

Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive held in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton TA1 1HE, on Tuesday 12 March 2024 at 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Bill Revans (Chair)
Cllr Liz Leyshon (Vice-Chair)

Cllr Theo Butt Philip
Cllr Dixie Darch
Cllr Sarah Wakefield
Cllr Ros Wyke

Cllr Adam Dance
Cllr Heather Shearer
Cllr Richard Wilkins

In attendance:

Cllr Mandy Chilcott

Cllr Claire Sully

Other Members present remotely:

Cllr Steve Ashton
Cllr Andy Hadley
Cllr Val Keitch
Cllr Tony Lock
Cllr Sue Osborne
Cllr Jo Roundell Greene
Cllr David Woan

Cllr Nicola Clark
Cllr John Hunt
Cllr Marcus Kravis
Cllr Frances Nicholson
Cllr Leigh Redman
Cllr Gill Slocombe

12 Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1

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Apologies were received from the Lead Member for Communities, Housing and Culture, Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts, the Associate Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Housing, Cllr Fran Smith and the Associate Lead Member for Performance and Communications, Cllr Tom Deakin.

12 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 2

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The following declarations of interest were automatically recorded:

Theo Butt-Philip - Wells City Council

Adam Dance - South Petherton Parish Council

Heather Shearer -Street Parish Council

Richard Wilkins – Curry Rivel Parish Council

Ros Wyke - Westbury-sub-Mendip Parish Council

12 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 3

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The Chair noted that there had been no public questions submissions received by the published deadline.

12 Delivering Economic Growth via Gravity Enterprise Zone - Agenda Item 4

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The Leader of the Council, Councillor Bill Revans introduced the item and highlighted key points including: the importance of the Gravity Enterprise Zone for Somerset; the work of the former Somerset County Council, Sedgemoor District Council and latterly of Somerset Council; the opportunity for Somerset to be at the heart of the green energy industry; the creation of 4000 highly skilled jobs; links to the Hinkley Point C development alongside Leonardo in Yeovil; and ensuring Somerset has a vibrant and prosperous economy.

At the invitation of the Chair, the Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets Councillor Ros Wyke added to the points raised by the Leader, highlighting: the importance and the scale of the achievement for Somerset Council; the impact of the Enterprise Zone on the local community and economy; the positive impact for the developments supply chain; improving investment in the skills agenda across the county; that the site had been out of use since 2008; the role of local government in identifying brownfield commercial development sites alongside work with commercial partners; the need to amend the Capital Strategy and Treasury Management Strategy in due course; the need to create a Gravity Locality Investment Plan; negotiating an extended 10 years during which time all business rates will be held by Somerset Council, running until 2053; the importance of maximising benefit to the local economy; the establishment of an Executive Sub-Committee to ensure good governance; and that this would be the first of several papers to be considered by the Executive.

The Executive Director of Climate and Place Mickey Green and the Service Director of Economy and Employment Planning Paul Hickson were then invited to add

additional points and highlighted that: the report refers to “Phase one” of the Gravity Enterprise Zone; the report details the approach of how Somerset will make this zone work; the zone will run until 2052 and it is a long-term investment into Somerset; the positive conversation and feedback from scrutiny and the impacts on local people and housing; and work to agree the final detail of the terms of the £55m grant.

Lead members raised questions and discussed the report and the following points were raised and discussed: a number of lead members thanked all involved from councillors to officers for all hard work on the project; how the project is an exemplar of working across the Council; the Council’s risk appetite, including maximising opportunities whilst taking care of those most in need; the importance of communications including publishing committee papers and public announcements; the need considered skills and training; the site proximity to the M5 and relatively quick build timescales; governance and the role of stakeholder groups; the positive reflection on the local community this project gives; the importance of renewable energy and investing in this; the focus on governance for the project going forward; the importance of risk management; the continuity of work of officers and the workings of The Local Development Order and Section 106 Agreement including a local employment and care leaver clause; and work required to complete the strategic infrastructure in the proximity of the site.

Other members present raised questions and discussed the report and the following points were raised and discussed: shared the thanks and the importance of the project; the project is a Countywide investment; timescales for the updates required to the Capital Strategy and Treasury Management Strategy updates; KPI data and the importance of being transparent with tangible numbers going forward; and the ‘local first’ agenda. In response it was noted that KPI data and the investment plan will be part of phase two and will be brought forward through reports via Scrutiny, Executive and Full Council.

Following consideration of the officer report and discussion, the Executive agreed to:

A) Welcomed the progress on the Gravity Enterprise Zone, the expected significant investment by Agratas in creating the UK’s largest gigafactory on the site and the potential benefits to Somerset.

B) Endorsed in principle the creation of the Gravity Locality Investment Plan (the ‘Investment Plan’) and the Council’s proposed approach to financing it and mitigating the risks associated with this scale of investment, as set out in paragraphs 6.1 to 6.9.

C) Noted the ongoing work associated with finalising the Investment Plan and the financing of this plan to minimise the risk to the Council’s financial situation, and notes that this will be the subject of a future report proposing the Executive recommend to the Full Council an amendment to the Council’s Capital Strategy and Treasury Management Strategy to accommodate the investment.

D) Delegated authority to the Executive Director for Climate and Place in consultation with the Section 151 Officer to complete negotiations on an extension to the Enterprise Zone designation and to agree the terms of any grant from the Department for Business and Trade, as set out later in this report.

E) Agreed to establish a Gravity Enterprise Zone Executive Sub-committee (as set out in section on legal implications) and delegates authority to the Executive Director for Climate and Place in consultation with Lead Member Economic Development, Planning and Assets to develop the Terms of Reference and detailed governance arrangements.

F) Approved the establishment of the advisory Governance Groups required by the Gravity Local Development Order (LDO) Section 106 Agreement and for Officers from Somerset Council to be represented on these groups, and delegates authority to the Head of Planning / Chief Planner to complete the governance arrangements outlined in the legal implications section of this report.

Leader of The Council, Councillor Bill Revans thanked the committee and noted the next meeting of the Executive on 8th April 2024.

(The meeting ended at 11.02 am)

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CHAIR