

# ***Report to the Council***

**Committee:** Cabinet

**Date:** 27 July 2017

**Subject:** Assets & Economic Development

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor A Grigg

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## **Recommending:**

**That the report of the Economic Development Portfolio Holder be noted.**

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### **1. Visitor Economy**

**Tourism Website** - The new tourism website continues to build both in content and page views. To date 137 pages have been produced containing over 250 images. Page views continue to build and have reached record highs of 6,000 and 7,000 average per week over the Easter holidays and May half term holidays with a peak of 8250 during one week.

**2017 Tourism Conference-** Friday 20th October has been booked for the 2017 Tourism Conference which is once again hosted and sponsored by the Marriott Hotel Waltham Abbey. The latest annual tourism and visitor figures presented this year show growth once again with the income breaking the £200m mark at £204m and the district's tourism-related jobs rising from 7% to 8%. Day trips have also risen by 6%. It is only the overnight visit numbers and related income that remains unchanged in a sector challenged by a shortfall in accommodation provision

### **2. Town Centres**

**Town & Village Centres / District Economic Opportunities Fund** - The first stage of the Ongar In Bloom project supported by the Town Centre Opportunities Fund has now been installed delivering a striking and colourful entrance to the town centre. Buckhurst Hill Residents Society is part way through a project to increase people's awareness of the business offer in Queens Road through engagement between school children and these businesses. A first tranche of children have visited Queens Road on several occasions, interviewed businesses, produced promotional material for them and held a market outside these businesses. Epping Town Partnership hosted the Epping Young Traders Market & Festival on 8<sup>th</sup> July. The event was a success bringing energy and vibrancy to the high street and attracting large numbers of visitors to enjoy the markets stalls predominantly operated by young entrepreneurs and the entertainment put on by local school students.

**Waltham Abbey Wayfinding Project** - A number of land ownership issues are being worked through to determine the acceptability of a number of the proposed locations for signs and this has slowed the delivery stage of the project. It is hoped that once these issues have been resolved, the necessary planning and highways permissions can be determined and the installation work will follow soon after that, although that work is now likely to take place outside of the 2017 Summer season.

### **3. Business Support**

**Eastern Plateau** - The Economic Development Team continues to be active on the Eastern Plateau Local Area Action Group (LAG) and a first project has been awarded in the District for just under £14,000.

**Trade Delegation on 16th June 2017** - The Chairman, Cllr Stallan together with Members of the Council and colleagues from Essex County Council, hosted a visit for 11 delegates from a local authority and businesses in KeQaio, China. Presentations were made by Cllr Mohindra setting out the major priorities of the County regarding building partnerships with China and attracting inward investment. This was followed by a presentation on tourism development in the area and a tour of the District, hosted by a local tourism company. The Team will continue to work to develop links with a view to future investment opportunities.

#### **4. Major Projects**

As Members will be aware, the Council is actively engaged in a number of major asset management projects. Monitoring of the delivery is reported to the Asset Management and Economic Cabinet Committee on a regular basis and if Members have a particular interest in any project they can refer. However, I would like to draw attention to the fact that we have achieved practical completion of the main Shopping Park from our contractors McLaughlin and Harvey, who have delivered the building on time and on cost. The Council has secured a good tenant mix with several national anchor stores e.g. Next, TK Max and Aldi. The units are 80%+ let and our tenants are currently actively engaged in fitting out their stores with the majority set to open by the end of September. The supporting S278 Highways Improvements have experienced a number of technical problems, largely in relation to services and utilities, but I am pleased to report should be largely complete by the end of August in advance of the Park opening.

A site visit for all Members had been arranged for the 21 July 2017 at 10.30 a.m.