

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ECONOMY

9 JUNE 2005

EXETER SCIENCE PARK - PROGRESS UPDATE

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To update Members on progress towards developing the Science Park.
- 1.2 To inform Members of the Memorandum of Understanding being agreed between the partners working towards the proposed Science Park.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Exeter's Vision has, as one of its key themes, establishing the city as "a prosperous city" by promoting sustainable investment. The document refers to one of the key ingredients for the successful expansion of the Exeter economy as the development of a science park, in conjunction particularly with partners, including the University of Exeter, East Devon District Council, Devon County Council and the Met Office.
- 2.2 The Exeter and Heart of Devon Economic Partnership "Economic Development Strategy" has as one of its main objectives the development of an Exeter Science Park. The intention is that it would build upon the success of the University's Innovation Centre and "establish a key centre for scientific/technological excellence in the region that projects the scientific and business capability, capacity and ambition of the city and the sub-region".
- 2.3 The current "partners" have been meeting regularly to agree its specific purpose and the steps to be taken to bring it to fruition, including confirming the site, negotiations with land owner(s), determining site constraints and access issues and initiating discussions over potential support from the South West of England Regional Development Agency. The project is progressing to the extent that a more formal agreement between the partners is felt to be appropriate.

3. PROGRESS UPDATE

- 3.1 A project plan and timetable for laying the groundwork for delivering the Science Park has been agreed. The timetable focuses on:
 - establishing the Partnership, its authority and governance by the end of May 2005.
 - negotiating and managing the relationship with the land-owner
 - ensuring planning issues are dealt with appropriately and at an early stage by working together with East Devon District Council and Devon County Council
 - establishing a delivery mechanism/body and business plan

- handing over to the delivery body at an appropriate stage
- 3.2 Executive agreed on 14 September 2005 to support the costs of employing a Project Officer to progress important early stages of the initiative. A contribution of up to £25,000 per year for two years was agreed. Officers from partner organisations have been progressing matters to date but there is now the need to resource the necessary work more appropriately in order to build on the longer term working relationships which will contribute to its success.
- 3.3 The Partnership has agreed that the University should lead the project as the long term inter-relationship with a strong research based university and its Innovation Centre will be central to the success of the Science Park. The Partnership is now chaired by the Registrar of the University and the development project will be managed, on a day-to-day basis, by senior staff of the expanding Innovation Centre. There will be costs associated with the technical aspects necessary to prepare for the park and it is intended that the Council's contribution, along with other partners' financial support will be used to fund these.
- 3.4 Detailed discussions have taken place between the partners over the planning aspects of the project. In order to secure a successful and viable science park, there is a need to prepare a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which covers a number of specific aspects. The Partnership is commissioning on behalf of East Devon District Council specialist consultants to support the preparation of the SPD and in particular to:
- identify the most appropriate location for the development within the eastern part of the Exeter PUA, taking into account transportation and access issues
 - specify what is necessary to secure the quality of development desired, including landscape and architectural considerations
 - determine how East Devon District Council's planning and other powers can best be used to ensure that the development takes place as required and is restricted to "acceptable" Science Park occupiers.
- 3.5 The intention is to conclude this work by March 2006, including all necessary consultations.

4. MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

- 4.1 The "partners" have agreed that in view of the scale and importance of the project that there is a need for a more formal relationship between them. As an interim arrangement prior to determining the nature of the body needed to finally deliver and manage the science park, a Memorandum of Agreement has been agreed, as attached as Appendix 1, which sets out:
- the key characteristics of the proposed park
 - the role of and operation of the Partnership
 - the expected working practices and commitment of the partners
 - financial management responsibility

5. RECOMMENDATION that

- 5.1 Members note the progress made and support the Memorandum of Understanding between the partners working towards the development of the Science Park.

**RICHARD BALL
HEAD OF ECONOMY AND TOURISM**

ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

Background Papers used in compiling the report:-

None.