

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



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Report reference: AMED-018-2015/16

Date of meeting: 14 April 2016

Portfolio: Asset Management and Economic Development

Subject: Economic Development Report

Responsible Officer: Mike Warr / Vicki Willis (01992 564042 / 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;

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. One Business Briefing

The Winter edition of One Business Briefing was published in late February and represented another step on in terms of partner liaison to produce a vibrant and engaging business magazine. Ten external partners contributed articles and graphics, all of which involved close liaison with economic development officers to secure and structure the content. Additionally, a number of these external partners featured the One Business Briefing on their social media streams resulting in a wider social media reach than previously.

The number of contacts to whom the Briefing has been directly distributed by email has again risen with this edition being sent to in excess of 1100 business contacts with social media also encouraging further direct downloads of the Briefing from the council's website. In addition to the usual digital edition of the Briefing, a short print run of copies of the Briefing was also produced and has been distributed to attendees at the recent Visit Epping Forest Tourism Conference, as well as to businesses and attendees at the most recent round of BEST Growth Hub digital workshops, run at the Essex Technology and Innovation Centre in Ongar.

2. Eastern Plateau

Economic Development has continued its representation on the Eastern Plateau Rural Development Programme's Local Action Group. As at mid-March there are several projects based within the district that are at early stages in the application process and the Programme Facilitator reports that there are a good number of further leads across the entire project area and across all of the Fund's priority themes. We will report more in due course.

3. Visitor Economy

Economic Development is working with colleagues in Planning to commission a Visitor Accommodation Needs Assessment. The main driver of this work is the preparation of the new Local Plan and the Study will form a key part of the evidence base helping to inform tourism policies in the Local Plan. Beyond planning policy, the study potentially has the scope to inform broader interventions within the Council e.g. through the Economic and Tourism Development Teams, perhaps in the future use of the Council's own assets or providing assistance to Development Management until the adoption of the emerging Local Plan.

The Visit Epping Forest 2016 Tourism Conference took place at the start of English Tourism Week at the beginning of March. Generously sponsored by the Marriott Hotel together with Vibrant Partnerships, the event attracted more people than last year and featured six speakers including the Chairmen of Visit Essex and Vibrant Partnerships. Around ninety delegates represented a range of tourism and visitor sectors both large and small, from the Chinese PPM International to local B&Bs, Paradise Wildlife Park to Redwings Horse Sanctuary. Workshop sessions saw feedback from five groups with common themes for opportunity and growth including gaining benefits from closer joint working, awareness building by better use of social media and internet-based offers, marketing outside of the district to bring visitors from further afield and creating themed packages for specific target audiences. One negative identified was that poor public transport was a barrier for both a positive visitor experience and recruiting staff. As with previous conferences, networking was seen as one of the benefits of this event and everyone took advantage of the opportunity to discuss ideas and make new contacts during lunch. Once again a universally acclaimed event which delegates appreciate and affirm they wish to remain a regular fixture.

4. Town Centres

A project to replace an eyesore at the front of the parade of shops in North Weald and the creation of a new Visit Epping Forest website have been approved within EFDC's Town & Village Centres Opportunities Fund. The Team is also liaising with applicants to progress a handful of further applications to the Fund.

5. Business Support

The Economic Development Team has been working on a valuable exercise to dramatically improve the information and contact details it holds for local businesses within the district. This work will mean we are better able to manipulate the data we hold in order to disseminate relevant information as widely as possible and to encourage local awareness and take-up of the various programmes that are available e.g. funding, business support & advice, workshops. These enhanced contacts are a start point in developing stronger communication links with our local businesses in terms of understanding their needs, issues and opportunities and how these might then inform where our future priorities and focus should be. Part of the project is involving a tele-marketing exercise to obtain further details from some businesses as recently flagged-up to Members, partners and officers.

6. 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 (SE LEP)
- Invest Essex and Essex Innovation Programme
- Lea Valley Food Taskforce
- 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

Economic Development attended the re-opening of the Epping Forest District Museum in Waltham Abbey and was delighted to see the high quality of the heritage and tourist offer that this attraction will now bring to the district. Having seen the development and spoken to a number of local business stakeholders at the launch it is clear that the museum will also be a fantastic asset for the local and district wide business community. It is intended that the museum will shortly host a business networking event and the economic development team have also arranged for the Essex Economic Development Officers meeting to take place at the museum later in the year. We would like to congratulate the Museum, Heritage and Culture team on successfully delivering this fantastic project.

Economic Development has recently met with Grangewood Investments to understand more about its investment plans at Oakwood Hill Industrial Estate, particularly in light of its Cr@te development on the Industrial Estate receiving planning consent in February. This liaison is ongoing but the Team has already introduced Grangewood to several partners such as Invest Essex where there might be the scope for mutually beneficial opportunities for business development.

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

Due Regard Record

This page shows **which groups of people are affected** by the subject of this report. It sets out **how they are affected** and how any **unlawful discrimination** they experience can be eliminated. It also includes information about how **access to the service(s)** subject to this report can be improved for the different groups of people; and how they can be assisted to **understand each other better** as a result of the subject of this report.

S149 Equality Act 2010 requires that due regard must be paid to this information when considering the subject of this report.

Not applicable as this report is for noting only.