

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE -ECONOMY
7 JUNE 2007**

**EXECUTIVE
19 JUNE 2007**

CITY CENTRE STRATEGY FOR EXETER 2007-2012

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To outline the City Centre Strategy for Exeter 2007/12, recently agreed by the City Centre Executive and the City Centre Management Partnership Board (CCMPB) and to seek Members' comments on and support for it.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 This strategy sits within the context of a wider set of regional, sub-regional and Exeter-wide plans and policies (including the Regional Economic and Spatial Strategies, the Devon Local Transport Plan, the Exeter and Heart of Devon Economic Strategy, the Exeter Visitor and Tourism Strategy, the Exeter Vision, a developing Exeter Climate Change Strategy, Exeter Local Plan First Review and the emerging Exeter Local Development Framework). Its focus is on the particular issues and priorities facing the economic, social, administrative and civic core of Exeter, its City Centre.
- 2.2 The development and growth of the City Centre will also, in due course, be addressed through a City Centre Area Action Plan as part of Exeter City Council's Local Development Framework. This will consider proposals for spatial change in the City Centre up to 2021 and beyond. The City Centre Strategy and the City Centre Area Action Plan will be designed to complement each other.
- 2.3 A comprehensive audit of the City Centre was undertaken by CB Richard Ellis in 2005. A 'brainstorming' session to identify and agree strategic priorities and actions was held in late 2005 involving key City Centre figures. Consultation was also undertaken with business, with members of both the City Council and County Council and with other stakeholders. This strategy is the product of that earlier consultation and more recent discussion within the CCMPB. It takes as its starting point, the completion of Princesshay and the new opportunity this development affords.

3 STRATEGY CONTENT

3.1. Annex A provides a full copy of the strategy. The strategy begins with an assessment of Exeter City Council's current strengths and identification of areas where further progress would be desirable (pages 2 and 3 of the annex). It is proposed to also include a 10-year target for Exeter's progression within the hierarchy of retail centres. Quantification of this target will be determined once further information exploring the 'drivers' behind movement up/down the retail hierarchy becomes available. The target will be accompanied by a vision for the City Centre that in turn, helps to frame strategic aims and individual actions for the next 5 years. The vision outlined is for an Exeter City Centre which:

- builds on the things that make it distinctive and give it a competitive edge;
- delivers a positive first impression, particularly in the quality, sustainability and accessibility of its built environment;
- offers facilities and attractions that will enhance the vibrancy, diversity, status and prosperity of the City;
- provides, as a matter of course, a safe environment for all who use it.

3.2. The strategy goes on to define 4 aims with a number of associated projects for the period 2007-2012. These are described as:

1. Securing and building on Exeter City Centre's competitive advantage
2. Giving a better first impression
3. Delivering a vibrant centre which offers attractions for all
4. Achieving an even safer environment

3.3 **Aim 1: Securing and building on Exeter City Centre's competitive advantage**

The objective here is to build on a shared understanding among stakeholders of what makes Exeter and its City Centre unique. Key proposals -amongst others- include plans to bring forward the redevelopment of the bus station to significantly increasing the depth and breadth of the retail offer; and to continue to broaden the character of the city centre economy through the promotion of a café culture and extended retail hours.

3.4. **Aim 2: Giving a better first impression**

High quality, visually attractive and accessible public spaces, which allow a wide range of uses and activities, are essential to giving a better first impression. Significant and environmentally sensitive refurbishment of the current Debenhams building; again, the careful redevelopment of the bus station; the enhancement of the Queen Street approach to High Street, St David's and Central station and Park & Ride gateways; and continued investment in co-ordinated signage and information sources are all important. Doing more to reveal some of Exeter City Centre's hidden pockets (e.g. Coombe Street, Parliament Street etc) and increasing pedestrian 'connectivity' between Fore Street, the 'West Quarter' and the Quayside are also considered integral to delivering a better first impression.

3.5. **Aim 3: Delivering a vibrant centre which offers attractions for all**

A number of projects are planned which build on Exeter's generous array of facilities, events and civic resources, and which in turn will help to strengthen Exeter's position in the hierarchy of cities. These address the diversity of the City Centre economy, the character and accessibility of urban spaces within the City Centre (e.g. promotion of the Castle Quarter and other unique Quarters); the range of festivals and activities and, the nature and quality of public open spaces (and public art within them). Work on the RAMM, proposals for the Northernhay Gardens (subject to a successful bid for Heritage Lottery Funding), the future business-led refurbishment of the Rougemont Castle area and County Council plans for the redevelopment and extension of the Central Library are all important in this respect.

3.6. **Aim 4: Achieving an even safer environment**

Levels of crime and anti-social behaviour in Exeter are low compared with other similar cities. Nevertheless, a minority of Exeter residents do *feel* unsafe when in parts of the City Centre in the evening and at night. Negative perceptions have the potential to undermine long-term ambitions for the City Centre. A number of projects are therefore proposed which will help to maintain a quality and safe environment, one that is perceived as such by residents and visitors alike. In particular, an expansion of the 'Exeter Business against Crime' Initiative is planned, additional Police Community Support Officers are being provided, CCTV needs will continue to be reviewed and a 'Child-Safe Zone' (a nationally recognized initiative which establishes a clear protocol for missing children) will be offered.

4 MONITORING PROGRESS

4.1 Day-to-day monitoring of performance in relation to strategy aims will be led by the City Centre Manager who in turn, will report regularly to the CCMPB (City Council Members sit on this forum). Some elements of the strategy (proposals for the bus station in particular) will be brought forward through the City Centre Area Action Plan as part of the City Council's Local Development Framework.

4.2. To support effective performance monitoring and evaluation of individual projects, a 'baselining' exercise will be conducted by late Summer 2007 using the following broad indicators:

- Retail trade statistics, derived from regular anonymised/aggregated surveys of major retailers
- Vacancy rates and rental data
- Resident surveys (e.g. Wavelength)
- City Centre Car Park usage and revenues
- Pedestrian Footfall

4.3 Progress on these indicators will be reported regularly to the CCMPB.

5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. The strategy offers costs for a number of the schemes it outlines. Approval will be sought from relevant authorities in due course for those schemes that have so far not been subject to detailed specification and costing.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 That Members of Economy Scrutiny and Executive:

- Comment on and offer support for the City Centre Strategy and,
- Resolve to receive updates on progress in relation to it.

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

Background papers used in compiling the report:

None.