



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, TRANSPORT AND TOURISM SCRUTINY
COMMISSION

Held: THURSDAY, 4 MARCH 2021 at 4:00 pm as a virtual meeting using Zoom

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Waddington (Chair)
Councillor Sandhu (Vice Chair)

Councillor Broadwell
Councillor Fonseca

Councillor Rae Bhatia
Councillor Porter

Councillor Valand

In Attendance

City Mayor – Sir Peter Soulsby
Deputy City Mayor – Adam Clarke
Asst. City Mayor – Danny Myers

* * * * *

121. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chair led introductions and advised this was a virtual meeting as permitted under section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020 to enable meetings to take place whilst observing social distancing measures.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Joel.

It was noted that Councillor Valand needed to leave the meeting early due to another meeting commitment.

122. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to declare any pecuniary or other interest they may have in the business on the agenda.

Councillor Broadwell declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in that she was a sole trader refurbishing bikes and therefore had a general interest in the business on the agenda and particularly in cycle related schemes.

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, this interest was not considered so significant that it was likely to prejudice the Councillors' judgment of the public interest and there were not therefore required to withdraw from the meeting.

123. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair announced that an item from Corporate Estates in relation to Economic Regeneration of Workspaces due to come to this meeting had been deferred to the April meeting.

The Chair also announced that the commission had been due to revisit issues around accessibility and disability but sadly the Chair of the Leicester Disability Group had passed away due to Covid, therefore that item had been postponed until the organisation was able to come back.

The Chair agreed to a change in the running order of the agenda to take the item "Questions for the City Mayor" before the substantive items of business.

124. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 14th January 2021 be confirmed as an accurate record.

125. PROGRESS ON MATTERS RAISED AT THE LAST MEETING

The Committee noted that, further to minute item 112 supporting provision of English lessons for speakers of other languages (ESOL) the budget for that had still not been confirmed but was being explored with other funding options that may be available and the possibility of linking to the work with the Textiles Academy.

126. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

127. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that no questions, representations or statements of case had been received.

128. QUESTIONS FOR THE CITY MAYOR

The City Mayor was asked why £600k was given to the Haymarket Consortium Ltd when the council had already spent £3.5 million, what had happened to that money and what was being done to ensure in future that due diligence and scrutiny occurred?

The City Mayor responded that £3.5 million had brought the semi-derelict

Haymarket building back into use and the reasons for the loan were covered in the decision notice and report published at that time. The impact of Covid 19 upon the new company that took over responsibility for the Haymarket was very significant and they had not had the opportunity of building reserves like an established company would have. In terms of how the loan had been spent the City Mayor commented that the operation of a building the scale of the Haymarket would use up resources quickly and needed to be matched by people coming through the door and paying for seats. For comparison it was noted that the Curve is subsidised every year. Unfortunately, the pandemic was not predicted, and its arrival did not stop the company's duty to pay bills which left them in a position where their liabilities outstripped their assets when the company closed.

The City Mayor was asked whether there were active efforts to get the building into use again in future? The City Mayor commented that what the council had because of its investment was a building transformed from a major liability with costs of service charges, rental and maintenance into something that could be a major asset to the city. It was disappointing the company initially could not take it forward however there were productive discussions ongoing about bringing the building back into use and a briefing on the various options could be brought to a future meeting in due course.

129. LLEP ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLANNING

The Director of the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP) submitted a presentation setting out details of the LLEP Economic Recovery Plan.

Councillor Myers (Assistant City Mayor, Policy Delivery and Communications) addressed the commission and advised that the council had received £2m from the European Social Fund to deliver the "Get Inspired" and "Youth Hub" projects between 1st April 2021 and end 2023. This would enable continued work with LASALS and funding towards youth advisor posts as well as opportunity to explore and enhance work with others such as Transform.

Councillor Myers (Assistant City Mayor, Policy Delivery and Communications) also advised it had been announced in the budget that additional funding was being made available through the UK Community Renewal Fund to pilot programmes and invest in skills. Leicester had been identified as eligible to apply and a bid for £3m would be worked up for submission by end of June 2021.

The Head of Economic Strategy & Engagement (LLEP) gave an overview of the LLEP Economic Recovery Planning taken in three stages: analysis of the economic shock; details of the creation of a short term economic recovery plan and lastly insight into the development of a long term economic recovery strategy.

Data illustrating the current situation around Job Postings, Furlough and Claimants was explained. It was noted that the number of job vacancies had

dropped in 2020 (although not all jobs are advertised) with some rise later in the year and currently Leicester had the highest number of furloughed people in the East Midlands which could possibly account for the low number of jobs advertised. The claimant count (per centage) in the City was also higher than other comparators although it followed the same trajectory.

The Recovery Plan (available on the LLEP website) contained five sections: Business Recovery; People, Employment and Skills; Green Recovery; Innovation, Science and Technology; Infrastructure, each with their own priorities and underpinning all priorities in the plan are “golden threads” that cut across everything.

The Head of Economic Strategy & Engagement (LLEP) briefly illustrated progress against the plans priorities and how repurposed LLEP GPF funding had been allocated to interventions within the Recovery Plan, e.g. £90k establishment of area Digital Skills Partnership which would research and gather evidence around digital skills deficits and reasons behind that; e.g. initiative around place marketing, with allocation of £185k to Invest Leicester. Lastly £20m allocated to “Getting Building Fund” to deliver four projects namely: Junction 23 M1/A512 Access Improvements; St Margaret’s Gateway; Sport Park Pavilion 4 and Granby Street/St Georges Street Regeneration Gateway, which would all contribute to enabling recovery from the impact of Covid-19.

The Chair invited Members to discuss the presentation which included the following comments:

- In relation to the £185k for Leicester place marketing this was repurposed LLEP GPF funding allocated to Place Marketing, and was a top up to contributions from both the City and County local authorities in recognition of the need to include more activities that enhance Leicester and Leicestershire and showcase it as a great place to visit, invest and live.
- In terms of opportunities being explored to help young people recover from the impact of Covid-19, it was noted that 18-24 year olds tended to have higher rates of unemployment, £100k was being put towards NEET prevention through intensive targeted support and additional funding allocated for extension to Gateway schemes that offered opportunities to experience the working environment for a year. There was close work with both universities on the Graduate City programme to retain graduates and offer opportunities as well as a key piece of work exploring jobs in the future and to understand where those opportunities will lie as the demography of businesses has shifted. LLEP had also produced a series of videos around the world at work to help embed career guidance into schools, employment hubs etc.
- It was clarified that the “Claimants” data related to Universal Credit claimants that are seeking work, this was currently significantly higher than the national average. It was difficult to specifically say which sectors had shed jobs at the moment, as this data was previously collected by DWP in respect of JSA claimants but is no-longer with Universal Credit.

- It was felt that Golden Threads were helpful and a good way of approaching proposals. It was confirmed that funding had been repurposed to allow access by businesses and those had started immediately, some projects were still subject to a procurement process e.g. Kick Start, whereas, the Place Marketing scheme had been approved so all of those activities were imminent starts with funding completed and/or delayed to next year.

The Chair welcomed the approach adopted by LLEP beginning with analysis, then developing a shorter and long term action plan.

AGREED:

That the contents of the presentation report be noted.

130. CITY ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLAN - UPDATE

The Director of Tourism, Culture and Investment submitted a presentation providing updated details of the City Economic Recovery Plan which included progress drawing in external finance and activity in several key areas namely support for people, support for business, the City Council as an employer, measuring impact and City promotion.

It was noted that a large part of the economic recovery speed was dictated by national policy around Covid-19, however there had been good progress on drawing in external finance to support initiatives such as the £2m secured to extend the council's Employment hub.

On behalf of the government, the council's finance team over the past 12 months had been able to pass on £100m of support to local businesses across Leicester and the government had also made available another £10m (with the possibility of a further allocation flagged via the Chancellor's recent budget) of additional restricted grant that will be used to both sustain businesses, and to support them change course (if necessary) and be more sustainable in the future.

Members also noted that:

- It was anticipated there may be a rise in redundancies and LASALS had relaunched its redundancy support package for individuals referred and was reaching out to employers too, the package included a flexible offer of careers advice, planning and online interview skills.
- £2m ESF funding for the Employment Hub would secure services that work with business, with employment skills plans, pathways and traineeships.
- Apprenticeship numbers had plummeted during the pandemic, the team had been working within government policy creating opportunities to aggregate unspent apprenticeship levy from employers enabling businesses to receive training costs for new apprentices.
- The council had been approved as a Kickstart intermediary body with an initial programme approved covering 87 vacancies with that number potentially able to increase once more vacancies were identified,

enabling paid work for unemployed 18-24 year olds.

- A new Youth Employment Hub would be launched via a virtual service with a physical hub to support young people into employment following at the old Visit Leicester Gallowtree Gate premises.
- The new Textiles Training Academy would launch later in year supporting people to develop technical and higher level skills in the fashion/textile industries.
- The Construction Training Hub (with funding secured from CITB alongside council resources) was now on site at Ashton Green with a secondary site planned at Glen Parva. A manager had been recruited for that programme and work was ongoing with a range of construction companies to create opportunities in that sector to provide people with construction specific employability skills.
- Digital Inclusion had become a strong theme over the last 12 months, and work was ongoing to combine digital skills training and around loaning devices. Funding had been secured for 80 devices in the first year which would be loaned to the most vulnerable first as part of a joint initiative which included LASALS, Smart Cities and Neighbourhood Services.
- An Ex-Offenders Project was being developed to support ex-offenders into employment in partnership with the Police and Crime Commissioner, the DWP and the Council. Funding from DWP had enabled the appointment of a new co-ordinator post in the employment hub.
- Graduate Retention scheme in partnership with both universities in Leicester now had ten companies signed up and due to target the first cohort in June 21.
- An Economies for Healthier Lives bid had been made in partnership with the Public Health teams. The programme focus is on reducing health inequalities through observing labour market and displacement because of Covid-19. Public health data showed where impact was being felt and opportunity had been taken to submit a £500k bid to the Health Foundation to look specifically at this and labour market interventions. It was proposed that a project manager be appointed who would bring together a range of support services for mental/physical health and employment hub and volunteering.
- Entry to employment posts within the City Council were noted.

In terms of business grants attention was drawn to the following:

- 213 small business recovery grants had been approved, helping those businesses to reposition and invest in core digital technology.
- Growth grants continued to be popular and the team were looking to increase the grant pot with government.
- The retail café seating grants scheme was currently closed but the intention is to use ARG resource to top it up to support more businesses when restrictions are eased.
- Shop front improvement grant was an existing scheme that had been very popular especially during the pandemic with nearly 600 enquiries received for grants up to £5k. The scheme was currently closed whilst

applications in the pipeline were assessed.

Regarding City Promotion the £185k grant secured from LLEP would be used to boost Place Marketing and deliver new video and digital content at key destinations as part of wider strategic tourism programme. The City Centre Director was leading on new itineraries and trails, a suite of physical and digital content that included trails and guides to Roman Leicester, the Thomas Cook story, eating and drinking etc and targeted at the staycations sector.

The Chair invited Members to discuss the presentation which included the following comments:

- Officers were congratulated on the success of the business and discretionary grants schemes which were very useful; in terms of the Shop Front Improvements scheme it was queried whether those were freely available across the whole of Leicester as there were some areas such as Green Lane Road where shops were in need of improvement and such a scheme would add value to that part of the city. It was advised that the shop front improvement scheme had been running for several years and had previously prioritised several neighbourhoods, however officers were exploring options to see if the scheme can be expanded through other resource.
- It was recognised that a substantial amount of money was being invested to help with apprenticeships and employment however it was queried what was being done to support the hard to reach families with young people. Officers responded that there was a lot of work around that in the Employment Hub, as well as work with the Princes Trust and Futures which particularly tried to engage with those disadvantaged. The additional funding secured would also have focus on reaching out and contacting those with needs and hidden needs, as an example the textiles academy will be engaging people through employers and that will bring contact with other groups such as those who spoke English as a second language.
- In terms of providing assurance that the £185k would be used to provide a positive portrayal of Leicester officers agreed to bring a further report to a future meeting to show how that money had been applied and its impact.
- Responding to concerns about rebuilding Leicester's reputation it was noted that allegations of slave labour and exploitation across the textile/factory sector had been discussed many times and there was a piece of work to coalesce those organisations where allegations were centred. However, it was important to promote the wonderful work that goes on across the city, and at same time to ensure those organisations with powers to act do so. A review of this work would be published over next few weeks.
- In relation to East Midlands Airport being identified as a free port it was understood that the activity will be harnessing freight and the business that already exists there and so it should not pose a threat to the city but open up positive opportunities for people in Leicester that might want to commute there to work. In terms of LLEP they were working alongside

Derby and Notts LEPs in developing the bid and it is very much predicated on further inward investment, forecasting 30,000 direct jobs on three sites namely the East Midlands Airport, the Ratcliffe on Soar power site and at the Toyota site on A50. This will offer a range of financial incentives with a job focus on advanced logistics and automotive.

- Regarding the economic recovery dashboard data, it was confirmed that relevant, evidence based decision making was aspired to however not all data was available at ward level but the platform did allow some mapping which could then be made available at ward or other levels. Officers were also exploring data from other services to build into the platform and there was ongoing work around how IOS and DWP data could be obtained and made available at ward level. It was noted that the speed of the pandemic meant data was not always available. At a high level data showed the impact of the pandemic had been disproportionately felt in different sectors. Research looking at sectors that had done well throughout the pandemic, those sectors where demand had dipped but was predicted to recover quickly and others where there may be a more permanent drop in demand.

Drawing discussion to a close the Chair commented that she was pleased to hear the many positive actions planned but felt that one thing missing, which would be helpful to see at a future meeting was the analysis and data e.g. to know who was most impacted by Covid-19 and lockdown, their ages, where they live, are they men/women, are they with or without qualifications, in low skilled/paid jobs, which businesses affected, which sectors, etc and from that can identify where to direct effort and initiatives.

AGREED:

1. That an update report on Place Marketing/Invest in Leicester to be brought to a future meeting to show how additional funding of £185k had been applied and its impact,
2. That a further report with data and analysis of impact of Covid 19 and lockdown on people affected to be brought to a future meeting,
3. That a report providing details of work undertaken by the council and other partners regarding working practices across the Textile/Factory sector to be brought to the next meeting.

131. TRANSFORMING CITIES SCHEMES - CONNECTED LEICESTER

The Director of Planning, Development and Transportation submitted a report updating on the Transforming Cities Fund (TCF) programme and Connected Leicester aimed at providing improved choices for commuters who travel by bus, cycle or walk as alternatives to car use.

The City Centre Streets Programme Manager briefly introduced the report noting that Members had received a separate informal briefing in February regarding three schemes at Beaumont Leys, Anstey Lane/Buckminster Road and Abbey Park Road which were briefly recapped.

Officers had given consideration to a cycle way along Brading Road, however the issue was that this would be twice the length of Buckminster Road, also Brading Road was relatively narrow with no space to widen footways so bikes would have to share space with vehicles and that road had quite a lot of traffic.

The Chair acknowledged that Brading Road was quite narrow and it would be difficult to put a cycle lane in, it was suggested it would be preferable to see a cycle lane created along the grass verge of Buckminster Road rather than the closure of that road.

A member stressed a point made previously about Leicester East being included in this type of development programme in future.

A member raised concerns about the success of such schemes, whilst road surfaces and footpaths for example were in poor states and whether these types of schemes were improving congestion, lowering journey times, reducing air pollution and carbon emissions.

A member commented that the costs of owning and running a car was prohibitive to many and indirect costs such as air pollution, accidents, health aspects, should be borne in mind and, perhaps more should be done to discourage driving. The city is built on assumption of being able to drive but the biggest obstacle to getting around city by alternative means is its infrastructure, as a lot of design decisions favoured the car driver. It was suggested that the Beaumont Leys scheme could be more ambitious.

Responding to Members comments it was explained that these schemes were intended to encourage people to use more sustainable and active modes of transport, such as cycling or bus transport but acknowledging that some people do need to continue to use a car. Radial trips around the city were not well catered for but officers were trying to develop a city less dependent on cars although the way the city had been built up over more than a hundred years made that challenging. There was also continuous growth in terms of population and road users to take account of.

The Director Planning- Development & Transportation commented that some important points had been made and there was a need to consider the city we want to live in future, a lot of cities saw sustainable transport as part of their place making and Leicester was a successful growing city, with an enormous amount of growth and have to keep working at investing resources to help people move around the city and investing in sustainable transport was important too. Equally important was the state of road and footways and much of this investment benefits states of roads too as it also includes resurfacing roads.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions and in summary noted that there was considerable support for most proposals, noted the concerns raised about the issue on Buckminster Road which would be subject to consultation, there was a wish to see more of this type work in Leicester East and there was some concern also about the impacts.

AGREED:

1. That the contents of the report be noted,
2. That the comments of the Commission be noted and considered as the schemes are developed,
3. That Officers include alternative options to closure around the Buckminster Road location when the consultation is undertaken.

132. DISCUSSION ON POTENTIAL ITEMS FOR UPCOMING COMMISSION MEETINGS

The Chair invited Members to contribute ideas for what should be on future meeting agendas.

Suggestions included:

- An item on “Reserving Rights of Way of former Central Railways”.
- Exploring issue of space in the urban realm and potential for building a fixed mass transit system for the future.
- An item to discuss The Impact on Climate Emergency in terms of Construction Projects.
- Insight into “Leicester Rangers proposing a new stadium using sustainable building”.
- A discussion around where lessons could be learnt about the £600k loan to Haymarket Consortium and a small investigation into what happened there.

The Chair thanked Members for their contributions and invited any further proposals by email.

133. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None notified.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions to the meeting.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 6.55pm.