



## Leader's Report

24 July 2024

### Report of the Leader of the Council

#### PURPOSE OF REPORT

To present the Leader's report to Council.

This report is public.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

To receive the report of the Leader of Council.

#### REPORT

##### 1.0 Cabinet

1.1 Information on Cabinet matters is provided in the minutes from the Cabinet meeting held 4 June later in this agenda.

##### 2.0 Decisions required to be taken urgently.

2.1 No urgent Cabinet decisions have been taken since the last Leader's Report.

##### 3.0 Leader's Comments

Due to the snap General Election, there was no Full Council meeting held in June 2024, and so dear reader, I hope you are sitting comfortably, as this promises to be a lengthy report! Thanks go to several officers who supplied me with key updates in their service areas which will be incorporated into this report throughout.

Before I begin I would like to offer my best wishes to the Mayor, Cllr Abi Mills, who has recently announced that she is receiving treatment for breast cancer. I'm sure you will all share my hopes for her speedy and full recovery. Abi's son, Cllr Hamish Mills, is the Deputy Mayor and will be Chairing full council in

her place. I trust members will be suitably well behaved in meetings as Hamish steps into that role temporarily! I also send my best wishes to the Conservative group leader, Cllr Andrew Gardner who has also suffered some ill health recently. I hope to have him back in the council chamber – and making my life more difficult - as soon as possible. Get well soon!

### **3.1 Elections & Eden**

Firstly, I'd like to thank council officers and staff who have put in weeks of hard work to meet the challenge of a snap General Election. Following the General Election of 4<sup>th</sup> July we have seen a change of Government nationally and the re-election of Cat Smith MP in Lancaster and Wyre. In Morecambe and Lunesdale David Morris has been succeeded by the newly elected Lizzi Collinge MP. I'd like to congratulate both of our district's MP's on their success at the ballot box and look forward to collaborating with them on a range of issues for the benefit of residents in our district. We thank David for his 14 years service as an MP and wish him, his wife Emma and their family, all the best in their future endeavours.

Lizzi has already found time to meet with myself and the Chief Executive to discuss a number of pressing issues. Our wide-ranging discussions touched upon issues such as housing, local government funding, renewable energy generation, AirB&B and holiday lets, devolution in Lancashire, cross boarder working, health partnerships, the Heysham nuclear power stations, other anchor institutions, public transport and more! However, at the top of our mutual agenda was Eden Project Morecambe, for which Lancaster City Council is the accountable body. I offered Lizzi an initial briefing of progress toward delivery and information on a number of key milestones that have been achieved in recent weeks. I was able to share with her that Lancaster City Council and Eden are currently working on a revised Full Business Case (FBC) and details of delivery timescales to submit in to Government by the end of July 2024. We are also now in contract with Eden with regard to the first £2.5M of Levelling Up Funds and Eden are currently procuring professional services for the design team to enable work to progress at pace. The next community conversation, which will be an in-person event, is to be held on 6<sup>th</sup> August with further firm dates and details to follow. Negotiations also continue with Eden with regard to the transport and parking solutions to ensure that both Eden and town centre are well served without detriment. I have undertaken to facilitate more in-depth briefings for Lizzi and will facilitate introductions to key individuals and partners associated with Eden moving forward.

The unexpected General Election prevented the previous Government from releasing the full £5m of early draw-down funding which had been agreed. However, the City Council was able to take steps necessary to facilitate the release of £2.5m of early draw-down funding despite the procedural frustrations of the pre-election period. Whilst I am delighted that Eden Morecambe now has access to £2.5m of cash in the bank, I remain committed to securing the remaining £2.5m promised, to ensure the continued smooth delivery of the project in terms of liquidity in these vital early procurement stages. I have

written to Lizzi as Morecambe's new MP to request her assistance in engaging with the civil service to help achieve this ambition for our district.

I have also written to both Lizzi and Cat to share the District Councils Network (DCN) prospectus. This details ways in which District Councils and the Government can work together to bring forward meaningful change to build many more homes and drive down homelessness, reduce pressure on the NHS and improve public health, deliver jobs and sustainable inclusive growth, cut carbon emissions, tackle fuel poverty and grow the green economy and to ensure investment transforms local places. The full prospectus can be viewed online here: <https://www.districtcouncils.info/wp-content/uploads/DCN-Prospectus-General-Election-2024-FINAL.pdf>

I would also like to note the University Ward by-election, which was also contested on 4<sup>th</sup> July. Labour's Erin Hall completed her studies in sociology and accepted a trainee teacher position outside the district, creating the ward vacancy. (If she's half as good a teacher as she was a councillor and community advocate then her students are very lucky to have her indeed!) Congratulations go to her successor, Maria Deery of the Green Party – I offer a warm welcome to you as our district's newest Councillor.

### **3.2 Lancaster City Parking**

The consultation on the draft Parking Strategy for Lancaster City Centre has recently closed. This was supplemented by three workshops held with the Grand, The Chamber of Commerce and Lancaster BID. Officers are currently working through the responses and the comments received at the workshops. There are certainly a lot of issues for us to resolve to address the concerns raised and we have now launched a Project Board to look at actions. The High Street has been under incredible pressure for many years, and we recognise the sensitivity local businesses have when proposed changes to the availability and location of parking come forward. We also recognise that parking revenues are a major source of income for our council, especially important at a time of local government funding crisis. As we review the consultation response, we are committed to identifying the right solutions to both allow us to maintain the necessary quantity of parking in the right locations, but also allow us to achieve meaningful and much needed regeneration in the Canal Quarter. Discussions about adaptation to existing Council land holdings to boost parking availability are ongoing, and several members of the Cabinet are advocating for plans to bring forward a multi-storey car park at the northern end of the gyratory.

### **3.3 Mainway & Skerton High**

This month has seen the establishment of a new cross-council governance structure to support the direction and progress of the regeneration of the Mainway council housing estate and development of new housing on the former Skerton High School site. The school was demolished earlier this year following a successful Brown Field Land Release Fund bid. Following the recent planning application submission for these new homes and now with a

focus on financial and development deliverability, it is the right time to bring together a core Programme Board. This will have regular oversight of the project, resources and risks, whilst also assisting with problem solving and ensuring the voices of the community affected are heard. The first meeting of the Programme Board has taken place, and my thanks go to the various representatives across the political parties as well as officers for their commitment to attending and working towards the future success of the project. A smaller sponsor group for the project will meet quarterly starting after the summer break. An audit process is also being commissioned which will account for the progress made toward delivering regeneration on Mainway over several years. This is another welcome step in good governance for the project and will help put us on good footing as we look toward other future council led social housing developments in our district.

More broadly I would like to remind members of the Housing and Property Annual Report circulated to all members via email on Weds 12<sup>th</sup> June by Joanne Wilkinson. This comprehensive document is worth absorbing and provides a significant insight into ongoing works and challenges faced in this service area.

### **3.4 Allotments**

Allotments across the district are highly valued by the people that use them. As well as providing a space to grow fruit and vegetables, they bring benefits far beyond this. They improve mental and physical health, offer access to a green space and nature, are places to be with or around others as well as be in your own space. They are also rich habitats that support wildlife e.g. plants, insects, birds, and small mammals. This eight-month project looked at the present provision of allotments in Lancaster District and their characteristics (e.g size and facilities), how they are used and run, their contribution to biodiversity, their climate resilience, the demand for allotments, other community-led food growing models in the District, future visions for allotments and support needs. The report details a significant number of recommendations for improvements in areas such as expanded provision, process and administration, finance, facilities, communication, and also highlights responsibilities for both the local authority and for individual allotments. The full report can be read here:

<https://foodfutures.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/LD-Allotment-Review-2024-FINAL-DIGITAL.pdf>

### **3.5 Frontierland**

The consultation on objectives for the Frontierland site has been concluded and the Project Board have reviewed the responses which were generally in agreement on the 11 objectives identified for the site. The project board has also been expanded to include representatives from external partners such as the local business community, culture sector and Morecambe Town Council. The next steps are that Lancaster City Council will seek a development partner for the site by way of competitive dialogue. Given the progress with Eden and that we are entering stages of contracts we are keen to engage the developer

market and are currently working on holding an event for the development industry after the Summer holiday period. We know what an exciting opportunity this is for our district, and can't wait to show off all that Morecambe has to offer to potential partners who can bring forward the kind of development that meets all of our objectives for the site.

### 3.6 Climate, Nature and Net Zero

The Council **STILL** awaits the Planning Inspector's final report on the Climate Emergency Local Plan Review (CELPR). Meanwhile the CELPR was lauded at the recent Local Government Chronicle Awards as part of a "forward-thinking" approach towards net zero. The judges recognised Lancaster's *"unparalleled tenacity and determination in pushing boundaries and leading the charge on a national scale. Their commitment to addressing climate adaptation and mitigation through revised planning policies has set a shining example for other local authorities to emulate."* The judges said this *"impactful initiative showcases how planning authorities like Lancaster City Council can create lasting, sustainable change for local communities, especially for the most vulnerable"*.

At the time of writing this report the Local Plan Review Group is due to consider a report setting out the next stage of the full Local Plan Review. The scoping consultation concluded in May, and a formal 'Issues and Opportunities' consultation will launch this summer. There are nine broad issues to consider, namely:

- Addressing the climate emergency;
- Nature recovery and biodiversity;
- Protected landscapes and townscapes;
- Transport and connectivity;
- Meeting our housing needs;
- Providing the right types of home;
- Design, healthy lifestyles and safe communities;
- Securing economic prosperity;
- Right infrastructure, right places.

The consultation will also include in-person public events. It represents a comprehensive opportunity for our residents and businesses to get involved with shaping their district. More details will be publicised shortly.

The Burrow Beck Solar Array proposal continues to progress and promises to help us meet our renewable energy generation aspirations, help us reduce our CO2 emissions and deliver a financial return to our budgets. Earlier this month Cabinet approved the financial support for the initial stages of the project, including the commissioning of detailed designs (at our first live-streamed Cabinet meeting!). A planning application will be brought forward before the autumn. Further consideration is being given to plans for a dual use for the site to also promote biodiversity net gain and capitalise on associated revenue opportunities.

The local planning authority are progressing several other projects, all of which align with the ambitions in the Council Plan. The Local Area Energy Plan, which aims to identify the most cost-effective pathway to net zero, is expected to be completed in the Autumn. Work on a Climate and Nature Strategy, which is intended to be an overarching plan for all the council's climate mitigation and adaptation workstreams, has recently commenced. And the Council has fulfilled its "first considerations" duty under the Environment Act 2021 with regard to setting out how it aims to conserve and enhance biodiversity across the district. A new biodiversity website 'hub' has been created which includes a Biodiversity Action Plan. This was approved by Cabinet in June.

We are also working with North West Employers Organisation to lead a NW climate change portfolio holder / officer group. The aim of this group is to develop joint plans to progress the move to net zero for our entire region. Working in this way allows us to tap into the capacity of Councils from Cumbria, Lancashire, Greater Manchester, Cheshire and Merseyside. The inaugural meeting was recently hosted by us in Lancaster Town Hall.

### **3.7 Local Economy**

The vision, objectives and workplan to develop and deliver a new Digital Strategy have now been established. An Officer / Member sub-group meets regularly to review progress against a detailed delivery plan which includes co-creation with key stakeholders both internally and externally. It is anticipated that the final strategy will be available in quarter three. Work has also started on scoping an Economic Strategy for the District. A Project Board is being created and the next stage will commence baseline work to assess the District's current economy and look at holding workshops with key stakeholders to develop a vision, objectives and actions for the new strategy. There is an aim to get a draft Economic Strategy by the end of 2024 ready for consultation with adoption in 2025. My thanks go to Lancaster University who have offered to support the strategy development work in partnership with our officers and members.

Officers submitted the end of Year 2 UKSPF report to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) on May 01<sup>st</sup> 2024. We have since received approval from government regarding the delivery of both our UKSPF and REPF programme. We have since received our Grant Determination letter and we will receive 100% of our UKSPF allocation for Year 3 in early June 2024. All funding is now committed to projects to achieve a balanced programme.

In May the Chief Officer for Sustainable Growth attended a national development event in Leeds, UK REIIF. Lancashire had a stand (which we participated on) and the County Council had prepared an investment prospectus for the county. This document highlighted potential development opportunities in our district including Frontierland, Heysham Gateway, Canal Quarter and the Health Innovation Campus. It also promoted Morecambe generally in anticipation of the 'Eden effect'. The prospectus is available here:

<https://investinlancashire.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Lancashire-Investment-Prospectus-2024-low-res.pdf>

### **3.8 Fit for the Future**

Work to address the Council's structural financial deficit and ensure responsible fiscal management of the council by returning balanced budgets is ongoing. The Fit for the Future programme is the new phase for the existing OBR programme and is driven by the Council Plan 24-27. It consists of 14 projects to improve service delivery across the council, streamline and digitising processes where possible, and deliver savings. The projects are now underway and provide monthly update reports to the OBR Strategy and Coordination Group, and joint Cabinet / Leadership team meetings are held bi-monthly to review progress. The three digitalisation projects (Customer Services, HR Recruitment and Licensing) are further on than the other projects as these were started in late 2023, following a workpiece carried out by the consultancy PeopleToo. To date progress for the 14 projects is on track, with full plans and the expected outcomes and benefits of each project in the process of being created. The estimated savings for each project are to be determined by October 2024 to tie in with the budget setting process, although the savings may not be realised until after this date. Members will continue to be briefed on progress.

The consequences of more than a decade of budget cuts and chronic underfunding of district councils by the previous Government continues to manifest itself in new and problematic ways. In addition to the challenges we face in service provision and delivering our ambitions for residents, we also see the impact on the very fabric of the buildings we own. A complete stock condition survey of our built assets (Civic and Commercial) is nearly complete and the Cabinet should receive a full briefing on the outcomes in September. Early indications are that the full compliance, repair and maintenance liability for the entirety of the asset base will present an extraordinary cost pressure to the Council. Part of the work for the Fit for the Future Assets group is identifying urgent works, assessing the value (social and financial) of our holdings and looking at creating a wider strategy to meet this challenge. My hope is that in dealing with this challenge, we can identify solutions which not only meet the cost pressures but also allow us to take meaningful strides toward delivering on our other shared key aims and ambitions, as agreed by us all in our Council Plan. As ever, we don't have the luxury of only dealing with one challenge at a time!

The L50 licence plate, formerly associated with the Mayoral car, has now been sold after being marketed for many months.

### **3.9 Partnerships**

Cabinet recently agreed to signing a memorandum of understanding to formalise the Lancaster District Strategic Partnership. The Lancaster District

Strategic Partnership has been established to spearhead the wider district's collective strategic ambitions. The overarching strategic priorities for the partnership will be: 1) Sustainability and the Climate Emergency, 2) the Economy, 3) Health and Wellbeing and 4) Communities. Agreed strategic priorities have alignment with the ambitions of the Council Plan. It is anticipated that the LDSP will add value to the council's ability to deliver strategic ambitions, by applying a partnership approach to delivery. The founding members are:

- Lancaster City Council
- Lancaster University
- University of Cumbria
- Lancaster and Morecambe College
- Lancaster District Chamber of Commerce
- University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay
- Lancashire and South Cumbria ICB
- Lancaster District CVS
- Lancaster Arts Partnership
- Lancashire County Council

A meeting of the Cabinet / Leadership teams of Lancaster City Council and Westmorland and Furness Council to agree Morecambe Bay focussed priorities we could work on jointly is upcoming. This meeting was scheduled for July but at W+F request has had to be postponed. We have also been leading on a district-council approach to complementing various health systems. Including plans to devolve some health to local footprints via the health and wellbeing board. In related news Lancashire and South Cumbria have bid for a WorkWell Partnership Programme (WWPP) Vanguard submitted by the ICB, with authorities, in January 2024 to the Joint Work and Health Unit (DWP and DHSC). It has been confirmed that the bid was successful, and that Lancashire and South Cumbria have been awarded £4.6m to provide the programme for 5000 people, including an area of focus in Lancaster & Morecambe. The WWPP vanguard aims to research and test approaches to the causes of, and provide specialised support to individuals to prevent, people leaving the labour market due to health conditions.

Work with the District Council Network has been undertaken to help ensure Government understands the value Districts add including recent national coverage of the challenges the new waste reforms create for Councils, from the perspective of District Councils and specifically Lancaster City Council. The Chief Executive penned an article about this which can be read here:

<https://www.circularonline.co.uk/opinions/simpler-recycling-uncertainty-how-local-authorities-preparing/> The DCN Annual General Meeting took place on 1<sup>st</sup> July.

The Local Government Association (LGA) general assembly was scheduled to take place in early July, however had to be moved to a virtual meeting due to the snap General Election. I attended both the virtual assembly and the Labour LGA meeting that immediately preceded it. I have also attended virtual meetings of both Key Cities and UK100.



Looking at partnerships in local government, in May I attended the Carnforth Town Council's annual meeting, 'the assembly'. I heard much about the way the Town Council is working for Carnforth and was impressed by the approach to delivering on a wide range of their priorities. We are currently planning a 'summit' event with Morecambe Town Council. With the intention of gaining an understanding of our joint priorities and then agreeing how we can best work together to add value to our communities. We are working with Lancashire County Council to develop options for a more joined up approach to waste collection / waste disposal that would help us respond to the funding challenges already faced and new waste reforms. This approach is informed by data and we have worked with County and the national organisation WRAP to develop a performance template that will allow comparison with other Districts and help us develop a range of options. We continue to work closely with County on key specific projects including Eden and on-street parking issue in our district. A scheduled meeting between the Leaders of Council's across Lancashire was postponed due to the snap General Election. The previous Government and the three upper tier authorities failed to take their devolution plans for Lancashire and the proposed Combined County Authority through parliament in the time they made available to themselves - something I note we collectively warned them might happen. Many Lancashire Leaders were critical of the plans in terms of funding and the scope of powers devolved and all will be keen to understand the incoming Government's view of devolution in our area.

### **3.10 Culture and Events**

Through OBR – a new events team has been merged under one service including Ashton Hall, The Storey and The Platform. UKSPF funding has increased staffing capacity to work on new leads and income generation opportunities across the sites. The Team have worked tirelessly since the merger of teams and have secured bookings such as televised BBC New Comedy Awards, Comedian Nish Kumar and other large events including silent discos and beer festivals.

This May Lancaster once again hosted the Highest Point Festival, with headliners including Tom Odell, Busted, Cat Burns, Sam Ryder, Caity Baiser and an epic DJ set from Gok Wan. I attend a stakeholder reception at the festival and saw first-hand what great work has been done to bring it all together, and heard about the steps taken to ensure the sound disturbance and other inconveniences for nearby residents were being monitored and minimised. Members will be please to know that hosting the festival generates a positive contribution to our revenue budget too.

May also saw the colourful return of Festa Italia to Lancaster City Centre, with food, music, dance and decorations on display.

In June I attended PRIDE in Lancaster, joining the march with the queer community and local organisations which support us. I was pleased to see

officers and vehicles from Lancaster City Council join the parade, and welcome our continued backing of local PRIDE events. I was invited to give a speech and took the opportunity to speak about the importance of allyship, for the crucial role that non-queer voices have in challenging homophobia and transphobia, and in advocating for the rights and freedoms of the LGBT+ community.

In June we celebrated and commemorated the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the D-Day landings. Events and beacon lighting ceremonies took place in Morecambe, Carnforth and Lancaster. I attended beacon lighting ceremonies at both Lancaster Castle with the Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire, and at the Priory where the Mayor lit the beacon. I also attended a concert featuring the award-winning Morecambe Brass Band at the Priory, with a performance set list ingeniously themed around a narrative of the D-Day landings.

Armed Forces Day celebrations in Morecambe saw an impressive parachute display over the bay from the RAF Falcons. This was followed by a parade where the Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire took the salute, and a Drumhead Service. I took the opportunity to view many of the displays and entertainments, enjoy the hospitality of the WI and was honoured to meet local D-Day veterans.

In July I attended an event at Lancaster and Morecambe College which celebrated their 200 year long history of continuous technical education – with a few changes of address and some rebranding along the way – traced back to the founding of the “Library and Mechanics’ Institute” in 1824. There was a plaque unveiled commemorating the opening of the building by the late Duke of Edinburgh, the presentation of artwork by Chas Jacobs and the ribbon cutting on ‘the MET’ by Professor Vanessa Toulmin.

In July we also saw both the concurrent return of both Dino Fest and the Bay Health Festivals to Lancaster. Together these events packed out the City Centre and Dalton Square. Congratulations to the teams at Lancaster BID and Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS for crafting such popular events, promoting visits to our high street and promoting healthier lifestyles.

I have also met with Neuro-Dropin to discuss their plans for new premises in the city, attended a Civic Dinner hosted by Lancaster University – with a focus on place-based partnership work, and visited the Parkinsons UK drop-in support and information event at Barton Grange Garden Centre.

### **3.11 Deputy**

In June Cllr Jean Parr deputised for me in attending the "Humanity Cartoon's Exhibition" at Lancaster Library, organised by Time to Help UK Panel in partnership with Human Right Solidarity and Dialogue Society. The "Humanity Cartoons" refugee cartoon competition is focused on raising awareness and inspiring thought about the plight of refugees through the medium of cartoon art.

Cllr Joanne Aincough deputised for me in attending the D-Day celebration and beacon lighting events in Morecambe in June as I had already agreed to attend similar events on the same day in Lancaster.

Cllr Caroline Jackson deputised for me in attending the County's D-Day commemorative service at Blackburn Cathedral with the Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire and the Dean of Blackburn.

In July Cllr Peter Jackson deputised for me at short notice for a meeting with 'Young Cities'. In Lancaster Young Cities will work with Escape2make, Lancaster City Council and members of Lancaster University's Imagination Lancaster team. It was a fruitful meeting emphasising the social justice and educational opportunities of enabling children and young people to have a meaningful say in the planning, design, development and stewardship of their neighbourhoods, towns and cities. It is likely that further work with Young Cities will fall within Cllr Jackson's portfolio responsibilities.

#### 4.0 Decisions

The following decisions were scheduled to be considered by Cabinet on 9 July 2024:

Lancaster District Strategic Partnership' Memorandum of Understanding'
LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report
Burrow Beck Solar Project
Asset Consideration – Lancaster

No Officer Delegated Key Decisions have been taken since the last Leaders report.

ICMD 31	Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) Grant Award: Communities, Well-Being and Partnerships	Published on: 16.04.24 Taken by: Cllr Peter Jackson
ICMD 32	Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF), Grant Award: Climate Action	Published on: 16.04.24 Taken by: Cllr Gina Dowding
ICMD 33	Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) Grant Award: Visitor Economy, Community Wealth Building and Culture	Published on: 16.04.24 Taken by: Cllr Catherine Potter
ICMD 34	UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), Grant Award: Regeneration, Skills and Digital Innovation	Published on: 18.04.24 Taken by: Cllr Nick Wilkinson
ICMD 35	UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Grant Award: Community and Place	Published on: 24.04.24 Taken by: Cllr Peter Jackson
ICMD 1	Disposal of Council Land	Published on: 03.06.24 Taken by: Cllr Phillip Black
ICMD 2	Virement of Capital Funding	Published on: 05.06.24 Taken by: Cllr Caroline Jackson

The following Individual Cabinet Member Decision has been taken since the last Leader's report.

### **Background Papers**

Cabinet agenda of the meeting held on 9 July 2024.