

SCRUTINY ECONOMY COMMITTEE 12 NOVEMBER 2009

Sustainable Development and Transport Portfolio Programme for 2009/10

Long Term Spatial Strategy

June Statement

As I previously reported, the key to a long term strategy for the City is the Secretary of State's decision on the Regional Spatial Strategy modifications. We are assured that these will be published at the end of June and based on her recent decision re the South East Regional Spatial Strategy, we might expect the South West's allocation to be towards the upper end of the range. If that is the case, the City will face a very challenging prospect of finding space for up to 15,000 dwellings within the City's existing boundaries. We will bring forward a revised Core Strategy by the end of this year and seek public views on that Strategy. In the length of time needed to take this through the approvals process, the Council will have to consider, during the latter part of this year, what interim measures it should take to ensure that a five year housing land supply is maintained.

Current Position

As Members are aware, there has been a significant delay in the publication of the Secretary of State's finalised Regional Spatial Strategy with the decision to commission further work on a sustainability appraisal which will not be available until the New Year. The City Council has, in the meantime, decided to go out to consultation on options for accommodating both 12,000 dwellings and a maximum of 15,000 dwellings. The 15,000 dwellings target is not one which we support but we are undertaking the consultation out of necessity to avoid the process being de-railed if the higher target is subsequently adopted by the Secretary of State. The consultation will be completed by 19 November and we will be reporting to Planning Member Working Group and Executive in early 2010 on the results of that consultation and the recommended way forward.

The New Growth Point

June Statement

Despite the impact of the recession on the housing market, progress is being made on the key projects which are being led by the New Growth Point. Given the combination of confirmed funding from the Department of Communities and Local Government, the Department for Transport, the Homes and Communities Agency and the three local authorities, it is very likely that the infrastructure that is needed for these projects will be delivered over the next two years or so. The infrastructure enhancements include the passing loop at Axminster (to provide hourly train services to Exeter), the Clyst Honiton Bypass, the main local route at Cranbrook, the enhancement to Junctions 29 and 30 and a new Walking/Cycling Bridge over the M5 between Gypsy Hill and the Science Park. Negotiations continue with the New Community Partners on key funding issues; the County Council has announced its joint venture partner for Skypark; and the Science Park is likely to see the construction of the first building starting on site in 2010.

Current Position

There has been very significant progress for the New Growth Point partners in the last six months with the grant of consent for Cranbrook and Skypark imminent and the consideration by East Devon of the Science Park application due on 17 November. Whilst this may at first sight appear to be slow progress, as Cranbrook and Skypark have been in the system for some considerable time, there has been a major restructuring of the funding of the infrastructure for these schemes to deal with the consequences of the Recession and extensive negotiations have had to take place over the last year to keep these projects on track. There has also been very good progress in negotiations between the New Community Partners, the New Growth Point, the Homes and Communities Agency and a leading energy provider to ensure that a Combined Heat and Power scheme is delivered at the start on site of development in this area. A comprehensive funding package is in place and a series of legal agreements are being negotiated which back up the planning consent and funding packages which will hopefully see a series of linked starts on site in Spring 2010. Enhancements to Junction 29 now sits with the Secretary of State for final decision and tenders are in preparation with a view to a contract being placed in mid 2010 for the construction work to start. Planning Consent has been given for the new Walking/Cycling Bridge over the M5 between Gypsy Hill and the Science Park.

Affordable Housing

June Statement

As previously outlined, we will include the enhanced 35% standard and the lower threshold in the revised Core Strategy to be published later this year. Achievement of full provision on each development will still be critically dependent on sufficient central government funding.

Current Position

There is no further progress on this position until the Core Strategy is published.

Climate Change

June Statement

Research which was commissioned by the New Growth Point has highlighted the scope for, and costs of, delivering low and zero carbon development. The scope for Combined Heat and Power is being assessed as part of the delivery of the various projects in the New Growth Point.

Current Position

As I outlined above the proposal for a Combined Heat and Power scheme to serve Skypark and Cranbrook is well advanced with a planning application imminent and funding in place to deliver it. Other CHP or renewable energy opportunities will be explored as part of the urban extension proposals for Monkerton, Newcourt and south west Exeter.

Bus Station Site

June Statement

We continue to work on the background studies for preparing a Master Plan for the Bus Station which include a Transportation Study, a Parking Study and an Archaeological Evaluation. This work will be completed in late 2009 enabling a full Master Plan to be prepared during 2010. It remains a commitment to provide a high quality public transport interchange at the heart of a mixed use, commercial scheme.

Current Position

Work on the Transportation Study is almost complete and the Parking Study is well underway, for completion by Christmas. The Archaeological Evaluation will shortly be on site. As a result of all of this work being completed early in the New Year, we will move to the preparation of a full Master Plan during 2010. It is not anticipated that there will be a start on site in less than five years.

City Centre Enhancements

June Statement

We have recently completed the re-paving of Martin's Lane and we are now developing proposals for the Gandy Street area. Following this work, we are looking at the Fore Street/North Street/South Street area that needs to be planned in conjunction with proposals for the High Quality Public Transport project on which Devon County Council are leading.

Current Position

Members have agreed to prioritise resources on improvements to Northernhay Street, the top of Fore Street and Gandy Street. Design proposals for Fore Street and for Northernhay Street have progressed, but the Gandy Street proposals are on hold whilst discussions regarding the Madhouse unit are completed.

Pedestrian Signing in the City Centre

June Statement

I am pleased to draw Members' attention to the completion of this very high quality scheme which has replaced the old finger posting system which was nearly 30 years old. It is a much more extensive, high quality signing system for pedestrians across the whole of the City centre. This work was completed in the early Spring and we are now installing City centre plans in our car parks.

Current Position

As previously indicated, this work is now complete.

Cowick Street Enhancement

June Statement

Having completed work at Heavitree Fore Street we are keen to see a range of enhancements at Cowick Street and consultation on a number of options was completed before Easter. I am expecting to see detailed proposals put before Planning Member Working Group very shortly for implementation in 2010.

Current Position

Outline design work is proceeding well with full public consultation having taken place in August and three meetings of the Steering Group dealing with more detailed design work having taken place since then. Unfortunately London and Cambridge Properties are not prepared to participate in this scheme and so the focus is on most of the length of Cowick Street and adjacent streets. The design is being very much driven by local residents and we will be reporting back on progress to the November meeting of Planning Member Working Group, with the likelihood of a final public consultation in January 2010.

Long Term Transportation Strategy

June Statement

We will continue to work with the County Council to find a package of measures that will limit the growth in car traffic and ensure reasonable air quality. We welcome the County Council's commitment to expand Park and Ride and we are working with

them on the development of their High Quality Public Transport proposals. I continue to believe that the interests of the City centre are best served by effective traffic management which puts pedestrians and shoppers ahead of the convenience of motorists. We want to work with the County Council to ensure that this is achieved.

Current Position

The County Council has now started work on the preparation of Local Transport Plan 3 (for the period 2011-16) which is scheduled for submission to the Department for Transport by late 2010. Given the questions posed earlier by Council with regard to the operation of Paris Street, it is apparent to me that we need a comprehensive City Centre Transport Strategy and I am hopeful that the County Council will work with us over the next few months to prepare such a Strategy for consultation.

Concessionary Travel

June Statement

This continues to be of very significant concern for the Council in that we have incurred costs in excess of £1.3 million during 2008/09, over and above the grant aid provided by government. In the current year we expect this cost to increase to £1.67 million, and thus we are engaged in continuing lobbying efforts to change the system in the longer term, but more crucially, to amend the grant formula in 2010/11 to overcome the inequity whereby there are some ten authorities with deficits in excess of £1 million and there are many other authorities who are receiving grant in situations where their costs have declined from previous years.

I am also pleased to say that we are about to sign the agreement with Stagecoach which caps the Council's liability for reimbursing the cost of the scheme to Stagecoach in return for a three year deal. In the light of two other authorities where Stagecoach have successfully appealed against the established reimbursement rate, this looks like a good outcome for Exeter.

Current Position

The City Council has recently had the opportunity to re-state its case by virtue of a ministerial delegation in September. The response from the Minister was very positive with a clear commitment to address the funding shortfall in 2010/11 which we have identified. It is hoped that a revised funding formula will be published in the near future which will address our concerns for 2010/11 (though not for 2008/09 or 2009/10).

Civil Parking Enforcement

June Statement

The Council assumed responsibility for on-street parking enforcement in May 2008 and since then has been developing the service in response to the priorities of the County Council (as highway authority) and local residents. The response to the Council's running of the service has been largely favourable and there is ongoing dialogue between the service, the County Council and local residents on how further improvements can be delivered in the current year. One of the particular aspects of the service I hope to see developed in the coming year is extended evening enforcement.

Current Position

Since the last report in June, there have been a number of positive developments in relation to the operation of civil parking enforcement. These include a redesign of beats to improve both effectiveness and coverage, higher levels of Sunday enforcement in residents' parking zones, and the launch of motorcycle patrols to deliver more rapid reactive enforcement. The motorcycle

team have responded to 128 specific requests for enforcement action since the introduction of this service and, as a result of all these initiatives, the number of calls and complaints to the enforcement 'hotline' have decreased sharply.

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Portfolio Holder Sustainable Development and Transport**