

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 22 February 2018

Subject: Assets and Economic Development

Portfolio Holder: Councillor A Grigg

Recommending:

That the report of the Assets and Economic Development Portfolio Holder be noted.

1. Town Centres

Waltham Abbey Wayfinding Project – I am pleased to advise that the installation of all 15 signs is now complete and response to date has been very positive.

2. Visitor Economy

2017 Tourism and Visitor Conference - The Team has produced and distributed a report from the Conference.

The Tourism and Visitor Board – This is being joined by two representatives of Broxbourne Council who recognise the benefits of cross border working to capitalise on the expansion plans in and around the Lee Valley.

The District's tourism website - This continues to increase its audience. The January analytics are showing around 7k people viewing with 15.5k pages viewed. This is a 150% increase over viewing this time last year and over 200% increase in the number of pages viewed, reflecting increased awareness and the larger amount and range of information available.

North Weald Airfield event - A locally based company is continuing with its plans to create a destination event at North Weald Airfield for 2019 and has recently appointed a new event manager with responsibility to take this forward.

3. Business Support

Business Rates – The Team has produced a mini version of its One Business Briefing to accompany the Non Domestic Rates Bills that will go out in March. The Briefing highlights current funding and support programmes open to businesses locally in order to encourage take-up and also appeals to businesses to provide us with a contact email so that the Team can keep them updated about it works and future business finance, support, events etc.

South East Business Boost visit to businesses – South East Business Boost (SEBB) is a capital grants scheme for business growth. The Team is working with SEBB to coordinate an industrial/business estate visit in the district in February to encourage local access to the Programme.

4. Skills

Epping Forest District Skills Board - The Board held its inaugural meeting on 04 December chaired by Cllr Mohindra and hosted by Epping Forest College. Those attending included representatives of leading local employers plus representatives of the District and County Councils, the DWP and Epping Forest College. After introductions and a presentation with overview on the district's current economy, employment and education and training, a wide ranging discussion took place around current and future skills needs, the changing nature of

business and training and recruitment. As a result of the meeting, a number of people agreed to explore identified opportunities further. It was agreed that this board, together with additional representation (some invitees expressed a wish to be involved but were unable to attend on this particular date) should meet on a regular basis and that the next step was to decide upon priorities and agree a work programme with key timelines. The next meeting will take place in February.

5. Food Sector

Closing the Gap: State of the area's food industry – The Lea Valley Food Board report is now finished and will be launched at an event in February or March 2018.

BioBoost Project - The Team continues to work with the Food Board on this. Currently we are compiling a programme of events for 2018. This is to showcase the various projects within BioBoost in order to fulfil our communications commitment to the project.

Epping Forest Shopping Park – The Epping Forest Shopping Park is proving popular with shoppers, with healthy trading levels reported throughout Christmas and the New Year. Negotiations are ongoing with prospective tenants for the three remaining units, with one unit likely to complete terms by the middle of February. The associated Highways improvements for the Shopping Park are also complete, with the one outstanding matter of additional safety railings at the junction with Borders Lane, to be installed this month. After concerns raised about the safety of pedestrians utilising the crossing at the end of Oakwood Hill Road, Essex County Council have been asked to review the possibility of the crossing having pedestrian controlled lights. To date no response has been received, however officers will pursue.