

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE
29 JUNE 2009

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES ACT 2007 - PROPOSALS

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To consider proposals received in response to the Sustainable Communities Act 2007.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Executive on 9 December 2008 received a report informing them of the provisions of the Sustainable Communities Act 2007. The Act offers local authorities and communities the opportunity to put forward proposals that enhance the economic, social and environmental sustainability of their area. It starts from the principle that local people know best what needs to be done to promote the sustainability of their area, but that sometimes they need central government to act to enable them to do so. The Act provides a channel for local people and the councils which represent them to ask central government to take such action. Executive agreed that the Council should participate in the initiative and publicise information on the website.
- 2.2 Following Executive, information on the Act together with a proposal form was included on the Council's website and leaflets were produced for distribution. The closing date for submissions was 18 May 2009.

3 SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS

- 3.1 The Council received five proposals in response to the Act, four of which were from the Transition Exeter Transport Group and a fifth, which duplicated one of the other proposals, was received from an individual member of the public. The proposals relate to:

- Bikes on rural buses
- To equate city centre parking and bus fares
- Integrated transport
- Non domestic rates on store car parking charges (two identical proposals)

Brief details of all proposals are attached as Appendix A to the report. The full proposal forms have been circulated to members of Executive and can be viewed on the Council's website.

- 3.2 A panel comprising 11 members of the public met on 27 May to consider the proposals. Seven members of the Panel were representative of 'communities of interest', three members were drawn from the Council's Consultation Volunteers database of people keen to engage with the Council and one member was identified through third sector contacts who may be underrepresented in 'civic and political activity'. Representatives of Transition Exeter Transport Group presented their proposals and the Panel were invited to ask questions and seek clarification on the issues raised. The meeting was chaired by Councillor Laura Newton, Portfolio Holder

for Housing and Social Inclusion and attended by Councillor Wadham, Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Development and Transport.

- 3.3 The Panel supported two of the four proposals to go forward to the Executive and the Local Government Association (LGA), which has been appointed as “Selector” by the Government. The proposals were evaluated as follows:
- (i) The proposal to have bikes on rural buses was supported subject to consultation with bus operators and related partners taking place prior to submission to the LGA.
 - (ii) The Panel decided that the proposal to ‘equate city centre parking and bus fares’ should not go through the SCA process but be addressed locally.
 - (iii) The proposal for an Integrated transport system overseen by Exeter City Council was unanimously supported in principle, but the Panel suggested that it needed to be further developed giving more time for consultation with the relevant partners and therefore should not be submitted on this occasion but at a later date.
 - (iv) The proposal for Non domestic rates on store car parking spaces received unanimous support with amendments to give discounts for adherence to sustainable community priorities.
- 3.4 The Director Economy and Development has reviewed the four proposals and his comments are included at Annex 1 to this paper. In brief, his evaluation of the proposals is as follows:
- (i) Bikes on Rural Buses – likely to stand more chance of acceptance and have greater practical value if targeted on specific routes (with leisure destinations) and backed by grants rather than seeking to proceed by compulsion.
 - (ii) Equate City Centre Parking Charges and Bus Fares – this proposal will produce substantial adverse side effects and should not be pursued. The concerns are set out in detail in the Annex.
 - (iii) Integrated Transport – in principle a very desirable objective but requiring major legislative, institutional and financial changes which are likely to be opposed by the operating companies and by key government departments.
 - (iv) Charging Non Domestic Rates on Store Car Parking Spaces – probably misconceived (rates are already levied) and intended as seeking to introduce parking charges. Very sound objective that should be supported but the notion of discounts for use of local produce would be impractical and open to fraud.
- 3.5 Subject to formal endorsement by Executive, the proposals will be submitted to the LGA Selector Panel. If Executive decides not to support the proposals, it should provide reasons for its decision. The Selector Panel, made up of Councillors from the four parties represented on the LGA, will consider the proposals alongside all the others received nationally and submit a shortlist to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. There is no appeals process in relation to decisions of the Selector Panel but proposals not short-listed can be revised and re-submitted in response to later rounds of invitation from the Secretary of State.

3.6 The final decision on proposals rests with the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government who will cooperate with the Selector in trying to reach agreement on proposals. The Secretary of State is required to publish reasons for her decisions and an Action Plan on how proposals will be implemented.

4 RECOMMENDED

Executive is requested:

- 4.1 to note the views of the Sustainable Communities Act Panel in respect of the proposals submitted;
- 4.2 to consider whether to support the submission of the following two proposals made under the Sustainable Communities Act 2007 to the Local Government Association Selector Panel:
 - Bikes on rural buses
 - Non domestic rates on store car parking spaces
- 4.3 to indicate reasons for their decision, should Executive decide not to progress either of the two proposals; and
- 4.4 (i) to ask the proposers to undertake further work on the Integrated Transport proposal and (ii) to continue to set parking tariffs through the established mechanism of the annual review process.

ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S DEPARTMENT

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

Project proposal forms

17 June 2009