

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

MONDAY, 27 FEBRUARY 2023 - 1.30 PM



PRESENT: Councillor D Mason (Chairman), Councillor A Miscandlon (Vice-Chairman), Councillor G Booth, Councillor A Hay and Councillor R Wicks

APOLOGIES: Councillor D Connor, Councillor M Humphrey, Councillor M Purser, Councillor R Skoulding and Councillor F Yeulett

Officers in attendance: Linda Albon (Member Services & Governance Officer), Amy Brown (Assistant Director), Anna Goodall (Assistant Director), Stephen Beacher (Head of ICT Digital & Resilience), Peter Catchpole (Corporate Director and Chief Finance Officer), Nick Harding (Head of Planning), Simon Jackson (Economic Growth Manager) and David Wright (Policy & Communications Manager)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor I Benney, Councillor C Boden, Councillor D Laws (*joined 15.20pm*), Councillor P Murphy, Councillor S Tierney

GUESTS: Richard Cuda, Rebecca Bekkenutte, Jnathan Finlay, Fliss Miller, Edward Colman, Nigel Parkinson, Steve Clarke, Gareth Preece, Martin Johnson – CPCA Growth Service

OSC25/22 PREVIOUS MINUTES.

The minutes of the meeting of 16 January 2023 were confirmed and signed.

OSC26/22 UPDATE ON PREVIOUS ACTIONS.

Members considered the update on previous actions and made the following comments:

- Councillor Booth referred to the update on the development on Gaul Road, March which was discussed at the meeting attended by Clarion in December. He stated his concern that information received from the Planning Team and Clarion was conflicting and he asked why the Planning Team update said there had not been a pre-application discussion when Clarion were insistent that they had been involved in pre-application discussions. Councillor Mason said that the item had been marked as complete but agreed that further investigation was needed for clarification. Nick Harding said he would provide an answer by the end of the meeting.
- Councillor Hay asked if there is any further update regarding the shared planning arrangements with Peterborough. Nick Harding responded that Peterborough City Council had confirmed they are withdrawing all their current support as of 1st April 2023. This includes planning policy, Section 106s and associated management, ecology, and strategic housing. Councillor Booth voiced his concern about extra cost and further delay in development of the local plan if we must start again with new staff, when the plan is already about two years behind schedule. Councillor Mason offered to discuss this further outside of the meeting.

OSC27/22 UPDATE ON CPCA GROWTH SERVICE AND IMPACT ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN FENLAND

Members considered the update on CPCA Growth Service and impact on Economic Development in Fenland. Fliss Miller, Jonathan Finley, Rebecca Bekkenutte, Richard Cuda, Martin Johnson, Gareth Preece, Steve Clarke, Nigel Parkinson and Ed Colman were welcomed to the meeting.

Members made comments, asked questions and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Booth noted that Fenland receives the smallest contribution in SME CapEx grants. He asked why Fenland has less than 10% of the investment when he understood we were going to be one of the priority areas. Richard Cuda responded that a weighting system had been created that puts Fenland at the top. Martin Johnson explained there are a number of success stories in the Fenland area, one being the Turmeric Co., with Agrimech in Manea due to come before the Board next week. Agrimech will be expanding their manufacturing facility which will double their capabilities to build machinery for export and will receive about £100k of a £400k project. Martin Johnson added that a higher weighting determines which businesses go forward for internal assessment before going to representatives from the business board. He stated that Growth Works are certainly out in Fenland making connections and he encouraged members to let them know of any businesses they are aware of requiring capital expenditure assistance. Councillor Booth thanked Martin Johnson for this information but said his answer did not support the evidence; £21k is not even an average wage for one person. Richard Cuda clarified that the figure referred to actually related to the number of jobs. Martin Johnson added that the investment to Agrimech was actually at least £140k with another £100k coming shortly if approved. Councillor Booth thanked both for the clarification.
- Councillor Miscandlon said he had this morning attended an impromptu Skills Committee meeting at the CPCA where various questions were raised about the data within the programme. It appears that Peterborough does well for grants because they can complete agenda forms for the Skills Committee correctly, but he would like to know what help is being given by the CPCA to lesser councils that either cannot or do not have the officer time to complete the forms so therefore miss out. It was also noted at that meeting that there is a lack of training providers for apprenticeships within Fenland, and the data appears to suggest students are being paid to go to other areas from the budget set for this area. Councillor Miscandlon stressed that there needs to be training providers in this area; it is a situation of great concern to this Council, and he would like to know what is being done to help FDC and the residents of Fenland.
- Fliss Miller responded that there are several training providers in Fenland. The CPCA has just invested in the North Cambridgeshire Training Centre; there is the College of West Anglia and a number of national providers providing training courses locally. The CPCA has just launched a training provider network forum to encourage working together to better understand the geography. Fliss Miller added that in her opinion there are enough providers but as a combined authority they are doing more to get their providers to ensure there are progression pathways to ensure further opportunities. She added that Fenland does quite well in terms of the number of apprenticeships and the figures are growing. Councillor Miscandlon said he still did not believe Fenland is getting value for money.
- Councillor Wicks said he would be interested to know who the training providers are as members may like to share this information in their wards; and he asked if it was possible to break down the apprenticeship figures to show the number of apprentices who are post-graduate and those who are plus 18. Fliss Miller responded that as part of the wider skills provision that information could be obtained but apprenticeships are just a small part of the growth works programme.
- Councillor Wicks asked by market town how much success has there been on the work that is being conducted within the district? Richard Cuda responded that there is no provision for breaking the data down into that level of detail, however recognising the importance of it, this is something they can provide. They have a CRM system called HubSpot that shows where the jobs and apprenticeships have come from, from which they can export the data. Councillor Wicks said that his point is that Cambridgeshire County Council has a green policy, and this is an opportunity to deliver employment within commuting distance, even if it involves remote working, and he asked if Growth Works had a duty to work towards creating an environment where jobs are on the doorstep rather than making people travel, which does not contribute to a green policy. Councillor Wicks added that Fenland has the cheapest land prices in Cambridgeshire to develop industry and employment, but it is not happening. Richard Cuda

responded that the jobs and outcomes are in Fenland, but they cannot capture remote working, and that does not count as a job outcome; the remit is that the jobs must be in the region. Councillor Wicks asked why Growth Works could not facilitate this by developing enterprise zones and hubs. Richard Cuda explained that this is not the job of Growth Works, but they can help drive growth and jobs. Anna Goodall clarified that Growth Works were given a remit and the presentation given today describes how they have fulfilled that remit; some of the questions being asked are outside of the scheme hence Growth Works are unable to respond accordingly but it is clear that they can provide details of the scheme and provide reassurance that it has been delivered successfully to date.

- Councillor Mason asked for information about the Agri-Tech proposition in Whittlesey. Rebecca Bekkenutte explained that this came about through Market Access Programmes (MAPS) run by the Inward Investment team. When the investment service began two years ago, it consisted of one person trying to build an inward investment option and raise its profile with the Department for International Trade who have no regional targets. They were trying to raise a regional profile outside of life sciences and identify their own leads, rather than relying on the Department of International Trade. The MAPS were created with the idea of creating collateral, promoting the programme with international networks, effectively saying there is a market opportunity in life sciences or advanced manufacturing or Agritech, and encouraging them to be part of the programme and they will be put in front of a panel of experts who will help facilitate their journey into the region. For advanced manufacturing and Agri-Tech it was a case of trying to find a way to see how they could benefit Fenland. Rebecca Bekkenutte added that for Agri-Tech, a research institution was commissioned to identify opportunities within the region and raise the profile of Fenland in this sector and she and her team are now engaging with FDC to suggest companies who might benefit from identifying these aggregate companies into their supply chain. The proposition was just to help create selling messages Councillor Mason thanked Rebecca Bekkenutte for the information given, which he found reassuring.
- Richard Cuda said there would be more wins if remote working could be captured and gave for context the example that for a Fenland resident commuting to work in Huntington then statistics would be captured within Huntingdon.
- Councillor Booth said to clarify the point he was making earlier about the amount of investment or grants awarded to Fenland, he would like to know the proportion of grants coming into Fenland as a total of the budget. Martin Johnson said the total amount over the last 18 months is in the region of £4m and his calculation shows this to be well north of the £144k shown in the presentation and there are a couple of others that are potentially missing so potentially £250k over 4. Councillor Booth said that is still a low percentage out of the total budget; Martin Johnson responded that there are about 800 eligible businesses out of about 7,900 in the entire CPCA region that would get these grants. In many respects it is a smaller region, but it has the same opportunities as all the rest; it is a function of whether businesses decide to respond or events that we might put on in the region; we work fairly across the entire region. It is perhaps the appetite to respond that would put more of the budget Fenland's way. Councillor Booth said his observation would be that not as much is being invested per capita in Fenland and yet this is an area of deprivation which desperately needs that investment to grow the area and the jobs and skills. Martin Johnson said it would be great if anyone can come up with a list of companies that need that kind of capital investment, because they would like them to be able to take advantage of any of the grants whether they be Revenue or CapEx. He said let us work together to see how we can improve that. Councillor Booth asked if they have a good relationship with the Economic Growth team; Martin Johnson confirmed they do.
- Councillor Miscandlon said it was good to hear about events in Peterborough and Hunts and asked if they are considering anything similar in the Fenland area. It would be good to hold a business event as it would be useful for some of these companies to know there are grants available. Martin Johnson said a couple of events are proposed already so we are investing in creating that awareness through a business event and holding business awards.
- Anna Goodall said it is in our interest to work well with Growth Works. There have been considerable communications in relation to the scheme, but the difficulty is in getting businesses to engage; some of them are working under considerable pressure, not least with

the increase in energy bills. That is why the case studies have been so important to see the benefits at grass roots level, so it is working well.

- Councillor Booth said it sounds like there is a bit of disconnect between Fenland and Growth Works, on the one hand we are not engaging as well as we could; local government moves slowly it is said but that needs to be looked into and the lines of communication improved. Martin Johnson agreed.
- Councillor Mason said that Fenland has specific requirements that are different to Peterborough; perhaps better liaison is required, and a better understanding of what Fenland needs specifically. Richard Cuda responded that they would welcome that engagement. The programme was created on a one size fits all approach so perhaps there should be more focus on a particular area.
- Anna Goodall said that following on from the point regarding a call for businesses and sites; Councillor Benney has made it clear that he would like the Economic Growth Team to be very proactive around sites so we can promote them and that is why we are working on a development prospectus to understand the sites that have planning permission that have not been developed yet or are ripe for development in terms of job creation or inward investment. We need to understand what is preventing those sites coming forward now or what the blocks are. It will not be resolved overnight but it is a priority for us in accordance with Councillor Benney's wishes.
- Councillor Miscandlon said the formation of the new local plan with designated industrial areas is progressing very quickly and hopefully will be validated within the next year. Councillor Booth said he felt that was rather optimistic. Nick Harding said the timetable is published online for the preparation of the local plan, withdrawal of services from Peterborough will impact on this but a paper will come before members on how best to proceed. Councillor Booth said another issue is a lack of business centre spaces, and we discussed at the last Overview and Scrutiny meeting that the Chatteris extension is not going ahead, so there are some real challenges in finding suitable locations. Richard Cuda said the sooner the better, but his team will be there to provide support when it comes and there are some 18-24 months development on some of these opportunities.
- Councillor Booth asked for thoughts and comments in delivery of the added jobs that were supposed to be provided following the attendance of the Growth Works team last year as he does not find them to be that transformative. Richard Cuda said they cannot capture anything unless they have contributed to it. Councillor Booth said in terms of organic growth it is possible that companies could expand and create jobs anyway so it cannot solely be down to interaction with Growth Works; commercial businesses will always find a way to expand if they want to even though it may be a slower process. Jonathan Finlay responded that we do ask these questions about to what extent has an intervention actually helped accelerate business plans so there is always a challenge both internally and externally. Richard Cuda confirmed that this is a question that is also raised by Combined Authority colleagues; Martin Johnson concurred. If approval given this week for Agrimech they will have created 20 jobs for £100k; Agrimech do not know where else to build their businesses and without our help they could have gone elsewhere.
- Councillor Mason thanked all attendees for their time and their presentation.

The update on CPCA Growth Service and impact on Economic Development in Fenland was noted for information.

(Councillor Booth asked for it to be noted that he has a zero hours contract with Peterborough Regional College).

(Councillor Booth left the meeting at 15.15pm).

OSC28/22 PROGRESS IN DELIVERING THE ECONOMY CORPORATE OBJECTIVES TO INCLUDE PLANNING 2022/23

Members considered the Progress of Delivering the Economy Corporate Objectives to include Planning for 2022/23 presented by Councillor Benney, Nick Harding and Simon Jackson.

Members made comments, asked questions and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Miscandlon said that Growth Works are holding businesses events in Huntingdon and Peterborough and asked why they have not considered doing the same in the four Fenland market towns. Simon Jackson responded that there is a conversation about holding a similar event in Fenland and there had already been a successful event in Wisbech. He added that the team has a relationship with some thirty to forty businesses, but the biggest issue found when speaking to them is both a lack of skills, and a lack of people coming through the door whether they are skilled or not. They do engage with local colleges and there is a new, proactive chairman in the Chamber of Commerce Committee who would like to work with FDC, however any event must be focussed and have an outcome rather than be held for the sake of it.
- Councillor Miscandlon said there is a proposed science park in Kings Dyke so it is important to engage now with companies that may occupy the site that may be wanting to employ. Simon Jackson advised that a significant amount of time has been spent with the site owner and his agent and agreed that there should be some exciting opportunities going forward. Following a call for sites they had submitted an application to be in the local plan and later this year should be submitting a plan for the Victory works site.
- Councillor Mason asked if there was a timescale for that application. Simon Jackson replied that the latest information he has is only that the agent will be submitting an application for the area known as Victory works, not including the pit, sometime this year.
- Councillor Hay said that she has been hearing from businesses that they are against expanding because of a lack of good infrastructure. Dualling of the A47 and a March to Wisbech railway line need looking at as an example. Nick Harding acknowledged there is a need to keep up the momentum regarding the A47 to get the ear of Government as it would make such a difference to the economic future of the area and in terms of the Wisbech Access Study, staff are pushing for consideration of junctions that are not yet funded to ensure they do receive the required funding. Councillor Wicks said it was also not important to forget the Ely north junction.
- Councillor Mason said that in respect of the A47 dualling, there has been a business case and land acquired but there is an opinion that until there is development beyond Kings Lynn, there may not be much mileage in economy for the area. Simon Jackson said this does not stop the significant number of enquiries received from businesses looking to move into the area. The biggest block is surface land availability. He agreed there are many issues regarding transport, and better transport access would help but he has not heard of it being a major block. Dualling would be a significant boost no doubt, but people do get used to what they have got.
- Councillor Benney said that a relief road at Whittlesey would be a big boost from Fenland into Peterborough. It would open up industrial land as vehicles go through the town and make access harder into industrial areas. He added that four years ago when he was given his role as portfolio holder for economic growth there was no economic growth team, there was just one officer who was overworked. He recalled that there was not even a list of businesses in Fenland. Now there are two officers he is proud to work with in Simon Jackson and Ann Wardle, along with Anna Goodall and economic growth has come on in leaps and bounds. Now with the addition of an administrator, the team has grown and achieved so much in these four years, particularly in providing a foundation for good growth and this bodes well for the future. He also meets regularly with Mark Greenwood, Head of Property, Assets and Major Projects, to keep abreast of what is going on and he would like to take this opportunity to thank every member of the team publicly in case he is not re-elected at the forthcoming district council elections in May.
- Councillor Miscandlon said this was one occasion when the portfolio holder and officers can blow their own trumpet and congratulated them on a job well done. Councillor Mason agreed but added that Fenland also needs to receive its fair share of investment from the Combined Authority if it is to move forward.
- Councillor Miscandlon noted that the report incorrectly stated that the Whittlesey Heritage

Visitor Centre project had been cancelled and asked if this can be altered as the project had only been suspended. Councillor Boden agreed this was an error and confirmed that the project had been suspended and not cancelled. We are actively looking for an alternative site and for additional funding from a third-party source.

The progress of Delivering the Economy Corporate Objectives to include Planning 2022/23 was noted for information.

OSC29/22 PROGRESS IN DELIVERING THE TRANSFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION PORTFOLIO 2022-23

Members considered the Transformation & Communications Portfolio Holder update.

Members made comments, asked questions and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Hay noted that press releases are shared with some local magazines and asked why Centrepoin is not included as this is published in Chatteris quarterly. Councillor Tierney said the more ways to communicate the better and this magazine can certainly be added to the list. Councillor Hay thanked Councillor Tierney and said she would forward the contact details.
- Councillor Mason commented on the Whittlesey Neighbourhood Plan. A lot of work went into the plan over five years and at the beginning there was quite a degree of public consultation. The draft was a very worthwhile document, but he wondered if it would have been more beneficial at the end to have another consultation just to outline what the final draft was before holding a referendum on it. He had a lot of people comment that they did not know what the plan was in its final form, and they found it difficult to access the information. Therefore, for future benefit, maybe there should be a consultation at the end of the process. Councillor Laws said she did not disagree; unfortunately, Whittlesey Library directed some people to Fenland's Local Plan instead of the Neighbourhood Plan which caused additional confusion and she was also approached by some people because they did not understand what a neighbourhood plan would deliver. It had been promoted well and publicised quite widely as to where people could find that information, but some would say it had not been publicised enough. It was unfortunate that we did miss the publication dates for two free Whittlesey magazines, but this was due to the dates being changed for Christmas. If the article she had written had been published in those there would not have been so many enquiries. However, with the Neighbourhood Plan it would not be the responsibility of FDC to consult but that of the parish or town council. There is something to be learned from that and maybe it is a suggestion that should be put forward to Wimblington, who are currently pursuing a neighbourhood plan, that they hold that consultation and viewing period before a referendum, however we did the best we could.
- Councillor Tierney said it is important to understand the responsibility of different councils. This is Overview and Scrutiny for Fenland District Council but the neighbourhood plan is brought forward by the town council so we cannot be involved with the consultation of any kind, that is the for the town council to do but as a partner it is important to help promote, and we did everything we could. Anything to be learned needs to go to the town council.
- Councillor Laws commented on the negative aspects of social media that also led people to be misinformed regarding the plan and possibly encouraged them to vote against it. Councillor Miscandlon agreed and said that the district plan needs to be explained to the public in clear terms but as we get nearer to approval of the plan we also need to stop or manage the misinformation that is likely to come out on social media. Councillor Laws agreed and added that is correct in terms of social media, but we also need to educate the libraries; we should not give them paperwork for the public to view but to provide a briefing sheet to give them a greater understanding, there are some lessons to be learned here.
- Councillor Tierney said that the Plan was placed on the front page of the FDC website to make it as visible as possible. Furthermore, he agreed with Councillor Miscandlon about making things clearer; he is passionate about removing jargon and the use of plain English and he requested that if anyone spots anything that they feel should be made clearer, then please let him know. He would welcome Overview & Scrutiny input into any official or draft version of a

document going forward.

- Councillor Mason said he was very impressed with how transformation is taking place and how it has become simplified over the last few years and congratulated Councillor Tierney.
- Councillor Laws added that she would like to thank Emma Nasta in the Planning Team for helping to produce a validation document in simple English that all can understand in place of the previous document which would be the worst example of jargon and gobbledegook that she could think of.

The Transformation & Communications Portfolio Holder update was noted for information.

OSC30/22 FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the Future Work Programme.

- Councillor Mason said the formation of the Panel will change considerably after the district elections in May, but the work plan remains, and he offered his best wishes to whomever will be sitting on the Panel after that time.
- Councillor Wicks said it is important in the absence of a report by the Mayor of the Combined Authority that his attendance be arranged sooner rather than later.
- Councillor Miscandlon noted that Anglian Water are due to attend in October but suggested this be brought forward bearing in mind the amount of water leaks that are being reported currently. Councillor Wicks agreed; there have been considerable problems within the villages that has impacted them greatly. Councillor Miscandlon said he is aware they are not under an obligation to attend but they were very accommodating previously.

4.05 pm

Chairman