

Report to: Cabinet
Date of Meeting: 6 March 2019
Public Document: Yes
Exemption: None

Review date for release None

Agenda item: 20

Subject: Simplified Planning in the Enterprise Zone

Purpose of report: This paper puts forward the recommended approach for the introduction of a simplified planning regime for the Enterprise Zone (EZ) sites.

Recommendation:

1. Approve the recruitment of a dedicated post to progress Local Development Orders for each of the EZ sites.
2. Approve Option 1, starting with the Airpark and Science Park sites, as the best way forward.

Reason for recommendation: Simplified planning is part of the overall EZ offer to businesses. A dedicated officer will be able to progress the introduction of site specific Local Development Orders at pace thereby helping to encourage future investment.

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Financial implications: The financial implication are highlighted in the report and have been factored into the overall position of Enterprise Zone's financial position.

Legal implications: The report raises no legal implications which require comment.

Equalities impact: Low Impact
Potential impacts on equality will be managed through the Implementation Plan for the Enterprise Zone.

Risk: Medium Risk
There are two main risks associated with the recommendation:
- EDDC is unable to appoint a candidate with appropriate experience.
- EDDC are unable to deliver the LDOs in a reasonable timescale.
The report details the approach to mitigating these risks.

Links to background information:

- [Overview report – January 2016](#)
- [Cabinet Paper May 2016](#)
- [Cabinet Paper November 2016](#)
- [Cabinet Paper March 2017](#)
- [Cabinet Paper November 2017](#)



- [Cabinet Paper April 2018](#)

Link to Council Plan: Working in and funding this outstanding place.

The Council Plan identifies a range of activities to deliver economic growth – including developing ways to deliver economic benefits, promoting inward investment and working with the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership to deliver growth.

1. Background:

- 1.1 Simplified planning is part of the overall offer and benefit of Enterprise Zone designations and has been included in the work programme from the commencement of the designation in April 2017.
- 1.2 The purpose of a simplified planning regime is to assist in improving the delivery timescales of a new building from concept through to commencement on site, along with the certainty of planning approval. There are a variety of mechanisms that can be used to provide simplified planning these include: Local Development Orders (LDOs) which can enable development within particular categories of development without the need for planning permission; and a Planning Charter for business which sets out the Local Planning Authorities aims in timescales and customer service, but is not a formal designation.
- 1.3 The use of LDOs within a simplified planning regime is recognised to provide certainty to potential investors and encourage new development, with occupiers benefiting from reducing planning costs and accelerated delivery. LDOs have been introduced on sites both with (e.g. Newquay Aerohub) and without EZ status (e.g. the Nexus 25 development at Taunton).

2. Progress to date:

- 2.1 In July 2017 EDDC Strategic Planning Committee approved the commencement of work on an LDO at Exeter Science Park. This work was not progressed as the subsequent procurement process aimed at getting a consultancy team on board was unsuccessful. The wide variance between the tender submissions, particularly reflected in terms of the proposed budgets, highlighted the need for greater precision and clarity in terms of what is required to progress an LDO.
- 2.2 In the interim period the work of the team has focused on delivery of key infrastructure within the EZ, rather than on LDOs. This has been largely successful with the following achieved:
 - Instrument Landing System – likely to be delivered by a third party, the upgraded system will remove a key barrier to the delivery of Skypark and Airpark (alongside Exeter Logistics Park).
 - Long Lane – the design of an improvement scheme has been completed and is being considered in a separate paper to this Board.
- 2.3 The progress made towards delivering key infrastructure is important in the LDO process. It means that the resulting LDOs will be less complex to deliver as there are no longer significant infrastructure barriers that will first need to be resolved to unlock the relevant sites.

- 2.4 The approach to introducing LDOs has been reviewed and it is now recommend that the EZ budget is used to fund an additional member of staff rather than a consultant. This will mean that the technical expertise developed will be retained in-house and the member of staff will deliver all of the proposed LDOs.

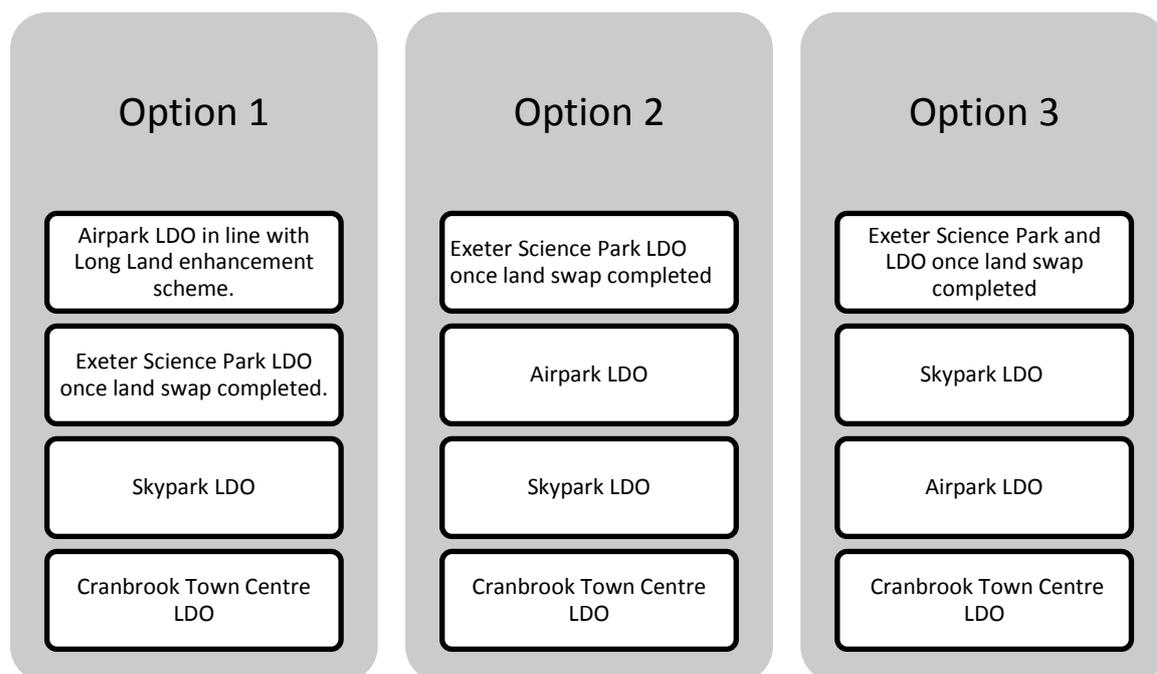
3. Proposed approach

- 3.1 To support the delivery of the LDO an Officer Working Group (OWG) will be established within EDDC as local planning authority. This OWG will consist of the LDO Project Officer, Enterprise Zone Programme Manager, Major Projects Team Leader, Head of Development Management and Strategic Planning Manager. The group will meet every 6-8 weeks, with additional meetings as required, to ensure an effective process.
- 3.2 The proposed approach is to develop an LDO for each of the EZ sites. It is expected that each LDO will take approximately 9-12 months to complete, following master planning and completion of environmental surveys and assessment. It is suggested that the commencement of each LDO is staggered to ensure the process meets the individual site requirements.
- 3.3 The Airpark site is the only EZ site that does not currently benefit from an outline planning permission. It therefore makes most sense to progress the LDO in line with the Long Lane enhancement scheme rather than to embark on a more traditional approach in terms of preparing an outline planning application for the site. The Air Park site boundary is a departure from the Local Plan allocation, but this would not be an issue in developing an LDO for the site.
- 3.4 Exeter Science Park would benefit from an LDO once the land swap is completed. The outline planning permission will no longer reflect the boundary of the site. An LDO process could be undertaken alongside a revised masterplan for the site.
- 3.5 Skypark development follows the existing outline planning permission but an LDO would enable accelerated deliver of the site.
- 3.6 Cranbrook Town Centre would benefit from an LDO once the Development Plan Document has been adopted. The requirements of the Cranbrook LDO are significantly different to the other EZ sites, developed in conjunction with the Cranbrook Planning Team.

4. Options and Priorities

- 4.1 There are 3 suggested options to developing the LDOs.
- 4.2 **Option 1** – this approach focuses on securing an LDO on the site without consent (Airpark), which is also a departure from the Local Plan. Then commencing on the Science Park LDO when the land swap is complete and the existing outline planning permission does not cover the right land area. The Skypark outline planning permission boundary has not changed, but the LDO would support accelerated delivery. The Cranbrook LDO would be commenced once the DPD is approved and there is greater certainty about the type of development being proposed in the town centre.

- 4.3 **Option 2** – This approach would focus on the Science Park LDO being commenced when the land swap is complete. Then working to secure an LDO on Airpark. Followed Skypark and then the town centre.
- 4.4 **Option 3** – this approach acknowledges that Science Park and Skypark are the larger EZ sites and that an approach could be to focus progressing the LDOs for the larger sites which are likely to generate higher benefits in terms of retained business rates. Work would start on the Science Park LDO and then focus on the Skypark LDO. Once the LDOs are completed on the larger sites work could commence on the LDOs for Air Park and finally Cranbrook. But this approach will create more work for the planning team as it is likely that an outline permission would be submitted for the Airpark site.



- 4.5 Of these Option 1, starting with the Airpark and Science Park sites, is considered to represent the best way forward.

5. Funding and delivery

- 5.1 The EZ Implementation Plan included a budget of £30k per year in 2017/18 and 2018/19. To date this budget has not been spent. This budget can be used to fund the salary of a new member of staff and provide a budget for studies/technical work that requires specialist skill.
- 5.2 In order to ensure that we can attract the calibre of person to progress this important area of work the proposed salary for the post is £45k. Together with on costs this gives a cost of circa £60k p.a. that will need to be met from the EZ budget. It is proposed that this is a fixed term 3 year appointment.
- 5.3 In addition to salary costs it is expected that an additional budget of £20k p.a. will be required to help progress the LDOs.
- 5.4 The proposed approach will require the support of site owners. It is important to emphasise that the expectation is still that site owners will still need to progress key background and technical documents, such as masterplans and Environment Statements, at their own expense.

6. Risks

6.1 There are two main risks to this approach:

- inability to appoint a suitably qualified person with appropriate experience. This risk is reduced by advertising the role at an enhanced salary.
- unable to deliver the LDOs in a reasonable timescale. When the post holder is appointed a work programme for the LDO process will be completed and progress report to EZ Board meetings. This will ensure that site owners/manager are aware of progress being made and where delays may occur. This will need to include robust programme management arrangements within the Council.

7. Conclusion

7.1 This report recommends that EZ funds are utilised to support a specific post to lead the introduction of Local Development Order across the Enterprise Zone sites. Subject to a successful recruitment exercise it is anticipated that a post holder should be in place during Summer 2019 to commence work on the LDOs. It recommended that the focus of this post should first be on progressing LDOs for the Airpark and Science Park sites.