

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 19 DECEMBER 2014

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

Economic Development & Tourism

You will be aware that I believe it is important to champion Lincolnshire on the national stage. We know that developers are starting to look to Lincolnshire as an area of growth, and it is important for us to keep Lincolnshire firmly in their thoughts. We are doing this in a number of ways.

For example, I mentioned in a previous statement that we had submitted bids for EU 'Leader' funding. This is a programme that provides funding for communities and businesses in rural areas. The process is competitive, but I am delighted to inform you that all four of our programme bids were successful, as was a bid made by our colleagues in North and North East Lincolnshire. Together these bids will provide £8.5m for rural businesses, and once the contract negotiation processes have been completed we will be able to explain what businesses and community groups will need to do to bid for the funding. We expect this will be in February.

As members will know from the Economic Development newsletter that I produce, I recently accompanied three Lincolnshire businesses to a major UK Trade and Industry event. Lincolnshire County Council, and the businesses that accompanied me, were hand-picked to attend the event because UKTI see us as an organisation they can work with, and an area that is attractive to visitors and investors alike.

The Council's Business Investment Team attended MIPIM UK in October on behalf of the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership (GLLEP). Working in partnership with three companies – Willmott Dixon, Delta Simons and Morgan Tucker – we hosted a networking event with each partner inviting 8 existing and/or new contacts. In addition, we also arranged a total of ten appointments during the exhibition which has resulted in several promising follow up enquiries. This is part of the continuing strategy to engage with intermediaries and investors, building relationships, nurturing partnership working and helping to facilitate meetings and visits to the Greater Lincolnshire area.

Our work on helping businesses use digital technologies has recently been recognised nationally. Our network of digital hubs in Mablethorpe, Boston, Horncastle, Louth and Lincoln won a National Next Generation Digital award for 'Digital Education and Expertise' in mid-November.

Similarly, our work on raising the importance of coastal regeneration is recognised within Whitehall. The Leader of the Council and I recently met Penny Mordaunt MP, a Minister in the Department for Communities and Local Government. She was in Lincolnshire to sign the LEP's Growth Deal, but we took the opportunity to discuss the other aspect of her ministerial portfolio, coastal regeneration, whilst she was here. It was clear to the Leader and I that she understood the important role that LCC plays in leading that dialogue on behalf of a network of national authorities, and at the time of writing this statement, I am looking forward to meeting her again in London to press for further recognition of Lincolnshire's coastal needs.

The re-opening of Lincoln Castle Revealed in April, 2015 also gives us the chance to attract visitors and investors to Lincolnshire. As you will see from Cllr Nick Worth's council statement, the build project is nearly completed. As you will have already heard in the media, we were delighted to be able to announce a £1.4million donation from the David Ross Foundation to complete the funding arrangements for the Magna Carta Vault at Lincoln Castle. It is very appropriate that a Lincolnshire born businessman who has such strong educational links with the county through his academies, should be the sponsor of this state of the art vault for this most iconic document.

All tourism material for 2015 will major on Lincoln Castle Revealed and our programme of celebratory events. We are encouraging a 'Return to Lincolnshire' to all former residents and those with county connections and this is already showing good resonance with local people.

Visitors to the Lincoln Christmas Market were informed about our plans for 2015, and our attention turns to the programme of major events that we are preparing. Marketing and PR plans have been in place for some time and much preparation work has been put in place to get national and international journalists to visit. A steady stream of journalists have already visited, many of whom want to return next year to write a specific Castle piece when it completes; however the majority of journalists want to visit in March 2015, just before it re-opens. Plans are in place to ensure that we offer them a smooth operation. Visit England brought in a major familiarisation visit of key national and international journalists during the Christmas Market and they were given a behind the scenes tour of the Castle.

Turning to more local matters, we continue to be a strong force within the GLLEP by actively supporting their vision and operations. We have submitted three strong bids for funding in the current round: Peppermint Interchange in Holbeach, Spalding Western Relief Road, and a Food Production Sector grant scheme. Whilst the level of funding available to LEPs in the current bidding round is lower than previous rounds, our bids are strong and we hope that they will lead to a long-term increase in funding even if the Government does not currently have the funds available to support them at this time.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer's Autumn Statement explained that there would be a small increase in the amount of funding available to LEPs, but there will still be high levels of competition for the funds. Despite the Chancellor being unable to provide significant amounts of new money in his Autumn Statement, I believe that it was a budget that recognised the importance of small business to the economy. Announcements on business rates relief, apprenticeships, export, research and development, and extra backing for loans to business all demonstrate his commitment to economic growth.

As I have explained before, we are one of only a small number of local authorities that leads a skills programme. As I meet businesses and indeed training providers too, it is clear that a massive challenge facing Lincolnshire is the need to provide skills for economic growth. We are playing our part in this by supporting the LEP and its sister partnership with the Employment and Skills Board to create pilot schemes that can then be used to shape wider, Government funded provision. For example, we have just commissioned a local HR specialist to run a programme that will help 25 businesses to recruit and induct good quality staff. We hope that this pilot will be able to turn into a major EU funding bid that will help businesses

introduce more effective strategies for recruitment and retention. To complement this project, we are working with Boston College who are compiling practical recruitment information for businesses which will be added to our business information website, Business Lincolnshire.

And finally, the launch of the EU funding programme – worth £120m to Lincolnshire- is getting nearer. I am meeting my counterparts in other organisations to encourage them to develop strong bids that meet our shared ambitions for economic growth, and I know that my officers are doing the same. £120m of funding gives us the chance to make a real difference in the county, and I am determined to use this opportunity to best effect.

Environment

Lincolnshire County Council continues to work with Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust to repair the damage sustained in the December 2013 tidal surge at the nationally important nature reserve of Gibraltar Point, and to develop the Coastal Observatory at Chapel Point.

In early November, the Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership held its Annual Conference, themed 'Farming with Nature'. Presentations from a range of speakers, including representatives from the agricultural community, explored pragmatic approaches to farming in Lincolnshire that can meet the needs of business as well as protecting and enhancing the environment for all. In the current difficult financial climate, it was encouraging to see the Conference fully subscribed, and to hear about a growing recognition of the need to ally nature conservation with the promotion of key aspects of Lincolnshire's tourism economy.

Promoting this approach is an important part of the Council's Natural Environment Strategy, and we look forward to working more closely with the GLLEP and the business community more widely, to realise the enormous contribution our environment can make to the economy and health of Lincolnshire's communities.

Sustainability

The SCoRE (Schools Collaboration on Resource Efficiency) project encourages students to promote sustainability and reduce energy use through activities like energy audits, taking gold in the Green Apple Awards, a national campaign to find Britain's greenest companies, councils and communities. Their accomplishments in reducing energy consumption within a local authority placed them first out of 500 competitors. Schools who have participated in the programme have reduced their electricity consumption by an average of 8 per cent in just a few weeks - with some seeing a reduction of up to 50 per cent in their energy bills. With schools spending around £7 million per year on their energy bills, the programme is significantly contributing to the target of a 22% reduction in the Council's carbon dioxide emissions by 2018.

The Lincolnshire Schools Switch Off Challenge took place on 21 November, with over 60 schools taking part in switching off all non-electrical appliances. Early results show electricity savings of up to 63% compared to a normal day.

Flood Risk Management

The Environment Agency has published consultation draft Flood Risk Management Plans. It is required to do this under the Flood Risk Regulations of 2009. The Plans cover large river basin areas, and Lincolnshire is split between two of them, one for the Humber river basin (extending to most of Yorkshire and each bank of the Humber), and the Anglian river basin, stretching from the Witham catchment down through East Anglia and into Essex. The Flood Risk Management Plans are intended as a means of linking with wider environmental legislation, and as a mechanism for joining up the work of different flood risk management authorities. In Lincolnshire we established this kind of joint approach in 2012 with our joint Flood Risk Management Strategy and this approach will be reflected in our response to the new documents through the Lincolnshire Flood Risk Management Partnership and the Flood and Drainage Management Scrutiny Committee. The national deadline for consultation responses on the Flood Risk Management Plans is 25 January 2015.

Other related current public consultations include the Environment Agency's draft River Basin Management Plans, setting out a very broad approach to achieving European environmental objectives and open for response until March 2015, as well as the Local Flood Risk Management Plans of the neighbouring Lead Local Flood Authorities of North East Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire and Peterborough, which have a range of deadlines from 19 December onwards. Lincolnshire County Council will be commenting on these plans and strategies in line with our established strategic objectives to support the National Flood and Coastal Erosion Management Strategy, and to promote effective environmental management and closer joint working with adjoining Lead Local Flood Authorities.

Further to delaying its original proposals for implementing the proposals for Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) legislation in the 2010 Flood and Water Management Act, Defra issued a rapid six-week consultation, outlining a very different approach. This would, in effect, seek to deal with SuDS through the National Planning Policy Framework and local planning policy – that is through local planning authorities with advice from unspecified third parties and relying on planning conditions. Arrangements for long term management of any agreed SuDS schemes were left open, although the consultation suggested a range of possible approaches including management companies and local voluntary approaches, among others. We understand that Defra received up to 400 responses to the consultation, including our own, and we currently await the Department's formal response.

In the Chancellor's Autumn Statement Government confirmed a total pot of £2.3billion for Flood Defence projects. As a result of this commitment, the Boston Barrier project along with flood alleviation schemes at Louth and Horncastle are now fully funded. Our contribution to these three projects is a total of £17million. On the other hand, we have recently received confirmation from Defra of Lead Local Flood Authority revenue grant for 2015-16, which appears to be reducing from £450,000 to £300,000; a reduction of 33% from the 2014-15 figure. Other Lead Local Flood Authorities are reporting reductions of up to 33%. I will be writing to Defra Secretary of State, Liz Truss, seeking an explanation for the reduction in light of recent Government statements regarding the high priority attached to flood risk management.

Planning

Development Management

In respect of Development Management over the past 12 months the focus has been on improving performance in respect of the time taken to make a decision on planning applications. The majority of planning applications received by the Council are being determined in a faster time than the Government's target of 65% of major applications being determined in 13 weeks.

This gives greater confidence to developers to ensure that the appropriate developments receive approval faster, allowing those schemes to be developed quicker, whilst the schemes that are inappropriate applicants are informed of the Council's view in a timely manner.

In terms of protecting the environment, the Development Management team continues to be pro-active in this regard having undertaken 178 site monitoring visits to mineral and landfill sites since September 2013. This ensures that planning permissions granted by the Council are monitored to ensure conditions attached to these permissions are complied with and my Officers work with developers to ensure they undertake developments to the appropriate environmental standards.

Finally, the Enforcement team continues to take a pro-active approach to ensuring waste developers comply with the requirements of planning permissions by undertaking over 150 site monitoring visits since September 2013. In addition, over 140 complaints have been received highlighting possible breaches of planning control which are all fully investigated and the complainant informed of the outcome.

Strategic Planning

Local Plans

LCC's Minerals and Waste Pre-Submission Core Strategy and Development Management Policies document will be out for public consultation on 5 January 2015 for 6 weeks. As a key component of Lincolnshire's emerging Minerals and Waste Local Plan, the document will set out the key strategy/principles to guide the future winning and working of minerals and the form of waste management development in the county, and include Development Management Policies setting out the criteria against which planning applications for minerals and waste development will be considered.

LCC has formally responded to the recent consultation on the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan: Preliminary Draft. The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee considered this consultation draft of the Local Plan at its meeting on 25 September 2014 and raised some concerns which were included in the report to Environmental Scrutiny on 31 October 2014. As this is a first draft outlining the Plan's overall approach and principles, a number of gaps are evident which will be addressed in more detail in the next iteration (Draft Local Plan, July 2015). LCC supports the overall strategy of urban concentration and the proposed distribution of development and officers will assist in plugging those gaps, especially in the areas of demographics, housing targets and infrastructure viability.

LCC has responded to RWE's Triton Knoll (Offshore Windfarm) Electrical System Consultation raising strong reservations about the suitability of the proposed landfall at Anderby Creek and onward cable route through Orby to Bicker Fen. LCC officers have worked constructively with RWE and its consultants to minimise and mitigate the environmental impact should the scheme receive approval. In the meantime, LCC is actively investigating viable alternatives to the proposed incursion into the Coastal Country Park.