

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ECONOMY

5 June 2008

Present:

Councillor Margaret Baldwin (Chair)

Councillors Gale, Boyle, P Brock, Coates, A Hannaford, Martin, Newcombe, Noble, Sheldon, Starling, Wardle and Winterbottom

Director Economy and Development, Head of Economy and Tourism, and Member Services Officer (SLS)

Also present:

Councillor Mrs S R Brock - Portfolio Holder for Economy and Tourism
Councillor Wadham - Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Development and Transport

Also present:

Keith Cooper - Cooper Simms Consultancy
Steve Gerry - Cooper Simms Consultancy

18 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2008 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

19 Declarations of Interest

The following personal interests were declared:-

COUNCILLOR	MINUTE
Councillor Martin	20 Member of Exeter City Council Fair Trade Steering Committee) 22 (a Director of Heart of Devon Agency- HoDEA)
Councillor M Baldwin	22 (Company Secretary of Enterprise South Devon)
Councillor P Brock	22 (local shop owner)

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ECONOMY

20 Portfolio Holders to Present Their Priorities for the Forthcoming Year

Councillor Wadham presented the following priorities within the Transport and Sustainable Development Portfolio for the forthcoming year:-

Long Term Spatial Strategy - to meet the challenge of accommodating the growth in Exeter's population as envisaged by the Government. A response will be made to a further draft of the Regional Spatial Strategy, which is expected by the end of July; to bring forward the revised Local Development Framework Core Strategy by the

year end and to continue working with East Devon District Council and Devon County Council to deliver our commitment to the New Growth Point.

Affordable Housing - to include an enhanced 35% standard and a lower threshold in the revised Local Development Core Strategy.

Climate Change - use the planning system to encourage developers to meet higher standards of construction and insulation and to raise the percentage of renewables and underpinning this work by close working between Planning and Building Control.

Environmental Enhancements - implementation of the Fore Street, Heavitree Enhancement this summer, working with Devon County Council. Continue to develop plans for the enhancement of Cowick Street; other work includes the completion of Paris Street/ Sidwell Street improvements and proposals for the re-paving of Martin's Lane will be brought forward shortly. There will also be further consideration with the County Council on what other enhancements to secondary City Centre streets are justified.

Debenhams and the Bus Station Site - continue to develop high quality re-modelling of the exterior of the Debenhams tower to bring the site back into use as quickly as possible, as well as essential background work with preparation of a master plan for the Bus Station site to deliver a high quality bus interchange at the heart of the scheme.

Signing - continue working with Devon County Council to endorse the proposed new pedestrian signing system.

Demand Management - work with the County Council to limit growth in car traffic and improve reasonable air quality; maintain the focus on Park and Ride expansion, particularly on the A30 Western approach as well as continuing to support the Cycling Demonstration Town Project, Walking Strategy and TravelSmart project.

Civil Parking Enforcement - complete the transfer of the Traffic Warden function to the City Council, and continue to ensure the appropriate level of enforcement is maintained.

Councillor Wadham and the Director Economy and Development gave the following responses to Members' questions -

- A review of the affordable housing threshold should have a positive effect on increasing affordable housing stocks.
- Regarding parking enforcement, it was important to ensure that the lines and signs were correct, and he had every confidence that the level of enforcement was appropriate. The Director added that a glitch in the software affecting the handheld recorders used to issue tickets had now been resolved. They would continue to draw the County Council's attention to any incomplete signs and lines.
- The Director advised that a number of options on the future of the Bus Station site had been discussed with Stagecoach, including the possibility of seeking alternative sites for their engineering operations and for overnight bus parking.
- Sites in the vicinity of the A30 Western approach for a new Park and Ride have been identified and a number of suggestions were being explored.
- The Director stated that meeting the Council's target for delivery of affordable housing in the coming year was likely to present a challenging target due to the current downturn in the building trade. Further discussions on applying affordable housing policy to smaller developments will be brought forward for consideration later in the year following the finalisation of the Regional Spatial Strategy.

Councillor Mrs S R Brock presented the following priorities within the Economy and Tourism Portfolio for the forthcoming year:-

City Centre Regeneration - following on from the successful completion and launch of Princesshay, work will continue with Land Securities to deliver the re-modelling of the Debenhams building. Background studies which will form the basis of the Master Plan for the Bus Station will continue.

Street Markets - continue to develop the programme of markets including the weekly Farmer's Market and range of other seasonal and visiting markets throughout the year, including a special Christmas Market.

Tourism Promotion - improve the Quay House visitor and information facility, bringing forward a package of measures to promote sustainable tourism.

Regenerating the Canal Basin - continue working on the Old Electricity Building site and progress the Maclaines site and 60 Haven Rd through Sutton Harbour and the creation of 14 Affordable Housing Units by Signpost.

Economic Development Strategy - to continue working closely with the Exeter & Heart of Devon Economic Partnership and contribute to the review of the Economic Development Strategy.

Science Park – to progress the Council's foremost economic development commitment to develop the expansion of growth in science and technology, overseeing the completion of the master plan, the establishment of the Science Park Company and submission of a planning application by 2009.

Delivering other Employment Sites - working closely with landowners to release key sites in Exeter: support the expansion of the University being mindful of the impact on the local housing market.

Improving Skills - working with a range of partners to establish a successful Skills Board to improve the skills level of the workforce.

Review of the Arts Strategy - to oversee a refresh of the Arts Strategy with draft proposals being brought forward to Scrutiny Committee - Economy in September.

Property Portfolio - to continue to manage effectively the Council's property portfolio, investing in the fabric and facilities of the Corn Exchange to underpin its growing popularity.

Councillor Mrs S R Brock and the Director Economy and Development gave the following responses to Members' questions -

- Initial plans for the Debenhams tower include 94 flats with small retail outlets on the lower ground to first floor; there is no provision for office accommodation or any other leisure facility. A suggestion to let a portion of the retail outlets to green or independent traders would be for the developer to consider. The Director agreed that those involved were mindful of the need to ensure the quality of the end design.
- The Director advised that the main focus for upgrading works at the Corn Exchange was a refurbishment of the toilet facilities and renewal of a more sustainable pellet boiler heating system over the next two financial years.
- The suggestion for a Fair-Trade Market was welcomed by Councillor Brock. (Councillor Martin in stating this also declared an interest as a member of Exeter City Council Fair Trade Steering Committee)
- A suggestion for some remuneration for small businesses allowing use of their toilet facilities might be a way forward for the shortfall of facilities at the Quay was noted.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the reports of the Portfolio Holders for the forthcoming year.

(Report circulated)

21 **Exeter & Heart of Devon Economic Development Strategies 2008 - 2013**

The Head of Economy and Tourism presented the report seeking Members' views on the emerging Exeter and sub-regional economic development strategies covering the period 2008-2013. He referred to a review of the Exeter and Heart of Devon Economic Strategy by Cooper Simms Consultancy, and the work will also include a separate strategy focusing on specific issues related to the city.

Keith Cooper, a Director of the Cooper Simms Consultancy made a presentation and outlined the approach and methodology for the review, including a revision of the monitoring indicators as well as identifying new actions for 2008 – 2013. He had organised a series of interviews and workshops, which had raised a number of useful points. He also circulated details of a business survey which Members were invited to complete.

He outlined the Strategic Objective targets reached in the last five years and outlined Exeter's Specific Actions for the future including the following:-

- Continue to focus on the growing knowledge based organisations in the city, working with the Met Office, Science Park, University and Peninsula Medical School as catalysts for further investment
- Develop a clear strategy for occupants of the Science Park
- Promote the science city concept and maximise the occupation of both phases of the Innovation Centre
- Promote a dedicated conference facility in the city centre
- Aim to attract and retain public sector and other knowledge based industries
- Continue to develop business links with schools, including addressing low attainment in education and raising aspiration
- Address deprivation in priority areas of the city
- Work as a partnership to identify and seek funding for the 'liveability' elements in the city especially for the working age population
- Ensure appropriate membership of the EHOD partnership and develop its capacity to deliver

Keith Cooper responded to Member comments on the apparent desire to shift more commercial interest towards the east of Exeter, referring to the physical and geographical constraints of the remaining parts of the city. He clarified the funding arrangement for Cranbrook Station and new community at Cranbrook and the scope of the Inter Model Freight Terminal as a warehouse/ distribution depot.

The Chair thanked Keith Cooper for attending.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the report and supported the key aims and priorities as the basis for wider consultation.

(Report circulated)

22 **Support for Small Businesses**

Councillor M. Baldwin declared a personal interest as a company secretary of Enterprise South Devon. Councillor P J Brock declared a personal interest as a small shop owner. Councillor Martin also declared a personal interest as a Director of the Heart of Devon Enterprise Agency (HoDEA).

The Head of Economy and Tourism presented the report updating Members on changes to the advice and training offered for new and small businesses with the support of the City Council, and latterly through Enterprise South Devon. This has been a valuable service, and following consultation with the Portfolio Holder, an agreement had been reached with Peninsula Enterprise and the Innovation Centre to provide a coordinated approach to support for pre-start and new business from 1 June 2008.

A Member referred to the City Council's significant property portfolio and suggested that it would be useful to have a report on business premises and suggested one way to support business start up might be to offer lower rents, particularly where a business premises had a high turn over rate. The Director advised that only a small percentage of business premises, mostly in Exeter's business centre, were in City Council ownership, and so there was little influence on setting rental income. An annual report on the debtors and voids will be made in the autumn.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the report.

(Report circulated)

PERFORMANCE MONITORING

23 Capital Programme Monitoring (2007/08 Outturn)

The Director Economy and Development presented the report advising Members of the latest position with regard to the 2007/08 Capital Programme for Economy.

A complete list of capital projects was circulated and a number of projects were highlighted, including the works at the Canal Basin and Quayside. The Director responded to a Member comment stating that the cost of funding the drain diversion on the site adjoining 60 Haven Road was agreed in consultation with the Leader. In response to a query about the riddle in the paving in High Street, he said that remedial works were planned to improve the colour contrast.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the report.

(Report circulated)

24 Economy Scrutiny Stewardship 2007/08

The Director Economy and Development presented the report advising Members of the overall financial performance of the Economy and Development Directorate for the 2007/2008 financial year ended 31 March 2008. Details of the main variations by management units highlighted were set out. The Director responded to a comment and clarified the surrender detail of Haven Road Industrial Estate, advising that the City Council had now withdrawn from the intermediate relationship.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the report.

(Report circulated)

25 Performance Management Indicators 2007/08

The Director Economy and Development presented the report advising Members on the current position on key performance at the end of the year on a range of services across the Directorate. There were national indicators as well as locally set targets.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the report.

(Report circulated)

26 **Civil Parking Enforcement**

Councillor Prowse attended under Standing Order 44 to speak on this item.

The Director provided a verbal update on the establishment of the civil parking enforcement function in the city. The commencement of a working service has been a challenge for both the County and City Councils with the teams continuing to work closely to bring together three separate workforces – Exeter City Council's car parking attendants, the transfer of traffic wardens and the appointment of a number of new employees on new terms and conditions of service.

There has been a low key build up enforcement and it is recognised that a balance has to be struck between income and effective enforcement. There are currently a number of vacancies created by a number of traffic wardens who did not transfer, and advertisements for one senior and six civil enforcement officers will be placed shortly. Their appointment should address the concerns from both City and County Council Members regarding the appropriate level of enforcement will ensure a more comprehensive service for the city. A contact number for this service will be also be publicised.

Councillor Prowse addressed Members and welcomed the update particularly in respect of the situation regarding vacant posts. He asked if the City Council could further encourage the County Council to address his concerns over the legality of enforcement and the current state of the signs and lines in the city. The Director welcomed any information on erroneous signs and lines and outlined the current guidelines by civil enforcement officers when issuing parking tickets.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the report.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.40 pm

Chair