



SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 4 NOVEMBER 2020

DRAFT CITY OF LEICESTER LOCAL PLAN 2020 TO 2036

DRAFT MINUTE EXTRACT

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive regarding the draft City of Leicester Local Plan for 2020 to 2036 which sought its view on the draft County Council response to the proposals. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 8' is filed with these minutes.

The Chair welcomed Mr Grant Butterworth, Head of Planning at Leicester City Council to the meeting. Mr Butterworth provided a presentation as part of this item and a copy of the slides is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion the following points were raised and responses provided by Mr Butterworth on behalf of the City Council:

Redistribution of housing

- i. Whilst it was recognised that regeneration opportunities in the City were limited and capacity to meet all its housing need constrained, concern was expressed that 7,742 dwellings would need to be redistributed to the districts.
- ii. It was noted that the City Council had explored a number of options to use land in the City, and that this included some controversial sites which would result in the development of green open space which was already limited in the City. Mr Butterworth said it was recognised this would be a sensitive issue and every effort had been made to seek to minimise the number required to be redistributed, but it would be important for the City, County and district councils to work together to manage this.
- iii. A comparison was made to the approach adopted in Manchester which had undertaken significant regeneration of living accommodation in its City centre. Mr Butterworth responded that Leicester City was a smaller and more compact City which presented different challenges to those faced in other areas.

University accommodation

- iv. It was questioned whether there had been an overdevelopment of university accommodation in the City and whether this had affected its ability to now

provide long term dwellings for permanent residents. Mr Butterworth reported that the City Council had been reliant on the University providing projections for its accommodation needs which had been forecasted over the next 5 – 10 years. The City when compared to other University towns had been below the national average in terms of the level of its student accommodation, but this had increased in recent years and was no longer considered to be an issue. It was noted that there was now a move away from purpose built accommodation to private rented properties which was considered positive.

- v. The impact of Covid-19 on university accommodation was yet to be confirmed. It was acknowledged that some students now attended courses remotely. Feedback on this issue from the University would be considered as part of this consultation.

Employment

- vi. Members raised concerns about the distribution of employment developments and the proposal for offices (which generally attracted high paid jobs) to be primarily located in the City whilst warehousing (which attracted a lower paid workforce) as well as housing, would be pushed out to the County. It was emphasised that warehousing often generated heavy vehicular traffic and therefore had a negative impact on air quality and pollution levels. Further concerns were raised that this did not support the generation of a wide range of job opportunities for those leaving Leicester University. It was suggested that more thought should be given to creating a more even distribution of employment facilities across the County and City.
- vii. Given the effects of Covid-19 and the number of people now working from home, it was queried whether there was or would continue to be the same level of demand for office space in the City. Mr Butterworth reported that steps had been taken to improve the quality of office provision in the City and this had been supported by developer confidence in this area. However, the impact of Covid-19 would be considered as the City developed its Local Plan into the next phase.
- viii. The allocation of land for employment purposes was challenged if this potentially pushed more houses in to the County. Particularly as this resulted in people having to commute back into the City and therefore risked increasing congestion levels which was already a problem. Mr Butterworth responded the allocation of warehousing in the City would be an inefficient use of land given its limited supply. The extent of land allocated for employment was also relatively small and competing demands for residential sites was not therefore an issue. He suggested that given the nature of the City, it would not be appropriate for the Plan to emphasise housing over other facilities, but acknowledged it was a difficult balance that needed to be struck.

Transport Infrastructure

- ix. A number of concerns were raised regarding transport connections in and out of the City and the level of congestion which it was suggested acted as a disincentive to visit. A member further suggested that targeting the use of cars in the City might have a negative impact on visitor numbers as whilst reducing congestion, there was not always suitable alternative public transport available and investment in bus services was not always the best alternative over the long term as services often changed and/or ceased. Mr Butterworth highlighted the City Mayor's programme to prioritise walking and cycling in the City which would improve the City environment to make it a place where people would be happy to live as well as visit. It was acknowledged that the City's growth plans needed to be supported by appropriate transport interventions, but unrestricted car use was not regarded as the right way forward and alternatives would therefore be sought.
- x. It was highlighted that investment in public transport by the City and County Council working together to improve connectivity had been substantial but that resources were limited as both Council's continued to face increasing financial pressures. A reference was made to the potential benefit of further investment in the Park and Ride service. Mr Butterworth said he was optimistic about the future for public transport despite the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and increasing the use of these options was not reliant on price, but significantly on reliability and quality. Reducing overall congestion in the City would therefore be key.
- xi. Concern was expressed that traffic moving into the City caused congestion and delays outside the City boundary which in turn affected pollution levels in the districts. The redistribution of housing out of the City it was argued would also further exacerbate these problems. Mr Butterworth explained that as part of the Local Plan process, the City Council would need to undertake detailed modelling to ensure the transport implications of its draft Plan could be accommodated. Details of this transport modelling would be published as part of the next stage of the local plan process. At present, there was confidence that the scale of development proposed could be met in transport terms. However, if there was less provision for transport improvements then consideration would need to be given to the capacity of the existing network. The transport implications arising from unmet housing needs redistributed to the districts would not be relevant in the short term but would need to be addressed over time as schemes arose.
- xii. It was questioned whether the Strategic Growth Plan (SGP) still provided the necessary strategic view of infrastructure requirements across the region. Reference was made to the suggestion that the Leicester A46 expressway might not go ahead though it was acknowledged that no announcement had been made to confirm whether or not this was the case. Mr Butterworth said that the Strategic Growth Plan had been invaluable as the City Council had developed its draft Plan. Planning for infrastructure over the long term meant it was easier to identify and plan for where investment was needed in a

coordinated way. If a scheme included within the SGP was not to be taken forward, then the MAG would consider this along with any need to review the SGP itself.

Retail

- xiii. Members highlighted the impact of Covid-19 on the retail sector which had already been affected in the City by the development of out of town shopping areas such as at Fosse Park. It was emphasised that many district councils had sought to resist such shopping areas in the County to support the City area. It was questioned whether consideration had been given to reducing retail provision to support more housing. Mr Butterworth confirmed that the City Council had asked consultants to consider the potential for freeing up residential capacity and the outcome of that work was awaited. Pressure on the retail sector in the City, like in other cities, had been an increasing issue pre-Covid and it was likely that recent changes to the Planning Use Classes Order would continue to add to those pressures. Despite this, the City had been moving more towards leisure facilities and investment in that area had been and continued to be strong.

Government White Paper and Infrastructure Funding

- xiv. Members questioned how funding for infrastructure would be generated and what impact, if any, the Planning for the Future White Paper and proposals for a new national infrastructure levy would have on the Plan. Mr Butterworth confirmed that the White Paper would impact the Local Plan. However, the details of this would not be known for some time and it was estimated that implementation of any new legislation could take 2 possibly 3 years. The City Council therefore proposed to press ahead with its draft Plan, but there would be sufficient flexibility in the process and as part of the requisite 5 year review to take account of future changes in the planning system. Section 106 funding would be sought for the infrastructure needed, but this would not fund all that was required, and further government funding would need to be sought. It was noted that government funding initiatives were often short lived and did not support longer term planning which increased pressure on local authorities to manage.

Member engagement

- xv. It was suggested that a more regular interchange between County and City Council members would be beneficial. The City was the hub of the area and it was important for all districts and the County as a whole to see it flourish. Joint working would therefore be important.

The Chairman thanked Mr Butterworth for attending and welcomed an officer to come back as part of the next stage of the local plan consultation process.

In respect of the Council's draft response to the Consultation, officers were asked to specifically consider the following:

- Rewording of paragraph 25 of the report which suggested that areas such as Blaby, Charnwood and Harborough were 'located within the built framework of the City'.
- Strengthening of the position set out on pages 48 and 50 (consultation page nos.181, 187 and 190) of the appendix attached to the report regarding the adequacy of road and transport infrastructure.

RESOLVED:

That the comments now made be submitted to the Cabinet for consideration.

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