

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 01 DECEMBER 2023

Statement from: Councillor Colin Davie - Executive Councillor for Economic Development, Environment and Planning

GROWTH SERVICES

Economic Infrastructure

The Council's leadership role in the countywide energy for growth agenda continues, and its working relationships with the two electricity Distribution Network Operators (DNOs) who cover Greater Lincolnshire continue to strengthen. In parallel and following the production of the 'Energy Options Analysis for Greater Lincolnshire' this summer, we now have and are already using to good effect an online interactive electricity supply and demand analysis tool to help inform both our and the DNOs' infrastructure investments.

At the South Lincolnshire Food Enterprise Zone near Holbeach in South Holland, private sector investment continues to follow on from the Council's. One of the centrepieces of the scheme, The Hub, the council's first innovation centre has now been open for just 13 months and has now reached 50% occupancy.

The Sutton Bridge placemaking scheme in South Holland, which is currently at detailed design stage, is a perfect example of a small, local economic development initiative designed to encourage greater spend with local businesses. The objective is to maximise the influence of the village's marina and other tourism assets to increase footfall to and from the village centre, by creating better physical and visual links between the two locations. The scheme has been developed with the local community to ensure ownership and buy-in and is programmed for delivery in Spring next year.

In East Lindsey, the Skegness Countryside Business Park extension, which Members will recall was completed in 2021, will provide a much-needed opportunity for local employers to expand in sectors which will help to diversify the coastal economy. A local developer has recently completed several industrial units on the first plot, which are available for small local businesses to rent.

Across the county, we continue to support our small business tenants, which total around 145, in our five business centres, innovation centre and industrial and commercial units. Occupancy levels remain buoyant with a health mix of lease renewals and new tenants.

Infrastructure Investment

Work continues in developing the proposals of the Greater Lincolnshire Strategic Infrastructure Delivery Framework to support the case for infrastructure investment, to meet the needs of our key economic sectors and to promote inclusive growth for our residents. The current focus is supporting the Council's energy work and that of other public sector partners across the region. As part of this, WSP have been commissioned to map and assess clean energy activities in Lincolnshire, benchmark against other areas and to set out options

for an Energy Strategy for the region. This will help draw together the council's existing work and responsibilities and position the county to best effect, enabling us to address our energy constraints and harness new energy opportunities to drive local growth and local benefits.

In a similar way, work has been undertaken to look at the challenges and opportunities in our rural economies and communities. We have looked at how issues of sparsity manifest in the provision of services and how it impacts the private sector, but we are also seeking to tell a lesser told story around Greater Lincolnshire's rural growth opportunities. These are present in our natural capital, the potential pool of economically inactive people who can share skills and work flexibly, and the presence of entrepreneurial clusters within our rural areas; where businesses have diversified, adapted, and innovated to not just survive but thrive. As this work draws to a close, we hope to have some compelling case studies and data that will support focused interventions that drive the economic links between our rural hub towns and their rural hinterlands. If the rural economy can thrive, this strengthens the wider economic impact of Greater Lincolnshire so that everyone will benefit.

I am also delighted to report that two Scrutiny Panels have completed deep dives into how the Council can support the agricultural sector to best effect, and how this council can help drive a revival in the region's high streets and town centres. I am currently overseeing what actions we can prioritise to best effect, but partnership, lobbying, place-making and digitalisation are at the heart of the thinking, together with the development of innovative pilots. Under one review, this will help drive town centre footfall and under the other will be designed around recruiting young people to work in agriculture as a career of choice.

Work is also underway to secure funding and responsibility for the Lincs Coast 2100+ Investment Plan, in partnership with the Environment Agency (EA) and East Lindsey District Council (ELDC). The Council recognises the importance of collaboration, vital to address the physical and social challenges that the Lincolnshire coast faces now and in the future. This work is substantial and will build on the recently completed Adaptive and Resilient Communities (RCC) project, enhancing our understanding of the challenges, and helping shape future decisions to support the impacts of climate change on coastal communities. The project will also enable us to focus investment on what is needed after consultation with communities and stakeholders.

Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI)

Work continues on the LEVI pilot, a scheme to introduce on street Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure for the residents of Lincolnshire. Leading a consortium of five Local Authorities across the Midlands, the Lincolnshire Team are working on the contract and tender process, with a tender expected to go out by the end of November 2023.

Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) have also secured further funding from the government's Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund. The Midlands have come together to create two partnerships, with support from the sub-national Transport Body, Midlands Connect, to successfully submit a bid for the LEVI Fund. The partnerships have been awarded £39.3m, and each local authority has been allocated an individual amount from that pot. LCC has been awarded £5.6million and will lead the third consortium group of seven Local Authorities. The consortium partners are currently undertaking the financial modelling required by the

funding providers, to ascertain the number of chargepoints we can expect to deliver with the funding and the associated private sector investment.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Business Lincolnshire Growth Hub

The Business Lincolnshire Growth Hub Team continue to be busy, providing much needed support to local businesses. In the first two quarters of 2023, 492 businesses have been supported.

The new jointly funded Business Lincolnshire UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) Shared Service maintains much of the good practice developed through the many years of delivery experience since the Growth Hub launched in 2015. Although the funding pot is smaller than that provided by European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), there is still a good breadth of services. As well as generalist advice, the service provides Specialist Advisers for Low Carbon, Manufacturing, Retail, Leisure and Hospitality, Agriculture and Horticulture and Digital. There is also in-depth support for Low Carbon, Manufacturing, Retail, Leisure and Hospitality, Social Economy, as well as Start Up and Scale Up programmes. The advisory support is complemented by an online events programme.

The team also continue to deliver services funded through other routes. For example, the East Midlands Made Smarter Adoption programme for the manufacturing sector, and the Create Growth programme aimed at high growth businesses in the creative sector.

East Midlands Made Smarter industrial digitisation programme delivery is well; year two is moving at pace, and interest in the programme remains good. To the end of September 2023, we have engaged with 52 manufacturing businesses, delivered 23 Road Maps, and awarded three grants. The first cohort under our Leading Digital Transformation element started on 2 November 2023, and we have delivered a number of Technology Transfer Workshops in Lincolnshire.

We also continue our partnership work with Lincolnshire Co-op and the Mosaic Digital Hub, providing important support for the fast-growing Digital, Creative and Technology sectors in the county. A popular, targeted events programme has now been established, and the Digital Lincolnshire online brochure has been launched which highlights many of the area's world-class digital businesses. This is an important tool for collaboration, talent retention and inward investment.

The team have also been undertaking activities to support the delivery of the International Trade Strategy that launched in October 2022. This has included adviser training, enhanced website content and a co-ordinated export marketing campaign, as well as practical support through the Export Peer Network and Roundtable, and the Empowering SMEs in International Trade programmes. We are seeing improved co-ordination and cross referral between providers which is great for the business community.

In November 2023, we also held our 'Going Global Export Conference' at the International Bomber Command Centre and the Taming the Dragons Investment Pitching Event, now in its 11th year. Future flagship events will include our very popular Manufacturing Conference on 8 March 2024.

Business owners continue to face significant challenges, particularly recently as a result of high inflation and interest rate hikes, and the Growth Hub Adviser Team provide an important support system for small businesses working their way through these difficulties. That said, many businesses that we are working with have continued to have positive growth and investment plans, and this can be seen through our support to high growth businesses through our next level programme which has now supported its 275th fast growing business.

We are very pleased to highlight that our ongoing evaluation activities continue to confirm that our business support services are well received, with 92% of respondents either satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of the service, and 91% of respondents either very or somewhat likely to recommend the service they received / event they attended to a friend or colleague.

All the elements of the Shared Service have now been commissioned and are in delivery. There is now expected to be a fairly settled business support landscape for the short term, whilst post March 2025 plans develop.

Skills Bootcamps

The Skills Bootcamps are part of the government's Lifetime Skills Guarantee, helping everyone gain skills for life. They are free (a contribution to the cost from the employer is required if sending their own employees), flexible courses of up to 16 weeks, giving people the opportunity to build up sector-specific skills and fast track to an interview with a local employer, and for employers to upskill their workforce.

We are finalising the third wave of support which started in September 2022, having been awarded a grant of £939,500 from the Department for Education (DfE) in May 2022 to deliver the programme across Greater Lincolnshire. Focusing on Greater Lincolnshire residents and employers, with a target of 310 learners to achieve by 31 March 2023. Overall, 272 learners started a Skills Bootcamp and of those, 262 completed the programme, a 96% success rate (DfE target was 80%). This outcome has put Greater Lincolnshire on the top of the DfE Grants Area Performance Table. Skills Bootcamps offer included Food Manufacturing and Food Safety and Compliance (University of Lincoln), Clinical Care Programme (MEDEX), Shipping and Maritime and Logistics and Transport (MODAL).

We are now also currently delivering a fourth wave for which we were awarded a grant of £2.2m in February 2023. The target is for 1,151 learners to achieve by 31 March 2024. Skills Bootcamps being delivered include Digital, Construction and Retrofit, LGV Driving, Leadership and Management, EV Technicians, Clinical Care, Hospitality Excellence, Food Manufacturing and Food Safety. We are currently at 88 learner starts, with more in the pipeline. We continue to build on our success and have recently submitted a proposal to the DfE for a grant of £3.2m to deliver 1,180 learners from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. We are expecting to be notified in late autumn of the outcome.

PLACE AND INVESTMENT

Team Lincolnshire Activity

Team Lincolnshire held their first annual conference on 17 September 2023. The event was attended by 97 ambassadors (70% of the membership) and themes for the event were, 1) the future strategic direction of Team Lincolnshire; 2) Focused Collaboration and Connectivity across business communities in Lincolnshire. We have been aligning the Team Lincolnshire Ambassador programme, Inward Investment promotion and Foreign Direct Investment support, to ensure a cohesive sector-based approach to support all investors. This will help to lever the existing sector propositions, and Team Lincolnshire events will be sector specific and geographically balanced to ensure maximum benefit for Ambassadors and Investors.

The event was very successful, we welcomed 20 new Ambassadors joining the programme, celebrated the successes achieved over the last seven years and delivered the 2023-2025 Business plan.

Visitor Economy

Visit Lincolnshire (www.visitlincolnshire.com) has seen excellent growth in 2023. In the busy July to September period, the site received over 237,000 sessions, largely from organic search; this is up 77.9% on the same period last year. We attribute this to the optimised and continuously updated events pages, and also the new valuable destination and category level content added in recent months. The average conversion rate of visitors clicking through to a booking link is around 19.3%; this has consistently been around 13-15% so we are very pleased with this jump. 95% of all traffic is from across the UK, with 4% from the Lincoln area and 35% from the London area.

Continued development of the content on the website is important to ensure that our site is fresh and vibrant and maintains its number one spot in terms of search engine optimisation. The Cycling area has now been improved and now features 38 routes. The Wolds Birding area went live in late September; the Fens and the Lincoln Edge areas are left to complete. Bird watching is a great fit with our Nature Tourism offer: walking, cycling and exciting developments at our nature reserves.

The King Charles III England Coast Path (KCIIECP) Toolkit is nearing completion. The path sections in Lincolnshire are anticipated to complete in early 2025, and we need to ensure that our businesses are ready for the opportunities it brings. To accompany the toolkit, workshops will be held in January to March 2024.

Although the web analytics are excellent, the tourism season of 2023 has been challenging. Businesses report no pattern to trade, last-minute bookings, those visitors who do come are not spending, and there are still a lot of job vacancies. There have been closures across the board, with retail having taken a particularly big hit. We have seen some quality businesses go, and many report on the sheer cost of doing business. Our findings are consistent with the rest of England; the bad weather has not helped, but clearly people are feeling the economic pinch.

ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING

Flood Risk and Water Resources Management

Recent flooding following Storm Babet has been a focus for officers. Significant work has been undertaken in our role as lead Local Flood Authority, to assess and investigate the causes of flooding into properties, often referred to as the section 19 process. With so many properties unfortunately suffering from water ingress across the county, this work will take some time to complete. We will work with partners, such as the Environment Agency and Anglian Water, to ensure that the work is undertaken efficiently. Each investigation will be submitted to the relevant authority who may have responsibilities to resolve concerns to ensure there are no repeats.

The current figures based on what we have had reported to us and collated from partner organisations are as follows:

- Internally flooded properties = 573
- Externally flooded (gardens, outbuildings etc) = 484
- Road closures = 50
- Highway flooding (not requiring road closures) = 102

Please note that these numbers may be revised as we continue to receive information, verify records, and commence the formal investigation process.

Away from the floods, the County Council has long recognised the economic and environmental potential of our coastal areas. We 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. In October, I was pleased to sign up to the Local Government Association Coastal Improvement Group “Pledge for the Coast” seeking to ensure that our coast and its communities are resilient and to join calls for an appointed Minister for the Coast.

Officers have been actively engaged with various partners through an Environment Agency led initiative on three specific programmes, looking to the future adaptation of our coastline and water resources.

Following the completion of the Adaptive & Resilient Coastal Communities Project, the Lincs Coast Investment 2100+ project has started to look at reviewing how strategic infrastructure delivery behind the built and natural flood defences will need to be shaped. This is in light of the need to approach decision making in the context of the adaptive approaches required.

Similarly, the Humber 2100+ project has created baseline data to understand tidal flood risk affecting the estuary and surrounding land. I was pleased to endorse this on behalf of the Council in September 2023. This data will now help shape how the project undertakes its next

steps to agree the strategic approaches and associated flood risk measures available to manage tidal flood risk into the future around the Humber.

For both the Fens 2100+ and Future Fens Integrated Adaptation project, we are working with the Environment Agency and drainage boards, as well as Anglian Water and land managers, to start to develop similar long-term plans for managing future flood risk and supporting economic prosperity in the Fens. In the Fens, land is below mean sea level and will be susceptible to the risk of flooding from both the rivers and breaching or overtopping of the coastal defences.

With regards to the Lincolnshire Reservoir project, our officers maintain regular communication with Anglian Water and will continue to push for the project to incorporate a wider range of benefits than just water storage and distribution. This will ensure that the economic, environmental, and recreational benefits of the scheme are recognised. Currently, discussions are focussing on the opportunities that open water transfer to and from the reservoir may bring; as well as the wider strategic resource options that are required to support the development of the whole reservoir project.

The Greater Lincolnshire Groundwater Project is continuing to develop an understanding of a broad range of groundwater risks and opportunities across Greater Lincolnshire. In recent months, working with the University of Lincoln, Lincolnshire County Council's Project Groundwater team are collecting data on the present salt levels in the soil in the Fens, using modelling software to understand how salt water might infiltrate the soil and impact food production in the future. This innovative work has already gained interest at a national level, including amongst some major supermarket chains.

We were also pleased to see the government's commitment to tackling sewage pollution from storm overflow discharges and the impacts that this has had environmentally and on coastal bathing waters.

Sustainability and Natural Environment

The Council has delivered its most recent Carbon Report into its overall Greenhouse Gas emissions and in greater detail on the sources of emissions than previous iterations. I am pleased to inform members that we can demonstrate that the authority has reduced its emissions by nearly 72% since the baseline figure was taken in 1990. Similarly, between 2016 and 2023, we have reduced carbon emissions from energy consumption by 51%.

We recognise that the challenge of meeting Net Zero by 2050 is a strong one and there is much more that can still be done. The Sustainability team have been working to ensure that the Council's fourth Carbon Management Plan will be completed in the near future and will highlight how we may seek to rise to those challenges.

An example of this is that the Council has a large number of older buildings which are difficult to make energy efficient. Many of our schools have at least parts that are from the Victorian era, and it will be a challenge to make these buildings energy efficient and net zero carbon. Recently the Council received funding from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme to produce a Heat Decarbonisation Plan. The work to produce this is being managed between

the Sustainability Team and the Corporate Property Team and will look at the costs of decarbonising the top twenty energy using buildings at the Council. The initial results from this work have identified a series of energy efficiency improvements, such as LED lighting replacements and insulation upgrades, that can reduce running costs and carbon dioxide emissions.

On 18 September 2023, I attended the launch of the new National Nature Reserve on the Greater Lincolnshire coast, which marks the first in the new King's Series of National Nature Reserves committed to enhancing biodiversity and nature recovery while connecting people with nature. The site covers 33 square kilometres along almost 30 kilometres of Greater Lincolnshire from the south of Cleethorpes to the north of Mablethorpe, making it the ninth largest National Nature Reserve in the country.

I was equally pleased to learn of the addition of the East Coast Wetlands to the tentative list for consideration by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a World Heritage site. The area incorporates the majority of the Lincolnshire Coast and is part of the East Atlantic Flyway, extending from the Arctic to South Africa. This is globally important for migratory waterbirds. Officers will be working with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) lead on this proposal over the coming years.

As the Responsible Authority for the delivery of the Greater Lincolnshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy. The Council is working closely with the local nature partnership on putting together this important strategy for the protection, enhancement, and recovery of our vulnerable habitats, to ensure that the area benefits in its delivery of biodiversity net gain. Preparations are well underway; a governance structure has been agreed and we look forward to the completion of the strategy. This will help identify, set priorities and advocate for the recovery of our most vulnerable habitats and to aid in the delivery of biodiversity net gain across the region.

The Sustainability Team has jointly commissioned a study with the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership to look at the environmental impacts of the cold chain sector in the county. The project is being delivered by the Lincoln Institute of Agri-Technology at the University of Lincoln. Anecdotal evidence suggests that small scale agricultural cold stores, such as potato stores, have been significantly affected by the rises in energy prices. The report will look at opportunities to improve the efficiency of cold stores and reduce overall running costs.

Greater Lincolnshire is a centre of cold store activity in the UK, with important clusters in Grimsby, Spalding, and Grantham. There is a growing demand for new large-scale cold store facilities. This report will identify suitable locations for cold store expansion, where there is sufficient electrical capacity to power new facilities.

The Sustainability Team has also been working with the Public Health Team and the environmental health teams at the district councils to look at air quality in the county. The Environment Act 2021 has new targets for air pollution levels and the project has looked at how these new air quality targets will be measured in Lincolnshire. Some initial testing of particulate matter in the air has been undertaken at eight sites around the county.

In general, air quality in Lincolnshire has improved over recent years. This has been due, in part, to improving vehicle engine standards; in Lincoln, the Eastern Bypass has improved air quality by diverting HGVs away from the city centre, having a noticeable impact on the pollutant levels measured in the city.

Planning Services

The Planning team continues to be engaged with the ever-increasing expansion of Nationally Significant Energy Infrastructure Projects that continue to emerge in the county. These cover the full spectrum of renewable energy such as solar, carbon capture, offshore wind, hydrogen, and the associated expansion of the National Grid infrastructure to move this energy generated around the country. This continues to create tension between the provision of producing renewable energy to meet the country's Net Zero ambition, and the impacts caused to our local communities who are being faced with the prospect of hosting large-scale energy projects with all the associated disruption without any tangible compensatory measures for the impacts caused. This situation is only likely to escalate as the number of these energy projects continues to increase within the county.

The Council's core planning activity of minerals, waste and our own developments is also seeing an increase in work demands with the emergence of large-scale anaerobic digestion plants being brought forward in the county. A couple of these are at the application stage with others at the pre-application stage. Also, the demand for the county's sand and gravel reserves continues to increase, with a number of applications for large-scale sand and gravel extraction currently before the Council for determination. Finally, the application for the North Hykeham Relief Road has recently been submitted with the expectation that this will be brought to the Planning Committee for determination in the Spring next year.

Finally, due to resourcing issues and the higher than anticipated potential sand and gravel sites being promoted by developers to be included in the updated Minerals and Waste local plan, the timetable for the public consultation on this updated plan has slipped. This public consultation is expected to take place next summer once the consultation proposals for the updated policies and sites to be included in the Local Plan have been approved by the Scrutiny Committee and Executive.

Historic Places Team

The caseload of the Historic Places Team continues at a pace, partly due to carrying some vacancies at a time when the incoming workload continues to increase. A great deal of the team's work continues to be in support of our colleagues across Planning Services with Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, predominantly applications for solar farms but also including the Lincolnshire Reservoir and other infrastructure projects. One such infrastructure project, the water supply pipeline currently being constructed across the length of the county by the Strategic Pipeline Alliance, has resulted in a number of significant findings. They are still excavating the Roman site between Bracebridge Heath and Waddington, although this should have been completed by mid-November. It looks increasingly as though the site consists of light industrial activity associated with what must have been a large high-status structure nearby (and outside the area of excavation). The site

contains a number of corn dryers (a method devised by the Romans for prolonging the life of wheat for flour), lime kilns (for making the lime for mortar) and quarry pits as well as buildings for domestic use.

Other planning work includes the increasing demand for minerals, particularly sand and gravel, the preparations for the North Hykeham Relief Road application and a number of major development projects in both Newark and Sherwood and Bassetlaw districts in Nottinghamshire.

Members of the public continue to report objects to the Finds Liaison Officer (part of the national Portable Antiquities Scheme). Recently, a second season was spent excavating at Cammeringham to recover more evidence of the Anglo-Saxon cemetery that we first started work on in 2021. The project is now being run as a student project in conjunction with the University of Central Lancashire.

The team continues to provide access wherever possible to the county's Historic Environment Record (HER). We are close to an agreement with the Heritage Trust of Lincolnshire to make arrangements for access to the HER and for data exchange to ensure the HER is as fully up to date as possible. Once this agreement is in place it will be possible to further develop the online HER. Recently, we have uploaded to the HER a record of every historic school building across Lincolnshire and all the information from the Inns on the Edge historic pubs project. We are continuing with the work with Historic England on this. All the data gathered by the Extensive Urban Survey project has been passed on to the Archaeological Data Service for long-term curating (as requested by Historic England) and is being incorporated into the HER.