

STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD AS A VIRTUAL MEETING

19 November 2020

Present:

Councillor Luke Sills (Chair)

Councillors Newby, Atkinson, Buswell, Hannaford, Henson, D, Moore, D, Moore, J, Owen and Packham

Also present:

Director City Development, Housing & Supporting People, Director Net Zero Exeter & City Management, Director Comms, Culture & Leisure Facilities, Director Finance, Corporate Manager Democratic and Civic Support, Service Lead - Environmental Health & Community Safety, Democratic Services Officer (SLS) and Democratic Services Officer (MD)

In attendance:

Councillor Philip Bialyk	- Leader
Councillor Rachel Sutton	- Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Net Zero Exeter 2030
Councillor Bob Foale	- Portfolio Holder for Transformation & Environment
Councillor Emma Morse	- Portfolio Holder for City Development

23 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Strategic Scrutiny Committee held on 24 September 2020 were taken as read, approved as correct, for signing by the Chair at the earliest possible convenience.

24 Declaration of Interest

No declaration of interest was made by a Member.

25 Questions from Members of the Public Under Standing Order 19

In accordance with Standing Order 19, a member of the public, Mr P Cleasby submitted the following question on the Local Industrial Strategy:-

What progress has the Council made in attracting funds in response to each of the funding requests set out in the Exeter Local Industrial Strategy?

The Council Leader, Councillor Bialyk offered the following response and explained that the clear steer from the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) officials, following publication of the Exeter Industrial Strategy (EIS), was that Whitehall would expect the formal Industrial Strategy to be on the same geography as the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and include Devon, Somerset, Plymouth and Torbay. The Exeter Industrial Strategy has been used to inform the production of the Heart of the South West Local Industrial Strategy with its focus on clean growth and Exeter's opportunity based on data and climate and environmental sciences. Having encouraged

the Heart of the South West Councils and LEP to produce an Industrial strategy for consideration by the previous Government, we have still not heard back from Government on whether the draft Industrial Strategy has been accepted.

Funding has been secured by Exeter College as part of a hub and spoke proposal for digital, to be known as the South West Institute of Technology, with the hub being based at Exeter. The skills escalator has been widely discussed and may well have supported the successful bid by the College. Funding has been secured from the Cabinet Office and the One Public Estate to produce a business case for a sustainable development fund. Funding continues to be secured by the Exeter Science Park to support the provision of new accommodation. There has been no success with the Institute of Environmental Risk, or in relation to Sparx (an Exeter based educational technology company) and Exeter City Futures. However, since the publication of the Exeter Industrial Strategy, Sparx has secured major private sector investment and it has been rolled out to many more schools in this country and abroad. In short, we have done a lot of work as a city and region to support the industrial strategy but we still await the publication by Government and funding has been secured from Government and this has been administered through programmes administered by the LEP and/or Devon County Council, and the case with the One Public Estate.

Mr Cleasby did not ask a supplementary question, but he agreed that this was all very encouraging and he thanked the Leader for the response. He looked forward to the Heart of the South West LEP publishing their plans soon.

The Leader referred to his membership of the Heart of the South West LEP Board, representing the Devon district authorities who had been pushing for the publication of the plans which he considered would be unifying. It was disappointing that in view of the delays to the devolution discussion, the plans had also been set aside for the duration of this Parliament. He confirmed that this authority was looking at other opportunities to draw down funding for important projects in our city and also the greater city region. He welcomed Mr Cleasby's question and suggested there was always the opportunity to ask such a question in the public section of the next meeting of the LEP Board.

26 **Presentation on Covid-19 by Portfolio Holders and Questions from Members and Answers on Covid Recovery**

The Chair introduced the four Portfolio Holders who reported to this Scrutiny Committee, to present their respective briefing updates with a focus on the Council's Covid-19 recovery stage.

Questions from Members submitted in advance of the meeting, with the answers given at the meeting, together with the supplementary questions and answers made at the meeting, are set out below for each Portfolio.

The Council Leader, Councillor Bialyk in presenting his briefing note highlighted the following:-

- Build Back Better Project, which was the subject of a report that went to Executive on 3 November and will be presented to Council in December; and
- the latter part of the update which demonstrated his involvement in the recovery of the city with a number of strategic and internal meetings.

Questions from Committee Members

1. Councillor D Moore - Liveable Exeter Transformational Housing Programme:

When will the approach for engagement and involvement of the community at an early stage, and the strategies for continued community engagement and involvement be published?

The Leader confirmed that high-level city engagement in relation to the Liveable Exeter programme was originally planned to have continued over the course of the past months, however Covid-19 has impacted significantly in terms of this engagement and several planned engagement opportunities have been postponed. Liveable Exeter has, nonetheless, sought to support several initiatives which have been developed during Covid-19 and a website for Liveable Exeter now exists to provide residents with more insight into the programme, its aims and ambitions. This website platform will continue to develop in the coming months and it is expected that this will become a key platform through which to engage residents and communities – especially whilst the effects of Covid-19 remain.

In terms of future events, it is worth stressing that Liveable Exeter is a complex, dynamic and long-term programme made up of several work streams and projects. A 'one size fits all' approach to engagement would therefore not be appropriate and project level engagement will be tailored to relate to specific projects and work streams. This means that engagement will be undertaken at a time, and in a means, which is most appropriate in terms of both engaging residents and in supporting the delivery of the programme. There is therefore no intention to publish a programme of engagement relating to the Liveable Exeter programme at this time.

Supplementary question and response.

Councillor Moore thanked the Leader and referred to the high level engagement and the prospectus of the Garden City Programme and referred to the proposals and whether the local community is being or will be engaged at an early stage. It was clear that in respect of community, both in terms of current and the future that residents must have a meaningful say in developing the proposals from design to delivery to constructively contribute to the future of the city. Whilst appreciating the impact of Covid-19, which has made it more difficult to engage communities, she asked the Leader to bring forward those plans and let Members know when those proposals would be coming forward.

Members should be reassured that there was every intention to engage the community and residents of Exeter. He was quite keen to commence with some form of engagement, although he could not be specific at this stage. Liveable Exeter would change many parts of the city, and in order to deliver 12,000 homes, we would in effect be going upwards as opposed to sideways. He referred to the commitment made to maintain the city's green and open spaces and he cited Northbrook and Bull Meadow and part of the Clifton Hill site as examples and of their work with the Devon Wildlife Trust. It was important to start the debate, establish the direction and be able to work together to understand what was needed on a site by site basis. He was keen to engage, come together as a city, to maintain job and graduate retention and ensure our children could have a ready supply of homes. He reiterated that he had every intention to engage the community in order that we could work together to do the right thing.

The Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Environment, Councillor Bob Foale in presenting his briefing note highlighted the following:-

- the main focus over the last few months of working with the Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer on the Medium Term Financial Plan to address the savings needed of over £4m in the next year, and

- a number of meetings had been held with the Director Net Zero Exeter & City Management and the Service Lead - Environmental Health and Community Safety to discuss enforcement and car parking.

Questions from Committee Members

- 1. Councillor K Owen** - *Your portfolio holder's report refers to continuing partnership working with Exeter University and the Police. Have there been recent discussions with these two partners about CCTV provision on the edge of the University campus? The Registrar of the University has indicated his willingness to engage in such discussions following a representation made to him by local residents.*

Councillor Foale advised that this area was outside of the fibre optic network on which our CCTV system operates and therefore the costs of connecting any additional cameras would be extremely large. Once the CCTV system is upgraded, it may be possible to connect additional cameras but there would be ongoing data charges. Any cameras if placed now would have to be stand alone or managed by others.

Supplementary question and answer.

Given that highway land is also relevant to this issue, is it the intention to include the County Council in these discussions?

The County Council would be included in any discussions that may take place, particularly as they have some funding streams that could be made available. We continue to look at the Council's £4m deficit, and concern how that will be made up, CCTV is highly desirable, but expensive as well and it is hoped that, because of the expense of installing CCTV equipment, the County Council might be able to help fund any installations considered necessary.

- 2. Councillor J Moore** - *What are the options being considered to bring car parking income back up to previous levels and how do these align with our 2030 carbon neutral commitment?*

A range of options are being considered including tariff changes and dynamic charging aimed at discouraging entering the city during the main busy periods and encouraging people to make fewer but longer visits to the city centre. However until the pandemic stabilises it is impossible to say if these will have the desired effect.

Supplementary question and response

Can the Portfolio Holder explain how the tariff charges will work?

Comparisons have been made with similar charges from comparable compact cities with similar economies to Exeter such as Bath and Chester to see what they were doing. A range of options could be available including:-

- a straight increase which could be too simplistic an option;
- a staggered increase according to distance and historical usage; and
- scope for the introduction of weekly or monthly parking tickets being more widely available.

However, it will be difficult to recoup the level of income currently being lost during the pandemic.

3. Councillor D Moore - *In-sourcing of Leisure: What is the outcome of the VAT review and will this lead to an increase cost for users; and, for how long is the 'membership only' use expected to continue for?*

The VAT implications are still being finalised and are complex in nature. Once the work has been completed the Section 151 Officer will set out the implications for Leisure to Members.

Supplementary question and response

When do you expect the outcome and will it be before the end of this lockdown period, and will there be any spaces for single uses of the leisure services, particularly as there is a demand for swimming to be used as one off sessions as it was important that this issue was clarified as soon as possible?

It will be completed as soon as the Section 151 Officer sets out all the implications. It is hoped that there will not be an increase in costs for users. He was delighted the service had come back in-house and the facilities would be improved, but it was in the hands of the Section 151 Officer as to when he completes his report.

The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Net Zero Exeter 2030 Councillor Rachel Sutton in presenting her briefing note highlighted the following:-

- a significant piece of the update related to Exeter City Futures (ECF) and the collaboration that was taking place between ECF, the City Council and the University of Exeter along with addressing low carbon construction and retrofitting and the development of the skills agenda. In the last couple of days there had been more Government attention on Kickstart and she welcomed a question and opportunity to respond on this subject, as well as talking about digital skills, which was a key ask of the Council's recovery plan;
- the focus of Building Greater Exeter had changed with a number of assets being used to support schools and promote careers in construction, with virtual events, YouTube and shared videos and an education hub, and
- meetings of the Devon Wide Climate Emergency Response Group and the Net Zero Task Force have continued, as those groups have sought to ensure that these plans have recovery embedded from the start. The consultation on the Devon carbon plans was due to start very shortly and that will run into January.

Questions from Committee Members

1. Councillor J Moore - *I joined one of the Exeter City Futures open conversations and it was great to hear about the work of different groups across the city to protect and promote our green spaces. It felt very much like an introduction without time in the meeting to discuss future actions or collaboration. I'm not sure if this was the same for the other conversations. Did any plans for future actions come out of the conversations? Is there the possibility for further meetings for each conversation area with a focus on collaboration and future actions?*

Councillor Sutton referred to a couple of open conversations and had found them very engaging. Details of the discussions from the day have been uploaded onto <https://www.exetercityfutures.com/greening-wrapup/> Contact details have been added to each speaker under The Ask – to encourage participants to engage direct with speakers in potential opportunities or innovative collaborations.

She also offered more detail of the Exeter City Futures Connect Events which provide an open platform, bringing together residents, communities, local businesses, charities and city stakeholders to listen and support community-initiated projects that help Exeter work towards its ambition to be carbon neutral by 2030. The events currently take place online, starting with five minute pitches and moving to tabling breakout rooms where presenters can take questions and hold discussion about their projects, it is hoped this format offers a creative and collaborative environment and fosters a vibrant community of Exeter change makers.

Usually, the Connect Events offer the opportunity for those sharing details of their community-led projects to follow up their presentations with discussions around their 'ask' (what they need from those in the room to help progress their projects) with the audience in breakout rooms. This provides some opportunity for the projects to connect with people and resource, stimulate collaboration, and inspire others to devise similar projects on the same evening. However, the Greening the City Connect event more time was given to the presentations, which meant we did not get into the breakout rooms.

These events are supported by the National Lottery Community Fund.

Exeter City Futures has recently launched an online community to aid discussion and collaboration for those in the city wanting to be a part of Exeter's progress towards net zero: [Exeter Net Zero Journey Slack](#)

As ever, Exeter City Futures were happy to explore how the team can further facilitate the chance to form collaborations, develop action plans, and connect people and ideas where they positively impact on Exeter's ambitions to become a carbon neutral city. We continue to meet with community groups, businesses, academics and others keen to find out how Exeter City Futures can support their net zero plans, and enable connections to people, resource and ideas wherever possible.

If Councillor Moore or any other Member or member of the public required any further details, or wished to discuss the response, Exeter City Futures would be happy to set up a meeting. Councillor Sutton encouraged Members to take advantage of that offer.

- 2. Councillor D Moore - Net Zero Exeter: Does the work with the university cover how the carbon emissions from both the city's development and the recovery plan will be offset over the next ten years, if not who and when will this be addressed?**

The work with the University is to prepare a carbon action plan for Exeter City Council. The scope of this Carbon Action plan is currently being developed in conjunction with the University, but Councillor Moore was right to talk about moving forward and projected growth would be considered as part of this work.

Supplementary question and response

Whether the projected growth would be for the whole city and would that be the action plan for the City Council and would that be a future piece of work for the University of Exeter or will you or somebody else be taking that forward and how that would be looked at.

Councillor Sutton thanked Councillor Moore for the question and said that in the short term the work was being carried out around the City Council and our plans and we will look to see the outcome of the work of the University and then move forward and continue. In an effort not to prejudge the report, it was important to get that work completed, and projected growth was part of looking forward to try and achieve this in

the next ten years, and without taking that into consideration it is not going to a fully and accurate report.

3. Councillor D Moore - Kickstart: how many employers have participated in the Kickstart bid, and of these how many were small businesses, social enterprises or charities?

We have submitted two applications to the Department Work and Pensions (DWP) as follows, both are still awaiting approval, and DWP are carrying out further due diligence checks on all businesses that have submitted the following placements:-

On the 27 October 2020 – there were 53 placements from 20 businesses, and on the 13 November 2020 – there were 42 placements from 12 businesses.

In total there were 95 placements with 31 businesses (there are placements from Exeter City Council departments on both applications.) as well as one charity, two Community Interest Companies, one Housing Association and the one Local Authority (Exeter City Council).

Supplementary question and response

Were these small or larger businesses?

Councillor Sutton confirmed that she would obtain a response and the information would be provided to Councillor Moore in writing.

Councillor Atkinson wished to congratulate the City Council for becoming a Kickstart gateway and introducing Kickstart placements, particularly as a large proportion of Devon businesses are small and Medium Size Enterprises and micro businesses. She was pleased about the support to businesses and also to young people at this difficult time. Devon County Council have not yet become a Kickstart gateway.

Councillor Sutton offered her thanks to the officers involved for their support of Kickstart.

Questions from other Committee Members

Councillor Hannaford - *Given that Exeter has a strong track record in introducing carbon neutral development and greener initiatives, will the Council take advantage of any further opportunities resulting from the Government's new commitment to carbon reduction and green technology, particularly as we have a strong green track record in these areas and are in good position to take advantage of any support that was available.*

Councillor Sutton confirmed that the City Council will work with its partners to ensure that Exeter benefits from the funding available as part of the Government's commitment to supporting green technology. This will only be clearer when the Government announces the detail of its proposals. To some extent the Government is catching up with the City Council as a similar initiative by the Government in the past was abandoned. She would welcome any such announcement and look forward to seeing the detail and will do the best to get all of the help we can and work with our partners to do that.

Councillor Hannaford - *Given the noticeable improvement in air quality along Cowick Street and Alphington Road during the lockdown, will the Council seek to introduce further measures to reduce congestion along the arterial routes into the city, which would make such a big difference?*

Councillor Sutton stated that reducing congestion along the city's roads relies to some extent on educating the public and to encourage less reliance on the car. The introduction of hybrid and electric vehicles will be beneficial and the Council will work with the County Council as the highway authority on this issue such as encouraging the introduction of more electric charging points across the city. The Council remains committed to reducing congestion in the city and a consequence of that will be better air quality.

The Portfolio Holder for City Development Councillor Emma Morse in presenting her briefing note highlighted the following:-

- following her new appointment as Portfolio Holder she wished to record her thanks to officers across the Council and particularly colleagues in Planning. Officers had been very helpful in bringing her up to speed with some very big issues that had come forward and she offered her thanks to the Director, Bindu Arjoon and officers from the Planning team, Roger Clotworthy, Jill Day, Katherine Smith, and Jean Marshall who have all made sure she was always well briefed and informed. The service has continued to carry on during the whole of lockdown, with only a pause of onsite visits, but we are continuing with them where it is safe and possible for them to do so;
- there had been an opportunity to relax the hours of deliveries to supermarkets and work on construction sites with two requests submitted, one having been allowed and one refused. The level of planning applications being made were back to pre Covid levels with the detail included in the report; and
- during this time, and although not directly related to Covid, the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan had ceased to exist, but the City Council had been working on a way forward with a report to the Executive very soon.

Questions from Committee Members

Councillor Hannaford - *Given the level of concerns expressed regarding the proposed changes to the planning system as set out in the Government White Paper, which is regarded by many to be a "developers' charter" with a presumption for development and have a detrimental impact on the city as a whole, how is the Council engaging in the consultation process ?*

Councillor Morse advised that the contents of the White Paper were considered in detail by the Planning Member Working Group and she thanked those Members who had contributed to enable a robust response to the consultation process which was submitted by the Council at the end of October. The City Council, as with other South West Councils, expressed many concerns including the number of houses proposed for the region compared with that for the northern powerhouse, bio-diversity issues and the limited reference to carbon neutral 2030 goals. Although there were some welcome elements, in general the proposals did not strengthen the planning process and the Council's response was suitably robust. Given that there is also considerable opposition from the Shire Counties, a number of changes can be anticipated before the Bill becomes law.

Councillor D Henson – *Given the receipt of complaints from residents adjacent to building sites following the relaxation of construction hours on these sites, are ward Councillors advised in advance of the changes?*

Councillor Owen - *Given that there were two applications for the extension of hours, one being refused and one being allowed, and having not been made aware of a relaxation in my ward, until a resident made contact with him, have there been any other complaints*

to City Councillors in respect of the application to extend the hours of operation of these two constructions sites?

The Director for City Development, Housing and Supporting People assisted with the responses and stated that only two applications for relaxation of hours had been received so far. Any complaints made would have been dealt with in the service, but if Councillors were not previously informed they will be notified of any changes made going forward.

Councillor Newby – *He was aware of a development site with residents in situ and asked whether it would be possible for the planning authority to suggest to developers of sites to make their occupants aware of any changes in ongoing construction hours. A number of his constituents had contacted him concerned over the changes to the hours of operation and potential for noise and disruption.*

Councillor Morse confirmed she would look into this, as the Planning Committee could include conditions as part of any application. She also suggested that Councillor Newby should discuss the matter with planning officers if he felt there was an enforcement issue.

Councillor Newby replied that the matter related to a lack of communication between developers and those who have brought on site or around but he appreciated the comments.

Councillor Diana Moore expressed her disappointment at not being successful in submitting three questions, based on the Portfolio Holders' updates for this meeting. Councillor Bialyk assured Councillor Moore that she would receive a written response in due course which would be circulated to all Councillors.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.35 pm

Chair