

**MINUTE EXTRACT - MEETING OF THE SCRUTINY COMMISSION HELD ON
31 OCTOBER 2018**

38. Strategic Growth Plan

The Commission considered a report and presentation of the Chief Executive which set out the revised Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan (SGP), which had been amended in the light of consultation responses. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 8', and the slides forming the presentation, is filed with these minutes.

The Commission also considered a submission from the Campaign to Protect Rural England, a copy of which is filed with these minutes.

In introducing the report, the Chief Executive advised that the SGP would be a key document to help the local area plan for future development needs. Leicester and Leicestershire were one of the only areas in the country developing a voluntary plan in this way and had consequently attracted interest from central Government and agencies such as Homes England. He noted that the SGP was not set in stone but would be reviewed as new evidence became available and would be considered and tested through the Local Plan process at district council level.

The Commission was advised that the breakdown of consultation responses showed that 42% of respondents agreed with the key priorities and 42% disagreed. 57% of respondents disagreed with the A46 Expressway being a primary growth area. 54% of respondents agreed that Leicester should be the central city. 47% agreed with the proposals for the development of the Northern Gateway (now the Leicestershire International Gateway) whereas only one third of respondents agreed with the proposals for the Southern Gateway, which had been removed from the Plan as a result of the consultation. A full report of the consultation findings was available on the SGP website.

Arising from discussion the following points were raised:-

- (i) The SGP had been prepared in the context of Government policy and guidance, as well as independent evidence, such as the Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA). The HEDNA was recognised as a robust and comprehensive assessment. It was based on the 2014 housing need projections and was therefore in line with the Government's latest guidance for calculating housing need, which were currently subject to consultation. These figures were preferred by the Government to the 2016 projections which had only recently been published and had yet to be considered in the context of other available evidence and Government policy.
- (ii) The Commission was keen to see a review timetable built into the SGP. Officers advised that it had always been the intention to review the Plan in the light of triggers such as updated housing need projections, but acknowledged that this had not been made explicit. The Commission felt that clarity around the triggers for a review would provide some assurance for stakeholders.

- (iii) Concern was expressed that the response rate for the consultation was low, with only 588 responses received across Leicester and Leicestershire. It was understood that each stakeholder had been responsible for their own consultation; however, it was suggested that the County Council should reconsider its arrangement for consultations, with a view to improving their effectiveness. It was noted by officers that the consultation response was broadly in line with response rates for similar strategic planning documents.
- (iv) Some disappointment was expressed that there was already significant congestion in some areas, such as Coalville, but the SGP proposed further managed growth. The Commission was assured that the SGP intended to change the recent approach to development, which had seen the addition of new extensions to existing settlements and which if continued into the future would lead to further congestion and a lack of sustainability. In addition, a package of measures to address congestion issues around Coalville was already in place. In the future, using the SGP as a framework for the more detailed, statutory Local Plans would result in a more sustainable distribution of development across the county, creating new communities which were supported by infrastructure. It was intended that the Local Plans would also seek to address concerns around issues such as air quality and the housing needs of an ageing population.
- (v) It would be important to take account of development outside of Leicestershire which could have an impact on the county, particularly in terms of congestion and the long-term infrastructure required to address this. Officers confirmed that developments around Toton in the north of the county and the Oxford-Cambridge arc to the south had been taken into account, but acknowledged that the Kettering and the A14 could have been given greater attention. Members were reminded that the proposed A46 Expressway was intended to relieve congestion to the south of the county.
- (vi) It was confirmed that the dual role of the County Council as landowner and as promoter of land for development had not been raised as an issue during the consultation. The County Council was aware of potential conflicts of interest and the usual appropriate safeguards would be put in place before any planning application process commenced. In addition, consideration was being given to how, if any profits were realised from the sale of County Council land, these could be used to forward-fund infrastructure developments.
- (vii) Midlands Connect had commissioned a study into the A46 Expressway, which was due to be published on 7 November and would then be made available to members. Due to the scale of the development, this work was being taken forward by Midlands Connect and Transport for the East Midlands, with support from the County Council and other affected local authorities. The study would look at all options in the context of issues such as cost and resilience for the transport network.

- (viii) The Transport Evidence which had been published during the consultation period, leading to its extension, was at a very high level, with broad themes which would need working through at the Local Plan level. A transport strategy would also be developed with Leicester City.
- (ix) The Leicestershire International Gateway would be an area of major growth and job creation. HS2 was expected to be delivered from 2033. The County Council's Cabinet had approved the use of additional resources to enable a proactive approach to be taken to mitigate the impact of HS2 and realise benefits for the area. The Government had announced the creation of a development corporation the previous week, including the International Gateway and station at Toton. This was at an early stage and the implications were not yet known. However, Leicestershire County Council and the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP) intended to be actively involved in creating it.
- (x) In response to a query about skills and workforce, the Commission was advised that this would feature in the Local Industrial Strategy (LIS), which would focus on putting the right training facilities in place and supporting people into better jobs, including through the promotion of knowledge-based skills. The LIS would interact with the SGP particularly as the LLEP was involved in both documents. The evidence base was also consistent across the two.
- (xi) A conscious decision had been taken to exclude strategic B8 class of land use, (storage and distribution) from the SGP. This was because the four district councils most affected by this type of land use were already working together to commission an independent study which should enable them to influence any proposals for strategic B8 development in Leicester and Leicestershire in the future.
- (xii) It was confirmed that the SGP evidence base had identified the protection of green wedges as an important consideration when planning for development. The methodology for identifying and reviewing green wedges had been in place for a number of years. It was currently being considered by Planning Officers and would be revised if necessary.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the comments now made be submitted to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 23 November;
- (b) That the Cabinet's attention be drawn to the view of the Commission that arrangements for review should be explicitly built in to the Strategic Growth Plan;
- (c) That details of the national consultation on the national planning policy and guidance be circulated to members of the Commission for information.

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