

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

As we emerge from Covid Lincoln is busy again and we are getting used to living with the virus and adapting our lives. The city is busy again. Most people are working, and many people have returned to their workplace for at least part of the week. Our NHS is under great strain and everyone needs to pull together, get vaccinated and help keep each other safe.

There are a large number of vacancies in the local economy and many of them are in the social care sector. Some of these vacancies are advertised as having competitive salaries. These are often a few pence per hour over the National Minimum wage. The basic problem in social care is the very low wages paid to most staff. Sadly, this has not been addressed by government who control the wage rates.

There are sectors where wage rates are increasing, notably in construction where there are shortages of skilled trades. But the idea that we have moved into a high skilled, high wage economy is a fantasy.

I am visiting several local manufacturing businesses and the Lincoln Science and Innovation Park this month to discuss how businesses are managing as we come out of the pandemic and how they see the future. As a council we are ambitious for Lincoln and we are playing an active role in the economy and we have several ambitious projects to look forward to.

TOWNS FUND**CENTRAL MARKET AND CITY SQUARE TRANSFORMATION**

The biggest project of the Towns Fund will result in the transformation of the Central Market and the City Square area. That part of Sincil Street and the Waterside is scruffy and under-used. It is in stark contrast to the high quality of the refurbished and new buildings further along Sincil Street and at the Cornhill. Our project will improve the market and the surrounding area and create a place that will attract people for retail and leisure.

The city council undertook an extensive consultation programme which resulted in a good level of public support from those who responded, and planning permission has been granted. We are now in the process of consultation with the stallholders who will be compensated and helped to find alternative premises.

This is what we will do:

- Demolish the existing, poor quality, WCs, and butchers/fishmonger's corridor.
- Build a new commercial unit on the part of the market with potential 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 offering people a great place to eat and drink.
- Create a dedicated butcher/fishmonger sales area located at the western end of the market hall beneath a new mezzanine floor accessed from 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 create an attractive open space.

This project is a longstanding ambition and I hope we will be on site early in 2022.

OTHER TOWN FUND SCHEMES

Two other schemes will benefit residents in Park ward. Our officers are working with Highways officers to achieve improvements in the Sincil Bank area which will implement the Residents Parking Scheme and reduce rat runs in the area. The Lincoln City Football club scheme will improve the Stacey-West stand and the community education facilities beneath the stand.

LEVELLING UP FUND

Strangely The MP for Lincoln did not support some of the applications for funds for projects in Lincoln from the “Levelling Up Fund. Notably he refused to support the bridge crossing over the railway connecting the north end of Park ward with the city centre and the scheme to open up Wigford Way for development. He said, “I confirm that I will not be providing a letter of support for your chosen priorities as they do not accord with my view as to the best utilisation of taxpayers monies in providing enhancements for the majority of my constituents and the local business interests across the city of Lincoln.”

This is very strange and seems to indicate the Levelling Up agenda is not for Lincoln. East Midlands railways and Lincolnshire County Council must be scratching their heads at this strange statement and his lack of support for two excellent projects. Lincoln deserves better from its MP.

HIGH STREET HISTORIC ACTION ZONE

We have grasped the opportunity to improve/refurbish some of the historic buildings in the High Street Historic Action Zone area. The area runs from the South End of the High Street right up to the city centre.

St Mary’s Guildhall. This building is historically significant and is in need of substantial specialist work to make it structurally safe and bring it into regular public use. After very thorough survey work the physical works to make the building fit for purpose will start next month. As I have said before this is a gem of a building which would not look out of place in the uphill historic core of the city.

The Barbican/Albion Hotel. Most Lincoln people will be pleased to know that the HSHAZ board has approved grant money towards the refurbishment of the Barbican/Albion hotel. This will bring the building back into use and is part of the overall regeneration of the area just behind the High Street. The building is now a grade II listing building.

Grant money has also been allocated to improve the shops at 38- 44 Sincil Street. The grant will go towards refurbishing the shop fronts and improving the look and feel of the area.

I am in discussion with Heritage England regarding a significant heritage opportunity in the Southern part of the High Street and I will report on progress if we are able to proceed.

PARKING SERVICES

Many people mistakenly believe that it is a city council responsibility to provide car parking. It is not a statutory duty but over many years we have chosen to invest in car parks around the city to enable people from the city and outside to park to shop, for leisure and work. This supports local businesses and residents and underpins the local economy.

I have attached income information to the report which shows we have collected £2.6 million against a target of £4.5 million. Income tends to be uneven across the year and tends to drop off after Christmas. The income graph shows that October was a record month. If the figures continue to be healthy the trend will of course be positive.

But we have to be careful because we could be in an artificial bubble producing the high figures. People are returning to the city centre after covid, and staycations remain popular extending the holiday season into November. People may also be Christmas shopping early given the extensive media coverage of shortages of various goods. This is making up for the commuters staying working at home.

The income target for parking services has been reduced significantly this year to £4.5 million. Before covid the target was £6 million. This is of course very important in the context of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. No-one knows how many commuters will return so we have to be cautious and continue to observe the trends before we decide on our strategy for the long term.

TRANSPORT IN LINCOLN

A sustainable economy needs good transport links and different ways of getting around. Our officers have been involved in shaping the Bus Improvement (BSIP) for Lincolnshire that was submitted to government on 31st October which sets out an ambitious plan for improving public transport, particularly around reliability, service quality and extended services in the evening and at the weekend.

The objectives of the BSIP are:

1. For buses to contribute to the quality of place across Lincolnshire.

2. To recover bus usage to pre covid levels.
3. To improve bus user satisfaction rates.
4. To improve the perception of travelling safely on public transport.
5. To reduce journey times and improve reliability.
6. To increase service levels to include new developments.
7. To provide efficient multi modal connectivity between rail, bus, and other networks to connect the county with the rest of the East Midlands.
8. To support a reduction in operating costs through an efficient use of resources.
9. To maintain the number of operators providing bus services in the county.
10. To support economic growth and the levelling up of our most deprived communities through improving access for all to education, employment, and leisure.
11. To improve rural bus services to reduce rural isolation.
12. To reduce barriers to public transport use through attractive fares.
13. To improve air quality and reduce carbon emissions from transport.
14. To give users a say in how services are provided.

LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN 5

The County council are consulting, and we are pleased that they are focusing on all forms of transport and not just cars.

PARK WARD REGENERATION

The good work continues in Park ward to bring the community together and to improve the quality of life for residents and to improve the built environment.

Our officers are working with Highways officers to implement the Residents Parking scheme in two new zones 5C and 5D. This follows votes in favour by residents and should be in place by April 2022. The difference will benefit residents by removing the hundreds of cars which appear on the streets in the morning and disappear in the evening. The streets will be less crowded and there will be less traffic and better air quality.

Highways plan to redesign the road infrastructure to deter rat running and improve the street scene for pedestrians enabling quieter lives for resident and more opportunities for play and green spaces.

The redesign of Hermit Street will transform the area by making more family friendly with the flats redesigned and bigger and new family houses in places of unused garages. This will have a positive knock-on effect on Portland Street, Sincil Bank, and the north end of Park ward in general. We are at the Detailed design stage and I will report on progress. As we move forward, we will be looking at other opportunities to improve the built environment in the area and we will consider what can do in Palmer Street and other sites.

BUSINESS VISITS

I visited James Dawson/Fenner and the Lincoln Science and Innovation Park this week and will visit forgings manufacturer Bifrangi next week. I plan to visit Siemens

and the University of Lincoln before the end of the year and other businesses in early 2022. I am keen to understand how these businesses are adapting to the new economic and social conditions as covid recedes. It is also important to build relationships with local businesses and do anything we can to assist them and their workforces.

Dawson's and LSIP are near neighbours in the historic industrial Beevor Street area. Dawson's produce belts, hoses, tyres, and related products in labour intensive and high-tech ways. The long-standing business was acquired by the tyre giant Michelin and fortunately Michelin has invested heavily in new machinery and technology. I visited the Beevor Street site and also viewed the new manufacturing centre on Tritton Road where the investment is centred. I met the new general manager and look forward to working with them in the future.

Tom Blount welcomed us to the LSIP at the other end of the street and explained how the project was succeeding in stimulating the development of high tech businesses. I walked round the existing building and viewed the new buildings and preparatory works on the rest of the site. As members will probably know the LSIP site sits on what was the core of heavy engineering in Lincoln and it is great to see new and varied businesses there which reflects our much more diverse local economy.

PLANNING POLICY - LOCAL PLAN – ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

The Central Lincolnshire Local Plan is working its way through the consultative process and the next version will be taken to the Joint committee in February for approval before the final round of public consultation prior to being submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in the Spring.

I hope our county council colleagues will have a change of heart and support our ambitious proposals to address climate change by adopting changes in the planning regime which would see new buildings which are less polluting and more sustainable. At the moment they are fixed on a 2050 date and are wedded to a strange obsession regarding wind turbines. COP26 should have woken them up as should the increasingly strange weather across the globe. The problem is urgent.

Key to the success of all local plans in Britain is action by the government in terms of new build housing and insisting that they should be energy efficient. It is much cheaper to do this at the build stage than to retrofit houses. Hopefully the government will realise this could contribute substantially to reducing our carbon footprint nationally by 2030.

PLANNING SUCCESS

I think it is important to inform council and our residents of the excellent standard of our planning department. The statistics:

- 94% of non major applications granted within the prescribed framework against the national set minimum of 70%.
- 88% of major applications determined within the prescribed timeframe against the national set minimum of 60%.

- 97% of all applications are approved (due to the proactive work of officers negotiating good outcomes at pre-application and application stage).
- No appeals overturned in the last 12 months.
- We successfully defended a judicial review of the decision to grant permission for a new Aldi store on the former Co-op site at the Morland centre. A lot of officer input was required in defending this case and we were awarded £10,000 in costs by the courts.

Excellent work, well done.

GUILDHALL WINNERS.

The Guildhall has been recognised by Visit England as a venue whose staff go the extra mile to welcome visitors. We have been awarded an Accolade by VE. Well done to our staff who welcome visitors to our historic Guildhall. It is good to see the building being used more often and for Lincoln people and visitors to appreciate its historic value.

VISITOR ECONOMY

Christmas Market. Officers are working on final preparations for the Christmas Market. The event is hugely important in terms of our local economy and in attracting visitors to Lincoln and Lincolnshire in the future. This year the event is even more significant given that we could not stage it last year and it will signal a return to something more like normal life and the chance to celebrate Christmas with friends and family after the miserable experience for many people last year.

Preparations for the market are going well and are on schedule and the safety plan has been shared and agreed with the Safety Advisory Group partner agencies.

We will have 150 official stalls around the normal footprint of the market. This is slightly less than usual but will mean there is more room for visitors.

We are publicising a campaign to encourage visitors to follow guidelines agreed with public health. These are 1) Test before visiting. 2) wear a face covering in indoor areas or when it is very busy or crowded. 3) Use the hand sanitiser provided or bring your own.

Following a successful trial last year, we will also have our online Christmas Market on our market website. This will allow visitors who cannot attend to browse through our stallholders' businesses virtually and also links to the Shop Lincoln website to promote our city retail offer.

COUNCILLOR NEIL MURRAY – EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH.