

Extract from the minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 7 February 2018.

69. Leicester and Leicestershire Draft Strategic Growth Plan.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive which provided an opportunity to consider and comment on the draft Strategic Growth Plan for Leicester and Leicestershire. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 8' is filed with these minutes.

The Commission also considered the following:-

- A presentation setting out how the Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA) had informed the Plan; how the overall figures for growth had been determined and justification for the level of growth in the Plan; and how the distribution of growth had been determined and how developments on the borders of Leicestershire have been taken into account;
- A presentation setting out the transport infrastructure delivery and further transport assessment work needed to support the Strategic Growth Plan;
- A presentation setting out housing capacity in Leicester City;
- Written representations from the Campaign to Protect Rural England, Shelter Housing Aid and Research Project and the County Council's Public Health Department, copies of which are appended to the report.

A copy of the slides forming the presentations is filed with these minutes.

Mr N J Rushton CC, Leader of the Council, advised the Commission that he was proud of the draft Strategic Growth Plan as Leicester and Leicestershire were one of a very few county and city areas with such a Plan. He thanked the Members' Advisory Group (MAG) for their work in developing the Plan, recognising that they had had to make tough decisions. He noted that the Plan would be welcomed by the Government as Ministers would see the area's potential to deliver economic growth.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Tim Sacks, Chief Operating Officer for East Leicestershire and Rutland Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), explained that the level of detail in the Strategic Growth Plan would be important to support the local CCGs to plan for the future and identify which GP practices required development. He expected that the level of growth set out in the draft Plan would require between 10 and 20 new large health centres. Consideration of the draft Strategic Growth Plan across the local health and care system was needed in order to evaluate the expected impact of population growth on acute and community hospital beds.

Mr J B Rhodes CC, Deputy Leader of the Council and the Council's representative on the MAG, reminded the Commission that there was little opportunity for significant growth in Leicester City. It was inevitable that the level of growth set out in the Plan had been estimated, but it was felt to be as accurate as possible. It was therefore important to plan for that level of growth and to focus largely on developing a few strategic sites rather than significantly expanding villages and changing their character. Nationally, the concept of an expressway from Exeter to Hull, based on

the A46, had been proposed. This would improve east-west connectivity in Leicestershire and would bring significant strategic benefits for growth. The route had not been identified yet but the MAG supported the concept and had included it in the draft Strategic Growth Plan. Mr Rhodes also made reference to the importance of technology and how changes to technology such as vehicles which could be controlled electronically could change transport infrastructure requirements. The Strategic Growth Plan would be flexible in its ability to respond to new technology.

Arising from discussion the following points were raised:-

The Four Priorities in the Strategic Growth Plan

- (i) Members welcomed the principle of the Strategic Growth Plan, to prevent unplanned growth which damaged the character of local areas and lacked infrastructure. The proposals in the Plan were generally felt to be sensible and it was felt that a long term strategic vision would benefit the area and provide a framework for the development of future Local Plans at District Council level. A bold vision permitted larger, strategic developments which were more likely to have a design code to ensure high quality housing and the inclusion of initiatives such as garden towns and suburbs.
- (ii) Assurance was sought that the essential infrastructure needed to deliver the Strategic Growth Plan would be secured, especially as the East Midlands had the lowest level of public expenditure on transport infrastructure in England. The Commission was advised that the Leader of the Council was working to raise the profile of the area. The Council was a member of Midlands Connect and the Midlands Engine and could use these positions to lobby for funding.
- (iii) The A46 Expressway would gain funding through the development of a clear plan which could in turn be included in Highways England's Road Investment Strategy. The first phase of funding would be for a feasibility study.
- (iv) An infrastructure study was a requirement for all Local Plans. Without infrastructure it would not be possible to deliver the required housing growth in a planned way. The Strategic Growth Plan focused on principles rather than details; detailed plans for growth and infrastructure would be set out in the eight Local Plans.
- (v) A view was expressed that the priorities in the Plan did not address the reasons behind the need for growth, such as that people were living longer but not necessarily healthier lives. It was suggested that accessible and affordable homes, near facilities such as health centres and schools, should be a priority as should the need for homes to be near places of employment as this would reduce people's need to travel. It was confirmed that transport assessments were carried out at planning application stage and these included consideration of public transport, cycling and walking. Links to Leicester City from surrounding areas would also be important and it was confirmed that these would need to include a variety of methods of transport. Connectivity would be reconsidered as new technology was developed which could have an impact on commuting and employment patterns.

- (vi) It was confirmed that the Strategic Growth Plan was not a statutory Plan but it was felt locally that it was the most effective way of delivering the statutory Duty to Co-operate. There was no requirement for the Plan to have a formal examination in public, it was up to the partners to consult as they saw fit. It was felt that a mock examination in public, whilst feasible, would be an expensive exercise of limited value.
- (vii) The Prospectus for Growth had been submitted to the Department for Transport for information only, a response was not expected. The County Council would work with partners to bid for funding for infrastructure projects when funding streams became available.
- (viii) Although the development of the Ivanhoe Line was an aspiration for the County Council, it needed to be part of a larger rail franchise to be affordable and unfortunately there were no interested parties. The County Council could not afford to upgrade the infrastructure and run a railway and the project had therefore not been included in the Strategic Growth Plan.
- (ix) The Commission was pleased to note that the fifth building block for the Strategic Growth Plan was protecting the environmental, historic and other assets. It was important to protect these as they helped to make Leicestershire an attractive place to live. It was noted that the evidence identifying these assets was included in the Environmental Assets Plan which was available on the Strategic Growth Plan website. A sustainability appraisal was also being finalised and would be published on the website in the next few days.
- (x) The HEDNA had taken account of the characteristics of local economies in Leicester and Leicestershire. Economic Development and Planning Officers from the nine Local Authorities had been involved in the HEDNA's development. In terms of consultation with elected members, the publication of the Strategic Growth Statement in 2016 had enabled all members to comment on the direction of travel. Individual MAG members had a responsibility to disseminate information to members of their authority; in Leicestershire County Council's case a number of All Member Briefings had taken place prior to the publication of the draft Strategic Growth Plan. Public consultation on the content of the draft Strategic Growth Plan was also taking place and there had been a public consultation on the Strategic Growth Statement.
- (xi) The Strategic Growth Plan did not assess the impact of regional or nationally imposed schemes. These would have to be addressed by each Local Plan. However, the Strategic Growth Plan did provide a framework for growth and would support Leicester and Leicestershire to resist developments over and above the scale that had been identified in the Plan.
- (xii) A study of the logistics and distribution sector had been commissioned by partners in 2014. This study had recognised the need for a strategic rail freight interchange, for which a location had not yet been identified, and a minimum of 472 hectares of large scale strategic distribution facilities. These findings had been supported by the HEDNA.

Overall Quantity of Development in the Plan

- (xiii) The Government was currently undertaking consultation on a new formula to determine the level of housing growth required for each Local Authority area. It was expected that the figures for the Midlands would be similar to current figures and that any adjustments needed would be minor and relatively easy to calculate. The new formula was expected to prevent debate over different interpretations of the figures.
- (xiv) It was confirmed that the outcome of the Brexit referendum had been known when the HEDNA had been developed and that immigration figures had been adjusted accordingly. Migration was only a small component of the expected level of growth; it was largely driven by changes in the population characteristics. It was expected that the total figure for growth set out in the Strategic Growth Plan would ultimately be wrong as it was not possible to forecast accurately to 2051. However, it was based on the best possible evidence and would be regularly reviewed in the light of new evidence. The Strategic Growth Plan would be an important consideration at Local Plan Inquiries, as would up-to-date evidence.
- (xv) With regard to development in Leicester City, the figures in the Strategic Growth Plan included city centre development. Some capacity work was being undertaken in this area and would be reflected in the Leicester City Local Plan. Historic England usually expressed concern regarding planning application for tall buildings as they were not in keeping with the character of the city and this would also need to be taken into account.

Growth Locations

- (xvi) The proposed locations for strategic growth were generally supported by the Commission, although it was hoped that the Local Plans would reflect these proposals accurately. It would be important to reflect the need for affordable housing in the north of the County and to address the current difficulties in accessing employment opportunities at the East Midlands Gateway in the north of the county from Leicester or Coalville.
- (xvii) The level of development proposed for the East Midlands Gateway was 10,000 new homes, as opposed to 40,000 new homes around the A46 Growth Corridor in the south and east of the county. It was confirmed that this was because growth was more constrained in the north of the county by the physical environment. It was noted that there were currently plans for a lot of development in north Leicestershire but the pace of delivery was slow due to a lack of infrastructure. Some concern was also expressed that these planned developments were not affordable and did not deliver easy access to employment.
- (xviii) It was confirmed that there was currently no route proposed for the A46 Expressway. The County Council would not determine the route, although it would work closely with Highways England. As the proposal moved closer to

delivery there would be plenty of opportunity for public consultation on the route and for elected members to have an input.

- (xix) With regard to the key centre for growth of Lutterworth, infrastructure modelling would be undertaken to identify any pressures on the transport network where further work was needed to enable growth. This would also ensure that the adverse effects of growth would be mitigated against.

Next Steps

- (xx) Consultation on the Strategic Growth Plan would end on 5 April. A report on the outcome of the consultation would be considered by the MAG, as well as any changes to the Strategic Growth Plan required as a result of the consultation. It was expected that the final plan would be submitted to the nine Local Authorities for approval between October and December 2018.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the comments now made be submitted to the Cabinet for consideration at the meeting on 9 March;
- (b) That the written submissions from the Campaign to Protect Rural England, Shelter Housing Association Research Project and the Public Health Department be submitted to the Cabinet for consideration at the meeting on 9 March.

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