

GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECONOMIC GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 22 September 2022 commencing at 10.00 am at the Cabinet Suite - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

PRESENT MEMBERSHIP:

Cllr Robert Vines	Cllr John Murphy
Cllr Roger Whyborn	Cllr Alastair Chambers
Cllr Matt Babbage (Chair)	Cllr Chloe Turner
Cllr Paul McCloskey	Cllr Paul Baker (Vice-Chair)

Substitutes:

Apologies: Cllr Gina Blomefield, Cllr Sajid Patel, Cllr Stephen Hirst and Cllr Vernon Smith

Attendance via Video

Conference: Cllr Nicky Packer

In Attendance: Colin Chick (GCC)
Simon Excell (GCC)
Katherine Martin (GCC)
Sophie Benfield (GCC)
Tracey Birkinshaw (CBC)
Paul Minnis (CBC)
David Owen (GFirst)
Cllr Tony Dale (CDC)

35. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllrs Gina Blomefield, Stephen Hirst, Sajid Patel and Vernon Smith.

36. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

37. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2022 were approved by the Committee.

38. GOLDEN VALLEY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT UPDATE

Minutes subject to their acceptance as a correct record at the next meeting

Paul Minnis, Director of Major Developments and Regeneration, Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC), provided the Committee with a presentation on progress with the Golden Valley Development Project.

Members were provided with an overview of the project and noted that 132 hectares of land had been allocated to the project; CBC owned 50 hectares of that land divided into northern and southern parcels; 3000 new homes, 7500 new jobs and 2 million sq. ft. of commercial space would result from the project; and that the 150,000 sq. ft. National Cyber Innovation Centre would be delivered as part of the first phase of the project.

Members were informed that a development agreement had been signed in June 2022 with HBDXF, who would lead on the project, with CBC contributing as a partner.

In an overview of timescales for the project, it was understood that the aim was for the masterplan to be drafted by the end of 2022 and that the planning strategy would be submitted by Spring 2023. It was hoped that the first phase of the scheme would then be delivered by 2025. It was understood that a unit to showcase the centre could potentially be set up for meanwhile use.

It was noted that a levelling up fund bid for £20million to fund the delivery of the innovation centre had been submitted in August 2022.

The Committee was advised as to how the project would promote sustainability, which would include working with the natural landscape and features and providing green and blue space to increase biodiversity gain. The aim was for the project to be net zero carbon.

Members discussed the presentation and asked a number of questions of the information that had been provided.

One member asked what percentage of the housing build would be affordable, and what the renewable energy provision would be for the scheme. In response, Paul Minnis determined that the affordable housing provision would be 35 percent and that the use of renewable energy would be considered as part of the sustainability strategy, the details of which were still being worked out. With regards to the ambition for the project to be carbon neutral, assurance was given that CBC would ensure the developer was held to account in this area.

Clarification was sought as to the involvement of Tewkesbury Borough Council (TBC) in the planning process for the project. In response, it was understood that planning applications would need to be considered by Cheltenham Borough only, however CBC and TBC would be working closely together throughout the whole process.

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It was confirmed, following a query, that no risks to the scheme had been identified currently, and that the scheme could still go ahead should the levelling up fund bid be unsuccessful.

A question was asked about the education provision which would be delivered as part of the scheme. Members were advised that provision for a primary school was being considered, although secondary school provision was being addressed as part of the Elms Park development which would also cover the Golden Valley development.

One member requested additional information as to what the National Cyber Innovation Centre would comprise of. It was explained, in response, that the centre would comprise of a mix of government organisations, small start-ups and companies, and academia all focused on the cyber tech sector. The centre would include collaboration spaces as well as some public spaces. Further clarification was sought as to how this would be implemented.

It was queried what was being done to ensure that the people who would live in the affordable houses had the skills to work on the site. In response, it was understood that the strategy to promote the development of local skills and talent, as well as links with the local community, was still being drawn up, however an update could be provided at a later date.

In response to a number of further queries, it was confirmed that the site would be fully electric; that the developer had submitted for a biodiversity gain of 10 percent; that the detail for highways provision was still being determined; that the intention was for the project to provide enhancement for alternative forms of transport, including cycling; and that the use of rain water harvesting could be considered as part of the project.

Simon Excell, Assistant Director of Planning and Economic Development, Gloucestershire County Council (GCC), provided a reminder that the County Council would be a key statutory consultee to the project given its roles in planning, and as education, highways, library, transport, minerals, waste and fire and rescue authority. He queried what engagement CBC had had so far with GCC, particularly given the ambition for the masterplan to be finalised by the end of the year. It was confirmed, in response, that GCC had been extensively engaged with already, including for education provision, and that this engagement would be ongoing.

Colin Chick, Executive Director of Economy, Environment and Infrastructure, GCC, queried how the types of organisations using the National Cyber Innovation Centre would be controlled to maintain the focus on cyber tech. In response, it was explained that an occupier strategy had been signed with the developer, and that interest in the site by relevant organisations was already substantial.

One member noted that they were yet to see any schemes aimed at preparing young people with relevant skills in Cheltenham. In response, it was understood that the Cheltenham Education Partnership would be working out the detail for school programmes.

There were further queries as to whether it would be challenge to submit planning applications by Spring 2023; whether the public would be engaged with on the plans; and whether new jobs would be created as part of the project or would they be relocated. In response it was understood that the aim was for planning applications to be submitted by Spring 2023, not to be considered by the Planning Committee at that time; that the developer was currently working on producing a more detailed public engagement plan; and that it was hoped a high proportion of jobs resulting from the project would be net new.

The Committee thanked Paul Minnis for his presentation.

39. STATEMENT OF COMMON GROUND

Tracey Birkinshaw, Director of Community and Economic Development, CBC, presented the report on the current position of the Statement of Common Ground.

Members were informed that the Statement of Common Ground articulated the current duty for Gloucestershire councils to cooperate by identifying and demonstrating where common ground exists. The document contained 37 broad high-level agreements on areas for collaboration, such as housing, the environment, climate change and the economy. Once the Statement had been signed by all partners (Tewkesbury Borough Council was still to formally approve the document), the intention was for an action plan to be developed.

It was noted that the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Joint Committee (GEGJC) had considered the Statement of Common Ground at their meeting on 7 September 2022 and that they had agreed for the GEGJC Senior Officer Group to take away the recommendation to develop a Strategic Economic Development Fund bid and to develop proposals for developing an action plan going forward. The bid and proposals would be brought back to the next meeting of the GEGJC in November for its consideration.

One member queried the purpose of an action plan. In response, it was explained that the intention was for the action plan to set out responsibility for delivering outcomes within a set timescale. It would take the high-level principles of the Statement and dissect them to output orientated actions.

There was a further query as to whether the Statement would have an impact on the decisions made by planning committees when considering planning applications. In response, it was understood that the Statement would not impact day-to-day planning processes, however it would influence and inform development plans and would demonstrate collective responsibility to the planning inspectorate.

The Committee thanked Tracey Birkinshaw for her report.

40. PERFORMANCE DATA - Q1 2022/23

The Committee noted the Q1 2022/23 Performance Data report.

41. GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECONOMIC GROWTH JOINT COMMITTEE UPDATE

The Committee received a verbal update from Cllr Tony Dale, Chair of the GEGJC, on the GEGJC meeting held earlier in the month.

It was noted that members received a presentation from James Cooke, Western Gateway, on Gloucestershire's role in Western Gateway's growth agenda. The presentation detailed Western Gateway's 5 key missions for the area, as well as its 4 key approaches to working with partners within the region which included leading on projects, such as on the Severn Edge STEP Fusion Project; collaborating on projects, such as launching the Hydrogen Ecosystem project; convening partners; and advocating for partners. It was understood that James Cooke had welcomed the opportunity for further conversations with Gloucestershire district and county councils on future opportunities for the region.

It was explained that GEGJC members had also received a report on the Statement of Common Ground and the Committee had recommended that the GEGJC Senior Officer Group develop a SEDF funding bid and proposals for developing an action plan going forward.

The Committee also received an update on the position of UK Shared Prosperity Fund bids; on the completion of projects such as the West Cheltenham Transport Scheme, as well as on progress with the Made in Gloucestershire Scheme in an update from the GFirst LEP; and a report on the position of the Business Rates Pool.

Cllr Dale also explained that the GEGJC had voted to recommend that GEGSC consider an item on Bus Services, including current issues and bus driver shortages; the impact of these issues on the economy and vulnerable people; and the vision for bus services in Gloucestershire and how to bridge the gap.

One member requested that an item be included on the GEGSC work plan for an annual update on the position of the Business Rates Pool.

42. GCC ECONOMIC DASHBOARD

Katherine Martin, Data and Analysis Manager, GCC, provided the Committee with an update on GCC's Economic Dashboard. The Dashboard was published as a supplement to the agenda for this meeting.

One member queried whether a lack of affordable childcare was contributing to the numbers of children growing up in out of work homes. In response, it was acknowledged that this could be part of the reason, however the data currently does not determine the reasons why an individual may be out of work.

There was a question as to whether senior managers were considering the level of data presented at today's meeting when making decisions.

One member commented that the data indicated a worrying rise in claimants as well as a labour shortage, and asked how Gloucestershire's ageing population compared with the national average. In response it was understood that benefit claimant increases were being seen nationally, and that other rural counties were seeing an ageing population, similar to Gloucestershire.

A question was asked as to how the County could address its 19,000 job vacancies. In response, David Owen, Chief Executive of the GFirst LEP, acknowledged the challenges businesses were facing with recruitment. He explained that the Government was establishing a new local skills improvement plan scheme to address recruitment in sectors such as health and social care. He also advised that consideration needed to be given as to how to make Gloucestershire more attractive to young people and graduates.

Another member queried whether the ageing population in Gloucestershire was sustainable.

43. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The Committee noted the report.

44. WORK PLAN

Members discussed the recommendation from the GEGJC that GEGSC consider an item on bus services. Several members were keen to consider the item as quickly as possible. It was understood that a scrutiny task group was also being established to consider the issue. Following the discussion, it was suggested that a joint GEGSC and Environment Scrutiny Committee meeting be held, given that the topic was relevant to both committees.

One member proposed that the GEGSC consider an item on the funding of strategic infrastructure in Gloucestershire. As a similar item was already due to be considered by the Environment Scrutiny Committee at its meeting in November, it was suggested that this item also be added to the agenda for the proposed joint meeting between the two committees.

One member sought clarification on the GEGSC's role in scrutinising the LEP's Strategic Economic Plan. In response, it was understood that the Strategic Economic Plan would be coming to an end this financial year. The draft Local Industrial Strategy would be refreshed in line with the levelling up white paper and would replace the Strategic Economic Plan. It was suggested that an item to review LEP delivery against the Strategic Economic Plan and consider the future delivery of the refreshed Local Industrial Strategy be included in the work plan for Spring 2023.

It was noted that the terms of reference for the GEGSC would need to be reviewed in light of the end of the Strategic Economic Plan and introduction of the draft Local Industrial Strategy.

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It was also requested that confirmation be provided as to which district councils would host which GEGSC meetings in 2023.

45. FUTURE MEETINGS

The dates of future meetings were noted.

CHAIRPERSON

Meeting concluded at 12.35 pm

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