

**REPORT UNDER RULE 2(vi) OF THE COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES**

**Report by Councillor Neil Murray, Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth**

I was first elected to the council in 1983 and the current year has been the worst year I have experienced. As a council we have dealt with the government's Austerity policy to the best of our ability as we have been starved of income year on year. Austerity has meant that the public pay more for services year on year and get less for their money.

The covid 19 pandemic has made the situation much worse still and we have had to make yet more large cuts in our services and activities. This is a great shame because the cuts we are having to make undermine our attempts to support the local economy. It is particularly sad that we cannot financially support the Drill Hall as an arts venue any longer. I am proud of the way the City Council transformed a sad old military building into a modern centre for the arts. The arts are a part of the broader economy and it is a shame that central government are obsessed with councils spending less each year and doing less in the local economy.

The covid crisis overshadows everything and the government's "world beating" response to the crisis has turned out to be incompetence on a world beating scale. As I write this report we are looking at a potential second national lockdown.

I have been impressed at the response of our staff to the crisis. They have adapted and improvised to assist our communities in a number of areas including those in the Economic Growth part of the council. Our officers have administered two covid business support grants, the small business and retail grant scheme and the discretionary grant scheme. £ 22,474,500 has been claimed by Lincoln based businesses through these schemes.

**ECONOMIC RECOVERY**

City council officers are working with a wide range of partners on the Lincoln Towns Fund project and the Heritage Action Zone project which put together will make a substantial contribution to the recovery of the Lincoln economy. The Towns Fund project is around £25 million and will be invested in the city centre and support investment in the city by the private sector. Four areas of activity are addressed in the project. Digital connectivity, Transport connectivity, Skills and Urban Regeneration, Arts, Culture, Heritage and enterprise.

Digital connectivity is vitally important and Lincoln needs to be technologically equipped to compete with other local economies in existing and developing digital fields.

Transport connectivity needs to be improved in the Lincoln area to encourage modal shift and reduce congestion.

The range of skills available needs to be improved and better paid jobs more evident.

Urban Regeneration including Arts, culture, heritage and enterprise. The Towns Fund gives us the opportunity to promote arts and culture which has been shamefully neglected. It will also help us to improve the Central Market and the centre as a whole.

The Lincoln Heritage Action Zone project is worth £1.7 million and will be utilised to improve the historic Lower High Street area, St Mary's Street and Sincil Street working with Heritage England.

Aside from these projects the excellent reshaping of Sincil Street by the Co-op is near complete and together with our Transport Hub improvements the area has been transformed. We have started work on the Cornhill area with the removal of the kiosk and the opening up of the space.

## PLANNING POLICY

Our planning officers have an excellent record in processing planning applications. 95% are approved within the prescribed time limits and this is because of the professional methods officers use and key is the pre-application discussions which facilitate understanding of the parameters for development in Lincoln.

As a long standing councillor I am aware that planning issues are very important to residents and that they wish to be involved and consulted on all issues which affect their quality of life. As they stand the government's proposals to change planning law will change things for the worse. The changes could take away the right of the public to scrutinise planning applications. We have a planning system that works well in our city. I hope all members of council will agree with me that the government should leave planning well alone.

## HERITAGE

During the Austerity decade I have been consistent in calling out the government for the lack of support to all councils in conserving our heritage. Budget cuts year on year have reduced the service to skeleton proportions. Whilst there might be an ironic joke there in terms of archaeology this is not a funny situation. The historic environment is precious and needs constant, careful maintenance if it is to be conserved.

A small piece of good news is that a footbridge has been placed over the remains of the Roman wall which is located between the two wings of City Hall. This will protect the remaining historic fabric and will be safer to walk on.

## PARK WARD REGENERATION

In my report last year I discussed the progress being made in the Sincil Bank area of Park ward in our efforts to regenerate the area. As with most things covid has slowed this down. On a positive note residents in the area voted in favour of the introduction of residents parking. This will improve the environment for residents removing commuter parking which clogs up the narrow Victorian streets.

I hope the County Council will now move forward quickly to implement the residents' positive vote in the consultation process. It would also be beneficial to residents for the rat running issues to be addressed which should have been addressed by the County Council when the effects of the East West link were clear. The East West link is now well established and the problems of rat running are clear to see.

## THE VISITOR ECONOMY

It now appears that the covid crisis will not abate for some months and we have had to cancel the Christmas Market and Christmas lights switch on. Neither event is designed to make the council money but both are a popular part of Christmas and of massive benefit to the Lincoln economy.

On a positive note the Visitor Information Centre has been transferred back to the City Council from Lincoln BIG. Despite the difficult circumstances our staff have done a great job and were recently awarded a Trip Advisor Travellers' choice award for consistently good reviews.

## LOOKING AHEAD

Looking ahead there is much to look forward to. The council will get the opportunity to rule on the Western Growth Corridor planning application. If passed by the council the project will be a vital part in rejuvenating the Lincoln economy over a period of years alongside the other Sustainable Urban Extensions around the city. Good quality houses will be made available for Lincoln people and people new to the area. This is one of the few areas where government policy makes sense and they are supportive of the development.

Congratulations to the University of Lincoln on the award of the Times and Sunday Times Modern University of the year, a ranking of 45<sup>th</sup> out of 145 universities and 14<sup>th</sup> in the UK for student satisfaction. We tend to take the University for granted and it is important that we recognise the excellent progress made over the years and the huge contribution made to the economic and cultural life of the city and county by the University of Lincoln.

COUNCILLOR NEIL MURRAY - EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH.