

## **Background**

There is a clearly recognised need for Epping Forest District to get a robust Economic Development Strategy in place. It will be a strategy for Epping Forest District as a 'place'. Whilst EFDC will lead the process to develop the strategy it will be seeking to work alongside a wide range of partners recognising the involvement, influence and role of many stakeholders in the local economy.

This project plan sets out why the strategy is required and then scopes a proposed process by which it can be achieved.

## **Support that EFDC requires to deliver the Economic Development Strategy**

There is a small allocation within the Economic Development budget to help with the delivery of the strategy. It is felt there is such an abundance of evidence and in-built knowledge within the team that, subject to officer resource, a significant amount of the process can be carried out internally but potentially this sum could be used to:

- Fill gaps in knowledge that become apparent on digesting all available economic evidence
- For independent critical friend guidance and to ensure we are 'open' to new ideas etc
- Host a stakeholder event and for any costs associated with a business survey as part of the process of developing the strategy.

## **1. Why is the strategy needed?**

It is essential to be clear at the outset what the strategy is seeking to achieve.

The strategy will set out a vision and objectives for economic development in Epping Forest District and will be supported by a Delivery Plan and appropriate system for monitoring performance. The strategy will be supported by an evidence base appreciating policy and structural context and quantitative and qualitative socio-economic information presenting a picture of the District now.

Why is the strategy needed?

- To define our ambition and to articulate how Economic Development, working with partners, can add value and deliver
- To build upon economic evidence in the submission version of the Epping Forest District Council Local Plan, although recognising Economic Development goes beyond 'hard/physical' measures
- To understand the key strengths and weaknesses of the local economy
- To identify a clear list of priorities to provide focus to our work with partners at different economic geographies i.e. Eastern Hertfordshire, West Essex, LSCE and SELEP
- It may bring into focus the greater consideration of EFDC's own assets and potential for them to play a role in economic growth/employment creation.

- It is recognised that there is intrinsic value in the process of formulating the strategy. It is an opportunity to test and build upon our understanding of what is going on locally – something which will be beneficial to EFDC and our partners also. This process provide the opportunity to build stronger and proactive dialogue with stakeholders harnessing their key knowledge and culminating in the development of a shared vision and priorities for the District and importantly also, a commitment by partners to joint action to realise this vision.
- It is pertinent to note that we are not starting from a point of zero knowledge. The strategy development process will appreciate this, for example, appraising existing evidence and incorporating things we have been told in previous consultations but it also provides the opportunities to test these on partners and stakeholders and the exploration of other issues which the research may point to or that partners raise. It should be noted that a set of interim economic development priorities have been used in the last few years whilst the Economic Development strategy is developed.

## **2. Scope**

**There will be 3 key elements:**

- **ROBUST EVIDENCE BASE** (Comprising an appreciation of policy and structural framework within which EFD sits and building a socio-economic profile and testing with stakeholders and businesses locally. Key importance of this is not only informing the strategy but educating everyone about our area and its economic needs)
- **STRATEGY** (culmination of journey to determine what our vision is, ensuring there is acceptance/ sign-up/ shared ownership throughout council and partners.)
- **ACTION/ DELIVERY PLAN**

### **2.1 Robust Evidence base**

#### **Structural and Policy Framework**

To understand Epping Forest District as part of the broader picture. To develop a clear picture of Epping Forest District's position within economic development structures at sub-regional as well as more local levels.

Analysis of the national (i.e. Government's new Industrial Strategy), regional (i.e. SELEP), sub-regional (LSCC/ West Essex and East Herts FEMA) and local policy (Submission version EFDC Local Plan) context for Epping Forest District.

## **Socio-economic Profile**

We need to define what this will comprise and ensure we are aware of all existing information that can be fed in. It is likely to include but not be limited to the following:

- Nature of economy – sectors, workforce, commuting, entrepreneurship, geography, key employers, infrastructure, connections, broadband
- Impact and opportunities of digital innovation
- Jobs growth forecast
- Employment and Skills
- Business support (not any enhanced enterprise support for years. Is this needed?)
- Inward investment
- Commercial workspace – what we have and where, condition, future needs
- Town centres
- Rural economy, incl. glasshouse

## **Review of gaps in knowledge and potential to address**

To consider in completing the above if there are significant gaps in data/knowledge which we might be able to address finance and timescales permitting. As mentioned earlier there is a limited budget to potentially cover this.

## **2.2 Drawing out the Issues**

To begin to explore EFDC and partners' aspirations for local economic development. This relates to the earlier point that EFDC is not starting from a point of zero knowledge. There are already existing priority work streams in Economic Development i.e. Tourism, Digital Innovation, Skills. The evidence base for the strategy will be inclusive and draw upon what we know about these areas but it is recognised that these priority work streams may have their own workplans or even strategies.

Preparation of SWOT analysis based on preceding work on structural/policy context and evidence base to begin to draw out key messages- identifying what Epping Forest District needs to address in order to meet its economic development aspirations.

It is possible that a small number of SWOTs will need to be produced covering different themes in economic development – possibly business start-up and survival and skills, thriving town centres, rural dimension etc.

## **2.3 Engaging with partners and stakeholders**

Identification of the partners and stakeholders that need to be included in the strategy development process.

The following elements are currently proposed:

- Early and on-going engagement with Members via One Epping Forest's Economic Board (20 June/ 19 Sept/ 14 Nov)
- Reporting at AMED Officer and Member meetings
- Focused meeting with local partners – education, business support, business representative organisations, potentially Chairs of priority theme work groups

- i.e. Tourism, Skills, Food etc. This grouping could meet early in the process and then further down the line to agree that the drafted strategy is on track.
- Business survey – conduct first business survey after the above with results directly feeding into strategy process
- Engagement via the Business Briefing
- A broader workshop event with an invite to all businesses and broad range of other stakeholders with an interest in economic development.

### **3. Production of final strategy and action/delivery plan**

Outcomes of engagement outlined in 2.3 will be analysed and recommendations made on EFDC's emerging strategic economic development priorities.

A first draft of the strategy will be produced along with indicative actions and this will be presented to the Economic Board and discussed at a further focused meeting with local partners.

Mapping of the existing and potential contribution of public, private and not-for-profit sector agencies to the delivery/action plan through one to one communications by phone or email.

The final strategy will be presented to AMED (Officer and Member) with final sign-off sought at EFDC Cabinet.

The Economic Development Strategy will be professionally designed for widespread online use and produced in hard-copy to a lesser degree.

### **4. Timescale and milestones**

**Early April** - Discussion of project plan and final refinement

**Mid-April** - Complete structural and policy analysis

**Throughout April** - Determine what external assistance might be required

**End of June** - Complete socio-economic evidence base analysis

**Mid July** - Host focused workshop

**Late Sept** – Host broad workshop for all businesses and stakeholders. (potentially include 'access to funding' or similar element to increase appeal of event)

**End of October** – Assimilate evidence and knowledge gained to date and draft strategic economic development priorities and proposed actions stemming from these. Share and invite comment.

**End of November** - Draft strategy produced.

**December** – Finalisation of delivery/action plan element after continued engagement with partners and stakeholders.

**End of December/January** – Collation of responses to consultation and development of final draft strategy to be presented to Cabinet.