

**Draft minute extract from the meeting of the Scrutiny Commission,
8 April 2020.**

Leicestershire County Council's Revised Strategic Plan 2018 - 2022

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive which sought its view on the draft revisions made to the Strategic Plan 2018 – 2022 to reflect the Council's declaration of a climate emergency. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 8' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) Members welcomed the revised Strategy and the changes made to reflect the Council's climate change commitments. It was suggested that reference to Parish and Town Council's and other community groups be included in the Plan, as these had enormous capacity to contribute to the delivery of the outcomes identified.
- (ii) Concern was raised about the extent of the Council's ability to influence the local planning process to ensure housing growth in the area did not jeopardise the Council's environmental ambitions. Reassurance was provided that as well as the County Council, all local authorities in the area took climate change seriously. Members noted that whilst the County Council was not a local planning authority it was a consultee on all local neighbourhood plans which it helped shape. Though this process it was able to address issues such as climate change and the meeting of other wider environmental targets.
- (iii) Members noted that the Council's Head of Planning and Historic and Natural Environment chaired the local Chief Planning Officer Group which looked at detailed approaches to planning matters and at which concerns over environmental performance could be addressed.
- (iv) It was highlighted that the Council's newly formed Growth Unit would play a key role in discussions with partners to ensure growth in the area was delivered in an environmentally sustainable way. The revised Strategic Plan and Environment Strategy would underpin future growth delivery proposals and environmental considerations would therefore play a central role in future growth planning.
- (v) Members noted that the tranche 2 of the Environment Strategy (which it would consider next on the agenda) would look more closely at the delivery of carbon reduction in areas such housing and whilst there was a great challenge in this area for the County and District Councils, both recognised the opportunities available. Members felt this would require a significant change in attitudes to local planning and housing.

- (vi) Members expressed concern that the current circumstances arising from Covid-19 could seriously impact the County and District Councils specifically in terms of s.106 receipts, if timescales set down in contracts overran, and in the delivery of local housing supplies, as developments were put on hold. Members were particularly concerned that the latter could result in future unstructured developments taking place and pressure to priorities growth and the economy to the detriment of environmental ambitions. Members agreed that Government support in this area would be necessary and requested that the Cabinet consider these issues and the need, at some future date, to raise the matter with Government to ensure local authorities were not unduly disadvantaged.
- (vii) A member expressed concern that local planning authorities were required to continue the planning process during the virus outbreak and questioned whether this should be paused. Officers undertook to refer this concern to the Chair of the Chief Officer Planning Group for its consideration.
- (viii) It was acknowledged that the assumptions on which the report had been based would need to be updated to reflect the outbreak of Covid-19 which had impacted significantly on the way the Council was currently operating. Members acknowledged that at present, the Council's priority was to respond to the crisis as it developed. However, they were reassured that recovery planning was already underway, though understandably, this was in its early stages.
- (ix) It was highlighted that the current review had been only a light touch review to reflect the Council's declaration of a climate emergency and Members agreed that to continue to progress this commitment even in the current circumstances was necessary and appropriate. Members agreed that the Council's ambition remained unchanged through specific aspects of its approach might need to be altered because of the Coronavirus outbreak.
- (x) Members noted that a detailed review of the Plan would begin later this year/early next year which would take account of all the circumstances and outcomes arising from the coronavirus outbreak. However, it was suggested that in the short term, the Council's Environment Strategy and related Action Plan would be best placed to recognise and adapt to specific issues in the short/medium term.
- (xi) This approach was supported by Members, but it was suggested that a preamble be included in the Pan which acknowledged the current circumstances and how the Covid-19 outbreak would impact Council Policy which would need to be addressed at an appropriate time.

AGREED:

- (a) That the comments and suggestions now made be submitted to the Cabinet at its meeting on 28 April;
- (b) That the concern expressed regarding Government Guidance for local planning authorities to continue with the planning process during the coronavirus outbreak be referred to the Chief Planning Officer Group for consideration.

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