

STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12 September 2024

Present:

Councillor Liz Pole (Chair)

Councillors Mitchell, M, Atkinson, Haigh, Hughes, Knott, Moore, Palmer, Rees, Rolstone, Snow and Williams, M

Apologies:

Councillor Ellis-Jones

Also present:

Head of Service - City Centre and Net Zero, Head of Service - Legal and Democratic Services & Acting Monitoring Officer and Democratic Services Officer (LS)

Attending as Portfolio Holder:

Councillors Vizard and Wood

28 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 June 2024 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct.

29 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

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

There were no questions submitted by the public.

31 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 and responses were given by Councillor Vizard, Portfolio Holder for Climate, Ecological Change and Communities.

Question

1. The Royal Clarence Hotel Planning Application 22/0236/FUL

1. What progress has the developer made in applying for and discharging the conditions for this granted permission?
2. When does the Council expect work to start onsite and to be completed?
3. What assessment has the council made of the effectiveness of the measures to protect the remaining historic fabric before the work commences?

Response

1. **Progress on Applying for and Discharging Conditions:** The developer has made some progress following the conditional approval granted on 10 October 2022. Exeter City Council drafted the Section 106 agreement on 17 April 2023 and it was signed on 25 August 2023. However, no formal

applications have been submitted to discharge the specific planning conditions associated with the development. Several urgent works have been undertaken to stabilise the structure, including reducing the height of two chimneys under an Urgent Works Notice to prevent the risk of collapse and damage to neighbouring properties. Additional measures include introducing new internal structural scaffolding to provide stability and regular maintenance, such as pumping out standing water from the basement and removing vegetation. The site is inspected weekly by the owners' representatives to ensure the integrity of the scaffolding and check for structural defects.

2. **Expected Start and Completion Dates for Onsite Work:** The Council cannot currently provide a specific start date for the construction works. While the developer has indicated a potential start date in Spring 2025, this is contingent on completing the detailed design phase (RIBA Stage 4) and subsequent procurement of construction packages. Given that these elements are outside the control of the Council, we are cautious about setting public expectations. We continue to engage with the developer to encourage timely progression, but it is essential to note that these timelines may be subject to change.
3. **Effectiveness of Measures to Protect Remaining Historic Fabric:** In collaboration with Historic England, the Council has emphasised the importance of protecting the remaining historic fabric of the Royal Clarence Hotel site. Protective measures have been implemented, including installing new internal structural scaffolding for additional stabilisation and repairs to the lead valley between the Wellhouse and 15 Cathedral Yard. The site is subject to regular inspections and maintenance, such as replacing scaffold sheeting and hoarding as needed. These steps have been deemed adequate to prevent further deterioration of the structure while awaiting the commencement of construction. However, these inspections and maintenance works are carried out by the owner's representatives rather than the Council.

Supplementary Question and Response

Councillor Moore asked when enforcement would be put in place and Councillor Vizard answered that deadlines would be in place as with any planning application.

Question

2. NPPF consultation

In the Council's response to the National Planning Policy Framework consultation will the Portfolio Holder ask the Government to remove the provision for viability assessments (i.e. guaranteeing developer's profit) and request that Government work with developers to finance risk in other ways, so the expectations of local planning authorities for developers to meet obligations such as affordable housing can be assured?

Response

The Council will provide a response to the National Planning Policy Framework consultation. In doing so it will set out the importance of delivering development that complies with local plan policy and delivers appropriate contributions towards infrastructure and affordable housing. The emerging Exeter Plan will also provide for robust approaches to viability assessment in order to achieve such development.

Supplementary Question and Response

Councillor Moore asked that the option for funding viability in other ways be included in the response to Government and Councillor Vizard responded that Councillor Allcock had initiated discussion and he will refer to her for a written response.

32 Portfolio Holder report - Councillor Vizard

The Portfolio Holder and the Head of Service, City Centre and Net Zero responded to Members' questions making the following points:

- That 22,797 homes were now part of the food waste scheme;
- That 2,438.8 tonnes of food waste had been collected;
- Calculating the carbon reduction of food waste was in progress;
- Challenges of overall budget were included in the report;
- Scrutiny would be welcomed in looking a ways to find net gains;
- All areas are priority but that some were within the Council's gift and others not;
- That the Leader had called on DCC to engage regarding opportunities for a different model of bus service;
- Existing ECC EV charging was not tied to the existing devon scheme; and
- That revenue covers electricity and small surplus which is used for maintenance.

33 Working Towards Net Zero: ECC Corporate Carbon Footprint Report & Carbon reduction Action Plan

Head of Service, City Centre and Net Zero provided a verbal update on the Council's Corporate Carbon Footprint Report and Carbon Reduction Action Plan making the following points:

- Recruitment challenges from the South West Energy & Environment Group, from the University, had now been overcome;
- That SWEEG was now in its final stages of reporting to the Council;
- A breakdown of the spend of the net zero budget would be provided within the next report; and
- That the report would be presented in November.

34 City Wide Net Zero Programme and update on delivery

Head of Service, City Centre and Net Zero provided a verbal update on the Citywide Net Zero Programme making the following points:

- that the Net Zero City Wide Programme Manager had been recruited;
- actions from the Exeter Net Zero 2030 plan were being updated;
- the Exeter Net Zero 2030 plan was being cross-referenced with the Devon Carbon Plan and the Devon and Cornwall Adaptation Plan to create a work programme for the Programme Manager;
- that a full list of additional actions were contained within the Portfolio Holder update; and
- that the report would be presented in November.

The Head of Service, City Centre and Net Zero answered a question from a Member stating that the work programme will cross-reference with the Climate Change Committee and National Action Plan.

35 **Progress Report Shared Prosperity Fund update**

Head of Service, City Centre and Net Zero presented the Progress Report of the Shared Prosperity Fund making the following points:

- The Council had spent or allocated all of year 2 funding thereby releasing 100% of year 3 allocation, £892,000;
- For year 3 projects, 50% of funding had been paid to the major projects with the remaining 50% due to be paid this month;
- Year 3 focussed on support people with 3 major projects funded which include the Urban Learning Academy, the Exeter Youth Hub and Exeter College's Retrofit Academy.
- That there was a watching brief on the Prosper Project that may result in a small underspend on that project, but if that was the case existing projects would be reviewed and if they were unable to utilise the underspend then it maybe offered to projects which weren't successful in achieving SPF funding;
- That all funds must be spent by 31 March 2025;
- No projects could roll into the next financial year; and
- That it was anticipated that all funds would be spent within the timeframe.

The Head of Service, City Centre and Net Zero answered Members questions making the following points:

- That they will link with the Urban Learning Academy regarding possible links between E5 and People and Skills;
- Would link with project lead regarding biodiversity; and
- Feasibility study outcomes and whether these were met would be brought to committee.

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

Members commented on the work plan.

Councillor M Mitchell moved and Councillor Palmer seconded that the two Air Quality items be merged and following a vote this was not carried.

The Monitoring Officer clarified that SMB comments would mean the Strategic Scrutiny Committee would be fully informed and ensure the best report from officers. Councillor Hughes stated for the minutes that had additional information been available they would have voted differently.

Councillor Atkinson proposed and Councillor Knott seconded that the tabled Air Quality item be taken to SMB and returned to the committee with comments and following a vote was carried.

Councillor Knott proposed and Councillor Mitchell seconded that another meeting date be added in December for the Local Plan and following a vote was carried unanimously.

Members noted the Council's Forward Plan and draft Scrutiny Work Plan.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.27 pm

Chair

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RESPONSES

Responses given after the meeting to questions asked by Members:

- The Council currently does not have its own Biodiversity Action Plan, this is covered by The Devon Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) - Environment;
- Capacity issues had been the challenge in developing our own Biodiversity Plan;
- In regards to food waste rollout, timescales regarding rollout would be announced when necessary infrastructure work timescales had been finalised;
- Devon's Tree and Woodland strategy was developed in partnership with the District councils and Exeter had fed into that process throughout; and
- The principles and objectives in the Devon Strategy closely match our own, however Exeter's strategy was targeted specifically at delivering sustainable tree management and development within a city urban setting.

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