



Economic Growth Scrutiny Panel

Date: Thursday, 20 January 2022

Time: 16:00

Venue: Cathedral Room

Present: Councillor Mrs Marilyn Bowman, Councillor Ms Jo Ellis-Williams, Councillor Mrs Anne Glendinning, Councillor Mrs Ann McKerrell, Councillor Keith Meller, Councillor Michael Mitchelson, Councillor Peter Sunter
Councillor Christopher Wills (for Councillor Lisa Brown)

Also Present: Councillor Ellis - Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder

OFFICERS: Corporate Director of Economic Development
Head of Regeneration
Overview and Scrutiny Officer

EGSP.01/22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Brown.

EGSP.02/22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest were submitted.

EGSP.03/22 PUBLIC AND PRESS

It was agreed that the items in Part A be dealt with in public and the items in private be dealt with in Part B.

EGSP.04/22 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

RESOLVED – It was noted that Council, at its meeting on 4 January 2022, received and adopted the minutes of the meeting held on 21 October and 2 December 2021. The Chair signed the minutes.

EGSP.05/22 CALL-IN OF DECISIONS

There were no items which had been subject of call-in.

EGSP.06/22 CITY CENTRE STRATEGY

The Head of Regeneration submitted report ED.43/21 which provided an overview of the issues, challenges and trends affecting the vitality and viability of Carlisle city centre. He

summarised aspects of the report in relation to: the changing role of city centres; city centre performance and health check findings; diversifying the city centre; Economic Strategy Priority 3 - focus; City Centre Action Plan; Future High Street Fund; Carlisle Town Deal; Carlisle City Centre Task Force; and, City Centre Events - Programme and Pipeline Projects.

The Corporate Director noted that there was approximately £130M of government funding earmarked for the city for a range of projects including, the Citadels project (University of Cumbria relocating to the site), Station Gateway, Town Deal, and Future High Street Fund. The report provided a broad overview of how those aspects of the Economic Strategy would be implemented in the coming years. She set out the Business Case process for drawing down funding from central government.

In relation to the Citadels project, a fly through initiative was being developed which provided a visual representation of the scheme, she expected to be able to share it with Members in due course.

In considering the Strategy Members raised the following comments and questions:

- Was it possible for a Vision to be developed alongside the City Centre Strategy to help with buy-in?

The Head of Regeneration advised that a Vision for the Strategy already existed, and that it sat above the objectives outlined in the report, he undertook to circulate a copy to the Panel.

The Corporate Director added that the Vision had been developed by the Carlisle Town Deal Board which was made up of business and community representatives, she undertook to share the Town Investment Plan with the Panel.

- How was the boundary area of the city centre defined?

The Corporate Director explained that in Planning terms there was a particular definition of a city centre, the area defined in the Strategy was broader and encompassed the main retail area, including Lowther Street.

- How was it proposed to improve the public realm in the city centre, particularly in the pedestrianised area?

The Corporate Director responded that public realm was currently under the remit of Cumbria County Council and noted that responsibility would shift following Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Cumbria. Consideration was been given to the provision of new lighting and planting in the Green Market area.

- Had the funding for the Reinvigorating Market Square (Green Market / Old Town Hall) initiative identified on page 14 been approved?

The Head of Regeneration advised that the funding from central government had been agreed. The project would be delivered for the authority by Cumbria County Council, the legal agreement for which was currently being developed.

The Member further asked whether the £20.7M Towns Deal funding had been agreed?

The Head of Regeneration responded that the Business Case for the funding would be submitted by the end of March 2022.

- What plans did the Council have for the Market Hall?

The Corporate Director explained that the Council's Strategy was to use Town Deal Funding to reacquire the Head Lease of the Market Hall and then carry out refurbishments to the building. The Property Services and Regeneration Teams would consider what refurbishments may be carried out to make the property more attractive. The Corporate Director noted that other cities in the country had returned market halls to local authority control, and in due course options would be presented to Member of the Council for their consideration.

- Regarding the projects set out in the report that were subject to central government funding, a Member sought assurance that the monies would remain available following LGR.

The Corporate Director confirmed that the funding would remain available as it was allocated to the specific projects not the local authority.

- How comparable were the vacancy rates in Carlisle city centre to other areas?

The Head of Regeneration responded that it was difficult to compare rates with other city centres as there were different contexts across the country. He noted that vacancies in the Primary Shopping Area in Carlisle was 19% compared to the North West average of 17.8%.

- In terms of promoting the city's evening economy, a Member asked whether there were any plans to extend retail opening times beyond the current 5pm as happened in other cities? She commented that the Citadels project was likely to create increased footfall in the city centre.

The Corporate Director agreed that the Citadels project would increase footfall which would encourage extended trading. Other factors that would be important in developing the evening and night time economy included: broadening the offer of activities available; public transport accessibility; and new venues including the Market Hall. She further advised that discussions were taking place with The Lanes management team regarding the future use of the former Debenhams site. The City Centre Task Force was considering the matter of the evening and night time economy.

Members agreed the importance of increasing footfall into the city centre and the provision of attractive venues and activities for visitor to the city centre.

- How could the new working patterns brought about by Covid 19 be used to support the city centre?

The Head of Regeneration explained that as a result of changed working patterns there was an increase in people wanting to use city centre spaces as a meeting place rather than traditional offices many of which were located on the outskirts. This meant that going forward co-working spaces may become more attractive, it was likely that the Strategy would require updating to reflect the new trend so that appropriate initiatives and programmes may be developed to meet the need.

A Member commented that the city's history was an important aspect of its city centre offer. The Investment Framework and related projects identified the re-purposing of 6 - 24 Castle Street, was that project imminent?

The Corporate Director agreed that the cultural offer was an important strand of the city centre offer. Tullie House was the largest museum in the region, but it required refreshing and

improved access and the Castle Street project was a strand of that. Future High Street Fund and Arts Councils funding would be used to provide a front facing facility.

- Regarding the City Centre Task Force, a Member asked the following questions: what was its membership; did it have a community representative, as requested by scrutiny in autumn 2021; did it develop and implement ideas?

The Corporate Director responded that the Task Force acted as a sounding board to the Council, it gave Officers an understanding of what initiatives and projects were feasible and also highlighted areas in need of support. She further advised that Reverend Teasdale had been invited to participate on the board as a community representative, in response to the suggestion from Scrutiny.

In response to a question from a Member regarding the impact on the Council's finances brought about by changes to National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) of the projects in the report, the Corporate Director advised that the matter was a complex issue and that was currently being considered at a national level.

- Could the Council's increase its number of footfall checkers for wider use across the city centre?

The Head of Regeneration advised that the Council had installed a footfall counter in the city centre in 2021 and was monitoring the data it provided before committing to installing further counters, as they were expensive to install and maintain.

- Did Officers have clear ideas for diversifying the use of the city centre?

The Corporate Director explained that latterly, the UK's national planning policy was to protect city centres from uses other than retail, however, diversification was now acceptable. Officers had not yet identified proportions for different usages and it was important that the matter was led by the market rather than dictated by the local authority.

- Was Carlisle Castle managed by English Heritage?

The Corporate Director advised that the organisation formerly known as English Heritage had been split, the function for looking after the stock, including Carlisle Castle was the responsibility of the new English Heritage organisation; representatives of which sat on the Hadrian's Wall Partnership. It was also interested in the Borderlands Project, and may in the future seek grant funding.

The Member responded that the Castle was a fantastic asset for the city, he asked if the Council had any input into English Heritage's plans for the site?

The Corporate Director noted that English Heritage had initiatives it would like to pursue in relation to the Castle, Officers liaised with, encouraged and supported English Heritage.

- How did the Council plan to redevelop the Central Plaza site?

The Head of Regeneration stated that the site was complex and presented a number of challenges relating to retaining walls and the two-storey drop from street level. Monies from the Future High Street Fund were enabling the development of options for the site, stage one of which was near completion, after which survey and options work would commence.

A number of Members expressed their support for the Strategy and anticipation of the projects

detailed in the report, some felt the inclusion of additional background information in the report would have been useful.

The Corporate Director thanked Members, she noted that the report had been purposely designed to provide an overview as the amount of data support the Strategy and each of the projects was significant, she undertook to provide links to the relevant background documentation along with a copy of the summary of key findings, opportunities and challenges chart published on page 12 of the pack.

The Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder commented that the initiatives set out in the report would help create a bright future for the city and that they had materialised at an appropriate time, he commended the work of the Officers involved.

RESOLVED - 1) That the City Centre Strategy had been noted (ED.43/21).

2) That the Head of Regeneration circulate a copy of the City Centre Strategy Vision to the Panel:

3) That the Corporate Director of Economic Development circulate the following to the Panel

- Town Investment Plan;
- Links to the background documents used in the report;
- A copy of the Summary of Key Findings, Opportunities and Challenges chart.

EGSP.07/22 ECONOMIC STRATEGY AND THE VISITOR ECONOMY

The Head of Regeneration provided an outline of the Council's recently adopted Economic Strategy, with a specific focus on the objectives and actions in relation to the promotion of the visitor economy and the development of the tourism market within the Carlisle District (ED.44/21). The report also gave an overview of the two key workstreams which were to (a) develop a marketing and events strategy and (b) capitalise on the opportunities presented by the England's Originals Consortia, to develop and grow domestic and international visitor numbers.

The Head of Regeneration gave an overview of: the background to the development of the Strategy; the identified priorities within the Strategy with a particular emphasis on strategic priority 6 - Promoting Carlisle as a place to live, work and visit; and, the Marketing and Events Strategy.

In considering the report Members raised the following comments and questions:

- A Member was pleased that the Council was a member of the England's Historic Cities Consortium, she understood that the group aimed primarily to promote the cities within the Consortium to the American tourist market, she asked if it was possible for the group to market its member cities to the British domestic tourist market?

The Corporate Director responded that the Consortium was a national body that did seek to market the cities to an American market. Through the Council's participation in the Consortium, it had received funding from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport to develop material to showcase the city's history. That material would be used to promote the city in both domestic and international settings. The Council was also liaising with Visit Cumbria to capitalise on the increased trend for domestic holidays in Britain with a view to boosting visitor numbers to the district.

- With reference to paragraph 7.3 of the report: outputs and outcomes of the England's

Historic Cities Consortium programme of projects, a Member asked whether each of the items listed related to Carlisle district?

The Head of Regeneration advised that the items related to the whole programme rather than Carlisle alone, he undertook to write to the Panel setting out which of the outputs/outcomes related to Carlisle.

- A Member commented that given the proportion of the district that was within the rural area it was right that priority 5 of the Economic Strategy focused on that area, he felt it was important that the Council's Economic Development team included the rural area in Council initiatives.

The Corporate Director agreed with the Member and advised that, in conjunction with Eden District Council, the authority was developing a Rural Strategy. The scope of the Strategy was currently being defined and in due course Members would be invited to a workshop where they would be able to feed into the emerging Strategy.

- How did education connect to the Economic Strategy in respect of skills training?

The Corporate Director explained that there was an existing county wide Skills Strategy which had been developed by the Local Enterprise Partnership, which the Council had fed into the development of.

The Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder noted that in the Tees Valley, the Elected Mayor had assumed responsibility for post 16 education in the area and had worked with local businesses and colleges to develop and provide courses to meet the economic skills demand in the area.

- Were any areas of the district likely to see the the roll out of 5G mobile connectivity?

The Head of Regeneration responded that he was not aware of any plans currently for the provision of 5G in the district. The matter was one for mobile communications providers and it was likely that in delivering such services nationally that a hierarchy of size of cities was used where services were provided to larger urban areas first.

- A Member stated that there was no direct bus link between the city and Gilsland's Hadrian's Wall site, he further noted that in the Bus Strategy, the provision of such a services was a low priority.

The Corporate Director responded that the Chair of the Hadrian's Wall Partnership was keen to move the matter forward.

The Panel discussed the importance of marketing in relation to promoting and expanding the visitor economy.

The Corporate Director set out a number of methods used to market the district to tourist, including the Carlisle Ambassadors, she explained that direct marketing was challenging due to the cost implications.

RESOLVED - 1) That the Economic Strategy and Visitor Economy report (ED.44/21) be noted.

2) That the Head of Regeneration circulate a written response to the Panel detailing which of the items listed under the outputs and outcomes of the England's Historic Cities Consortium programme of projects related to Carlisle.

Councillor Mitchelson left the meeting at 17:40.

EGSP.08/22 OVERVIEW REPORT

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer submitted report OS.04/22 which provided an overview of matters related to the Economic Growth Scrutiny Panel. The Notice of Executive Key Decisions published on 17 December 2021 contained two items within the remit of the Panel: KD.01/21 Budget Process 2022/23 - 2026/27.

With reference to the Work Programme the Overview and Scrutiny Officer advised that the following items scheduled for the 3 March 2022 meeting of the Panel would now be submitted to the 14 April 2022 meeting of the Panel: LEP - Partner Update, and FHSF Project: Central Plaza Development Site Options.

RESOLVED - 1) That the Overview Report incorporating the Key Decision items relevant to the Economic Growth Scrutiny Panel be noted (OS.04/22).

2) That the following items be scrutinised at the 14 April 2022 meeting: LEP - Partner Update, and FHSF Project: Central Plaza Development Site Options.

The Meeting ended at: 17:42