

## **COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 10 DECEMBER 2021**

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

### **GROWTH**

#### **Economic Infrastructure**

The South Lincolnshire Food Enterprise Zone near Holbeach continues to progress rapidly. Grid reinforcement works to provide electricity are on target for completion by the end of the year, and this will complete the servicing of the whole of the 15-acre phase 1.

The Council's new, three-storey Hub building, funded by the Government's Getting Building Fund – a Covid-19 economic recovery initiative – is also under construction and due for completion in Spring 2022. This will provide high-quality office, laboratory 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.

In addition, the University of Lincoln's new Food Centre of Excellence opened in September, and its new Institute of Technology opened in November, forming the start of the 'National Centre for Food Manufacturing - South Lincolnshire Food Enterprise Zone Campus'.

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 rapid success; interest in the long leasehold serviced plots has been very strong and 10 of the 12 plots are now either under offer or subject to an offer.

There is also already strong interest in phase 2, the 27-acre site for which the Council made history in March by jointly purchasing and now jointly owning with South Holland District Council; this is the Council's first joint land purchase. The interest is from both potential investors and occupiers, with the significant scale of the now enlarged development generating this confidence.

In November the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership launched the UK Food Valley initiative to support growth and encourage inward investment to the area and ensure that existing food sector companies and new investors are supported. The South Lincolnshire FEZ was heavily promoted as being central to this.

In East Lindsey, the Skegness Countryside Business Park extension, completed in May, will provide a much-needed opportunity for employers to expand in sectors which will help to diversify the coastal economy. Our appointed agents are promoting this scheme to local developers and small businesses, and the first plot has already been sold, which will lead to the construction of a number of small commercial units for local small businesses.

Nearby in Huttoft, the new Boatshed Beach Café is scheduled to open early in the New Year and will help to raise the quality of our tourism offer.

In South Kesteven, construction started in November to spatially reconfigure the Eventus business centre in Market Deeping, to provide grow-on space and adapt to small businesses' new ways of working. The scheme is due for completion next summer and 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 five business centres and many industrial and commercial units. The resilience of local businesses continues to be strong, and the occupancy levels across the portfolio is at least as good as pre-Covid-19 levels.

### **Economic Development**

**Place and Investment** A brand new Team Lincolnshire website launched on 26 October 2021. This new platform had been developed in order to support Team Lincolnshire ambassadors but importantly drive investment into Lincolnshire. A new area includes support to businesses already located in Lincolnshire and the support on offer to those wanting to locate here. There has been a fantastic response since the launch with several new ambassadors joining including Global Berry – an agrifood company who LCC have supported with their investment in Nocton and other sites. The total number of Team Lincolnshire ambassadors now stands at 129. Please share the website widely with your networks: [www.teamlincolnshire.com](http://www.teamlincolnshire.com)

We are continuing to see a vast number of inward investment enquiries with 61 being received since April 21 - 46 being from foreign investors and 15 UK. They are from a diverse range of sectors with 44% being from the agrifood sector. A second South Lincolnshire Food Enterprise Zone webinar took place on 20 October giving attendees an insight into the progress of the FEZ, the future aspirations and the opportunities the UK Food Valley will bring to the county. Further promotion took place at the Fresh Produce Consortium Futures and Careers event at the Lincolnshire Showground on 4 November. The two FPC events featured the latest technology from the region, UK and internationally as well as inspirational presentations on future opportunities.

Greater Lincolnshire has been at the forefront of tackling technology development for the industry, notably through automation to increase labour efficiency and supply chain efficiency. 1,000 delegates and students were in attendance including a Dutch delegation. SJW Robotics, a Canadian company that has been supported by Lincolnshire County Council have now taken up a virtual tenancy at LCC's Eventus Business Centre in Market Deeping. This is hoped to be a stepping stone onto them gaining a physical presence in the county.

The **Business Lincolnshire Growth Hub** Team continue to be busy providing much needed support to local businesses. In Quarter 2, 381 businesses have been supported, predominantly from payments through the Digital Voucher Scheme, but we also saw the first payments of the Invest for the Future Grant being made for those projects that have been completed. Both schemes were part of the suite of support provided by the County Council to assist the recovery and restart of businesses post Covid.

There has been increased take up of the core business Lincolnshire Growth Hub services, as well as the new schemes around Business Resilience, Empowering SMEs in International Trade and a further phase of the Peer Network scheme, which are all now in delivery. However, business owners continue to face significant challenges around increasing costs, recruitment, supply chain issues as well as the ongoing impact of Covid on sickness and absenteeism within the workplace. All of these aspects impact on business owners and managers having time free to take up advisory support programmes, and this is causing a slight downturn in new enquiry levels and challenges around attendees making last minute cancellations.

That said, there continues to be active Growth Hub Adviser provision across the county as well as a full business events calendar, and there has been further growth in face-to-face client visits and event activity, with Growth Hub presence at the recent Climate Summit and GLEP conference – both large face to face events with really encouraging levels of attendance. It is true to say there is a trend towards more large-scale business conferences right around the county.

As a result of the support provided in Quarter 1, 215 jobs were safeguarded, particularly as a result of uptake by businesses of the Digital Voucher Scheme and Invest for the Future Grants 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 continues to be growth in new jobs created with 39.75 new jobs evidenced between April and June, which is slightly down on the previous quarter but nevertheless a positive result.

**Visitor Economy:** The recommendations of the Tourism Commission have now been in delivery for nearly nine months. The re-developed [www.visitlincolnshire.com](http://www.visitlincolnshire.com) continues to be added to and receives 40,000 visits per month, and our search engine optimisation now means that it is frequently coming top in searches. A social media campaign is supporting its growth.

An area of the site is being developed as [www.business.visitlincolnshire.com](http://www.business.visitlincolnshire.com) and this will launch on 30 November. This is slightly later than planned, but as tourism businesses had a very busy summer, we feel that this launch timing fits well with their business cycle. The site features 60 video masterclasses, factsheets, checklists and downloadable templates; everything is aimed at the visitor economy and is as jargon free as possible. A separate social media campaign will promote its use to businesses.

The *Green Tourism Toolkit* is underway and should be ready in the New Year. Businesses have been sent surveys and to encourage take-up, in return they will receive a free personalised summary report detailing their current sustainability performance and guidance to areas for improvement. We are majoring on a number of product development areas: cycling, walking, heritage, natural coast, generation alpha and business tourism. We support Visit Lincoln who are leading on Cycle Lincolnshire and are working with Active Lincolnshire on walking. We are developing a Coastal Bird Trail with the GLNP and the Lincolnshire Bird Club. A Business Tourism Study is nearing completion and we will soon be ready to get to a delivery stage.

Working with Team Lincolnshire, a Visitor Economy Investor Proposition is being developed and this will be ready shortly.

### **Infrastructure Investment**

Payments for **Rural Business Grants**, as featured in the coming edition of County News, continue to be processed and the businesses supported. 112 grants have been contracted by the team, payments of £1.2m have been made with a further 41 projects on target for completion and payment of the remaining £0.25m.

UK Community Renewal Fund awarded £800,979 to two Lincolnshire employment projects. These are now in the early stages of contracting and set up to enable successful delivery by 30 June 2022. UK CRF is part of the HMG's levelling up investment agenda and is being seen as a forerunner for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

The Levelling Up Fund application for LCC has been successful in securing £20m of external funding addressing connectivity issues on the A16. The scheme will support our sectors as they continue to grow and recover, including the UK Food Valley as it develops as a world leader. Importantly, this funding focusses on access to jobs and training opportunities as well as supporting access to markets for our businesses.

**LEADER** – we have recently drawn in additional funding from a national underspend to support more businesses in the county. The team is undertaking Eligibility and Completeness Checks for 8 live applications requesting grant totalling £519k with a view to applications being determined by January 2022. Monitoring and inspections work is also underway for completed activity with 3 live projects remaining from earlier calls.

**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

### Planning Services

#### **Development Management**

During the past few months the work of the planning application team has been dominated by a number of energy related projects for the county. These cover the full spectrum of energy from production of fossil fuels to significant renewable energy projects and carbon capture.

In November the Planning and Regulation Committee refused an application to produce up to 28 million barrels of oil from under the Lincolnshire Wolds at Biscarthorpe. The Committee was held in Louth to enable the local community to view and hear the debate. The application and Committee's decision attracted significant national and local media interest. It is expected that the company will appeal the decision to refuse the application and the appeal will be heard later next year.

At the other end of the energy scale the Council has been notified of the intention to bring five significant solar park projects to the county. Due to the size of the projects rather than the planning applications being determined at the local level these are all classed as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) which will be determined by the Secretary of State. The County Council as a host authority will have the opportunity for our voice to be fully heard during the examination process.

These projects are planned to use over 10,000 acres of the county's valuable agricultural land and we will be looking very carefully at them including the carbon balancing arguments of installing vast areas of solar panels on productive arable land in the bread basket of England.

We will consider very carefully how the County Council can make our very best representations on these proposals.

The team are also involved in another NSIP project that has the potential to bring to Boston the largest energy from waste facility in the country with a proposed 1.2 million tonnes of refused derived fuel being transported by boat to the site in Boston. During the summer, the Planning and Regulation Committee resolved to give the Council's support to this project. The application is currently at the examination stage of the process which will continue to April 2022 with a decision from the Secretary of State expected by September 2022.

#### **Lincolnshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan Review**

The first stage in the review of the Plan is the preparation of an Issues and Options Consultation Draft. Work has already commenced on this document together with the evidence base that will underpin it. This is programmed to be published for public consultation next spring. This is the opportunity for issues to come forward from both the minerals and waste industry and local communities to identify the issues that the new Plan should take into account.

This will be followed by the preparation of a Preferred Options Consultation Draft, which will take into account the findings from the earlier stage. This is programmed to be published for public consultation in spring 2023.

Then in spring 2024, the final Draft, known as the Publication Draft, is programmed to be published for public consultation.

The three draft stages of the plan will be subject to the scrutiny of the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee and will require the approval of the Executive before they are published for consultation.

Following this final phase of consultation, the approval of the full County Council will be sought to submit the Publication Draft for examination to the Secretary of State, together with any proposed modifications arising from the final consultation. It is anticipated that this will take place in summer 2024.

The examination will be conducted by a Planning Inspector and will include a public hearing. On completion of the examination, the Inspector will issue a report setting out whether the plan is sound and legally compliant and, if not, whether it could be made so by the inclusion of modifications. If a positive recommendation is received from the Inspector, the full County Council can then consider whether to adopt the plan, but it will only be able to do so if it incorporates any modifications recommended by the Inspector. It is anticipated that this will take place in winter 2024/2025.

The new plan will be informed throughout its preparation by a sustainability appraisal undertaken by an independent consultant. This process should demonstrate how the plan has addressed relevant economic, social and environmental objectives, including opportunities for net gains.

### **Planning and Archaeology**

We continue to provide advice on archaeology to District Councils in Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire. We recover the cost of this service and are developing a standard contract for these commissioned services.

A recent trend has been the increase in the number of NSIP projects for solar farms. We are working across Planning Services to develop a 'team approach' to the response to these proposals and to ensure a consistency of approach.

We also provide advice to government agencies and others responsible for change in our historic environment. One area of work which has taken a lot of time recently is the advice we give to Natural England on Countryside Stewardship. We are funded by the Rural Payments Agency for the advice we give.

### **Historic Environment Record (HER)**

The HER has been a victim of its own success. We have had so much use of our website, Lincolnshire Heritage Explorer, that we have exceeded the permissible level of map use as provided by Bing. We are investigating what can be done to solve this issue.

### **Local Listing project**

The local listing project is continuing apace. We are drawing up criteria for what might make it onto a local heritage list. Local communities are beginning to engage with the project which is great because the Government wants local people to nominate heritage assets for addition to the list. The big test for the project will be encouraging LPAs to adopt the process across the historic county of Lincolnshire.

A website has been created for the project which will be the public front end for the scheme. It will be launched in the coming few weeks and it will be through this website that members of the public will be able to nominate heritage assets for local listing.

### **Inns on the Edge**

The project is progressing producing a gazetteer of over 250 pubs and beer houses in the study area which existed over time. We are now starting to record pubs on the ground and are encouraging pubs to participate in recording social histories. The number of pubs to record is far greater than originally estimated so we are facing quite a challenge.

We shall be producing a briefing note shortly for those councillors situated within the project area. The project will culminate with an exhibition at the North Sea Observatory in June 2022.

In order to engage with people, we are developing an area within the new website Let's Talk Lincolnshire. We are hoping to use this to blog about the progress of the project, the pubs we record and the people we meet. This public access point will go live soon and will coincide with the fieldwork starting and visits being made to historic pubs.

### **Extensive Urban Survey (EUS)**

As part of a national programme being funded by Historic England, we are undertaking a survey of the 30 historic towns of the 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.

Given the Government's announcement of an Office of Place within the MHCLG and the drive towards more 'beautiful' outcomes from the planning system, the EUS is well-placed to influence local design codes. We are beginning to plan what might come next for the skills the team has developed and how we can deploy them to serve the best interests of colleagues within the local authority as well as the people of Lincolnshire.

### **Portable Antiquities Scheme**

The Finds Liaison Officer (FLO) in the Historic Places Team is funded by the British Museum to identify and record objects collected by members of the public from across Lincolnshire. Some finds are of such significance that the location from which they were discovered requires investigation. This is what happened at Cammeringham where a previously unknown Anglo-Saxon cemetery was investigated following some finds being recovered by metal detectorists. These finds prove what a wealth of archaeological artefacts remains to be discovered across the county. A Heritage Open Day organised at Ingham Village Hall about the project was a huge success.

## **Heritage and Wellbeing**

The pandemic has shone a light on issues of loneliness and social isolation. As we emerge from the lockdowns we are working with partners to seek funding for projects which will encourage people to engage with places in such a way that it enhances their physical and mental wellbeing. This might be through formal 'social prescribing' but is more likely to be through partnership projects. A network of organisations called the **Improve Network** has been established to maximise the potential of linkages across the natural and historic environment as well culture and the arts.

## **Natural Environment and Countryside**

### **Flood Management**

The County Council has long recognised the economic and environmental potential of our coastal areas and have been working closely with our partners over many years to ensure that the best solutions are put in place to manage the risk from coastal flooding, while securing a prosperous future for businesses and communities in these areas.

We have now entered a partnership agreement with the Environment Agency and the University of Lincoln to put these plans on a more robust footing for the future, with a new assessment of the possible impacts of sea level to form a jointly agreed and transparent evidence base that will help those on Lincolnshire's coast plan how they can best adapt to meet the challenges of climate change, and continue to thrive and realise the coast's potential economic contribution to the region and the country.

Members will be kept abreast of this initiative and I expect to begin reporting progress early in the new year.

We have also recently procured two additional trailer-mounted pumps to assist Fire & Rescue with the emergency response to flooding of homes, roads and other infrastructure. Cllr Dyer has attended an event recently where all four pump and vehicle sets were demonstrated by the Service.

We have also bolstered the response to localised flooding with a new protocol being drawn up by the authority which sets out how a multi-agency response to localised flooding affecting a single District area will be undertaken. Previously, flooding would have had to be widespread before being escalated to the level of the Local Resilience Forum. The new protocol provides for a response to be led by Emergency Planning and will ensure a much more co-ordinated response across multiple agencies to localised flooding events than previously undertaken.

The Property Flood Resilience Assistance project has also commenced its 12 month trial with a target to assist up to 35 residential property owners to protect their property from flooding. This innovative project has received national interest, including a parliamentary question being asked about government support for a national roll-out of similar projects.

We are also proposing to undertake a trial to move away from the use of sandbags as an operational response to flooding, utilising instead modern alternatives which are easier to store, easier to deploy to site and be more efficient at resisting flood water.

## **Sustainability and Natural Environment**

In October, the Council held its first Lincolnshire Climate Summit at the Epic Centre. The event was the official launch of the Council's Green Masterplan with the morning session featuring speakers talking on national environmental issues and with a particular focus on the United Nations COP26 Conference in Glasgow. The afternoon sessions were focussed on more local action and had speakers outlining Lincolnshire based projects to reduce carbon emissions including in the agriculture and tourism sectors.

The event also featured an exhibition of 35 stands from local and national businesses and was attended by around 300 people from whom the feedback was very positive. Prior to the in-person event, the Sustainability Team also led six online webinars on various environmental topics aimed at specific groups such as the construction sector and local communities.

As part of the Smarter Working programme and the work to reduce the Council's own carbon emissions, a new Travel Plan is currently being developed for the Council's own operations. This will look at developing the infrastructure to allow greater levels of sustainable travel and is likely to include funding bids for electric vehicle charging points at council operated sites.

With regard to the ongoing commitment to deliver against the Council's Green Master Plan, a Green Lincolnshire bid was made to the UK Community Renewal Fund. Unfortunately, this ultimately proved unsuccessful. However, there were a number of projects within the bid that can be started over the next few months whilst seeking additional funding from other sources. Examples include the Zero Carbon Parishes Project and the Eco-Schools project. The bidding process highlighted the need to encourage a Lincolnshire based capacity to deliver environmental projects from the private sector.

The Council was, however, successful in obtaining £170k from the Forestry Commission for the Local Authorities Treescapes Fund. The Fund is to encourage tree planting in non-woodland settings. Planting sites have been identified on some of the Council's own land and every parish council in the county was contacted for any tree planting opportunities on their land. The funding should enable planting of around 15,000 trees and for their maintenance over the next three years. Around 60 parish councils have proposed sites. In addition, some District Council sites and farmland sites have been proposed. Some of the planting sites will have trees to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee through the Queen's Green Canopy project.

The funding has allowed partnerships to be built up with landowners and public sector partners – which will enable the second phase of the tree planting project to do larger scale planting to progress towards the Tree for Every Resident target.

On 9 November 2021 the Environment Act 2021 was given royal assent. The Act covers a wide range of areas including water resources management and waste management, however, specific to the Sustainability and Natural Environment areas are the requirements for the authority to develop Local Nature Recovery Strategies and the Biodiversity Net Gain process.

The Biodiversity Net Gain system will put an obligation on developments to enhance the biodiversity value of the site or area as part of the development process and a biodiversity

metric has been developed to quantify the value of sites. The net gain system represents an opportunity to improve the habitats within the county whilst also offering a way of supporting development. Officers are seeking to identify a series of suitable large scale biodiversity projects where we can make the process of complying with the net gain regulations straightforward for developers.

Also within the Act is the requirement to develop Local Nature Recovery Strategies. These are a new system of spatial strategies for nature which will plan, map, and help drive more co-ordinated, practical, focussed action and investment in nature's recovery. The strategies are expected to include the wider environmental benefits of nature recovery, including nature-based solutions that counter the effects of climate change, such as natural flood management. The initial pilot areas have shown the potential for these recovery strategies to bring together land use planning and land management and we will be engaging closely with this, and with the implementation of Nature Recovery Networks with our partners over the coming months and years.

### **Countryside Access**

In tandem with the work being undertaken on promoting access to Lincolnshire's outstanding countryside in the Greater Lincolnshire Tourism Action Plan, I am pleased to learn that Natural England have submitted the final reports for the two remaining stretches of the England Coast Path in Lincolnshire from Sutton Bridge to Skegness and from Mablethorpe to the Humber Bridge. Once final approval from the Secretary of State is obtained for these stretches, provisionally outlined for February 2022, officers will then be engaged with establishing the route on the ground funded by Government Grant in Aid and ultimately the ongoing management of the route as a National Trail. This ongoing management commitment will be achieved in partnership with our unitary neighbours at North and North-East Lincolnshire Councils.

### **Lincolnshire Wolds AONB Partnership**

Within our Wolds Partnership team a new Government funded initiative has been launched known as Farming in Protected Landscapes. In managing this grant fund, the partnership will aid farmers and other land managers in the protected landscape to help them diversify their income streams, delivering schemes consistent with the wider AONB Management Plan and lay the groundwork for the Government's forthcoming Environmental Land Management offer. This will help grow businesses, create green jobs, enhance biodiversity and invest in infrastructure to attract more diverse visitors to support local economies.