

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 26 July 2016

Subject: Asset & Economic Development

Portfolio Holder: Councillor A Grigg

Recommending:

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

1. Visitor Economy

Economic Development has been working with colleagues in Planning to commission a Visitor Accommodation Needs Assessment for the district. This work will look at all forms of visitor accommodation, including serviced (hotels, pub accommodation etc) and non-serviced accommodation (self-catering, camping, moorings etc). As reported previously, 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 though, the Study potentially has the scope to inform broader interventions within the Council e.g. through the Economic and Tourism Development Teams and perhaps in the consideration of the future use of the Council's own assets etc. At the time of writing this update, interviews have been undertaken with potential consultants with the final decision on appointment to be made imminently.

A presentation has also been received from a potential provider of a new tourism website under the Visit Epping Forest banner. Work will now commence to realise the vision for a dynamic new website which is intended to greater promote and support the district's valuable visitor economy. The initial procurement and build of the website is being funded through monies awarded by the Town and Village Centres Opportunities Fund.

Following representation from the Tourism and Visitor Board members that a tourism conference towards the end of the year might be more useful than during English Tourism Week in March as staged currently, a decision was made to host a second conference this year on 14th October and this will once again take place at the Waltham Abbey Marriott Hotel.

The Visit Epping Forest leaflet has recently been enlarged, updated and reprinted. As part of an awareness building campaign, leaflet holders have been purchased and the new leaflets placed in high-traffic visitor outlets across the district. The leaflets feature our major attractions plus information on destination towns and villages in the district and will help drive traffic to the Visit Epping Forest website, particularly important in view of the planned refresh of the website mentioned above.

2. Town Centres

I recently chaired the latest Town Teams meeting which took place on 27th June. I am very pleased to say that the meeting was well attended and a number of presentations were

received at the meeting looking at town centre evacuation plans as well as findings from a recent Future of Town Centres seminar.

The 2016/17 Town & Village Centres Opportunities Fund was introduced to the town teams present at that meeting. At the time of writing, a report presenting a new policy document for the fund, setting out the parameters within which a wider range of organisations can apply to the fund, was due to be presented to Cabinet on 21st July for review and subject to this being approved a wider and more concerted launch and promotional campaign for the fund will then take place.

3. Business Support

Pop Up Café

The Economic Development Team is pleased to be testing a new format business event in the district in July. The Pop Up Business Café was, at the time of writing, due to be held at the newly-refurbished Epping Forest District Museum in Waltham Abbey on Wednesday 13 July, 10am to 1pm. BEST Growth Hub (which provides business support across the Greater Essex area) were helping to coordinate the café and ran a similar event in Southend earlier this year which was very successful.

The basic concept was to draw together a small number of business support and local business professionals in an informal setting and to invite local businesses and those looking to start-up in business. The businesses would be attracted by the chance to speak with a business professional (say marketing, accounting, HR etc.) for 10/15 minutes and the opportunity for networking.

Database

The Team's exercise to improve the information and contact information it holds for local businesses within the district has progressed well. The work is helping in the delivery of a number of the Team's current projects and means that its regular email updates (on business events, funding, training opportunities, awards etc) are reaching a bigger audience locally and similarly, so too will One Business Briefing from now on.

Asset Management

Progress reports on the Epping Forest Shopping Park, are being considered on a regular basis by the Economic Development and Asset Management Cabinet Committee, attended by the lead consultants responsible for project management and lettings. In addition, a report on the award of the main construction contract for the Shopping Park for those Members who are interested will be considered by Cabinet on the 21 July. I am pleased to report that the new Depot at Oakwood Hill is now largely completed, with the only outstanding issues in relation to some external hard landscaping. This will allow all the Council's Services to be transferred, from Langston Road, giving the appointed Construction Contractor a vacant site.

Also on the 21 July Cabinet Agenda, is a further report on the St John's Road Redevelopment.