

STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16 November 2023

Present:

Councillor Yvonne Atkinson (Chair)

Councillors Mitchell, M, Allcock, Asvachin, Knott, Moore, D, Read, Snow, Vizard and Williams, M

Apologies:

Councillors Branston, Ketchin and Leadbetter

Also present:

Director Corporate Services, Director of City Development, Service Lead Legal Services, Service Lead - Active & Healthy People, Assistant Service Lead – Local Plan, Service Lead - Communications, Tourism & Culture and Democratic Services Officer (SLS)

In attendance:

Councillor Philip Bialyk	- Leader
Councillor Emma Morse	- Portfolio Holder for City Development
Councillor Josie Parkhouse	- Portfolio Holder Climate and Ecological Crisis
Councillor Duncan Wood	- Portfolio Holder Leisure Services and Physical Activity
Councillor Martin Pearce	- Portfolio Holder Communities and Homelessness Prevention
Councillor Ruth Williams	- Portfolio Holder Place and City Management

68 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2023 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct, subject to the amendment that Minute 67 was a resolved matter.

69 Declaration of Interest

Councillor Read declared a Discloseable Pecuniary Interest, as having sought to ask a question under Minute 73 (Full Draft Exeter Plan Consultation), she had an interest as a Member of the Exeter Canal and Quay Trust (ECQT) and withdrew from the room, whilst the matter was raised by Councillor Moore.

70 Questions from Members of the Public Under Standing Order No.19

There were no questions submitted by the public.

71 Questions from Members of the Council Under Standing Order No.20

In accordance with Standing Order No. 20, the following questions were submitted by Councillor Moore in relation to the Portfolios of Councillors Bialyk, Morse and also Councillor Pearce who attended the meeting. The questions were circulated at the

meeting to Members of the Committee. The responses of the Portfolio Holders are set out in italics below: –

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS UNDER SO20 TO CLLR BIALYK

Questions from Councillor Moore

How advanced is the work undertaken by ECL on the scheme to redevelop Mary Arches?

The work was at the Feasibility stage and the Director City Development will be able to provide further detail. A report on the Disposal of various sites would be presented to the forthcoming Executive meeting.

How much did the council pay ECL for this work?

The Director City Development would provide the information to the Leader, but unfortunately it was not yet available. There will be information on an overall cost for this in due course.

Councillor Moore asked a supplementary question, whether the Leader would involve the Ward Councillors in the discussions on the Feasibility work before it was reported to the Executive. The Leader said that Ward Members along with all Members and residents will be consulted in accordance with the Consultation Charter.

How advanced is the feasibility work on the Southgate Liveable Exeter site?

The project was now at Stage 2 Feasibility.

Councillor Moore asked a supplementary question relating to the advanced feasibility stage, which was beyond a vision and concept and asked if Ward Members would be involved in the discussion. The Leader advised that appropriate Ward Members would be contacted for any of the sites in the city.

How much did the council pay ECL and third parties for this work?

The overall picture will be available with a report to the Executive on the disposal of land.

Councillor Moore asked a supplementary question, if the figures would be available after the meeting. The Leader stated they were not currently available.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS UNDER SO20 TO CLLR MORSE (Portfolio Holder City Development).

Question from Councillor Moore

In light of the National Audit office report on resilience to flooding <https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/resilience-to-flooding/> - will the Portfolio holder ask the Environment Agency for an assessment of the implications of these findings and their impact on Exeter and the development of the local plan?

The City Council has involved the Environment Agency in detailed discussions during the preparation of the Full Draft Exeter Plan. This has included inputs into site appraisal, policy preparation and evidence, while the EA have provided formal responses to the consultations which have been held previously. The EA have also

been proactively involved in the work on the Liveable Water Lane Supplementary Planning Document. The City Council would expect responses from the Environment Agency on the consultations for the Full Draft Exeter Plan and the Liveable Water Lane SPD; the EA would draw on appropriate policy, evidence, research and flood modelling as they see fit. The City Council is also working with Devon County Council and South West Water on the preparation of planning policy as other key organisations with responsibilities over flood risk, water supply and waste water treatment.

Councillor Moore asked a supplementary question to have sight of the correspondence. The Portfolio Holder advised it would be available at the end of the Local Plan process.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS UNDER SO20 TO CLLR PEARCE (Portfolio Communities & Homelessness Prevention)

Questions from Councillor M Mitchell

.Can the committee be provided with the details of the total income to date on a monthly basis from the Community Lottery since it commenced and the amount of income gained from the lottery by Exeter City Council?

The Community Lottery web site detailed an indicative figure of over £51,000 as the forecast for this year. The figure fluctuated with the buying pattern of tickets. The Portfolio Holder welcomed the income which was generated for good causes in the city.

Councillor Mitchell asked a supplementary question about the target set. The Portfolio Holder advised that they did not set a target, and the indicative figure was if the sales stayed at that level for the rest of the year. The projections were based on the number of ticket sales before launch and the percentage of the population that were likely to take the opportunity to support community groups in this way. Ticket sales were ahead of the target and that data will be reported to the Grants Panel in the spring and then on through the Committee process.

Based upon current predictions how much income will the Lottery in this current financial year contribute to community causes?

The following information was provided:-

As at 31/10/23) there were

- 832 members with 1590 tickets (monthly)*
- 95 Good Causes receiving benefit*
- Based on this the forecast for the annual contribution to good causes from the lottery is £51,012*

A historical monthly breakdown can be provided on the returns to date, from a report that can be downloaded from the dashboard.

72 Portfolio Holder report - Councillor Wood

Councillor Wood as Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Physical Activity reported on the respective areas of his Portfolio, which detailed the Council's published priorities, major ongoing programmes of work, issues impacting delivery, financial performance and budget requirements and potential changes being considered.

He highlighted the key elements of his portfolio which included the Live and Move work, carried out in partnership with Sport England and a number of key stakeholders across the city as well as the Leisure Service with the many challenges faced.

The following responses to Members were given by the Portfolio Holder:-

- funding opportunities from Government had changed with bids invited on a competitive basis. As stated in the Portfolio Holder report, a recent funding bid in respect of reducing the carbon impact and improving sustainability for swimming pools had been unsuccessful. Northbrook Pool would have been an ideal beneficiary, as investment had already been made at the Riverside Leisure Centre and the passivehaus St Sidwells Point facility. Although a second tranche of funding had opened, the criteria had not changed and the bid was deemed likely to have the same result. The Leisure team were adept at identifying funding opportunities, and making bids but there needed to be a good chance of success to warrant further staff time and effort.
- the pool at the Riverside was a key asset and function for the western side of the city. There had been significant investment at the Centre after the fire and there were no plans to close that facility. Improvement work has taken place to address issues on the roof, which was divided into three sections, to both strengthen and make more waterproof with just a joining section of the roof to complete.
- the work of Leisure Services and the Live and Move teams was interconnected and efforts continued with Sport England to engage those harder to reach individuals to encourage physical activity which was the core focus and function of the Live and Move Strategy.
- communicating the overall message of culture, lifestyle and fitness through the Council's Communications teams as well as the Leisure Communications team and the Council's newspaper, the Citizen had been successful. The popular Pay As You Go app runs alongside the monthly membership offer and the numbers using the city's leisure centres on a daily basis was testament to the quality of the service offered. Statistics have shown that there was still some work as part of the Live and Move strategy shows there was still some work to do with those people who might have limited time and resources. In response to a further question on developing a more interactive or tailored experience for the individual, the Service Lead Leisure, Culture and Tourism advised that the gym equipment in the Leisure Centres was linked to the My Fitness, My Wellbeing app, with data collected to feed into the Live and Move Strategy. Further work was being undertaken to improve the data collection.
- referencing the data company Deep Green, and a link between heat loss and sustainable activities in leisure centres. St Sidwells Point does not need this and there was no industrial activity to help Northbrook Pool. The Service Lead Culture, Leisure and Tourism added that there were logistical issues in this regard in the Plant Room at the Riverside, but that could change if the equipment in the plant room was updated.
- maintaining adequate levels of staff in the leisure centres throughout the year, especially poolside with also dependent on student availability as well as the national shortage of lifeguards and swimming instructors remained a challenge for the service. Budgetary constraints had put additional pressure around, energy costs in the Leisure Centres, but they have continued to remain open as well as bring the staff in house, when many other Centres have closed.

- he would work with the Service Lead Leisure, Culture and Tourism to provide some evidence to meet Councillor Moore's request for examples of the effort needed for bids to share at a forthcoming LGA event she was attending.
- the Bromhams Farm Playing Field building was well located and he was keen to meet with any community members who might put forward any ideas for a sports facility. There were larger changing facilities at the King George V Playing Fields, and they were exploring ways to expand the use and make more of a centre for the community and offer more cohesion within the sporting community. The Bromhams Farm Playing Field represents a similar opportunity.
- despite a very competitive environment, the challenges in running the leisure service and utility costs which were still comparatively high, he was confident the income would exceed the budget agreed at Council. The team continued to explore every opportunity to increase the income, through engagement with communities and delivering activities and he anticipated more growth income next year. A balanced budget will depend on a number of factors and whilst he was not in a position to commit, the aim was to look at less subsidy from the General Fund to support the services.
- the pricing structure to assess the facilities of leisure services were offered at the lowest rate that could be sustained across all of the service. The team were currently exploring a new leisure card, which would be targeted at those who were least active and whose inactivity represented a potential risk to their physical or mental health. Those individuals will be identified through their GP or other health group and invited to engage on a tailor made programme. The card will also offer a reduced Pay As You Go access as part of a period of reduced membership for off peak access to those individuals with limited income to encourage them to visit the leisure centre environment.

The Portfolio Holder also responded to advance questions received from Councillors M Mitchell and Read. The responses were set out in italics below:-

Questions from Councillor Read

What are the leisure service income generation targets and how is financial performance progressing against these?

The 23/24 income target for the leisure portfolio is £4.05m and to date, actual income received is £3.6m (89% of the target had already been achieved). The income generation target was likely to be exceeded by quite a significant figure.

In respect of your reference to ageing leisure stock, what is the funding requirement for the capital programme for these repairs and how do you expect it to be funded?

The following figures were given:-

- *Leisure Property enhancements £2.1m budget*
- *funding will be from borrowing and or from the various competitive funding opportunities*
- *Leisure Equipment Replacement £661.7k budget*
- *Leisure equipment replacement, £100k is a year-on-year budget funded from capital receipts. A sum of £561.7k is leftover from the previous leisure capital budget and been combined with the £100k to give an enhanced*

spend on a rolling replacement equipment programme across the leisure stock which does become worn out.

The Portfolio Holder responded to a follow up question on the percentage of borrowing and stated that at this stage it was not possible to confirm, but currently, borrowing was not an option due to the high interest rates. There would be different criteria if capital investment was required for health and safety reasons. Many of the funding opportunities bid for also required an element of investment from the Council.

Questions from Cllr Mitchell

Can you provide an update on the work on the Riverside roof, the total expected costs against the budget and will this work to fix the roof be the end of the work on site?

The work to consider the replacement of the middle section of the roof at Riverside was nearing the end of the feasibility stage. . The overall Cost Plan was being developed as part of the conclusion to the Feasibility Stage and this will confirm the cost position against budget. It was expected that the Feasibility Stage will be concluded prior to Christmas. Once the Riverside gym roof is fixed, all three roofs at the facility will then have been replaced. Unfortunately there was no guarantee that other aspects of the building would not fail over the coming years which will require further repair work, in this busy municipal building.

In response to a further question on whether the costs identified in the Feasibility study would meet the supplementary budget for roof work, the Portfolio Holder stated that the work would remain within budget. He added that a funding opportunity was being explored as well, and if successful that would reduce the funds needed to invest in the building.

In regard to St Sidwells Point Leisure centre can the Portfolio Holder provide details of the membership figures and attributable income against revenue costs for the last year?

The figures and the volume of people using the facility of the team to keep the facility at the standard were as follows - .

Since St Sidwells Point (SSP) was built there have been 1,960,811 visitors

There are 5256 live SSP members

There are 43,000 pay-as-you-go members

The Membership base has doubled in the first year since opening SSP and that is a clear indication of the current position.

All membership and all other income revenue streams are attributable against revenue costs.

In respect of a £2.1m subsidy for the service, the costs were applied holistically against that service wide membership. They are running a service and facility in the city and were keen to sustain it. SSP is a certified passivehaus building and the costs of running it are lower than any other comparable building in the city.

Councillor Mitchell followed up the question and referred to income in 2022/23 being £1.67m against a cost of £2.845m. The net cost to the budget was £1.172m against the membership income of £1.583m and he asked what actions might be taken to reduce the costs. He acknowledged that there were start-up costs.

The Portfolio Holder referred to the service wide challenges and the pressures of the high utility costs and inflation which was reflected in the rising staff costs. Every effort was being made to increase the income, despite starting from a difficult place in a difficult industry. When the budget was set, a sum of £2.1m was requested but he anticipated that the same level of funding would not be required in the next year.

Members noted the Portfolio Holder's report.

73 **Full Draft Exeter Plan Consultation**

Councillor Read having sought to ask a question in relation to a strategy declared a disclosable pecuniary interest as a trustee of Exeter Canal and Quay Trust (ECQT) and withdrew from the room, whilst another Member sought the information.

The Assistant Service Lead (Local Plan) presented the report which explained the progress made on the Exeter Plan (Local Plan) and made a presentation which was attached to the minutes. He explained the content of the Full Draft of the plan which is out for public consultation between 23 October 2023 and 15 January 2024.

The Chair reminded Members that the report was about the Local Plan consultation process and not a scrutiny of the Local Plan.

The Assistant Service Lead (Local Plan) advised that the team had been working on the Plan since 2021, when suggestions were made for development sites in the city. They consulted last year and had been reviewing the 3,500 responses and appraising further sites which were proposed during consultation. This current process is the third public consultation and covers the full Draft Plan. This work now included a large number of policies and strategies which direct the Plan. The six, strategic, brownfield sites identified had changed slightly but were still based on the sites in the Exeter Liveable initiative. The sites included in the plan were residential, employment or mixed use. They had also published a proposals map of all of the policies in the plan.

The presentation covered the detail of the Plan and he highlighted number of matters associated with the Plan. The identification of the strategic brownfield sites offered a sustainable strategy for the city. This offered an opportunity to meet the housing needs in sustainable locations and regenerate areas of the city. The challenges of developing brownfield sites were varied and included existing uses on site with multiple ownership and areas of contaminated land, the heritage setting of the city and the viability of the development. The current brownfield approach is a change from the previous plans which included large areas of greenfield development on the edge of the city.

There were significant challenges in delivering the evidence to support the Plan and to support the end of the process. The consultation was running for 12 weeks and was being run in accordance with the Consultation Charter and the Planning Statement of Community Involvement. There were a number of exhibitions and meetings with stake holder meetings and community groups running alongside an advertising and social media campaign. The next steps will include an assessment of the responses received and the Plan will come back to the Strategic Scrutiny Committee in March to provide an analysis of the responses. The team will put together more evidence and revise the Plan before further consultation next autumn as part of the formal Regulation 19 process and the publication of the Final Draft Plan. A more formal consultation will be run in a year's time.

The Assistant Service Lead (Local Plan) responded to the following Members' comments:-

- the consultation has been pitched to serve a variety of ways in which people can respond. Stakeholders were able to send detailed responses or very simple 'agree' or 'disagree' answers through the smiley or less happy face emojis.
- the structure of the consultation followed the Council's consultation Charter. The planning team had arranged 12 exhibitions and 2 pop up exhibitions in the Central Library and this was a significant undertaking. There was a limit to the events that they could support along with other meetings with community groups and with community builders.
- Regulation 19 was a formal approach and structure for commenting on the soundness of the Plan at the next stage of plan-preparation. That consultation on the Final Draft would take place next autumn and would be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate and examined through a series of public hearings.
- the team would review their strategy of consultation in advance of the Regulation 19 stage, however this stage is very regimented as set out by regulations and this could have an impact on how the consultation is run.
- Regulation 19 would be a final draft. All responses received together with the evidence base would be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate and an Inspector would have a series of meeting hearings to examine the plan. Respondents would be able to attend these hearings. The Inspectors recommends changes to the plan, and these recommended Changes are consulted on and then a final version of the Plan is produced.
- the call for sites had been carried out in 2021 and evidence was put together to support the Plan. The site appraisal is available as part of the evidence base for the plan. Any new sites which are proposed during the current consultation would be fed through that formal process and site assessment and conclusions would be made available when the next stage of the Plan was out for consultation. The Portfolio Holder City Development assured the Member that the call for sites would follow a robust set of criteria and it was not about the second sites coming forward again, it was about seeing new sites that would be appropriate.
- the team is working with neighbouring authorities and the County Council as there was a duty to cooperate on Plan making on cross-boundary issues.
- the principle of the Live and Move Strategy, Active Travel, Active Design principles and Place Making as well as the importance of health and well-being were included in the Water Lane Design Code and Development Framework.
- the site of St Luke's at the University of Exeter had been identified as an employment allocation, but was quite different to the other three traditional employment sites. St Luke's would offer a reinvigoration of the site to support the University's Research and Development functions and health partnership work with the Royal Devon University Healthcare Trust. It was a different type of employment allocation and that may need to be clarified in the next stage of the Plan.
- a Heritage Harbour strategy developed by the Exeter Canal and Quay Trust including the Harbour, Quay area and Water Lane had been taken into consideration by the Exeter Plan work.

Strategic Scrutiny Committee noted the work associated with the Full Draft Exeter Plan.

Live and Move Programme Update

The Service Lead Active and Healthy People presented the report which provided a further update from March 2023 for Members on work undertaken and planned under the Live and Move Strategy, across Exeter and Cranbrook, with the aim of increasing health inequality and physical activity. The report also provided an opportunity to highlight the Council's programme of work around physical activity and well-being in local communities, an update on the Sport England delivery pilot and an explanation of a focus and data collected from survey work carried out over the last 12 months to highlight the work in the city. The team had embarked on a process to extend their work with Sports England, making an application for funding until March 2028. A combination of the report and a background presentation (attached to the minutes) detailed the main points in the survey.

The Service Lead Active and Healthy People advised that an independent academic evaluator from Exeter University ensured that an objective robust evaluation was made of all of the work the team does. The level of data from the enhanced local active live survey was unique to Exeter, which together with feedback information from residents and their focus groups meant the team were able to target their resources and work where it was needed the most. The enhanced survey had been carried out in May 2023 and targeted 2,000 residents in the 20 priority areas in the city with the highest rates of inactivity and the poorest health outcomes. The study period from April 2022 until March 2023, analysed behaviour for the period when moving out of the pandemic, and a further evaluation would be made in a year's time to study any further physical activity habits.

The Service Lead Active and Healthy People responded to the following questions:-

- all of the data and information feeds into the digital strategy work led by Jo Yelland, Director as part of the Council's customer services and strategy work.
- the target for Active Travel England was agreed through the development of the Exeter Transport Strategy. The Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) was a local target that aligns with best practice and was set in advance of Active England's targets.
- the important objective within the Playing Pitch Strategy was to develop a network of community sports hubs, such as the Exwick Sports hub which was created in partnership with Exeter College and managed by the Exeter Community Trust. The aspiration was to develop more sites and continue to explore options for community led projects, and that might include seeking community assets transfer opportunities. As part of this theme, there had been some discussions relating to the changing rooms at the King George V Playing Fields. The team would have to reflect on their capacity to secure additional investment in their current programme of work.
- regarding the facilities at Bromhams Farm Playing Field, he would continue to engage with local partners, including Exeter College, the café owner, the Devon Wildlife Trust and the Exeter Spitfires baseball club who would like to consider that as their base.
- the data output covered the 20 priority areas.
- the priority areas did not include a student classification, but the team were aware that younger people had contributed to the city wide data which showed an increase in young people walking and an exercise to compare the data with the 20 areas and the city wide data would offer a breakdown of the people walking in the city.

- rather than any behavioural tracking devices which would have meant a significant investment for the Council and Sport England, the surveys were conducted by field work on the door step and covered a 12 month period.
- key policy interventions in relation to cycling, would require a systematic approach at national and local policy level. There should be a balance of infrastructure and behavioural change on the ground, working with schools, residents and community activity organisers who set up the local walking and cycling groups and who understand the local area. It was about having the positive experience of going for a walk and cycle and that could only be done if the investment in the infrastructure was in place.
- data from the Devon County Council, and Public Health data had informed the 20 priority areas and the Live and Move team were working in those parts of the city using information from the JSLA, and Sport and Active Lives. The data collected was being fed back to Public Health colleagues to include that information on their web sites and help inform policy decisions.
- in the context of walking and cycling the team have contributed significantly to the development of the walking and cycling infrastructure plan with Planning, the Parks and Open Spaces team, and the focus on walking and cycling as the first mode of transport. There was further consultation in this regard and he awaited the detail.
- he would ensure Members were included to the discussion with local stakeholders on the future of the changing rooms and wider Playing Pitch infrastructure at Bromhams Farm Playing Field.
- Cowick Barton Playing Field had been included in the survey. There was the potential to work with the community there, to improve activity levels, encouraging people to use the space for walking, cycling and informal recreation. An approach from local organisations in relation to the changing facility at Cowick Barton Playing Fields would be explored by both the Parks and Open Spaces and the Corporate Property teams.
- a further update would be provided in six months, and he would also continue to provide information on the data though the web site and the Scrutiny Bulletin.

Strategic Scrutiny Committee noted the progress made against the strategy, and its contribution towards key priorities in the City Council's Corporate Plan.

75 **Forward Plan of Business and Scrutiny Work Plan**

It was noted that the Scrutiny Programme Board would be considering the work plan of future business for Scrutiny.

Members noted the Forward Plan and draft Scrutiny Work Plan.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.55 pm

Chair