

## **REPORT TO EXECUTIVE**

Date of Meeting: 3 November 2020

## **REPORT TO COUNCIL**

Date of Meeting: 15 December 2020

Report of: Chief Executive and Growth Director

Title: Building Exeter Back Better – Exeter’s Covid-19 recovery plan

### **Is this a Key Decision?**

No

### **Is this an Executive or Council Function?**

Council

#### **1. What is the report about?**

In June 2020, Executive approved the production of a place-based recovery plan to support the city’s recovery from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Executive noted that the work would be led and coordinated by Council officers – with the input of other key city stakeholders – and that the Liveable Exeter Place Board would be asked to adopt the plan on behalf of the city. The plan was to have a focus on seven areas of recovery;

- Business Support
- The City Centre
- Community and Wellbeing
- Construction and Development
- Education
- Transport
- Visitor Economy (Culture and Tourism)

The recovery plan was to be based on 6 guiding ‘principles of recovery’. These principles were to be that the city would;

1. Work on the basis of a ‘build back better’ strategy, avoiding sub-optimal quick fixes or ‘replacement recovery’ that recreate the pre-Covid-19 status quo.
2. Aim for innovation and transformation, seeking progress on key priorities for the city, for instance: the climate emergency, clean inclusive growth, health and wellbeing, community cohesion, inequalities and cultural growth.
3. Plan with robust evidence of damage and needs assessment, setting ‘build back better’ development or transformational goals and outcomes.
4. Increase resilience for future pandemics (and other societal crises).

5. Collaborate with regional and sub-regional arrangements and our neighbours and showcase success in innovating and collaborating for shared outcomes, and;
6. Work with our communities to understand local issues and ensure co-delivery of this plan.

Executive also requested that progress be report back to Executive at a future date. This report now provides an update on the work undertaken since June 2020 and seeks approval of the draft 'Building Exeter Back Better' recovery plan.

## **2. Recommendations:**

Executive is asked to;

- (1) Welcome the work undertaken by the seven recovery groups in developing a place-based and sector-specific action plan, with associated 'asks', to counter the effects of Covid-19 upon the city, and notes the endorsement of the Liveable Exeter Place Board of the draft recovery plan document, on behalf of key stakeholders within the city;
- (2) Recommend to Council that the recovery plan be adopted; and
- (3) Executive note that the resources required to progress the various initiatives within the recovery plan will be a blend of funding sources, ranging from asks of central Government, regional funding pots, a variety of local and national funding, city council and private sector funding.

## **3. Reasons for the recommendation:**

The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the country have proved to be profound; the monthly decline in national GDP in April 2020 was three times greater than the fall experienced during the 2008 to 2009 economic downturn<sup>1</sup>; reported mental distress was 8.1% higher in April 2020 than it was between 2017 and 2019<sup>2</sup> and; as of 20<sup>th</sup> September 2020, over 9.4m jobs had been furloughed at a total cost to the Exchequer (to date) of £28.7bn<sup>3</sup>.

Whilst data suggests that Exeter has not been as severely affected by the pandemic as others parts of the country seeing, for example, amongst the lowest rises in competition for jobs in the country<sup>4</sup>, the effects of the pandemic have, nonetheless, been significant and our communities and businesses are likely to see long-lasting and wide ranging effects.

It is therefore extremely important for the city, and the wider region, that Exeter recovers from the effects of Covid-19 as quickly and effectively as possible, whilst also seeking to "Build Back Better", delivering on city ambitions around clean, inclusive and sustainable future growth.

The work outlined within the "Building Exeter Back Better" recovery document therefore sets out proposals for a place-based response to the effects of Covid-19. The plan has been

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<sup>1</sup> ONS data

<sup>2</sup> Institute of Fiscal Studies – June 2020

<sup>3</sup> HMRC data – gov.uk

<sup>4</sup> Centre for Cities – September 2020

developed in collaboration with city partners and has benefited from input from individuals and organisations within the city with specialisms and expertise within their fields.

The recovery plan contains specific 'actions and asks' which its contributors believe will not only facilitate recovery, but also ensure that the city is able to seek to deliver on its 2040 Vision. The accompanying 'asks' seek commitment to action and funding from city partners and stakeholders in making the plan a reality; securing the city's successful recovery and setting strong foundations for continued sustainable and inclusive growth.

Approval of the plan by Executive will provide democratic endorsement of the draft recovery plan and will ensure that the City Council, and its partners, are not only able to clearly communicate the action that the city intends to take in order to combat the effects of Covid-19 on the city, but that they can also clearly articulate 'asks' for the resources that the city needs in order to facilitate recovery from a wide range of partners – including government.

There is no suggestion that the full cost of the programme can be delivered through current recognised funding pots or through Council action alone. Indeed, an important reason for producing this programme in a timely fashion is to be ready with recognised projects should the comprehensive spending review give national government the funding to call for a pipeline of projects.

#### **4. What are the resource implications including non-financial resources?**

The programme has identified a range of projects that would require an investment totalling some £520m. This includes big ticket items, such as the establishment of a revolving carbon reduction fund. A figure of £200m has been identified as the sum required. This relates to the Net Zero Exeter 2030 Plan. That Plan has shown a variety of programmes that would need to be delivered at pace should the city wish to meet the ambition of a net zero city. Clearly the principle of a fund would have to be assessed with a business case and would be of a scale that would almost certainly require national and regional engagement. Indeed, the concept of the fund addresses the local industrial strategy produced by the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise and the priority it gives to Clean Growth. A Carbon Reduction fund would be of regional interest and is likely to be the type of ask the region will want to consider. Retrofit schemes would have to satisfy their own business cases and it is reasonable to assume that any mechanism put in place to support retrofit solutions will be a mixture of private and public sector funding. The scale of the fund could flex, but if the city and the region is to make progress at pace there has to be a fund sufficiently large to get economies of scale and support the development of a supply chain to convince investors this area is serious about this programme.

Further big ticket items include a multi-purpose venue, and projects to support the city centre as a destination. Various reports have already been considered by Executive on the potential for a multi-purpose venue and the transformation of the South Street and Corn Exchange area of the city centre. Likewise Executive has had sight of plans for the redevelopment of City Point, namely the wider development of Paris Street/Sidwell Street area of the city centre. The assumption is that major investment schemes for the city centre will be a blended mix of public sector assets, local finance raised by development, Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding from development, as well as private investment and national and regional funding. In challenging times the public sector often has to de-risk development. A mixture of investment

and grant has tended to be part of the cocktail of funding required to bring forward schemes. A good recent example of this is the Plymouth Box, a major cultural investment in Plymouth made possible by a significant investment by Arts Council England and Plymouth City Council.

Some initiatives, such as Project North Park at the University of Exeter campus are directed at the economic agenda for the city. To build the research capacity in areas where the city has world leading expertise and where the city needs to deliver local economic impact to drive innovation and enterprise. As with projects like Exeter Science Park we have a portfolio of achievements to point to which have been the result of national, regional and local investment.

The transport section has been shaped by work that has been in train for some time. The City Council has been working with Devon County Council on the Exeter Transport Strategy and the National Infrastructure Commission on next steps for cities, producing the Infrastructure Prospectus. The Prospectus identifies £100m of transport infrastructure required over the next 5 years to support the city, with at least 50% of funding required from government. Typically 50% of transport schemes have been funded by Section 106 agreements, CIL payments and local funding with 50% by national government or the region. It serves as a good example of how the £520m of asks may be considered, in broad terms a combination of local and national funding together with private investment. The transport section of the recovery plan aligns with the infrastructure prospectus.

It follows therefore, that the programme is not seeking permission to proceed on any of the specific projects, each project or programme will require work to be done to build a business case and to explore the funding mechanisms, however, the programme does point to the ingredients of recovery programme that provides decision makers with real clarity on what we should be pursuing and a tool for progressing those discussions. There are no direct resource implications arise from the recommendations of this report. Any actions endorsed through this report which require the commitment of council for resources will be subject to further reporting.

## **5. Section 151 Officer comments:**

Whilst the report sets out substantial asks in terms of funding, there are no immediate requests for funding for Council to consider in this report. The scale of investment identified in the report is significant and far beyond the affordability of the City Council alone. Council has recently approved a £37 million programme of improvements to its own assets, which will form the bulk of the affordable capital programme going forward, therefore the Council will have to rely on national and regional funding along with opportunities arising from CIL to secure its aspirations set out in this plan. Opportunities that have a clear business case which will cover the costs of funding the investment are more likely to be affordable to the Council, which is facing significant reductions in funding over the medium term that will impact on its ability to take on further unfunded debt.

## **6. What are the legal aspects?**

No legal implications are expected to arise as a result of this plan.

## **7. Monitoring Officer's comments:**

This report raises no issues for the Monitoring Officer.

## 8. Report details:

### What is the “Building Exeter Back Better” recovery plan?

The “Building Exeter Back Better” recovery plan is a city-level, place-based response to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic upon Exeter. The plan is the result of joint work between key city organisations, public and private, and seeks to facilitate a joined-up approach to delivering and promoting recovery within Exeter.

The plan seeks to identify short term actions and measures which can be implemented in order to bring about recovery. However, the document also seeks to identify medium to long term measures (‘actions’) which not only support recovery, but which can also deliver transformative change and help the city to realise its 2040 Vision.

The plan also contains ‘asks’ which will be made of contributors to the plan, other partners’ and government/public sector agencies, to commit resources (time, money or expertise) to support the implementation of the plan and the ‘actions’ set out.

### How has the plan been developed?

Following approval at Executive in June 2020, seven recovery work groups were formed to focus on the recovery areas set out and to contribute towards the development of the city’s Covid-19 recovery plan. Membership of the groups was (and still is) comprised of representatives of key city organisations and individuals with specialisms and expertise within the relevant field.

City Council officers took a lead role in coordinating the work of the groups with ECC Directors providing oversight of the work. Portfolio holders were involved in each working group and members of the Liveable Exeter Place Board were invited to chair the recovery groups in order to ensure city-level, cross organisational stewardship of the plan. An overview of involvement is set out, below:

Group	ECC lead	SMB Lead	Portfolio holder/Cllr	Chair (PB member)
1. Business Support	Rosie Bates	David Bartram	Cllr Morse	Matthew Roach
2. City Centre	Victoria Hatfield	David Bartram	Cllr Wood	John Laramy
3. Visitor Economy	Cath Hill	Jon-Paul Hedge	Cllr Sutton	Charles Courtenay
4. Transport	Richard Marsh	Karime Hassan	Cllr Harvey	Mike Watson
5. Construction and Development	Richard Marsh	Bindu Arjoon	Cllr Bialyk	Sir Steve Smith
6. Community Wellbeing	Cath Hill	Jo Yelland	Cllr Gussain	Dinah Cox
7. Education	Rosie Bates	Bindu Arjoon	Cllr Williams	Glenn Woodcock

Since formation, these recovery groups have worked on behalf of the city to plan and deliver short term response measures to combat the effects of Covid-19. After the initial response phase, the focus of the groups turned to recovery planning – considering both short term response interventions and longer-term, transformative interventions to support recovery from the effects of Covid-19 and enable delivery of the City’s 2040 Vision.

The recovery groups met regularly (and several continue to do so) and discussions were wide ranging. In order to coordinate the work of the groups and manage the relationship between them, the ECC lead officers met regularly in order to review progress, discuss key matters and coordinate the work of the groups.

Through the discussions of the groups, key interventions were identified and discussed and associated 'actions and asks' were established for each area to support recovery. Many of the 'actions and asks' have been drawn or developed from previous work undertaken by the city and its partners and are set out within the relevant chapter of the accompanying recovery plan document.

The nature and scale of 'actions and asks' set out to support and facilitate recovery are diverse, and the recovery plan chapters reflect this, but each group has worked hard to identify and respond to the unique issues faced by it/the groups and businesses it represents. This means that 'actions and asks' are, in some cases, relatively modest interventions which the groups felt would support recovery – in the short term or long term – whilst other are more sizeable 'actions or asks' which, whilst supporting short term recovery, will also deliver medium/long-term transformative growth for the city and support delivery of the 2040 Vision. All are equally valid and all are felt to be appropriate for inclusion within the recovery plan document as the 'actions and asks' have come from those who best understand the needs of the sectors within which they are involved.

Themes or items which recurred between the work of the various groups, or overlapped between the groups, were specifically discussed by the lead officer group as these items/areas offered obvious scope for the delivery of interventions which would support the realisation of multiple objectives (at a city level) or offer scope for significant impact – in terms of recovery, transformative (medium/long term change) or both. Items which recurred in discussions amongst several groups included items around digital skills, transport interventions (increased pedestrian priority in the city centre especially), city centre interventions to support vitality and create 'critical mass' and the need for ongoing support for our communities in recovering from, or continuing to cope with, the effects of Covid-19.

In developing the recovery plan, each group also considered the relationship to the Net Zero Exeter Plan (2030). Measures to support the realisation of the 2030 zero carbon objectives have been built in to the chapters/areas of focus and this has resulted in a recovery plan that supports the achievement of a net zero city.

Once the recovery groups had all produced draft output, a further review of the 'actions and asks' was undertaken by the lead officers in order to identify "Priority asks" on behalf of the city. The lead officers sought to identify three priority asks; these being actions which would have maximum impact across multiple agenda's/recovery areas and support short term recovery from the effects of Covid-19 but also achieve the realisation of the City's 2040 Vision. It was also deemed necessary to identify priority asks in order for city partners to unite behind core asks on behalf of the city and clearly articulate these to potential funding/delivery partners – accepting that those funding partners would be subject to many requests from many organisations and that the city would therefore need to have clarity around its own priorities and asks.

The three priority asks identified were;

1. A package of investment to support Exeter city centre: with initial focus on the investment in the City Point project as a catalyst for regeneration;
2. Investment in the development and implementation of a bespoke digital training and skills package for Exeter, and;
3. A five year funding package to support continued community activities by Wellbeing Exeter.

The draft recovery plan document was presented to the Liveable Exeter Place Board on the 7<sup>th</sup> October with each chapter presented to the Board by its respective recovery group Chair. The plan was warmly received by the Board and, although the Place Board has no formal decision making capabilities on behalf of the City Council, the plan was supported and endorsed by the members of the Place Board.

The Board also articulated a clear view that the City Council should undertake a further review of the plan prior to presentation of the plan to Executive in order to ensure that the document is realistic and proportionate and that it accords with approved and established Council policy. This review has now been completed and minor revisions have been made to the plan in this process in order to ensure the city has a recovery plan which is sound.

The plan (attached to this report) is therefore now presented for the formal review and approval of Executive. Executive is also asked to approve the priority asks set out within the plan.

#### Who is the audience?

The audience for the recovery plan document is broad and it is reasonable to expect that anybody with an interest in the city will be interested in the proposals contained within the recovery plan. However, 2 principles audiences are expected:

1. Residents and business – the ‘public’: by way of interest in seeking to understand what the city council and other key partners intend to do in order to combat the negative effects of Covid-19 upon the city; support continued growth and recovery of the city, and work towards the realisation of the Exeter 2040 Vision.
2. Funding partners and regional and national organisations: the city needs to be able to articulate what it intends to do to support recovery from the negative effects of Covid-19 and set out what it needs in order to do this (in terms of funds, resource or support.) A clear, city-backed and cross-organisational plan is the best way for Exeter to do this. The recovery document therefore seeks to allow the city to communicate with prospective funding partners and government bodies and to use the plan to request and lobby for the resources the city needs to facilitate recovery. The plan is also intended to show the ambition and capacity of the city to be a national and global leader in sustainable, inclusive and innovative growth and Exeter’s ability to deliver on this ambition.

#### How is this plan different to other plans, and how will it work with other plans?

This recovery plan is a city-level, place based response to the effects of Covid-19 – it is Exeter-specific and responds to the unique characteristics and needs of the city. The plan is

intended to work with other plans which already exist or which are in production – including strategic regional/county and national plans.

This means that the actions and asks contained within this plan can be ‘rolled up’ in to higher level county and regional plans and that those plans can be informed by this, place specific plan.

#### Will the plan become outdated?

No; the intention is for the recovery plan to be a live document and for it to continue to respond to the complex and dynamic effects of Covid-19 upon the city. It will therefore be kept under review (accepting that the Council only has limited resources to do this and so any updates will be periodic)

Where the city is successful in progressing actions or securing ‘asks’, it is expected that this success will be recorded. In turn, new actions and asks will then be incorporated in to the plan.

### **9. How does the decision contribute to the Council’s Corporate Plan?**

Covid-19 represents a significant threat to the Council, and the city, in terms of realising all of the ambitions set out within the Council’s corporate plan. A major cause of this is the effect of Covid-19 upon the city council’s own finances, but also on the capability of the city as a whole to continue to grow and develop.

Approval of the draft recovery plan, which is consistent with and supportive of the Council’s corporate plan, will therefore enable the city to clearly articulate what it wishes to achieve and to seek the resources required in order to make things happen. The decision will therefore contribute towards the realisation of the Council’s corporate plan.

### **10. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?**

Risks associated with the approval and progression of the “Building Back Better” recovery plan are low; the plan does not directly commit the Council financially or expose the council to any obvious risks.

The more significant risk would exist in the Council choosing not to approve or endorse the recovery plan document (although revisions can be made) as it could mean that the city/city council would fail to articulate how it wishes to facilitate recovery within the city and this could result in the council failing to receive support from partner and government agencies.

### **11. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)**

The recovery plan is focused on mitigating the impacts of the Covid-19 crisis on the economy and people of the city who either live in the city or are connected to the city through work, business and services. The focus on WellBeing, education and skills is a recognition of the potential impact on individuals and communities, consequences that may exacerbate inequalities. The focus on transport and the city centre acknowledges that there can be environmental consequences for our residents arising from congestion and that infrastructure and transport solutions will require funding, and transport measures can impact differently on communities. The impact on people with protected characteristics will be assessed at the appropriate time when the proposed schemes are

evaluated. In recommending the proposed programme as a whole, no potential impact has been identified on people with protected characteristics as determined by the Act. The work undertaken by the recovery workgroups has involved people and organisations from across the city and seeks to facilitate recovery from the effects of covid-19 to the benefits of city residents and organisations.

## **12. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:**

- 12.1 A key strand of the recovery work has been to focus on how the city will seek to “Build Back Better” from the effects of Covid-19. A key elements of this has involved considering how the city can facilitate sustainable, inclusive and green growth. For example: the proposals to designate the city centre as a zero-waste zone that supports a wider city agenda to be carbon neutral; the proposal to provide access to locally produced sustainable food and drink to businesses and residents, through a wide range of shops, markets, buying groups and on line purchasing; the proposal to trial car-free and pedestrian zones in the city centre.
- 12.2 Each recovery group has considered the net-zero roadmap in developing and forming its actions and asks for the recovery plan and the plan is therefore consistent with the Council’s carbon commitments. In order to ensure alignment between the recovery plan and the net zero plan, Exeter City Futures (ECF) were also invited to review the plan and comment up on it.
- 12.3 A stand out ask is the establishment of a carbon reduction fund, this would provide a source of finance for carbon reduction projects, such as retrofitting domestic and commercial properties. The recovery plan therefore seeks to support the Council in achieving its aspirations around clean growth and in realising the 2040 Vision.

## **13. Are there any other options?**

Doing nothing in response to the effects of Covid-19 upon Exeter is not an option; although the effects have been less severe than in other parts of the country, they are nonetheless significant and pose a real risk to the city, its residents and organisations. It is therefore appropriate to have a recovery plan which the city can utilise to direct recovery work and seek funding to support activity.

An alternative to the approval and adoption of the draft “Building Exeter Back Better” recovery plan would be for the Council to develop a recovery plan by itself (not including other organisations), or by noting the work undertaken to date but proceeding to complete the plan in isolation of other city partners. This approach would not be recommended as it would lead to the development of a plan which did not benefit from the involvement of city partners and would therefore run the risk of failing to account for the full range of challenges and opportunities which face the city in light of Covid-19.

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## **Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)**

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

- Report to Executive – 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2020: “Exeter’s Recovery Plan” (Item 8)
- Report to Executive – 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2020: “City Point: Update on Paris Street and Sidwell Street Regeneration” (item 12)
- Report to Executive – 14<sup>th</sup> January 2020: “New performance venue and redevelopment of the Corn Exchange” (item 13)
- Report to Executive – 9<sup>th</sup> October 2018: “South Street Regeneration”

Other background papers/relevant documents:

- South Street Urban Design proposals (2018)
- Heart of the South West Local Industrial Strategy, HoTSWLEP
- National Infrastructure Commission Exeter Transport Infrastructure Prospectus 2020-25
- Net Zero Exeter 2030 Plan

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