

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

Date of Meeting: 28 November 2023

Report of: Director City Development

Title: East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon and Teignbridge Joint Strategy approval

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Executive

1. What is the report about?

1.1 The City Council and East Devon, Mid Devon and Teignbridge District Councils, with support from Devon County Council, have prepared a non-statutory Joint Strategy called Our Shared Coordinates. The Joint Strategy sets out key functional linkages across the area, shows how the development strategies in Local Plans fit together and identifies key infrastructure themes, which would support growth. This informal prospectus-style document has been subject to input from a series of stakeholders. The report recommends that the Joint Strategy is approved, and published on the City Council website.

2. Recommendation:

2.1 That the Executive approves the Joint Strategy (Appendix 1) subject to agreement by the other partner authorities, with delegated authority given to the Director of City Development in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Portfolio Holder for City Development to make any amendments arising from the resolution of the other authorities provided these do not materially alter the content of the document.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

3.1 The Joint Strategy reflects the ambitions and proposals of existing and emerging Local Plans across the area. It sets out shared ambitions across a range of strategic planning matters across the four local authority planning areas, together with a high level list of infrastructure matters that have cross-boundary significance for supporting the delivery of planned new homes, jobs, services, transport and other development.

3.2 Approval of the Joint Strategy will demonstrate the commitment to ongoing joint working across the area on strategic matters. This will help to show the City Council's compliance with the duty to cooperate, which is a requirement of preparing planning policy. Preparing the joint strategy will therefore support the preparation of the Exeter Plan, the key emerging planning policy document for the city.

3.3 East Devon, Mid Devon and Teignbridge District Councils are taking equivalent reports through their Committee processes in late 2023.

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

4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the approval of the Joint Strategy. The preparation of the Joint Strategy has been funded from the financial contributions previously made from East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon and Teignbridge District Council for collaborative working on planning documents, technical evidence and studies. This resourcing was approved by the City Council on 8 July 2021.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

5.1 There are no financial implications contained in this report.

6. What are the legal aspects?

6.1 The need for the City Council to work collaboratively with neighbouring authorities on strategic planning matters is enshrined in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, paragraphs 24-27 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2023 and the Planning Practice Guidance. These set out that local authorities have a legal duty to cooperate with each other and other organisations to seek to address strategic planning matters that are likely to have an impact beyond the immediate District. In particular Section 33A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 sets out that to maximise effective working on strategic matters throughout the preparation of plans, authorities have a duty to engage constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis. The Joint Strategy helps to demonstrate compliance with this legislation. It should be noted however that the Joint Strategy itself is a non-statutory, informal document. It does not include policies or site allocations and will have no weight in making planning decisions.

6.2 The Joint Strategy includes illustrative, schematic diagrams and maps showing the spatial strategy for the area and the locations of major growth. These maps do not show specific allocations. The recommendation to approve the Joint Strategy should not be interpreted to suggest, that the City Council supports specific allocations or proposed allocations which may be included in the local plans of neighbouring authorities.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

Whilst this non statutory joint strategy reflects the shared ambitions across a range of strategic planning matters across the four local authority planning areas, members should note that this joint Strategy is not a development plan document, and therefore will have little weight when determining planning applications.

8. Report details:

8.1 Consultants LDA Design have prepared a non-statutory Joint Strategy, called 'Our Shared Coordinates', following instruction from Exeter City, East Devon, Mid Devon and Teignbridge District Councils and which has been supported by Devon County Council. This has followed decisions taken by each Council's respective committees in the summer / autumn of 2021, which gave approval for the preparation of a Joint Strategy for the administrative areas of the four authorities. The City Council Executive approved the preparation of the Joint Strategy in July 2021.

8.2 The Joint Strategy reflects the ambitions and proposals of existing and emerging Local Plans. It sets out shared ambitions across a range of strategic planning matters

across the four local authority planning areas, together with a high-level list of infrastructure themes (not specific projects) that have cross-boundary significance for supporting the delivery of planned new homes, jobs, services, transport and other development. The purpose of the Joint Strategy is to:

- Demonstrate the joined-up strategy and policy approach the Councils have taken across the functional area.
- Articulate the clear benefits of working together as a cohesive area to address strategic opportunities and challenges.
- Serve as the starting point for identifying key strategic infrastructure and funding challenges.
- Provide a framework for wider collaboration with key stakeholders who are central to the spatial place-making agenda in the area.

8.3 The Joint Strategy will benefit the four Councils through helping to establish a recognisable 'brand' and serve as a prospectus for the area, which may assist when making bids for Government (or other) infrastructure and delivery funding.

Content of the Joint Strategy

8.4 The Joint Strategy is a prospectus-style document which includes a vision, a spatial strategy and an ambition to position the area as one of the best places to live and work in the UK. In order to achieve this ambition, the Joint Strategy identifies six 'shared coordinates' for delivering sustainable growth which responds to the area's strategic challenges and opportunities:

- Net Zero.
- Quality Places.
- Jobs and Prosperity.
- Nature.
- Homes.
- Connectivity.

8.5 Each of the six shared coordinates are explained in their respective chapters, together with references to initiatives for each that are supported through existing and emerging Local Plans. The Joint Strategy is not a development plan document, and as such does not set policies for the development and use of land and buildings, or include site allocations for development. This will be the role of Local Plans prepared by the four authorities and neighbourhood plans prepared by local communities. The joint strategy will not be used as a decision making tool for planning applications.

8.6 The importance of investment in infrastructure (such as transport, green infrastructure, utilities and health care) to support growth is a cross cutting theme throughout the document. To this end the Joint Strategy includes a high level list of strategic infrastructure matters that have cross boundary significance, where the four authorities will continue to work in partnership and with Government agencies, transport and utilities providers to secure funding and investment. These infrastructure themes are:

- SANG (Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space) and nature recovery network provision.
- Strategic waste water and water supply improvements.
- Strategic energy grid improvements for import, export and distribution.

- District heating investments and renewable energy projects.
- Education improvements-primary, secondary, further, higher and special educational needs.
- Strategic healthcare provision.
- New railway stations and line improvements.
- Strategic active travel routes and trails.
- Improvements to the Strategic Road Network
- Multi-modal Exeter transport package.

8.7 More detail about infrastructure matters can be included in each Authority's Infrastructure Funding Statements and Infrastructure Delivery Plans as they emerge.

8.8 The Joint Strategy can be updated over time, including its high-level list of infrastructure matters.

Groups consulted

8.9 The Joint Strategy has been subject to a focused engagement with identified key stakeholders. This engagement has served to raise awareness of the Joint Strategy and its intended purpose. Key stakeholders have included:

- Natural England.
- Historic England.
- Environment Agency.
- National Health Service.
- South West Water.
- National Grid.
- Western Power (now National Grid Electricity Distribution).
- Network Rail.
- National Highways.
- Active Travel England.
- Devon County Council (as Local Education Authority, Local Transport Authority, and Minerals and Waste Planning Authority).
- Devon Housing Commission.
- Heart of South West Local Enterprise Partnership.
- Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership.
- East Devon AONB Partnership.

8.10 Comments have been received from 12 of the key stakeholders consulted. These comments are detailed in Appendix 2, together with responses to the comments and changes made to the Joint Strategy where these are necessary.

8.11 The Joint Strategy has not been subject to a public consultation since it is a non-statutory document and it does not introduce new policy or alter the content of existing and emerging Local Plans, which have themselves already been subject to public consultations at key stages in their preparation and also, in some cases, independent examinations.

8.12 The Joint Strategy was discussed by Planning Member Working Group, in November 2023.

9. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

9.1 The Joint Strategy includes a series of chapters covering key strategic issues facing the wider area. These support the delivery of all the priorities of the Corporate Plan:

- Prosperous local economy;
- Healthy and active city;
- Housing and building great neighbourhoods and communities;
- Net zero carbon city; and
- Thriving culture and heritage.

9.2 The Joint Strategy also links with, and helps to support, other key initiatives such Live and Move, the Exeter Transport Strategy and our net zero plan amongst others.

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

10.1 The Joint Strategy has been jointly prepared by four authorities, with support from Devon County Council. This means that Committee decisions will be required from the four authorities at similar times to enable the Joint Strategy to be approved across the Exeter, East Devon Mid Devon and Teignbridge area. There is a risk that one or more of the authorities does not approve the Joint Strategy. To help avoid this eventuality, officers have been working with their relevant Portfolio Holders/Cabinet Members to discuss the Joint Strategy's content and intended purpose.

10.2 A risk of not approving the Joint Strategy is that the City Council will be without a jointly agreed document with other Councils that will be capable of being used to demonstrate continued collaborative working and shared ambitions across a range of strategic priorities and for the delivery of infrastructure. This may be to the detriment of seeking funding for infrastructure projects from Government and other potential sources.

11. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)

11.1 Under the Act's Public Sector Equalities Duty, decision makers are required to consider the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct;
- advance equality by encouraging participation, removing disadvantage, taking account of disabilities and meeting people's needs; and
- Foster good relations between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

11.2 In order to comply with the general duty authorities must assess the impact on equality of decisions, policies and practices. These duties do not prevent the authority from reducing services where necessary, but they offer a way of developing proposals that consider the impacts on all members of the community.

11.3 In making decisions the authority must take into account the potential impact of that decision in relation to age, disability, race/ethnicity (includes Gypsies and Travellers), sex and gender, gender identity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, pregnant women and new and breastfeeding mothers, marriage and civil partnership status in coming to a decision.

11.4 In recommending this proposal potential impact has been identified on people with protected characteristics as determined by the Act and an Equalities Impact Assessment has been included in the background papers for Member's attention.

12. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

12.1 The Joint Strategy includes shared ambitions to help mitigate the effects of, and adapt to, climate change and move towards a net zero carbon future. Approving the Joint Strategy reconfirms the net zero ambition of the City Council in the context of similar aims of East Devon, Mid Devon and Teignbridge District Councils. This reflects the need to address climate change on a cross-boundary geography.

13. Are there any other options?

13.1 The other only other option would be not approving the Joint Strategy. This would have a negative impact in terms of demonstrating compliance with the Duty to Cooperate and would undermine efforts to seek funding for strategic infrastructure on a cross-boundary area.

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

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None

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