

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



**Epping Forest  
District Council**

**Report reference: AMED-004-2017/18**

**Date of meeting: 11 January 2018**

**Portfolio: Asset Management and Economic Development**

**Subject: Economic Development Report**

**Responsible Officer: Mike Warr / Vicki Willis (01992 564472 / 564593)**

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**Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**(1) To note the progress and work programme of the Council's Economic Development Section and provide feedback if Members wish;**

**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. Visitor Economy**

**2017 Tourism Conference**

The Economic Development Team delivered Visit Epping Forest's 2017 Tourism and Visitor Conference on 20 October at the Marriott Hotel Waltham Abbey with sponsorship from the hotel. Over 70 delegates registered and the feedback was very positive. Speakers included Cllr Gagan Mohindra outlining Essex County Council's support for business, Andrew Keeling from Hotel Solutions presenting its findings around local visitor accommodation demand and opportunities and Caroline Jenkins from Vibrant Partnerships, and a Tourism and Visitor Board member, outlining the new Visit Epping Forest Tourism Strategy. A comprehensive report on the Conference is being published.

**2. Local Plan**

Economic Development has provided significant support to the Planning Policy Team in

undertaking further detailed employment land work in support of the Submission Local Plan. Beyond the Local Plan, Economic Development is considering how this new evidence can be utilised to the best effect in the course of its work both operationally and strategically. For instance, how might we use the greater understanding of existing employment land to better coordinate the provision of business support or to assist with businesses seeking new premises, and also using this information to inform a new economic development strategy for the District.

### **3. Town Centres**

#### **Waltham Abbey Wayfinding Project**

The initial installation programme for the Waltham Abbey Wayfinding project was completed in week commencing 20 November resulting in 14 of the proposed 15 signs being installed. On the whole the installation process was undertaken very smoothly with very little disruption to the town centre, its businesses or visitors. The installation of the final sign is scheduled to be undertaken on 15 December as well as the remediation of a small number of snagging issues which will be addressed by the contractors. To date, the response to the new signs has been positive.

#### **Town & Village Centres / District Economic Opportunities Fund**

Several projects have been successfully delivered by partners this year utilising this Fund. Epping Town Partnership enlivened Epping High Street in July with the town's first ever Young Traders Market. Young entrepreneurs impressed visitors and local business people with their wide ranging products and the winners received cheques from sponsors to re-invest in their micro-businesses. Buckhurst Hill Residents Society received support from the Fund to work with younger school children to raise local awareness of the businesses and services available locally by the children and in-turn their parents. As well as meeting this broader raising awareness objective, the project was tremendously engaging and fun for the children and involved them visiting and interviewing businesses in Queens Road and culminated in them staging a market in Queens Road. Ongar in Bloom is progressing strongly in the implementation of its project and a further bid to the Fund relating to Buckhurst Hill is being evaluated at present.

### **4. Business Support**

#### **One Business Briefing**

A further edition of the One Business Briefing magazine for businesses was published in August. With a centrepiece eight page pull-out on social enterprises and a wide range of articles on business support, funding programmes, town centre initiatives, local digital award successes and innovative local businesses it was the biggest edition to date. It involved direct contributions from over 20 different organisations, many of whom have featured and shared details of the magazine via their social media outlets. This collaborative effort has seen the edition circulated to over 2000 direct contacts and, at the time of writing, downloaded from the council's website in excess of 540 times.

#### **Meet the Buyer**

In conjunction with Epping Forest Chamber of Commerce, the Economic Development team organised a Meet the Buyer Conference on 23 November, to enable local businesses to meet face-to-face with some of the biggest buyers in and around the District. Small- and medium- sized enterprises were able to understand how big organisations in the public and private sector buy, what they procure, how much they procure, and opportunities available. The event attracted over 70 delegates, representing a wide variety of sectors from aviation, health, research, tourism, and education. The Team secured sponsorship from the Marriott

Hotel Waltham Abbey and the event included speakers from London Stansted Airport, Public Health England, Essex County Council, Epping Forest College, and Vibrant Partnerships.

### **Eastern Plateau Funding**

The Economic Development Team is continuing its work with the Eastern Plateau Local Area Action Group (LAG). As reported previously, the Group continues to perform well in terms of its allocation of funding to date and a request is being made to the Rural Payments Agency for the Group to access additional funds. A further project has been approved in the district for a grant of c. £175,000 towards a project exceeding £1.25m. The Team will report more detail as soon as all contract matters are finalised. A good stream of project enquiries is also being fed through to the Eastern Plateau Team and so we are positive that more applications will be forthcoming.

### **Low Carbon Across the South East (LoCASE) Funding/ BEST Growth Hub support**

In partnership with LoCASE, the Economic Development team visited over 50 businesses on Langston Road and Oakwood Hill on 12 July to promote funding and support that is available to businesses. Latest reporting (August 2017) identifies that 4 grants have now been approved within the district with more in the pipeline. In a similar vein to the industrial estates visit, Economic Development Officers liaised with BEST Growth Hub on a business support surgery which was held at Crate Loughton on 19 September. BEST sat down with 7 businesses to discuss in detail the support they might be able to access and visited all businesses at the recently established Crate Loughton.

## **5. Digital Innovation Programme**

Economic Development officers in conjunction with One Epping Forest, Princess Alexandra Hospital and West Essex CCG submitted an application in November to the LGA / Design Council 'Design in the Public Sector' programme. The application was put together as a Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ) project to address the level of A&E incidents amongst the over-75 population of the Digital Innovation Zone.

The programme is designed to access Design Council consultancy expertise and equip teams with the skills to apply design principles to public service redesign. These skills could be applied to other DIZ and Economic Development projects wherever they may be focused. The team attended a Panel Interview at The Design Council on December 12th and have subsequently been informed that they were successful. Participation in the programme will begin in February 2018.

The second One Epping Forest Smart Places Seminar was delivered by Economic Development on Friday 8 September and attended by Councillor Grigg, Councillor Lion and Councillor Mohindra. The session at Harlow Council Chamber brought together more than 30 senior leaders from business, education, health, local authorities, partnership bodies and the voluntary sector to hear about and discuss the latest digital innovations and their application to the provision of health and social care. An executive report of the event has been produced and circulated to all attendees. This report will be used to further raise awareness and understanding of the digital work programme.

A third Smart Places Seminar focusing on Digital Skills for future jobs is planned to take place on 09 February 2018 at Haileybury College in Broxbourne Borough. It is planned that external speakers from business and academic perspectives will bring forward their thoughts on what is coming down the line in terms of digital opportunities and threats, but crucially also to focus back on what businesses, colleges etc. need to do now to prepare themselves & their workforces for an increasingly digital future.

The DIZ Board continues to meet on a monthly basis. This cross-border grouping, originally formed of Epping Forest DC, Uttlesford, Harlow, East Herts and Broxbourne councils, Essex County Council, the London Stansted Cambridge Consortium, Princess Alexandra Hospital, West Essex CCG and KAOData and chaired by Councillor Lion (with Councillor Mohindra as Vice Chair) has now welcomed representatives of Further and Higher Education and the voluntary sector. Membership will continually be reviewed and supplemented where appropriate to ensure it represents the key stakeholders in our digital future.

The Board has agreed to co-fund and co-commission a digital infrastructure strategy for a proposed DIZ covering the geographies of the five district local authority partners. The tender for this strategic document was opened at the end of November 2017 and is due to close on 20 December. It is hoped that the successful bidder will be appointed early in 2018 to begin work immediately.

An expression of interest has been submitted, on behalf of the DIZ Board, to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) to be involved in the DCMS Local Full Fibre Networks (LFFN) Programme. This programme will explore opportunities to expand full fibre networks through a range of mechanisms to support residents and businesses in accessing superfast broadband speeds. Representatives of the DIZ Board from EFDC and Essex County Council attended a workshop on the programme on 15 December and DCMS will now be inviting the submission of full bids.

## **6. Superfast Broadband**

As at November 2017 the network build had reached just over 3700 premises passed. Building work to install the final two cabinet areas of the network in Hastingwood and Ongar has now commenced. Wayleave negotiations to facilitate Gigaclear to build part of its network across North Weald Airfield are ongoing. Unfortunately, due to a number of issues that the contractor has faced, the full completion of the network is now scheduled for 31 March 2018 although it is hoped that many of the remaining premises will be connected in advance of that date.

Funding for Phase 4 was recently added to the Capital Review programme for report to Cabinet on 07 December. The tender process for this is already underway through Superfast Essex / Essex County Council (ECC) with the bidders' proposals likely to be evaluated in January / February 2018. Economic Development and Finance officers from EFDC will take part in the tender evaluation process. At the point of awarding the contract EFDC will be required to enter into a written agreement with ECC to confirm the £350,000 funding and prior to signing this, a further report will be taken to Cabinet outlining the outcome of the tender process and seeking its confirmation to proceed.

## **7. Food Sector**

### **Closing the Gap: State of the area's food industry**

The Team has supported The Lea Valley Food Board to complete this report. It follows an interim report published in 2014, Growing the Future, which took stock of the area's food industry. It will be published shortly and launched in January 2018.

### **BioBoost Project**

The Team continues to work with the Food Board on this. In November the nine project partners from the Netherlands, Belgium and the UK met at the National Institute of Agricultural Botany (NIAB) in Cambridge for a partners meeting. This was followed the next day by a BioBoost seminar, attended by 80 people from various public and private sector

organisations in the food industry. The topic focused on getting more out of horticultural waste and showcased some of the BioBoost projects doing just that.

**8. 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 (SELEP)
- London Stansted Cambridge Consortium (LSCC)
- Invest Essex and Essex Innovation Programme
- Lea Valley Food Board
- 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
- Superfast Essex
- Princess Alexandra Hospital
- West Essex CCG
- Essex Partnership University Trust
- Rainbow Services, Harlow
- Anglia Ruskin University

The inaugural meeting of the Epping Forest Skills Board took place at Epping Forest College on 04 December. Under the chairmanship of Cllr Gagan Mohindra, members included representatives of local large and small businesses, the County and District Councils, Epping Forest College and the DWP. Following a presentation giving an overview on the economy, employment and education and training in the District, there was a round table discussion on the major challenges and opportunities facing the local skills agenda. Areas of focus included increasing apprenticeships, the construction industry, future developments in the digital economy and employability skills for young people. It was recognised that there is a need for up and re-skilling the existing workforce alongside encouraging pupils to consider the regions priority skills areas and providing quality training to fill existing and predicted skills gaps. Consideration was given to how the Skills Board could best influence the skills agenda and whether the initial Board needed additional representation. A second meeting is being arranged for early in 2018.

**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