

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 31 July 2018

Subject: Asset and Economic Development

Portfolio Holder: Councillor A. Grigg

Recommending:

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

1. Visitor Economy

Partnership working – I am happy to report that the 2018 Tourism and Visitor Summit is being planned for the end of October and once again the Marriott Hotel Waltham Abbey is being approached as host and sponsor. A meeting is being organised with Harlow, East Herts and Uttlesford Councils to join with Broxbourne and Epping Forest District to explore joint marketing and promotion opportunities.

Visit Epping Forest website – The Visit Epping Forest website continues to grow. May 2018 saw the highest monthly visitors with a 26% increase over the previous highest month. 'Users' are being used as a KPI measurement with a target for the next quarter of 24,744.

Events - The proposed 2019 Food Fair for Waltham Abbey is moving forward with tentative dates of 05 and 06 May. Expressions of interest are being sought from potential stall holders and other participants. The organising committee includes Waltham Abbey Town Council, Waltham Abbey Church, Waltham Abbey Town Partnership, Vibrant Partnerships, Epping Forest District Museum, Abbey View Produce, P A Sparks and Sons Ltd and One Epping Forest. Funders are being sought and links explored with a number of organisations including the local schools, Town Twinning Association and the Health and Wellbeing Board. Following a series of discussions a locally based company is progressing its planning for a major destination event to be held at North Weald Airfield during the summer of 2019. Once final details have been agreed, a date for July 2019 will be announced and the event will be formally launched to the public.

External funding - An expression of interest has been made to Ville de Compiègne, a mid-sized town 80km north of Paris which is looking to lead on an EU Interreg bid for 2,500,000 € – 4,000,000 €. The bid requires other partners from countries within the EU and was referred to Visit Epping Forest by Invest Essex. The project seeks to link together visitor areas that fall just outside capital cities with a view to improving economic growth through branding, upskilling tourism staff and building visitor traffic between the participating locations and countries. In order to fulfil the geographic, population and diversity of attractions on offer, an area covering Waltham Abbey and Broxbourne, with the Lee Valley between, has been proposed for the bid. This bid is at an early stage with the bid lead currently talking to all those who have expressed interest, with a view to the selected participants developing a bid for submission in 2019.

2. Economic Development Strategy

The Team is focusing on the delivery of a new long term Economic Development Strategy as referenced in my April report. More updates will be provided in due course and Members will be invited to input into the strategy process in the autumn.

3. Business Support

Business contacts and GDPR - The Team is working to ensure that its database which includes approximately 2,000 contacts is fit for purpose going forward in terms of the requirements of GDPR. This also extends to ensuring that the Team is collecting and managing new details in the correct manner.

External Funding - The Team continues to work to attract external grant funding for businesses within the District. A few examples of this work are highlighted below:

South East Business Boost (SEBB) – as I have reported previously, SEBB is a grants scheme for business growth that is offering grants of £1,000 to £10,000 for up to 30% of total project costs. The Economic Development Team is working closely with SEBB in promoting the Fund and as at last reporting (May 2018) six grants have so far been awarded in the District. A couple of recent approvals are Connaught Farm Nurseries (£10,000) and Allen Watson Ltd (£10,000). Very recently the scheme has been extended to cover revenue as well as capital expenditure which is positive and the Team will be disseminating this message locally.

Low Carbon Across the South East (LoCASE) - The Team continues to help in the promotion of this scheme which assists SMEs in reducing business costs by cutting emissions and seeks to increase awareness of opportunities in the low carbon market. A total of 11 awards have now been made locally in the District; the total value of which being £86,000.

4. Epping Forest District Skills Board

The Skills Board met in April and presentations were made by Princess Alexandra Hospital, the LSCC and the Harlow Enterprise Zone. Partners outlined their skills needs going forward and the role schools and colleges need to play. As a result of the meeting, further meetings were agreed between PAH and Epping Forest College to create joint training opportunities and work experience for Care Students.

5. Digital Innovation Programme

This element of the Economic Development Team's work is covered in greater detail within Councillor Lion's Portfolio Holder Report so here I reference only a few headline activities in recent weeks. The Team coordinated a successful symposium to discuss the development of the Digital Innovation Strategy for the West Essex and Eastern Hertfordshire Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ) at Harlow College in mid-June with around 60 delegates spanning local, county and central government plus representatives from the health, education and voluntary sectors and a number of private sector and business representatives. The DIZ Board was also represented at the recent London Stansted Cambridge Consortium 2018 Conference and hosted a well-attended lunch-time pop-up session to discuss the formation of the DIZ, its aspirations and the wider picture for the Smart Place agenda beyond the usual city locations.

6. Food Sector

Closing the Gap: State of the area's food industry - I was pleased to attend the successful launch event for the final report of the Lea Valley Food Board with around 50 partners representing businesses, colleges and universities and enterprise partnerships. The event was held at the House of Commons hosted by the Rt. Hon. Dame Eleanor Laing M.P. on 23 May 2018. This report sets out the findings on local productivity and opportunities and

set out a series of recommendations to expand and sustain future growth. One of the report's key recommendations was the establishment of a new food partnership across the South East between government, business and academia.

South East Food Board - In its current format the Food Board will hold its final meeting in September. It will hopefully then become part of a wider regional partnership between local authorities and food industry representatives. A number of key partners from across the South East have indicated a willingness to become part of the South East Strategic Food board. The Vice Chairman of SELEP has agreed to host initial meeting; officers are making preparations for this.

BioBoost Project- The Team continues to work with the Food Board on this EU Programme. In June the project partners met in Belgium to review progress in the workstreams being led in each country around recycling and carbon reduction in the glasshouse industry. A series of events locally are being prepared and it is hoped that the food festival can be part funded for this service.

Asset Management and Development Projects – Members will be aware that progress on the management of the Council's Commercial Estate and Major Asset Management Projects, is reported on a regular basis to the Asset Management and Economic Development Cabinet Committee.

The Committee recently met on the 19 July, where a number of updates were received, to include the Epping Forest Shopping Park which is now reaching the anniversary of the first retail units opening and proving popular with customers, the disposal of Pyrles Lane Nursery, and progress on the St John's Road Epping redevelopment. If Members are interested in the detail, I would refer them to the report or the webcasting of the consideration of the item.