

REPORT UNDER RULE 2(vi) OF THE COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES REPORT BY COUNCILLOR NEIL MURRAY, PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH

We are finally emerging from the pandemic and a very difficult period for City of Lincoln Council. We have had to contend with the social and economic havoc caused by Covid-19 and the ongoing austerity policy of the government. This has caused us serious financial problems and forced us to cut services year on year.

RESPONDING TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS

During the pandemic council officers have done great work in ensuring the efficient operation of the various government business support schemes. Our staff, drawn from different council departments, administered several government schemes which provided different grants to hundreds of local businesses totalling millions of pounds. During the Lockdown periods council staff were very efficient in making sure that Lincoln businesses were able to access Mandatory grants which were paid to businesses mandated to close during the government imposed local and national restrictions on trading. These payments were paid regularly during the Lockdowns. Our staff also administered the Discretionary grant scheme which was designed to assist businesses which were not covered by the Mandatory scheme but which were adversely affected by the Lockdowns. This was of great assistance to businesses which do not pay business rates on their own account and businesses not mandated to close but nonetheless severely impacted by the restrictions on trading. We will administer Discretionary grants up till March 2022 which will be paid to businesses not covered by the other schemes. These funds will be used to assist businesses in reviving their operations and enabling them to improve their offer.

Some of the financial details. During the March to August 2020 lockdown the council paid 1265 small businesses and 669 retail businesses a total of £21,380,000 in government grants and 126 other businesses grants totalling £1,174,500 under a local discretionary grant policy.

During the second lockdown from November 2020 to April 2021 the council paid £6,850,597 to 875 businesses forced to close. £64,00 was also paid to 64 wet led pubs under the Christmas Support scheme. In addition, under a one off top up scheme was paid out to businesses mandated to close in January. 875 businesses received £4,412,000 in total. In total between November 2020 and June 2021 875 businesses have received £17,710,666 in mandatory grant funding.

ECONOMIC RECOVERY AFTER COVID-19**TOWNS FUND, LINCOLN CENTRAL MARKET AND CITY SQUARE**

The council has an important role to play in the economic recovery after Covid-19. We have been successful in leading the bid for Towns fund resources which have paid for the refurbishment and opening up of the Cornhill area. We have a brilliant

project which will see the transformation of Lincoln Central Market and the adjacent city square area.

The Planning committee granted permission for the project on 30th June and it is planned to start work early in 2022. We conducted a consultation exercise earlier this year in which we asked residents what they thought of the transformation proposals. We had an excellent response and very positive support. Our proposals included:

- demolition of the existing, poor quality, WCs and butchers/fishmongers corridor;
- build a new commercial unit on that part of the market with potential retail or bar/restaurant use over ground or first floor with a balcony overlooking Sincil Street;
- create a reconfigured market hall with both new and refurbished stalls catering for food and non food retail and a central food court area offering people a place to eat and drink.
- create a dedicated butcher/fishmonger sales area located at the western end of the market hall below a new mezzanine floor accessed from the within the hall;
- provide new, high quality, unisex toilets accessed from the refurbished hall.
- open up the stone arches and replace the stone with glazing to provide natural light and visibility from inside and outside the hall;
- replace the existing stalls and replicate those of 1938;
- redesign City Square to connect with the market and provide an attractive open space.

The Regeneration of the market and city square is a long-held ambition and will fit in well with the excellent improvements made by the Co-op in the Sincil Street area. In turn it supports the regeneration of the broader High Street/City centre area at a time when so many shops are disappearing due to increasing internet shopping.

We were pleased at the excellent response to the public consultation exercise and were not surprised when residents confirmed our view that we need to make the area more attractive especially in terms of variety of stalls and the look and feel of the place.

LEVELLING UP FUND

The government are following up the Towns Fund with a “Levelling Up” fund and we have made a bid for a bridge which connect the north end of Park ward at Tentercroft Street with the railway station and with St Mary Street and the city centre.

WELCOME BACK FUND

We have also bid for £180k to help the High Street and uphill area recover from the effects of Covid-19. Key elements include two large scale showpiece events in the quieter periods i.e. Autumn and post Christmas. We can also utilise the funding to brighten up the High Street.

LINCOLN'S CULTURAL HERITAGE

The closure of the Drill hall was a blow to the cultural life of the city. We were proud of the way the council took a tired old ex military building and turned it into a vibrant cultural venue. We did this with the help of the former East Midlands Development Agency and we subsidised the operation of the Drill hall in return for a diverse range of activities and it worked well until the government's Austerity policy forced us to reduce the subsidy significantly. The Covid-19 pandemic delivered the killer blow, reducing the venue's income critically. It is a sad day when district councils are so poorly funded that they cannot afford to support venues like the Drill Hall.

On a more positive note the County Council have adopted a less aggressive stance to the operation and survival of the Usher Art Gallery. After a much too long a period of time agreement has been reached which will hopefully see the gallery function properly in line with the wishes of James Usher when he gifted the building and collection to the city of Lincoln. I would like to thank everyone involved in the Save Lincoln Usher Gallery campaign. Well done SLUG!

PLANNING POLICY – LOCAL PLAN

We are one of the four Partner authorities who are responsible for the planning policy for the Greater Lincoln area. The others are West Lindsey, North Kesteven and Lincolnshire County Council. The proposed new plan is currently out for consultation and runs until 24th August.

There are 83 policies contained within the draft plan. Key policies relate to climate change, housing, biodiversity, retail and employment. Following the current round of statutory consultation there will be another round before the draft plan will be submitted to the planning inspectorate early 2022 and will hopefully be adopted formally in late 2022.

The climate change policies proposed are ambitious but realistic and aim to make new development more energy efficient, the generation of renewable energy and through providing a positive framework for addressing emissions to, ensure that Central Lincolnshire can become a carbon neutral area over the 25 year lifetime of the plan. It is a shame that the climate change elements of the plan were not unanimously supported by all members of the partnership. Our County council colleagues do not seem to be aware of the urgency of action needed to protect the planet. The extreme weather experienced in North America in recent weeks which has caused hundreds of deaths should be a wakeup call to Lincolnshire climate change deniers.

DEVELOPMENT CONTROL

Our officers do a great job in planning for Lincoln's future consistently meeting government targets for dealing with planning applications. Officers have dealt with or are dealing with a number of high value applications including the potential hotel development at House of Fraser, 70 extracare flats at De Wint court, the Bridge research and development building on Poplar Avenue, Completion of the Medical school at Lincoln university, the Central Market transformation project, extensions to

A&E and the Peter Hodgkinson centre and critical care assessment unit at the hospital, new purpose built student accommodation at Beaumont Fee and the former Windmill pine premises. Officers have also dealt successfully with applications for HMO permissions in areas which already have too many HMOs in line with the council Article 4 directive/policy.

ECONOMIC RECOVERY – POST COVID

SWANPOOL

In updating members on Swanpool/Western Growth Corridor I am reminded by officers that as it is a live planning application, I am limiting this update to factual information relating to the application. This is to ensure that we do not enter a discussion which could adversely affect the planning process.

The key factual points regarding the scheme are –

On the planning side the officers are working on the detail of the proposed conditions and addressing the final outstanding issues to enable Full council to meet as planning committee.

Should planning consent be granted the timescales for delivering the first phase of development, in accordance with the funding agreement with Homes England, have meant that officers are working on the detail for the scheme. These include updating detailed ecology, designing the landscaping for the first phase and the principles for the wider development, investigating the options for net carbon zero development, detailed design of the drainage and water management of the site and Placemaking design to ensure that the new community could become an exemplar from day one.

VISITOR ECONOMY – Christmas market

Our local visitor economy has been badly damaged by the pandemic. As we emerge from the pandemic, we expect visitors to be eager to come back to Lincoln or visit for the first time. Our biggest event and visitor attraction is of course the Christmas market and it was a shame we had to cancel last year's event. The market usually attracts around 240,000 people and adds around £12 million to the local economy. It really puts Lincoln on the national and international events map.

Our officers are actively planning for the 2021 market although our preparations have been different this year. We have changed the stallholders payment arrangements in recognition that some will have had difficulties given the cancellation of so many events. Hopefully the economy will be open in December and we have 142 stalls confirmed and part paid, and another 24 traders have applied, been offered a place and we await confirmation and payment (as at the start of July). In a normal year we would expect to have between 185 and 200 stalls depending on size and layout.

Of course, no-one can be certain regarding the public health situation going forward, but we need to plan for the best scenario and be aware of all potential situations. Let's hope that the pandemic has receded by December.

PARK WARD/SINCIL BANK AREA

Improving the Sincil Bank area is one of main priorities and excellent neighbourhood work is at the centre of bringing the community together through initiatives by council officers and community volunteers.

Residents have voted in favour of the introduction of a Residents Parking Scheme and hopefully the County council will be implementing this along with a traffic/environmental scheme to improve quality of life in the narrow streets which currently get clogged up by shopper and commuter parking. Covid-19 has slowed us down, but we are committed to transforming the Hermit Street area.

LINCOLN'S HERITAGE

Heritage Action Zone

We are now well into the four-year Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) project. HAZ is a grant funded, heritage led, regeneration scheme which is conducted in partnership with Heritage England and a budget of £1.7m. There are three strands to the project namely community, cultural and physical interventions.

The key capital and built environment projects are Lower High Street and Sincil Street shop fronts, St Mary Le Wigford church, Wigford Way intersection, The Barbican/Albion hotel, St Mary's Guildhall and Lincoln Central market.

The scheme starts at St Mary's Guildhall and extends northwards along the High Street and Eastwards to include Sincil Street and the central market. St Mary's Guildhall is a pivotal scheme within the HAZ and an extensive condition survey has led to an additional £ 174,621 being awarded to the scheme to undertake urgent remedial works to the fabric of the building to enable community use of the building in the future.

These works are vital given the building's historic significance. It is believed to date from 1157 and was occupied by the Guild of St Mary for many years. The budget will be spent on full re-roofing of the Norman house from the schedule including scaffold costs, monitoring and east gable drain and flashing. Works to the lead gutters on the north side, timber repairs and a conservative allowance for the handmade peg tiles including the quarterly monitoring of the elevation for a 2 year period. restructuring roof of the Northern range and reinstatement of windows in Norman House.

The council has been awarded an extra £85k for cultural events connected to the HAZ project. The idea is to highlight the activities of the HAZ project and to encourage people back into the city centre and specifically using the refurbished Cornhill space. We have also applied to be one of five showpiece cities for a wider celebration of the HAZ project. An art installation of national significance would be located in the city centre in the summer of 2023.

The Guildhall

The Guildhall is a building we can all be proud of and is becoming better known to residents and visitors alike. Rich Storey reported to the Historic Environment Advisory Panel earlier in the year on some fascinating investigative work undertaken around asbestos removal. These dendrochronological investigations on oak timbers in the building reveal for example that the joists holding the small landing at the stairwell were likely felled between 1460 and 1490. The most notable finding is that the timber lintel above a door in the cellar was dated as being felled in the late 12th century and was dated as growing from around the year 970 when the Danes dominated this part of England.

CAR PARKING/BUS STATION

Our parking services are very important to the council and to the city. We provide good quality parking for Lincoln residents and visitors and the income we take in is vital in enabling the council to provide services to the public. The Covid-19 pandemic has damaged our financial performance significantly.

As we move forward out of the pandemic the council will re-examine the role of car parking in the city. It is likely that fewer people will be office based for an entire working week and this means we will need to be flexible in our offer. Officers will make recommendations on new offers and marketing in the next few weeks. The city bus station has remained open during the pandemic as have all our car parks. We are in discussion with Lincoln City Football club regarding city centre alternatives to parking in the Sincil Bank area on match days.

BUILDING REGULATIONS

The construction industry has changed during the pandemic and a number of issues have emerged. Enforcement action has increased significantly with people carrying out works without building regulation approval. Most of these have been reported to us by members of the public. Reports of dangerous structures has doubled and is still on the rise. Officers are dealing with these as they are reported. New regulations for thermal efficiency and ventilation are likely to come into force in June 2022 as part of the Future Homes standard.

The construction sector is very busy, and many contractors are booked up well ahead. Material prices have risen and supply is limited leading to longer job times and serious frustration. The lack of professional builders has led to an increase in building by non professionals hence the increased enforcement action by our officers.

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