



Leicester
City Council

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

Held: THURSDAY, 19 NOVEMBER 2020 at 4:00 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Waddington – Chair
Councillor Sandhu – Vice-Chair

Councillor Broadwell
Councillor Fonseca
Councillor Joel

Councillor Porter
Councillor Valand

In Attendance:

Councillor Clarke – Deputy City Mayor Environment and Transportation
Councillor Myers – Assistant City Mayor Policy Delivery and Communications
Sir Peter Soulsby – City Mayor

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95. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, reminding everyone that 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.

At the invitation of the Chair, Members and officers present at the meeting then introduced themselves.

96. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Rae Bhatia.

97. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Broadwell also declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in relation to the general business of the meeting, in that she was a sole trader running a business building and refurbishing electric bikes.

98. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

a) 17 September 2020

Further to minute 77, “Declarations of Interest”, it was noted that Councillor Porter also had campaigned against the Local Plan before he was elected.

Further to minute 78, “Minutes of the Previous Meeting”, it was noted that the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership’s Economic Recovery Plan was still being developed and was likely to be confirmed at the meeting of the Board of Directors being held on 1 December 2020.

A member of the Committee expressed concern that his comments on the Draft Climate Emergency Strategy and Action Plan, (minute 81 referred), had not been fully recorded. However, no changes to the wording were suggested, so the minute remained unchanged.

Further to minute 86, “Leicester Textiles Sector (Modern Slavery & Labour Exploitation)”, the Chair reported that the Citizens’ Advice Bureau had recruited an engagement officer to look into issues in the textile sector. As not being proficient in English was a barrier to workers being aware of their rights, the officer had requested that classes in English for Speakers of Other Languages be extended to people without the usual documentation. The challenge with this for the Council was that production of documentation was an auditable requirement, so consideration would be given to whether alternative funding could be found to provide language classes.

AGREED:

- 1) That the Chief Executive of the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership be asked to provide copies of the Partnership’s Economic Recovery Plan to all members of this Commission;
- 2) That this Commission supports the provision if possible of English classes for undocumented workers, to remove language barriers for those workers, and asks the Director of Tourism; Culture and Inward Investment to consider whether funding can be found for English classes for undocumented workers; and
- 3) That the minutes of the meeting of the Economic Development, Transport and Tourism Scrutiny Commission held on 17 September 2020 be confirmed as a correct record, subject to the addition of the following sentence at the end of the third paragraph of minute 77, “Declarations of Interest”:

“Councillor Porter further declared for openness that he had campaigned against the Leicester Local Plan before he had been elected as a Councillor.”

b) 12 October 2020 (Special Meeting)

A member of the Committee expressed concern that his suggestion that properties should be converted to flats, rather than Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), had not been recorded fully, (the second bullet point on page 32 of the agenda, (minute 93, “Draft Leicester Local Plan (2020 – 2036) – Public Consultation”), referred). However, no changes to the wording of that part of the discussion were suggested, so that element of the minute remained unchanged.

The Chair suggested that the actions agreed in relation to minute 93, “Draft Leicester Local Plan (2020 – 2036) – Public Consultation”, could be reworded, to place greater emphasis on specific actions that had been endorsed by the Commission. The Commission agreed to this suggestion, as set out below.

AGREED:

That the minutes of the Special Meeting of the Economic Development, Transport and Tourism Scrutiny Commission held on 12 October 2020 be agreed, subject to the following amendment to the actions agreed under minute 93, “Draft Leicester Local Plan (2020 – 2036) – Public Consultation”, new wording being shown in italics:

“AGREED:

- ~~1) That the Director of Planning, Development and Transportation be asked to forward the suggestion of establishing start-up and business development premises to relevant officers for consideration;~~
[moved from point 1 to point 3]
- 1) *That this Commission recommends that the Director of Planning, Development and Transportation and the City Mayor give further detailed consideration to the following issues in drawing up the Local Plan:*
 - a) *The need for more and better public transport particularly in areas of population growth and an infrastructure that enables and encourages more environmentally friendly transportation;*
 - b) *The enhancement of green public spaces particularly in areas of dense housing;*
 - c) *The wisdom of designating scarce NHS land at the General Hospital site for new housing in view of the growing need for health services and beds, resulting from population increase and ageing;*
 - d) *The development of brown field sites including derelict and disused factory buildings for new*

employment and business opportunities and for other designated purposes;

e) Enabling development measures designated to create more local jobs, green jobs and business start-ups;

f) Ensuring that accessibility is a thread running through all parts of the Local Plan;

g) Protecting family houses in areas where Houses in Multiple Occupation conversions are adversely impacting upon neighbourhood communities and heritage assets; and

h) Controlling the numbers of betting shops, massage parlours and food take-away establishments in neighbourhoods with vulnerable populations and/or levels of saturation;

2) That the Director of Planning, Development and Transportation be asked to accept the comments *in 1) above and in the commentary to this minute recorded above* as this Commission's response to the public consultation on the Draft Leicester Local Plan (2020 – 2036); and

3) That the Director of Planning, Development and Transportation be asked to forward the suggestion of establishing start-up and business development premises to relevant officers for consideration. [wording unchanged, but moved from point 1 to point 3]"

99. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

100. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

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

101. WORKSPACE DEVELOPMENT

The Director of Tourism, Culture and Investment submitted a report updating Members on the Economic Regeneration Workspace portfolio, and specifically three projects to develop more workspace.

Councillor Myers, Assistant City Mayor Policy Delivery and Communications, who had responsibility for this portfolio, introduced the report, welcoming the support that workspace development gave to the support for businesses in different sectors. He also welcomed the positive impact this would have on local supply chains and expressed the hope that it would increase investment in the city.

The Head of Economic Regeneration reminded Members that the development of grown on workspace adjacent to Dock was progressing well and was due to be completed in early 2021. There already was good demand for space at that site. Separately, a developer was converting the Gresham building, (previously used by Fenwick's), to include flexible working space, the demand for which was likely to increase. In general, workspace occupancy was remaining high during the Covid-19 pandemic.

A further workshop scheme at Pilot House on King Street had the potential to be a substantial scheme. Its development was being led by the Council's Estates and Building Services division, which would be developing a funding package for the project. Current projections were that the workspace there could be available in 2022 – 23.

The Commission welcomed the ongoing success of this work and made the following points during discussion on the report:

- 50% of the workspace near Dock had been pre-let. Did officers have any indication of what proportion of the workspace in the Gresham building and Pilot House developments was likely to be pre-let when the developments opened?

Response from the Head of Economic Regeneration:

Marketing for the space next to Dock had been launched, but marketing for the Gresham development had not started yet, as the building was not due to open until late 2021. It was hoped that marketing for the Gresham development could start in early summer 2021. However, space there would not be leased, as desks would be available to rent on an ad hoc basis. Comparable schemes in other cities had been successful and it was hoped that this would be replicated in Leicester.

Development of Pilot House was at an earlier stage and the nature of the space to be provided had not been confirmed yet.

- Commercial rents in retail spaces currently were high, so it could be beneficial to encourage use of this space by other sectors. High rent levels and long leases were the result of market failure, in that they created barriers to entry to markets as new entrants often were not in a position to meet these costs or make a long-term commitment through a property lease.

Response from the Head of Economic Regeneration:

The Council brought forward schemes such as that to develop workspace where there was a market failure in provision. It did not manage the retail offer in the city, so would have a different role in discussions on affordability of retail premises.

Response from Councillor Myers, Assistant City Mayor Policy Delivery and Communications:

A lot of developments needed retail input at ground level to make those developments viable, but this was a different offer to that being made in this instance by the Council.

- Would providing the type of workspace proposed distort the market and lead to rents become excessive?

Response from the Head of Economic Regeneration:

Conditions attached to funding for workspace development did not allow the Council to offer the space at below market rent, as this would distort the market. Investment by the Council usually was the first public sector intervention in regeneration areas, in order to increase investor confidence in that area and stimulate job growth in the longer term.

- Clarification of what was meant by “demand research” and who had undertaken it was requested.

Response from the Head of Economic Regeneration:

A formal study had been commissioned earlier this year from an economic development consultancy, who looked across the city to establish potential demand.

The Council also maintained a list of enquiries received from people and businesses looking for space in the city, so it was known that a demand for workspace existed.

- How many additional jobs had been created through the development of these workspaces? What was the level of turnover?

Response from the Head of Economic Regeneration:

As these were pipeline projects, there currently were no jobs, and consequently no turnover, to report. The actual number would depend on factors such as the type of business using the space and the number of employees, but it was likely that the numbers would be similar to those for existing workspace.

- It previously had been suggested that some of the modern shops in Market Place that were scheduled for demolition could be retained as pop-up shops, with accommodation above. This would contribute towards the creation of a thriving city centre, both in business terms and encouraging people to live in the centre.

Response from Councillor Myers, Assistant City Mayor Policy Delivery and Communications:

The Council wanted people to live in the city centre. Approximately 10,000 people now lived there, which was a lot more than 10 – 15 years ago. A good business model that improved quality of life and increased footfall to an increased number of businesses therefore was essential.

- Consideration could be given to including a retail element and/or gallery space to the workspace being developed.

Response from Councillor Myers, Assistant City Mayor Policy Delivery and Communications

Good exhibition space already existed in the city, particularly in and near the Cultural Quarter, but also in other parts of the city, so had not been included in these projects.

- There would be a number of empty premises in the city centre and neighbourhoods after the Covid-19 pandemic. These could be used for a range of different uses, including pop-up retail use or business start-ups and work could be done with landlords to ensure that the number of vacant premises was minimised.

Response from the Head of Economic Regeneration:

The inclusion of workspace, pop-up shops and galleries all could be important in increasing confidence in an area. Various grant schemes recognised this and the Council worked with partners, including through the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership, to achieve this.

- Were other workspaces managed by the Council's Estates and Building Services division?

Response from Councillor Myers, Assistant City Mayor Policy Delivery and Communications:

The Council was a commercial landlord, so did rent a range of properties to businesses. However, the workspace initiative was to meet a need caused by market failure and was not a purely commercial undertaking.

AGREED:

That the Director of Tourism, Culture and Investment be asked to:

- a) Keep this Commission updated on progress with the development of workspace in the city;
- b) Keep under consideration how new and emerging businesses can be supported, particularly in response to the changing threats and opportunities created by the current Covid-19 pandemic; and

- c) Request that a report be prepared by the Council's Estates and Building Services division for the Commission at an appropriate time highlighting all of the workspaces managed by them and the Economic Regeneration service, highlighting the differences between them.

102. ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLAN

The Director of Tourism, Culture and Investment submitted a report on the Leicester Economic Recovery First Steps plan, setting out what was and was not included, and how that plan related and responded to this Commission's Task Group review report that was published earlier this year.

Councillor Myers, Assistant City Mayor Policy Delivery and Communications, introduced the report. He noted that claims for Universal Credit and Jobseeker's Allowance had doubled since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and it was expected that young people and women would be disproportionately affected. In addition, changes in shopping habits had been accelerated by the pandemic lockdown. The economic Recovery Plan therefore set out the first steps being taken in response to the situation in Leicester and how this reshaping of the economy also would help the city become a better and fairer place to work.

Government support had been requested, but it was considered that the Council would have to lead the response, for example by providing workspaces and as an employer supporting good apprenticeships. As a purchaser, the Council added over £250million per annum to the local economy and through its capital programme could provide opportunities to develop green skills. However, it was very important that the city worked together to drive the economic recovery forward.

The Director of Tourism, Culture and Investment explained that the Plan was part of a series of plans and documents being produced to guide the city's recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. He stressed that the Plan focussed on things that could be done with a high degree of confidence and outlined some of the things that could be done on a longer-term basis. Work on Smart Cities was an important part of this, as was the complementary Economic Recovery Plan being prepared by the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership.

The following points were then made in discussion:

- Had any indication been received that any multi-national companies were interested in moving to the city?

Response from the Director of Tourism, Culture and Investment:
Although it had reduced a little, the Inward Investment team still had a very healthy pipeline of enquiries from a range of companies across different sectors.

- How was the stated intention to support and prioritise employment for vulnerable groups to be implemented, particularly in relation to women, young people and those from Black and Minority Ethnic communities, who were all disproportionately affected by Covid-19?

Response from the Director of Tourism, Culture and Investment:

Support of this nature had been provided by the Council for a long time. For example, investment had been made through the Employment Hub and programmes targeting particular communities were in place. There was, therefore, confidence that the necessary skills and abilities were available to ensure that the stated aims in the Recovery Plan were achievable. This included work in partnership with others, such as that on start-up businesses being done with the Prince's Trust.

Response from the Head of Economic Regeneration:

The review previously undertaken by this Commission on inclusive economic growth underpinned the work of the Economic Recovery Plan and was specifically referenced within the Plan.

- What work was being undertaken with the city's universities to target young people, including school leavers, graduates and interns?

Response from the Head of Economic Regeneration:

The Council had programmes with both of the city's universities regarding graduate retention. In addition, funding from the European Social Fund had just been received for the creation of local internships.

- How would apprenticeships be sustained?

Response from the Director of Tourism, Culture and Investment:

A broad range of apprenticeship opportunities were available across the Council, but a particular focus for new ones would be on jobs for the green economy.

Response from the Head of Economic Regeneration:

The Employment Hub provided links with agencies and organisations and provided information on apprenticeships for those who needed it, as this was a set of organisations that supported people into employment. A lot of work also was undertaken with other agencies to make sure information was circulated as widely as possible and good use was made of routes such as social media.

- Reputational damage, nationally and internationally, caused by the city's extended lockdown and reports of "slave labour" in local businesses could make the recovery difficult to achieve. A clear message about the city and its economic recovery therefore needed to be given, to redress the balance and encourage people, including graduates, to work in the city.

Response from the City Mayor:

All work to address exploitation of workers was welcomed. Unfortunately, only limited success had been possible in addressing the causes, as central government was not using the powers available to it regarding this issue. The Council therefore was pressing the government to change its approach.

The characterisation of the city in this way was not backed up by evidence, as investment was still being made in the city, for example in developments such as that at Waterside. This was an example of where the Council had provided the infrastructure, with the rest of the investment being made by companies confident that the city was continuing to thrive despite the Covid-19 pandemic.

- The Council should retain a stake in developments. Selling land to private developers would remove any power the Council had to intervene if a development was inappropriate, as planning controls were unlikely to be sufficient in such situations.

Response from the City Mayor:

This was the way in which high quality developments, with the required mix and quality of development types, could be ensured.

- The focus on the textiles sector suggested for sector-specific support packages should be expanded to include the care sector, “green” jobs and, due to the increase in building work, all areas of work in the building sector. An important factor to consider in this was that the country’s departure from the European Union meant that it would no longer be possible to rely on importing skills.
- The report and Plan presented were a good starting point for the City’s economic recovery, but currently lacked detail and evidence of the current problems. A clearer idea of which sectors would be more adversely affected was needed, so it was hoped that, to help tailor the response in the city, detail and evidence could be included in the near future. In addition, an Action Plan should be included in the Recovery Plan, to identify the steps it was intended to take, by whom, when and what the targets were.

Response from the Director of Tourism, Culture and Investment:

It was recognised that the Recovery Plan needed to contain more detail. A delivery programme was being developed, but a decision had been made to not include statistics at present, in order to make it a similar style and length as other recovery plans being produced in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. It therefore currently just identified what needed to be done, but data was available that would help the recovery be tracked, which would be used as the Plan evolved.

Response from Councillor Myers, Assistant City Mayor Policy Delivery and Communications:

It was recognised that imaginative solutions to the issues facing the city needed to be found, so as the strategy for the Plan evolved, a wider analysis would be included in it, which needed to be data led.

AGREED:

- 1) That the Director of Tourism, Culture and Investment be asked to consider the comments recorded above as the Economic Recovery Plan is developed;
- 2) That it is recognised that the city's economic recovery requires support from strategic partners and central government, so the Director of Tourism, Culture and Investment is asked to seek this support, in the most appropriate form, whenever possible; and
- 3) That the Director of Tourism, Culture and Investment be asked to provide updates on the progress with the city's Economic Recovery, including the development of the Economic Recovery Plan and issues identified, at appropriate times.

103. NATIONAL PAVEMENT PARKING CONSULTATION

The Director of Planning, Development and Transportation submitted a report on the current national consultation on options to improve the management and enforcement of pavement parking across England. Members noted that, under the consultation, local authorities were asked to identify their preferred option from those offered and give general views on how pavement parking could be managed in the future.

Councillor Clarke, Deputy City Mayor Environment and Transportation, reminded the Commission that the findings of the review of pavement parking undertaken by this Commission in 2014 had been submitted to the government. These were reflected in the proposals now made by the government, so also were reflected in the proposed response to the current consultation.

The City Highways Director drew Members' attention to the options set out in the report, reminding them that the Council already had civil parking enforcement powers, (option 2 in the report). Permitting pavement parking by administrative resolution, as proposed under option 3, would require an assessment of each street in the city to be undertaken, but also would need enforcement to ensure that pavements did not become blocked. This would entail reviewing over 3,000 streets, of which it was estimated approximately one-third would need some form of controlled permissive parking. Designs for each street then would have to be drawn up, based on individual situations, and then installed. In total, this could cost approximately £3-4million, funding for which had not been identified at present. If the government made funding available to the Council quickly, this work could be completed in approximately 2 – 3 years.

The Commission welcomed the report, noting that the review in 2014 had arisen from evidence of incidents such as disabled people having accidents and pushchairs and prams having to be wheeled on to roads due to pavements being obstructed by vehicles parked on them. In addition, many streets were very narrow, so needed alternative ways of parking.

In response to a question, the City Highways Director advised the Committee that the Council currently did not have power to stop the obstruction of pavements, although fines could be issued if parking restrictions were in place, (for example, double yellow lines). At present, Traffic Regulation Orders had to be made to stop pavement parking and this had been done in a few locations.

Members were interested in what the positive impacts across a range of protected characteristics were, as mentioned in the Equality Impact Assessment. In reply, the City Highways Director advised that these were felt to particularly relate to age, disability, pregnancy and sex, as pavement parking could disproportionately affect elderly people and those who were less mobile, or were pushing prams and pushchairs, trying to get around the city on a daily basis. This could be highlighted in the response to the consultation if required.

It was noted that in some parts of the city residents had to park on pavements, even if they did not want to. Requests for dropped kerbs to give access on to properties were only approved if five metres of space was available at 90 degrees to the property, but a lot more could be approved if the space requirement could be measured at an angle to the property. A more flexible approach could increase the number of requests approved and therefore allow more vehicles to be parked away from the road.

Councillor Clarke advised Members that he was aware that consideration was being given to how greater flexibility over the approval of dropped kerbs could be achieved, but it was essential that what was allowed was safe and adhered to national regulations. The City Highways Director confirmed this, noting that in some cases an application could be approved if four metres of space was available. However, one problem with allowing people to park at a different angle and have a smaller amount of space available was that residents in properties changed over time, as did the size and shape of motor vehicles, so what worked for a car, for example, could be unsuitable for a van. In addition to considering the local situation, comparisons were being made with other local authority areas, to identify possible alternative arrangements.

AGREED:

- 1) That the Director of Planning, Development and Transportation be asked to note the following when responding to the consultation “Pavement parking: options for change” that this Commission:
 - a) supports Option 3, a national pavement parking prohibition with the provision to permit pavement parking by administrative resolution, as the preferred option;

- b) supports the suggestion that a lengthy transition period will be needed and asks the Director to include information in the response on what these timescales are anticipated to be and the reasons for these;
 - c) supports the suggestion that there is a requirement for funding to be provided by the government to meet the attendant costs involved in introducing controlled pavement parking where appropriate;
 - d) supports the suggestion that Option 2, allowing the Council to enforce against unnecessary obstruction of the pavement, also is progressed to enable pavement parking to be enforced during the transition period;
 - e) notes that the power to enforce against Unnecessary Obstruction may also enable the Council to pilot a zonal approach to permitted pavement parking areas without the need for marked bays and excessive signage;
 - f) supports the suggestion that support be given to streamlining the Traffic Regulation Order process in any case (Option 1); and
 - g) requests that the positive impacts for people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 of agreeing the recommendations be emphasised in the Council's response to the consultation; and
- 2) That officers be thanked for their work in preparing the response to the "Pavement parking: options for change" consultation and the approach suggested.

104. ST MARGARET'S BUS STATION DEVELOPMENT

Some concern was expressed that technical difficulties with this presentation had prevented it being circulated with the agenda for this meeting. However, in view of the nature of the presentation, it was decided to proceed with it. The Head of Development Projects then gave a presentation on plans for the development of St Margaret's Bus Station.

During the presentation it was noted that this was a major gateway regeneration project that would deliver the first net zero carbon bus station in the United Kingdom. The existing footprint of the bus station would be used, with some of the steel structure being retained. Similar facilities would be provided as at the current bus station and a new bus gateway on to Burleys Way already had been opened, which reduced bus journey times.

The planning application for the development had been submitted. It was anticipated that the existing bus station would close on 31 December 2020 and

be demolished in early 2021. The opportunity would be taken at the same time to undertake some new highway works and public realm improvements, such as the provision of a new “super crossing” across Burleys Way where a footbridge previously had been located. The development was programmed to be completed March – April 2022 and the bus station was expected to reopen in May 2022. While the bus station was closed, National Express would operate from the bus station apron, entering it from Abbey Street, and bus shelters and other facilities would be provided for passengers.

It was suggested that using the existing site and footprint of St Margaret’s bus station missed an opportunity to relocate that bus station to a site that provided greater connectivity with the train station. In reply, Councillor Clarke, Deputy City Mayor Environment and Transportation, explained that moving the bus station nearer the train station would increase journey times for National Express coaches, so would have the net result of reducing connectivity. However, funding had been received for an electric vehicle shuttle service to connect transport nodes in the city, which would help improve connectivity.

The Director of Planning, Development and Transportation explained that land with the capacity to enable the bus station to be relocated nearer the rail station was not available, but the desired integration could be achieved by improving walking, cycling and bus links. The Transforming Cities Programme included a number of elements to help achieve this, including the recently completed Savoy Street link. An options review was being undertaken to determine what could be linked with the electric vehicle service and this would be brought to the Commission for scrutiny when completed. In addition, funding also was available for walking and cycling infrastructure and a bike share scheme would have docking stations located at the bus and train stations.

AGREED:

That the proposals for the redevelopment of St Margaret’s Bus Station be noted and welcomed.

105. TRANSFORMING CITIES FUND - CONNECTED LEICESTER

The Commission noted that it was proposed that a presentation be given providing information on completed schemes within the Connected Leicester programme and plans for future works. Unfortunately it had not been possible to circulate this presentation before the meeting, due to technical difficulties with the slides, and some concern was expressed that the technical nature of the subject matter could make it difficult for Members to absorb the information being presented.

The City Centre Streets Programme Manager started the presentation, in order to provide an insight in to the work being done under this programme, but it became apparent to Members that the detailed nature of this work meant that it would not be possible to undertake meaningful scrutiny of the programme at this meeting. It therefore was suggested that it would be beneficial to defer the presentation until the Commission’s next meeting and in the interim for members of the Commission to be briefed on the programme.

AGREED:

That consideration of this item be deferred to the next meeting of this Commission and that in the interim an informal briefing session be held for members of the Commission on the work being undertaken.

106. QUESTIONS FOR THE CITY MAYOR

No questions were submitted.

107. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 7.04 pm

