire Councils, in addition to other key stakeholders. Funding for management would come from National Trails. The partnership would fund 25 per cent of the trails' maintenance, while National Trails would provide 75 per cent.

The Committee considered the report, and during the discussion the following comments were noted:-

- Members stressed their appreciation for the work undertaken by officers to help create the England Coast Path, particularly as all sections were near, or at, completion.
- It was felt that the England Coast Path would offer a great benefit for both the wellbeing of residents and the prosperity of the economy.

RESOLVED

That the report be endorsed, and comments as recorded be taken into account.

22 GREEN MASTERPLAN PROGRESS

Consideration was given to a report from the Sustainability Manager – Environment updating the Committee on the Green Masterplan and outlines the initial progress towards the Council's target to reach net zero carbon by 2050. It was explained that climate change adaptation work, staff training and engagement activities were contributing factors to the Council's excellent progress towards emission reduction. The Covid-19 restrictions had a significant impact to the reduction of emissions through working from home arrangements. However, the Council had already seen a 55 per cent reduction prior to Covid-19 through rationalising the Council's estate, investment into energy efficiency projects and wider national programmes to reduce the carbon emission on the electricity grid. Compared national figures, the Council significantly ahead of typical carbon reduction. The wider carbon emissions from the Lincolnshire economy were also identified, resulting in consideration being given to encouragement of reduction. The extent the Council could influence was nevertheless limited. Recognising that business and industry were significant contributors to carbon emissions, officers sought to establish a Climate Change Partnership with training programmes and potential support from the Community Renewal Fund. The Council was currently identifying sites to fulfil its objective of planting a tree for every resident. In addition £170,000 had been received from the Forestry Commission for the planting of trees in non-woodland settings. A Greater Lincolnshire Tree Strategy would be brought before the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee in the future.

The Committee considered the report, and during the discussion the following comments were noted:-

- Members stressed that the Council needed to continue to press hard to deliver this plan.
- Referencing the tree planting scheme, Members sought detail on the exact type of tree that would be planted. It was advised that, if practical, specific species would be introduced where requested while Tree Officers would determine otherwise. In addition, all trees planted would be native to the planting areas.
- Further detail of tree planting funding was sought by Members, particularly in relation to axillary forest and woodland improvements such as footpaths. It was advised that the Forestry Commission offered a number of schemes which were exclusively allocated to tree planting and tree maintenance. The Woodland Trust offered the England Woodland Creation Offer which offered 100 per cent of the tree planting for large scale woodland development for land owners. The north of the county also benefited from the Northern Forrest Area fund.
- Members asked if hedgerows could be included within the planting scope, suggesting that a hedgerow could be included on one side of every drainage ditch. It was advised a number of land owners requested hedgerows in addition to trees.

- Encouraged by the electric vehicle support, Members sought clarity of its feasibility, particularly the sufficiency of power in the grid. It was advised that there was a Electric Vehicle Strategy, currently in draft, would form part of the Local Transport Plan. In addition, a report into local area energy planning had been commissioned to investigate grid capacity.
- A Member observed the potential ethical and environmental impact of lithium mining for electric vehicles batteries. Officers appreciated the concerns around the sourcing of lithium; however noted, different chemical combinations were being investigated to reduce the need for lithium in the future.
- While acknowledging the potential disadvantages, Members were aware that other authorities had planted fruit trees for the local community. A number of parishes requested the introduction of community orchards. It was noted that 60 per cent of traditional fruit orchards had been lost since World War Two. There was also interest from food banks to introduce fruit trees.
- Noting the intent of the Green Masterplan to reduce carbon emissions for school transportation, Members asked if officers currently had any further updates to offer. It was advised that the school travel scheme were currently preparing to start 6 pilot schemes which would investigate smaller infrastructure improvements to encourage children to walk or cycle to school.

RESOLVED

1. That the report and comments be noted.
2. That the Committee received further updates on the progress of delivery of the targets

23 ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received 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 focussed where it could be of greatest benefit.

RESOLVED

That the work programme presented be approved.

The meeting closed at 12.54 pm

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