

EXETER BOARD

Thursday 25 September 2014

Present:-

Exeter City Council
Councillors Baldwin, Robson and Sutton

Devon County Council
Councillors Foggin, Hannaford, Hannan, Hill, Leadbetter, Owen and Westlake

Associate Members
Jude Taylorson (Faith Groups)

Also Present

Partnership and Policy Development Officer, Head of Youth Service, Community Involvement and Inclusion Officer, Neighbourhood Highways Manger (Exeter and East Devon), Democratic Services Officer (Committees) (HB)

APOLOGIES

These were received from Councillor Branston, Simon Bowkett and Geoff Pringle.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 17 JULY 2014

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2014 be taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

OPEN FORUM

Transport Issues in SW Exeter

Lynn Wetenhall of the Campaign for SW Exeter Smarter Travel (CWEST) put the following question to the Board under the Open Forum arrangements.

“Given the considerable disquiet expressed by both Councillors and many members of the public over the last four years regarding transport issues in SW Exeter and the building of 3,000 new homes, do Councillors agree that proposed transport solutions for SW Exeter, including the proposed park and ride on protected River Valley Park land, are urgently in need of some fresh thinking? We would also ask Councillors to secure transparency about what is going in and what is planned with regard to transport issues in SW Exeter, as there is a lot of interest in the topic.”

The Devon County Council position statement on the South West Urban Extension was circulated in response, Members briefly commenting on the importance of ensuring that transport solutions for the Exeter were sustainable given future development proposals for the City.

Responding, Ms Wetenall asked for greater clarity and transparency as proposals were brought forward, suggesting that a preferred approach should be to examine more radical solutions to the growing transport requirements of the City. In particular, she felt that the strategic roles of the County Council and the Local Economic Partnership should be clarified.

RESOLVED that the County Council Cabinet holder for Economy, Growth and Cabinet Liaison for Exeter and the Head of Planning, Transportation and Environment meet with CWEST to discuss the issues raised further.

Concessionary Car Park Permits

Beryl James put the following question to the Board under the Open Forum arrangements:-

“Will ECC continue to provide concessionary car park permits for city centre residents who do not qualify for street parking zone permits?”

In April 2014, the Council suspended the issue of residents permits to new residents to (I quote) 'close a loophole arising from car parking space lost to re-development twenty years ago'. This suspension was reversed following a public outcry, but the situation remains uncertain. It also remains an unfair anomaly, as residents who have zoned parking and on-street permits pay £20 per annum and can have two permits per household. The car park permits cost £125 per annum.

Many houses in St David's rely on concessionary parking permits because streets are too narrow for parking. These are good quality houses that attract professional people to live in the city centre.

I contend that failure to guarantee one permit per household will adversely affect the whole city centre because:

- The city centre is becoming saturated with purpose built student flats and there is a danger of creating an unbalanced immature (and sometimes irresponsible) young and transient population.
- Surveys have shown that attracting residents to city centres make them safer places for everyone to enjoy.
- Permanent residents and owner occupiers provide valuable support to community policing by reporting problems such as drug taking and noise nuisance.
- Residents care for their homes and communities, picking up litter, maintaining Victorian and Georgian housing, keeping historic areas, such as St David's, attractive for tourists led by Red Coat guides. Exeter lost so much of its heritage in 1942: a short sighted and wrong decision now could cost us much of what is left
- Uncertainty over the retention of the permit scheme has resulted in difficulties in attracting owner-occupiers when properties are being sold. These owners need to sell and may find that their only option is to sell to landlords or suffer hardship from being unable to sell at all. Either option will mean that lively city centre areas will become neglected and forlorn.
- The opinion of at least one councillor (expressed to me personally) that those living in the city centre should not expect to own a car is unreasonable, undemocratic, short-sighted and potentially damaging to the city centre. Most residents use their cars less, but still need to own one.
- I urge you to see Exeter as more than a retail paradise and to support city centre residents.

The Chair advised that a report covering the concessionary parking permit issue was currently being drafted and would be heard by the City Council's Scrutiny Committee - Economy on 13 November. It was noted that the parking permit administration had been passed over to the County Council by the City Council and that the issuing of permits was being examined as part of a wider review of car parking in the City currently being undertaken. Reference was made to particular parking problems experienced in areas of the City with a high student population.

Responding, Ms James stated that problems were not confined to student areas and urged the Scrutiny Committee not to adopt an anti-car stance.

RESOLVED that the question and comments of the Board be passed to the City Council's Portfolio Holder for Economy and Culture for inclusion in the report to, and for consideration by, the Scrutiny Committee - Economy.

EXETER COMMUNITY TRANSPORT ASSOCIATION

The Chair welcomed Mike Ellis and Chris Gale to the meeting.

Mike Ellis explained the work of the Association and the background to its funding requirements. It had operated from 1997, moving to its current premises on the opening of Princesshay. In the last 18 months, 2,135 people had been supported, less than 10% of whom were from outside Exeter. Its total running costs were approximately £120,000, with the County and City Councils providing 35% of its funding needs, compared with 70% in Plymouth. He had been in post for six years and had secured lottery funding for the first two years of this period, although staffing had been reduced from eight to two full time employees. It was run as a charity and it explored all avenues for obtaining financial support. A recent appeal to local businesses for a £1 a day support over 12 months for company logos to be displayed on wheelchairs had failed to raise any interest, despite figures showing that each visit to the City Centre by wheelchair users resulted in significant spend.

The re-location to Princesshay had led to a 35% increase in usage because of the highly visible location, although it was possible that Land Securities could identify an alternative base in the centre. Although the service had been free originally, an initial charge of £3 had been increased to £5.

Over the years, local authority support had been for specific projects rather than on-going revenue support. The Funding Sub Group was currently considering an application for £2,000 towards the cost of replacing the aging fleet of mobility scooters, powered wheelchairs and manual wheelchairs. The Board supported this application.

The Chair thanked Mike Ellis and Chris Gale for attending.

RESOLVED that:-

- (1) a grant of £2,000 be made to the Exeter Community Transport Association towards the cost of scooters and wheelchairs; and
- (3) the Chair, Deputy Chair and Councillor Hannaford meet with the Association to discuss the potential for securing a more secure, on-going financial commitment from the County and City Councils.

DEVON YOUTH SERVICE PROPOSED LOCATION OF EXETER HUB

The County Council's Head of Youth Service reported on progress with establishing the 100 Club as Exeter's youth hub and the centre of the network of provision for the City. The re-structure would see a reduction in County wide staff from 210 to 55, the new structure to be operational from 8 November 2014, when 50% of the staff work would be youth centre based and 50% targeted outreach. The County Council Youth Service was co-ordinating discussions with groups and organisations interested in developing youth services in Exeter and who were offering to take on the operation of the three youth centres at Phoenix Centre, Wonford, the Knight Club, Beacon Heath and Westside Centre, St Thomas, Cowick. It was suggested that a further priority would be the development of a joint youth strategy for Exeter for the betterment of teenagers in the City and would need to cover issues such as play, housing services and health and wellbeing. The development of this strategy would include a wide selection of partners, consultations and input. A Member asked for particular attention to be given to play area provision which, he felt, was in danger of being neglected.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Skills had asked the Board to support the development of community capacity in the three sites from its Community Grant Fund so that the County Council could favourably consider grant funding, from the £200,000 allocated by Cabinet, from the Community Infrastructure Support Fund, for capacity building in Devon.

The Chair welcomed Peter Stephenson of Exeter YMCA and Richard Cummings of ISCA Church to the meeting, their organisations having come forward with offers to take on the running of the three youth centres in the City.

Peter Stephenson circulated a paper (attached to minutes) outlining proposals to run the above centres at Wonford, Beacon Heath and Cowick. The YMCA proposed a different format to that of the County Council Service in that management of the centres would focus on the whole community whilst retaining an interest in serving young people and generating a surplus to enable YMCA Exeter to deliver youth work in each location. A wide range of individuals and organisations would be encouraged to use the YMCA Centres and it was the intention for many services to be delivered by other organisations.

He emphasised the complex nature of the project and the legal obligation under charity legislation to carry out due diligence. It was currently collating information on building conditions, community needs etc. to develop a robust business plan. Whilst it was believed that the centres had the potential to generate a surplus to cross subsidise youth provision in each location there would be a minimum of two years for an effective business to emerge. Pump priming was therefore vital to cover initial losses. The YMCA was working on an interim plan to deliver two sessions per week in each of the three Exeter centres over 12 months at a cost of £35,500.

Richard Cummings of ISCA Church, based in Beacon Heath, spoke on the Church proposal to run the Knight Club. The Church had been active in the area for a number of years, ran two after-school clubs and was keen to ensure the continuation of a youth service in the area. It was aware of the YMCA proposal and prepared for it to run the Centre if its proposals were supported. If the Church was the viable alternative, it acknowledged that the continuation of the service would be on the basis of serving the whole community.

Members referred to the short timescale to respond to the County Council's decision for the City's youth service to operate out of a single hub and of the urgency in reaching agreement to ensure the maintenance of a robust youth service in Exeter. It was crucial to secure, in the first instance, an interim youth service and to maintain a physical presence with the three remaining centres to remain open during the transition period. Urgent clarification was therefore required on funding commitments and appropriate management mechanisms. The YMCA, or other organisations would need to be re-assured that assuming initial management responsibility would not entail long term responsibility for the buildings and that an appropriate, interim lease arrangement would therefore need to be secured to allow for the early occupation of the buildings. Longer term agreements for occupation could then be developed. The County Council Estates Department was working on this.

For the County Council to consider grant funding for the three centres from the £200,000 Community Infrastructure Support Fund, a funding commitment was sought from the Board. Such bids had already been submitted from other towns in Devon with view to match funding. It was noted that the Board had already identified £15,000 for support for the identified centres but further guidance from the County Council Cabinet was required on the level of its contribution as well as the contribution proposed by the Board. Peter Stephenson asked for a firm commitment to provide funding in order for the YMCA to proceed with its preparatory work. Without funding identified and the leasing arrangements confirmed, it was likely that the youth centres would be shut for a certain period.

The Chair thanked Peter Stephenson and Richard Cummings for attending.

RESOLVED that:-

- (1) the Board agree to nominally offer £15,000 match funding to ensure continuation of the Youth Centres;
- (2) the Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Skills be asked to clarify the level of funding from the £200,000 allocated for capacity building in Devon; and
- (3) if necessary, a Special Board Meeting be held in light of the County Council's Cabinet Member's decision.

FUNDING SUB GROUP

RESOLVED that:-

- (1) the minutes of the Funding Sub Group of 30 July 2014 be noted;
- (2) Membership of the Sub Group be confirmed as the chair, Deputy Chair, Councillors Baldwin, Hannaford, Owen, Prowse and Westlake; and
- (3) the date of the next meeting of the Sub Group of 4 November 2014 be noted.

WEED KILLING IN EXETER

The Neighbourhood Highways Manager (Exeter and East Devon) reported that, of the County Council wide allocation of £343,916, for Weed Clearance, approximately £25,500 of the weed spraying budget had been allocated for Exeter. The £20,400 allocated Countywide for the Community Payback scheme would fund approximately 15-20 days of work to be undertaken in Exeter.

A meeting had been held between the County and City Council's on 22 September, to agree the correct timetabling of weedspraying for the autumn and effective use of the £25,500, including the categorisation of routes to be cleared. A programme of targeted weed pulling on strategic routes and key areas of the City had been agreed with a mechanical sweeper to clear weeds from kerb edges. In addition, a proportion of the £20,500 had been allocated to Community Payback to work in residential areas, after spraying by the City Council. Money would also be allocated for weed clearance on central reservations. A commitment had also been made for the early use, in 2015, of £20,000 from the Exeter Board's 2015/16 budget to prevent a repeat occurrence in this Rugby World Cup year.

A Member referred to the dangers to pedestrians, particularly the elderly, of grass and weeds hiding bumpy footpaths, cracked pavements etc.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and the use of £20,000 from the Exeter Board's budget for early weed spraying in 2015 be supported.

FEEDBACK FROM MEMBER REPRESENTATION ON MULTI AGENCY GROUPS

(a) Exeter Health and Well Being Board

The Board noted the minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2014.

(b) Community Safety Partnership

The Board noted the minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2014.

DATES OF MEETINGS 2014/15 AND BUSINESS

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(a) Board Meetings – all at 6.00pm

Tuesday 15 November 2014 (Civic Centre)

Tuesday 15 January 2105 (Civic Centre)

Thursday 28 April 2015 (County Hall)

Thursday 23 July 2015 (Civic Centre)

Thursday 24 September 2015 (County Hall)

(b) Future Business

(i) University of Exeter – Role in City

(ii) Location OF Community Assets in the City

(iii) Transition Town Exeter and Economic Development Strategy

(iv) Exeter Cultural Strategy

(v) Exeter Respect

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and closed at 8.08 pm)

Chair