

SCRUTINY ECONOMY COMMITTEE
9 JUNE 2011

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSPORT PORTFOLIO
PROGRAMME FOR 2011/12

Core Strategy

The core Strategy will be considered at an Inquiry starting 21st June. A number of significant policy documents will have to be produced during the year and represent a major undertaking for the Department, they include: Development Management Development Plan Document; Site Allocations DPD; and we will begin work on the City Centre Action Plan and Student Accommodation and small HMO's supplementary planning document.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Localism Bill

We have indicated our intention to introduce a community infrastructure levy for Exeter. CIL enables local authorities to obtain contributions from developers towards infrastructure. Unlike section 106 agreements, which are negotiated individually on a case by case basis, and tend only to be used on larger developments, the Levy applies to all new buildings that involve the creation of a new dwelling and possibly non residential development. From 2014 unless a CIL is in place Councils will be restricted in what can be raised by section 106 agreements. Therefore it is important to make progress with this initiative. We are currently working on the evidence base to support CIL. Key requirements will be: to produce a draft charging schedule for consultation; to produce evidence on viability; to produce an infrastructure delivery plan; and a code of practice. The policy framework for this work will be an adopted Core Strategy.

The growth area covers East Devon and Teignbridge and therefore it is preferable to have a CIL that is integrated with neighbouring districts, and vertically with the County Council. Therefore this summer our intention is to establish governance arrangements between the authorities for the introduction of a CIL. This work will be led through the Exeter and Heart of Devon Growth Board.

The Localism Bill has introduced the concept of neighbourhood plans and this suggests a level of community engagement that will require the Council to have clear protocols in place for engaging community groups and addressing requests for support. It is my intention that we bring forward a report on how the localism agenda will be addressed.

Affordable Housing

The government has profoundly changed the "affordable housing" product that it is willing to support financially. Affordable housing now includes housing that is 80% of an open market rent. The HCA no longer offer grant to subsidise the delivery of affordable housing as previously understood; instead registered providers will now be able to charge rents up to 80% of open market rents and use this increased income to fund new building. In practice this will significantly challenge our ability to delivery affordable housing at the levels historically produced in the City. Given that most affordable housing is likely to come forward through section 106 agreements, we will be working closely with the housing service to address the challenges of producing new dwellings in a fundamentally different policy and financial landscape.

Climate Change

The development of a local energy network to serve the City centre and Heavitree Road corridor to St Lukes and the RD&E is gaining momentum and this year we should see

stakeholders and the private sector energy companies develop a commercial proposition. The Energy partnership with E.ON will provide a platform for developing initiatives.

City Centre and Bus and Coach Station Site

The City Centre Vision is on the agenda of this meeting, a city centre transport study will be shortly concluded and this will provide the technical studies to underpin specific proposals.

We continue to work with Land Securities on a feasibility study of the redevelopment of the Bus and Coach Station site. A two year Exclusivity Agreement has been agreed in principle with Land Securities/Crown Estate to provide comfort to all parties during this process. The work is behind schedule and we had hoped to have received the feasibility study by now. However, developments with the John Lewis store at 1-11 Sidwell Street have given Land Securities reason to pause on the master planning work. This is understandable and we hope to receive the feasibility study in the autumn. The Concept master planning principles for the redevelopment of this site should be reported to a future meeting of Scrutiny committee later this year.

City Centre Enhancements

Members may have noticed the work currently being undertaken on Gandy Street. Works to Cowick Street and Northernhay Gardens are planned for later this year. Proposed improvements to the public realm outside the former Debenhams building are intended for later this year but precise timings will depend on the work programme for the John Lewis building.

Parking, waterways and flood prevention

It is important for all Members to realise that our ability to generate income from our assets, such as car parks and property, will be tested to the full because of the economic circumstances we face and I have therefore asked officers to pay very close attention to this in terms of the focus of their activities. With regard to parking, I believe we need to rebalance the competing claims of managing the City Council's off-street parking operations on the one hand against running civil parking enforcement on behalf of the County on the other. While the CPE role is clearly an important and high profile one, it is of little direct financial benefit to the City Council and over the next year I will be asking officers to focus in particular on the issue of how we can develop our own parking facilities to deliver a better service for customers and protect and grow income, rather than spending disproportionate management time on CPE-related matters.

We also need to devote time & effort to the City's key infrastructure. I have asked officers to bring forward new proposals for managing the river & canal function (which transferred into my portfolio last autumn) that not only reflect the continuing delay in receiving a decision from the Department for Transport on our future role as Harbour Authority but also the need to effectively meet the challenges associated with this. Dealing with the Department's decision, when it eventually comes, will be a significant task whichever way the decision goes; it will not be business as usual and we must ensure that the arrangements we have in place are fit for purpose.

I am also aware of the need for us as an organisation to engage seriously with the issue of flood risk (which in the wake of the severe floods of 2007, and continuing concerns over the effects of climate change, has moved significantly up the national agenda and has potentially major implications for Exeter). A number of Members will have attended a recent briefing by the Environment Agency outlining their early thoughts on how Exeter's flood defences might be improved, and in the next year I want officers to clarify the likely financial implications of various schemes and develop proposals for potential sources of funding. A paper on this issue will be brought to Scrutiny Committee for discussion in due course.

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