

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: April 2015

Subject: Portfolio Assets and Economic Development

Portfolio Holder: Councillor A Grigg

Recommending:

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

Waltham Abbey Studies

Reports commissioned on the issues and opportunities facing Waltham Abbey Town centre have now been received from consultants and are being refined in liaison with the Economic Development Team. The reports comment in varying degrees of detail on the potential for various interventions or development projects throughout the town. However, each of the reports have been compiled in isolation, not only from each other, but also the ongoing gathering of the Local Plan evidence base and the district-wide study being compiled by Hardisty Jones consultants. Given this ongoing development of the Council's Local Plan, and the parallel development of an Economic Development Strategy, it is not appropriate that these reports and proposals be taken forward at this point but they will inform future developments in the town in line with the outcomes and policies agreed in the Local Plan.

Superfast Broadband

The Economic Development Team is working closely with the Essex County Council Superfast Broadband team and supporting the Portfolio Holder for Support Services and Technology on the development of Phase 2b (The Rural Challenge Project or RCP) of the Superfast Broadband rollout programme. The RCP aims to provide solutions to the provision of superfast broadband to a section of the Epping Forest District's rural areas. The Invitations to Tender have been sent out to a number of bidders and the assessment of those bids is likely to take place during late April / early May

Staffing

A new Assistant Asset Management & Economic Development officer has recently been appointed to the Economic Development Team and it is anticipated will take up the post in late April / early May.

Business Support / Growth Hub

A brand new online business support, advice and growth hub has opened for Greater Essex. The BEST (Business Essex, Southend, & Thurrock) Growth Hub is being provided by the South East Local Enterprise Partnership and will act as a portal to enable local businesses to access the support they require. In the initial months, business enquiries will at first be handled by navigators in the Southend Growth Hub who will redirect them to the relevant local council contact. The online offer is currently a very simple one but this will be developed and enhanced over the next few months as a business support mapping exercise is completed, again supported by SE LEP funding. This mapping exercise will simplify access to the many varied national, regional and local business support initiatives that exist.

Business Survey

Essex County Council have now completed their business survey. A headline report for Essex has been generated but district level detail is, for the most part, still awaited. Just over 1,000 businesses were interviewed and 105 Epping Forest businesses were contacted. Some top-level (Essex-wide) results showed that although only 11% of businesses employed apprentices, up to 37% were likely to do so in the future. Some 64% were planning to train or upskill their staff in the next 12 months, 29% expected their number of employees to increase in the next 12 months and 77% were aiming to grow their business in the next 2-3 years.