

**Report to the Asset Management and
Economic Development Cabinet
Committee**



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Report reference: AMED-001-2017/18

Date of meeting: 06 July 2017

Portfolio: Asset Management and Economic Development

Subject: Economic Development Report

Responsible Officer: Mike Warr / Vicki Willis (01992 564472 / 564593)

Democratic Services: Jackie Leither (01992 564756)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

(1) To note the progress and work programme of the Council's Economic Development Section and provide feedback if Members wish;

Executive Summary:

This report updates the Cabinet Committee on a number of projects, themes and issues being explored by the Economic Development Team.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To appraise the Committee on progress made with regard to Economic Development issues.

Other Options for Action:

None, as this monitoring report is for information not action.

Report:

1. Visitor Economy

Tourism website

The new tourism website continues to build both in content and page views. To date 137 pages have been produced containing over 250 images. 91 of the pages promote local events including those of Countrycare, the District Museum, Airfield activities and other Council-related events. 17 attractions have full features as do 15 food and drink establishments and eight towns and villages. New listings continue to be added. Page views continue to build and have reached record highs of 6,000 and 7,000 average per week over the Easter holidays and May half term holidays with a peak of 8250 during one week.

2017 Tourism Conference

Friday 20th October has been booked for the 2017 Tourism Conference which is once again hosted and sponsored by the Marriott Hotel Waltham Abbey. The latest annual tourism and

visitor figures presented this year show growth once again with the income breaking the £200m mark at £204m and the district's tourism-related jobs rising from 7% to 8%. Day trips have also risen by 6%. It is only the overnight visit numbers and related income that remains unchanged in a sector challenged by a shortfall in accommodation provision.

2. Local Plan

Economic Development has been working closely alongside the Planning Policy Team in undertaking further detailed employment land work in support of the Local Plan. Of particular significance in recent weeks, is the positive response we have received in engaging with a range of stakeholders to enhance our understanding of the local commercial property market which is a vital element of the work. Also, work looking at employment land supply is close to completion and provides a much stronger understanding of the current situation in the District.

3. Town Centres

Town & Village Centres / District Economic Opportunities Fund

The first stage of the Ongar In Bloom project supported by the Town Centre Opportunities Fund has now been installed delivering a striking and colourful entrance to the town centre. As the first stage of a project that will continue throughout the remainder of this year and be completed next year, it is positive to see this first element being delivered well and to note the impact it has now that it is in full bloom. The Team will continue to work with Ongar In Bloom to ensure the remaining elements of the scheme are delivered.

Buckhurst Hill Residents Society is part way through delivering a fantastic project supported by the Council's Fund. The project is seeking to increase people's awareness of the business offer in Queens Road through engagement between school children and these businesses. A first tranche of children have visited Queens Road on several occasions, interviewed businesses, produced promotional material for them and held a market outside these businesses. The Residents Society has worked incredibly hard to involve a wide range of traders, including some which have not historically been engaged with town centre and community activities. The children also seem to have found the project both exciting and rewarding. More can be reported upon completion and evaluation of the initiative later in the year.

Waltham Abbey Wayfinding Project

A number of land ownership issues are being worked through to determine the acceptability of a number of the proposed locations for signs and this has slowed the delivery stage of the project. It is hoped that once these issues have been resolved, the necessary planning and highways permissions can be determined and the installation work will follow soon after that, although that work is now likely to take place outside of the 2017 Summer season.

4. Business Support

Eastern Plateau

The Economic Development Team continues to be active on the Eastern Plateau Local Area Action Group (LAG) and the Group is performing well in terms of its allocation of funding to date. A first project has been awarded in the District which is great news. This sits under the Farming Productivity priority within the Fund and is for just under £14,000. There are a couple of larger potential applications in the pipeline which is positive and the Team is looking at ways to promote the scheme to encourage further applications from our area. As reported previously, the LAG is seeking to spend its full allocation by March 2019.

Business Welcome Pack

Following consultation with a number of local businesses, it has been suggested that a business welcome pack might prove beneficial, given the Council's desire to provide help and support for business growth and new start-ups in the area. Member views are sought on whether this might be an idea that could prove beneficial in Epping Forest District which has a strong history of entrepreneurialism.

Business Confidence Survey

A previous AMED Cabinet Committee Meeting welcomed in principle the idea of conducting a regular local survey of business confidence. Members requested that a draft of the survey be brought to a future meeting to review content. Attached as an appendix, is the first draft of the proposed survey. Members' views are requested.

5. Digital Enterprise Programme

On 15th June, Cabinet considered a report bringing forward proposals to develop a Digital Enterprise Programme that will build on the successful infrastructure network improvements the District has seen over the last two years and start to further develop the area's potential as a Digital Innovation Zone. Cabinet endorsed the cross-border, cross-sector approach that this piece of work is developing and agreed that work to develop a co-funded co-commissioned digital strategy for the wider Digital Innovation Zone could move forward. Funding contributions in addition to Epping Forest DC funds have been agreed from a number of neighbouring local authorities as well as health sector organisations and local strategic cross-border agencies. Discussions with other potential co-funders are ongoing. The detailed contents of the digital strategy brief will be discussed and refined as part of the upcoming Smart Places Seminar 2 that Economic Development is hosting in July for interested parties and funding partners.

Cabinet also agreed as part of the same report to funding from the Town Centre Opportunities Fund, up to a maximum of £45,000, being used to explore the potential for the delivery of a free public wi-fi scheme in one, some or all of the District's town centres. The first stage will be the commissioning of expert advice as to the potential that exists for such a scheme in the district and the different solutions and models that may be available to fund such a programme.

Finally, Cabinet endorsed the expression of interest in potential further superfast broadband investment that was sent to BDUK / Superfast Essex by the Portfolio Holder for Technology and Support Services. This indicated that subject to completion of the procurement exercise and further details coming forward on the proposal, up to £350,000 would provisionally be allocated for this potential future investment. Formal commitment of any funding or investment is to be the subject of a further report to Cabinet once details are finalised.

6. Ultrafast Broadband Network

The ongoing delivery of the ultrafast broadband network in the District's rural areas was recently celebrated by Superfast Essex at a launch event for the next phase of its superfast / ultrafast programme and the District's efforts and support for the Rural Challenge Project were recognised. The network continues to be built out in the District although firm start dates have yet to be confirmed for the final two cabinet areas of Hastingwood / North Weald and Ongar. Completion of the full network build is still anticipated to be before the year end.

7. Partner Liaison - The Economic Development Team continues to liaise with, support and attend meetings with a number of Partner Organisations. These include, at varying intervals:

- Essex County Council
- South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP)
- London Stansted Cambridge Consortium (LSCC)
- Invest Essex and Essex Innovation Programme
- Lea Valley Food Board
- Essex Economic Development Officer group
- Essex Tourism Officer Group
- Epping Forest District Town Team
- Eastern Plateau Local Action Group
- Stansted Airport Local Authority Forum
- Tourism & Visitor Board
- West Essex Skills & Learning Forum
- Waltham Abbey Town Partnership
- One Epping Forest
- Superfast Essex
- Princess Alexandra Hospital
- West Essex CCG

Particular updates to note at this meeting include:

West Essex Alliance - Members and officers have for some years supported initiatives to deliver closer working in West Essex to promote and coordinate economic development. However, the West Essex Alliance has for some time not met at a wider sub-regional partnership level. Officers are currently working with senior members to re-establish an effective platform for West Essex.

Trade Delegation on 16th June 2017 - The Chairman, Cllr Stallan together with Members of the Council and colleagues from Essex County Council, hosted a visit for 11 delegates from a local authority and businesses in KeQiao, China. Presentations were made by Cllr Mohindra setting out the major priorities of the County regarding building partnerships with China and attracting inward investment. This was followed by a presentation on tourism development in the area and a tour of the District, hosted by a local tourism company. The Team will continue to work to develop links with a view to future investment opportunities.

Resource Implications:

None as this is a progress report.

Legal and Governance Implications:

None as this is a progress report.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

None as this is a progress report.

Consultation Undertaken:

None as this is a progress report.

Background Papers:

None

Risk Management:

N/A