

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ECONOMY

7 June 2007

Present:

Councillor Adrian Fullam (Chair)

Councillors Martin, Choules, Coates, Mrs Evans, Gale, Hannaford, Moore, Pettinger, Prowse, Sterry, Wadham and Winterbottom

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

Also present:

Councillor John Shepherd - Exeter City Council
Councillor Greg Sheldon - Exeter City Council

25. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 March 2007 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

26. Declarations of Interest

The following personal interests were declared:-

COUNCILLOR	MINUTE
Councillor Choules	29 and 32 (employee of Exeter University)
Councillor Hannaford	29 (Devon County Councillor)

27. Portfolio Holders to Present the Priorities for the Coming Year

Councillor P J Shepherd (Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Development and Transport) and Councillor G N Sheldon (Portfolio Holder for Economy and Tourism) presented a verbal report on the priorities for the forthcoming year in light of the Committee's work programme.

Councillor Shepherd highlighted the key areas for the Planning and Sustainable Development Portfolio:-

- **Policy** - to finalise the core strategy as part of the Local Delivery Framework, including Issues and Options papers for the City Centre Area Action Plan and East of Exeter Area Action Plan; to produce planning guidance on renewable energy and affordable-housing planning obligations; to continue to work with the University to draw up Supplementary Planning Guidance in relation to dealing with over-

concentrations of students in certain areas in the city; and to participate in the development of the Regional Spatial Strategy.

- **Climate Change** – to develop the planning and transportation lead in relation to the White Paper on Planning for a Sustainable Future, including using planning powers to encourage greater energy efficiency in commercial property developments.
- **Future Projects** - to support the latter stages of the development of Princesshay to ensure its opening in October; to continue to develop a scheme for Debenhams with conversion to retail, leisure and residential; and to continue to consider options for the future redevelopment of the Bus Station site.
- **City Centre Environment** - to finalise works in the city centre including improvement works in Lower High Street by the end of the summer, and enhancement of Cathedral Yard with the final section being laid in Cathedral Close by the end of July.
- **The New Growth Point** - to progress a joint project with East Devon District Council and Devon County Council for the development of Cranbrook, support for the TIF (Transport Innovation Funding) bid for a new transport system in the centre; the proposed Skypark, Intermodel Freight Terminal and Science Park.
- **Local Centres** – to progress the local enhancements for Heavitree, and commence the consultation process for Cowick Street with preparation of a detailed proposal for similar environmental enhancements.
- **Natural Environment** - to progress the Wild City projects through the general planning framework.
- **Transportation** – to support the County Council's TIF bid to tie in with the Park and Ride Strategy and identification of future sites particularly on the west side of the city; to manage the Concessionary Fare Scheme and consider the future funding mechanism particularly when the national scheme begins in April 2008 and reimbursement costs will be calculated from the departure point of passengers; to continue lobbying to improve the First Great Western franchise and maintain the Cross Country rail service; support an upgrade of St David's Station and Central Station gateways and further develop walking and cycling opportunities.

The following responses were given to Members :-

- The Portfolio Holder shared a Member's concern about the inadequacy of the rate of supply of new social housing for rent, and said that he hoped this would be given higher priority under the Brown administration.
- He said that the TIF bid would not be effected by the outcome of the unitary bid and cooperation between Exeter City Council and Devon County Council to help develop a city-wide solution to congestion will continue whatever the outcome.
- He said that charging has commenced at Topsham's Holman Way car park and that there were no plans at present to expand the car park.

Councillor Sheldon highlighted the key areas for the Economy and Tourism Portfolio:-

- **To Promote City Centre Vitality** – to continue to work on Princesshay with both Land Securities and McAlpines to ensure that it is open by October; to support the New Underground Passages Heritage Centre which will be open in September; as well as a purpose built Tourist Information Centre (Exeter Visitor information and Tickets) due to be fitted out from July; to support a detailed proposal for the regeneration of the Debenhams site delivering a mixed use retail and housing scheme by the end of the year; oversee the development of the draft City Centre Strategy working with the City Centre Management Partnership Board to finalise the document by the end of the year; working with key city centre partners to develop the Christmas Launch and a range of activities throughout November and December; to continue to work to develop the Exeter Festival of South West Food and Drink also working with the owners of the Castle and hopefully join up the event with the High Street.
- **Quay/Canal Basin** – to complete a number of projects including the Custom House and Cricklepit and progress the refurbishment of the Old Electricity Building, Maclaines Warehouse and 60 Haven Road and the adjacent sites.
- **Economic Development** - to continue to provide a proactive service for inward investment to small, medium and large companies wishing to relocate to Exeter, and help existing Exeter companies overcome barriers to expansion; further joint working with East Devon District Council providing information and a support service to create a joined up economic development service for Exeter and the sub region; to progress the Science Park and Innovation Centre, working with partners to submit a planning application for the Science Park by Spring 2008 and help secure sufficient funding by 2012 and develop the activities of the Innovation Centre; build on the newly merged Enterprise Agency to strengthen support for start up businesses, facilitate workforce development working groups such as Job Centre Plus, Connexions and the Learning and Skills Council to help deliver the key objectives of the Workforce Development Plan; and to continue monitoring the Positive Steps funding programme to help benefit the most disadvantaged getting into employment.
- **Tourism** –to build on the attractions and improvements to the city centre and work with partners to attract more day and short break visitors to the city.
- **Arts and Festivals** - to continue to develop a range of viable festivals to add to the city's cultural calendar; to continue to work with the main venues of the city to provide the majority of the city's range of cultural performances, events and exhibitions.
- **Property** – to continue to manage the extensive commercial portfolio in an efficient and proactive way; to support the refurbishment work of Debenhams; and to build on the relaunch of the St George's Hall as the Exeter Corn Exchange.

The following responses were given to Members :-

- Cricklepit would be completed by the summer.
- although there was disappointment over the closure of Foodeaze, every effort would be made by the Administrator to secure new tenants.
- that some investigation of possible funding towards developing a Christmas lighting scheme for district centres such as Heavitree and Cowick Street would be investigated.

The reports of the Portfolio Holders for the forthcoming year were noted.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY EXECUTIVE

28. City Centre Strategy for Exeter 2007 - 2012

The City Centre Manager presented a report, outlining the draft City Centre Strategy for Exeter 2007 – 2012, and gave a presentation that provided the background and context from which the Strategy had been developed. He outlined detail behind the Strategy's four main aims to :-

- Secure and build on Exeter City Centre's competitive advantage
- Give a Better First Impression
- Deliver a vibrant centre which offers attractions for all
- Achieve an even safer environment

The City Centre Manager responded to the following Member questions:-

- that a range of initiatives have made a positive contribution to dealing with anti-social behaviour, including additional city centre PCSO's (Police Community Support Officers), city centre CCTV, EBAC (Exeter Businesses Against Crime) and 'designing-out' crime and anti-social behaviour. Every effort is being made to encourage as many restaurants and cafes to open for as long as possible, as well as extending retail hours and make a connection between the day time and evening economy.
- the Director confirmed that the planned Bus Station redevelopment timetable (planning consent targeted for 2012) was challenging and that there were no plans to site an indoor market in that location. There were also no plans to re-site the Farmers Market as the difficulties of finding a central location, which could be effectively serviced were well documented. Members have taken the decision to invest in the present site with new stalls, but an open mind will be kept if any future options arise.
- although there is currently no specific detail relating to improving the environment of Little Queen Street and the surrounding area, a range of issues affecting Gandy Street including aggressive begging, 'signposting', illegal car and service vehicle parking and unsatisfactory traffic enforcement all need to be addressed once the current enhancement and construction works are completed.
- feedback from the new businesses in Bedford Street has been positive to date, with retailers confident of hitting their targets. The Director added

that a retail impact assessment will be carried out in late 2008 or early 2009, prior to taking forward further major city centre retail development.

- it is also anticipated that a report on Park and Ride, with a proposal for a facility on the west side of the city, can be brought forward to Members in the near future.
- enquiries about the status of the regeneration of Rougemont and Northernhay Gardens and about the level of street clutter in Martins Lane would be made and the Member contacted.
- any decision on taking forward a Business Improvement District proposal for the city centre would be widely discussed and Members were reassured that businesses would need to vote on a BID proposal.
- the state of some of the upper floors of shop premises on High Street was noted and there may be scope for further city centre living and accommodation following on from the success of Princesshay residential development and sales.

Scrutiny Economy supported approval by Executive of the draft City Centre Strategy, and noted that regular updates on progress would be made to Scrutiny Committee - Economy.

(Report circulated)

29. Proposed Science Park

Councillor Choules declared a personal interest as an employee of Exeter University. Councillor Hannaford declared a personal interest as a Member of Devon County Council.

The Head of Economy and Tourism outlined the case for an investment of £750,000 towards the development of the proposed Science Park, as a contribution towards the first stage of the project. A Business Plan has now been prepared, which includes a financial plan with broad details of the proposed investment needs and proposals for future management of the Science Park.

A Member enquired about the contribution made by the City Council and what level the University and County Council would be making. He was advised that the University were investing a similar amount with the County Council still to determine their contribution. The Member queried the future status of the venture, should Exeter's unitary bid be successful and was advised that based on the commitment of all partners in the last two years, the progression of this project was likely to remain unchanged as the Science Park represents a real economic opportunity for the whole sub region.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the report and recommended to Executive that the investment of £750,00 be approved.

(Report circulated)

30. Staffing Proposal for Economy and Development Directorate

The Director Economy and Development presented a report, seeking Member approval for additional staffing to meet new service requirements in Building Control, within the Economy and Development Directorate. Funding for the additional resource was previously allocated in the budget.

Scrutiny Committee - Economy noted the report and supported Executive approval for the alterations to the establishment as set out in the report.

(Report circulated)

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ECONOMY

31. Draft Climate Change Strategy for Exeter 2007 - 2012

The Director presented a report, which provided a short overview of relevant policy issues identified in the Draft Climate Change Strategy for Exeter 2007 to 2017 and sought Member comment and endorsement towards preparation of the final Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan by January 2008. Due to the cross cutting nature of climate change issues, this report was also discussed at Scrutiny Committee – Community. A number of initiatives were outlined including the introduction of a small additional ‘carbon offset’ levy on city centre off-street car park charges, which could be used to fund sustainable transport and energy initiatives within Exeter.

Members welcomed the report and made the following comments:-

- concern about congestion and air pollution levels particularly on the main corridors of Topsham Road and Alphington. He suggested there should be lobbying for cheaper bus fares. The Director responded that whilst bus fares were comparatively high in Exeter, under the current legislation, fares were set solely by the operator of the commercial bus network.
- that where possible the emphasis of public consultation should be to engage as fully as possible, particularly with those who did not normally respond.
- an effort be made to seek inclusion of the St Thomas area in the £1 city bus zone.
- the locality of schemes should be emphasised.
- concern that after the consultation and final document, there will be a tangible strategy and direction.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the report, and offered their endorsement of the research and consultation process outlined towards producing a Final Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan.

(Report circulated)

32. Capital Programme Monitoring Report (2006/07 Outturn)

Councillor Choules declared a personal interest as an employee of Exeter University.

The Director Economy and Development presented a report, advising Members of the latest position with regard to the 2006/07 Capital Programme for Economy, and provided a summary of the position at the end of the financial year. A number of projects were highlighted including Beacon Lane Shops, Cathedral Yard and Custom House.

A Member referred to difficulties in accessing the funding opportunities for Conservation Area enhancements. The Director updated Members on the efforts to recruit staff in Planning Services and gave an assurance that once vacancies had been filled, the backlog of work would be addressed. A Member complemented the approach and materials used in the Cathedral Close enhancement works.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the report.

(Report circulated)

33. Economy Scrutiny Revenue Final Accounts 2006/2007

The Director presented the details of the overall financial performance of the Economy and Development Directorate for the 2006/07 financial year ending 31 March. The report highlighted the major differences by management unit from the approved budget and the overall outturn position with a £590,742 surplus. Details of the main budgets highlighted were set out.

A Member asked whether proposals in the Planning White Paper would effect planning income. The Director advised that there was an impact on the Planning Services unit with each change in the planning system. A discussion on the White Paper 'Planning for a Sustainable Future' will be held at Planning Member Working Group to agree a proposed response.

Scrutiny Committee - Economy noted the report.

(Report circulated)

34. Performance Management Indicators

The Director Economy and Development presented a report, which advised Members on the current position of key performance indicators.

In response to a comment on staffing in Planning Services, the Director confirmed that there were vacancies in Planning but interviews were being held shortly. One of the main issues facing recruitment was being able to offer the appropriate remuneration. There were currently 7 posts vacant out of a total of 35 in Planning Services. Members' comments would be passed to the Strategic Management Team and the Chair and portfolio holders would be advised of the results of the current recruitment exercise.

Scrutiny Committee - Economy noted the report.

(Report circulated)

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.35 pm

Chair