



**SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 7<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2022**

**STRATEGIC PLANNING AND GROWTH RELATED MATTERS  
INCLUDING THE STATEMENT OF COMMON GROUND RELATING  
TO HOUSING AND EMPLOYMENT LAND NEEDS (JUNE 2022)**

**MINUTE EXTRACT**

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Executive which provided an update on the work being undertaken by the Growth Service and others with partners on a number of key strategic planning and growth related matters. The report also sought the Commission's views on the County Council becoming a signatory to the Leicester and Leicestershire Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) on Housing and Employment Land Needs 2022 which had been prepared by Leicester and Leicestershire local authorities to demonstrate that they are fulfilling the Duty to Cooperate in plan making. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 8' is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed Mr Grant Butterworth, Head of Planning at Leicester City Council, and Alex Roberts, Interim Joint Strategic Planning Manager, to the meeting for this item.

Arising from discussion, the following points were made:

- (i) The evidence commissioned by the Members Advisory Group (MAG) was extensive and clear. The allocations set by national government were non-negotiable and it would be vital for local authorities to work together to deliver these in a sensible and planned way.
- (ii) Work undertaken by the City had been robust and whilst it was under significant pressure to deliver more houses, it was inevitably restricted by what land was available and suitable for development. Consideration had been given to building higher which was possible in some areas but not others, such as the old town areas which were subject to planning restrictions necessary to respect the heritage of the area.
- (iii) The SoCG would provide a degree of certainty which was what both residents and the County Council needed. District council local plans were more likely to be approved if they could clearly demonstrate they had satisfied the duty to cooperate. The agreement of local plans would in turn give the County Council the clarity it needed to properly plan the infrastructure needed to serve these Plans.

- (iv) Whilst the uplift in housing numbers for the City, which resulted in the increased unmet need being passed to districts, might be considered undesirable by some, this could not be avoided. It had been demonstrated that the County had a housing shortage and locally this had to be addressed to support those seeking to buy and live in the area.
- (v) Joint working on planning and housing delivery through the MAG which involved the City, County and all district councils had been extremely successful. The boundary between the City and the County was in reality not seen by residents as many lived and worked across the two areas. Members recognised the need for cooperation both at a strategic level, through the development of the SoCG, and at local plan level.
- (vi) Whilst the demand for retail space had been affected by the Covid pandemic, in Leicester City the latest figures suggested retail was holding up well compared to national trends. Mr Butterworth confirmed that this would be kept under review but reported that the City had not had many applications to convert office space to residential and so an increase in such applications could not be presumed. Members recognised the need to be realistic rather than over ambitious in their expectations given the challenge the Inspector would provide to the City Council's local plan.
- (vii) Some Members raised concerns regarding the potential that a district council might not support the SoCG and what impact this would have overall and for that particular area. A member commented that not being party to the SoCG would risk their Local Plan being found to be unsound which could result in speculative developments coming forward in that locality. This would not be of benefit to the County Council as it could not then ensure the required infrastructure could be provided in a timely way.
- (viii) Members agreed that it would be regrettable if one partner were not to sign the Statement but noted that this would not undermine the importance and benefit of the Statement for those party to it.
- (ix) A Member questioned the delay in the publication of the Housing and Economic Needs Assessment due to incorrect figures being included and sought assurance that officers had confidence in the evidence provided by the consultants. Mr Roberts confirmed that one of the assumptions in the report had been incorrect, but that a detailed review by the consultants had been undertaken to assure there were no other errors and that the Assessment provided the robust evidence needed to support the SoCG.
- (x) It was noted that the Strategic Transport Assessment and the Strategic Growth Options and Constraints Study which had also been commissioned by the MAG had not yet been completed. Members noted that for various reasons, these two pieces of work had been more complex and so were still being finalised. However, Mr Roberts reported that partners had agreed that it would not be prudent to await their outcome, as the delay would have a negative impact on district council local plan processes.

- (xi) A Member questioned the impact the City's increased unmet housing need had on housing numbers included within the Strategic Growth Plan (SGP). Mr Roberts confirmed that the SGP covered a much longer timeline (to 2050) and so the higher forecasted growth figures within that remained unchanged given it extended over a much longer period.
- (xii) Members challenged how the cost of infrastructure to support the increased growth being passed to districts would be met given the financial pressures facing the County Council. It was noted that this was a significant issue that required better coordination of local plan processes by the district councils and then the prioritisation of infrastructure required to support those plans.
- (xiii) Whilst building on green field sites in the County might be considered, this was not a matter for the County Council, but a matter for district councils to address through their local plan processes. District councils would also address issues such as affordable housing.

**RESOLVED:**

That the comments now made be submitted to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2022.

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