

Cabinet

Tuesday 5 March 2024

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Isobel Seccombe OBE (Chair)
Councillor Peter Butlin
Councillor Andy Crump
Councillor Yousef Dahmash
Councillor Kam Kaur
Councillor Sue Markham
Councillor Jan Matecki
Councillor Heather Timms
Councillor Martin Watson

1. General

(1) Apologies

Councillor Margaret Bell and Monica Fogarty, Chief Executive.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None.

(3) Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 15 February 2024 were agreed as an accurate record.

(4) Public Speaking

None.

2. West Midlands Investment Zone

Councillor Isobel Seccombe, Leader, introduced this report which followed a paper considered by Cabinet on the concept of the Investment Zone on 9 November 2023. She reminded Cabinet that the West Midlands Investment Zone covered three distinct sites across the West Midlands Combined Authority region, with the subject of this report being the Coventry & Warwick Gigapark which was predominantly located within Warwick District, with a focus around the Coventry Airport

site and plans for a Gigafactory to support the UK automotive sector. This report provided an update particularly around the no detriment principle for Warwickshire County Council on business rates, investment finance for the Gigafactory, and governance arrangements, with recommendations for the County Council to participate in the West Midlands Investment Zone and to agree the Memorandum of Understanding with respect to business rates retention.

Councillor Seccombe explained the opportunities associated with Investment Zones, with the Gigapark alone expected to generate over 9,000 skilled jobs in engineering and advanced manufacturing together with over £2bn in growth. She considered it was an exciting opportunity and expressed her thanks to those involved in the negotiations.

Councillor John Holland noted the challenges faced during the negotiations. He also noted that the report stated there were no environmental implications associated with the decision which he suspected may not fully reflect the position. Councillor Timms explained that the report was focussed on the decision to take part in the Investment Zone. Environmental concerns would have been considered during the planning permission process. She considered that it should be noted that the site would support skills acquisition in the green industry and the sustainability of employment in that sector for young people was a valuable opportunity for the region.

Councillor Jonathan Chilvers noted that this was an important opportunity for the Council and, from a Warwick District Council perspective, he stated that negotiations were ongoing and a resolution was expected.

Councillor Roodhouse echoed comments around the opportunities presented by this project and asked for more clarity on the timeline so that he could better understand when the investment benefits would materialise. Councillor Seccombe advised that the final date to resolve negotiations was 1 April 2024.

Councillor Martin Watson expressed the view that the opportunities associated with the project were greater than the risks and emphasised the benefits relating to employment and growth. Councillor Jan Matecki echoed these comments, noting that it would improve the attractiveness of the region for business.

Councillor Seccombe reiterated the employment and growth opportunities presented by the site and explained the financial opportunities that were set out in the report in relation to business rate retention to further drive growth and opportunities in the area.

Resolved:

That Cabinet:

1. Supports Warwickshire County Council's participation in the West Midlands Investment Zone (WMIZ) and agrees to the Council becoming a member of such Investment Board, including any Joint Committee, established by the West Midlands Combined Authority relating to the WMIZ whose functions include oversight of the development of the GigaPark site; and
2. Authorises the Executive Director for Communities to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the West Midlands Combined Authority, Warwick District Council and Coventry City Council in relation to business rates and their retention across the

proposed West Midlands Investment Zone area, on terms and conditions acceptable to the Executive Director for Resources.

3. Devolution for Warwickshire Update

Councillor Isobel Seccombe, Leader, explained that since the publication of the Levelling up White Paper in 2022, the Council had been actively exploring the progression of devolution options for Warwickshire. Following the Government's Autumn statement in 2023, the Government had set out its intention to offer Level 2 devolution powers to councils that covered a functional economic or whole county area, and this Council had re-stated an interest in a Level 2 deal. Councillor Seccombe noted the engagement with district and borough councils, MPs, the WMCA and other strategic partners, that had taken place and highlighted the work of the County Councils Network (CCN) towards the delivery of a standardised deal for the eight county councils who had expressed interest in progressing at this stage. This paper set out the content of the deal alongside an initial assessment of what it could mean for Warwickshire.

Councillor Martin Watson welcomed the report and the transfer of powers to the Council, particularly in relation to the Local Skills Improvement Plan which would bolster the work that had been done to date in supporting adults with learning difficulties into work.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse applauded the work of the CCN, and he considered the elements relating to the skills agenda to be the highlight of the deal and he looked forward to how this would be developed in Warwickshire.

Councillor John Holland considered that more local decision making would result in better quality decisions and hoped that the deal would come to fruition. He noted the statement about there being no extra funding for Warwickshire but that if the spending was delegated then there would be associated administration costs which needed to be resourced and a new government, following the general election, may wish to review the position.

Councillor Jonathan Chilvers welcomed the report and that the Council would be one of the first authorities to benefit from the standard deal negotiated.

Councillor Isobel Seccombe emphasised the Council's ability to deliver on a clear plan and vision to take a deal forward at some pace. She looked forward to an announcement by government in the next few weeks.

Resolved:

That Cabinet supports progressing a Level 2 devolution deal for Warwickshire and authorises the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, to negotiate and finalise a devolution agreement for Warwickshire, subject to any further Council approvals necessary in respect of legislative changes required to implement the deal.

4. Electric Vehicle Parking Policy

Councillor Jan Matecki, Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning introduced this report which sought to address increasing demand for electric vehicle charging points through the introduction of a policy that would make a parking bay electric vehicle only while charging. Adopting the policy would support residents and visitors to make sustainable travel choices, in a safe manner, and help the Council meet its agreed climate emergency and net zero aims. Once adopted, the policy did not in itself change the designation of parking spaces but would provide the formal background to allow Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) changes to happen before a final decision was made on whether to take a chosen site forward.

Councillor Tim Sinclair welcomed the proposals and asked about the timelines for introducing the policy which would require some changes to driver behaviour. Councillor Matecki indicated that the TRO consultation process and timeline, including consultation, advertising and erection of signage once adopted, would be the same as for any other TRO.

Resolved:

That Cabinet adopts the parking policy at Appendix 1 to the report to enable the designation of on-street electric vehicle (EV) parking spaces as for use by EVs only.

5. Reports Containing Exempt or Confidential Information

Resolved:

That members of the public be excluded from the meeting for the items mentioned below on the grounds that their presence would involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1972.

6. Exempt Minutes of the 15 February 2024 Meeting of Cabinet

The exempt minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 15 February 2024 were agreed as an accurate record.

7. Warwickshire Property & Development Group (WPDG) - Business Plans for 2024

Councillor Peter Butlin (Deputy Leader of the Council) introduced this item and summarised the exempt report.

Resolved:

That the recommendations as set out in the report be approved.

The meeting rose at 2.25pm

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Chair