

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet
Date: 28 February 2023
Subject: Finance Portfolio
Portfolio Holder: Councillor John Philip

Recommending:

That the report of the Finance Portfolio Holder be noted.

Economic Development

Economic Development Programme:

On the 6th of December 2022, Epping Forest District Council's UK Shared Prosperity Fund three-year investment plan was approved in full by central Government, and funding received. This provides just over £1 million over three years to support projects in the district. However, spending on programmes in the next two financial years is dependent on the council meeting government reporting criteria set against the delivery of projects up to March 2023. Officers, at the time of writing are in the process of procuring packages of business support services - a key focus of year one UKSPF spending. Funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund is also being used to support the development of a new playground in Ninefields, Waltham Abbey, which is expected to be installed in the next few months.

Epping Forest District Council has also submitted its Rural England Prosperity Fund investment plan, which aims to secure a further £437,136 to invest in rural areas. At the time of writing, Epping Forest along, with other neighbouring authorities which applied for this funding, has not received approval of its investment plan.

Monthly Business E-Newsletter:

The Economic Development Team have released the January edition of the 'Business Matters' e-newsletter with topics focusing on the newly upgraded Visit Epping Forest website, applications for business growth loans, the recently announced 'Multiply' mathematics programme for Essex and recruitment help for local businesses.

General Economic Briefing:

According to NOMIS as of December 2022, unemployment in the district is currently at 2,270. This represents a small increase in unemployment over the last two consecutive months. It also indicates that the long-term trend since February 2021 of lower month by month unemployment figures in the district has ended. Epping Forest district unemployment levels are 2.8% of the total working population, which is below the average seen across the East of England region (2.9%) and below the Great Britain average (3.7%).

Visitor Economy:

The new Visit Epping Forest website has now been launched and initial feedback is very positive. The old site had served its purpose well but with mobile phones now being the predominant platform for users, and Google about to end support for the old site's analytics,

the change was required. Using the new format, we are better able to promote features on the homepage and are starting with a push for Valentine's day, supporting the hospitality outlets running related menus and offers. The 'What's On' page currently has 37 events listed, with the majority of them running up to Easter which is when the tourism season traditionally starts. Many of our local venues and attractions are getting off to an early start indicating the optimism they feel about the year ahead.

Officers are working with Ride London to promote a festival-styled event for Epping Town which will be the major activity centre for this year's race. In conjunction with London Marathon Events, businesses are being contacted and invited to participate in the festival which is being coordinated by Epping Town Council and the councils Community Team. Initial feedback from LME is that Epping businesses are open-minded about the ideas being presented and discussions are more balanced given a better understanding having experienced the reality of the event last year.

A good relationship has been established with the new Essex Film Board and since their inception, a significant amount of general filming has been taking place in the district. It is the Film Board's goal to attract major productions to the county.

Essex + Herts Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ):

On December 9th the DIZ hosted the latest of its ongoing series of Smart Place Seminars - '**What Can 5G Do for Us?**'. The session had national and international speakers from CGI, Bable Smart Cities and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS). It covered a range of topics on 5G including 'What makes a place smart?', '5G Use Cases from across Europe' and how to go about 'Attracting Investment in Digital Connectivity'. A vibrant discussion was then supplemented with a session delivered by the DIZ Programme manager on the 5G guidance and advice that is available from the DIZ website at: <https://diz.org.uk/guidance-best-practice/>.

Over 50 attendees registered for the event and learned about 5G and the applications it will support, what it could mean for a place like the DIZ, and a wealth of insight informing approaches to the planning, development and delivery of 5G initiatives across local authorities. A full recording of the session has now been made available for 'viewing on demand' along with copies of the presentations on the DIZ website at: <https://diz.org.uk/diz-resources/#1655209692503-76777918-f2dd>

The DIZ Programme Manager was invited by DCMS to participate in and speak at a panel session '**Exploring operating models for digital asset management**' at the latest DCMS Digital Connectivity Infrastructure Accelerator (DCIA) Dissemination Event in December. Attended by local authorities from across the UK, government departments and telecoms sector businesses and consultants, this was a fantastic opportunity to share details of the 'place-based' approach to digital innovation that has shaped the DIZ work programme from the very outset. The DIZ has been a member of the DCIA Early Adoption Group since the commencement of the DCIA pilot programme in early 2022 which is exploring how public sector assets can be mapped and made available to telecom operators to support the hosting of telecoms infrastructure such as small cell units.

Asset Management

Epping Forest Shopping Park

I am pleased to report that following the work undertaken regards the design for re-configuration of the car park quotes will be obtained for the actual works which will be presented in due course.

North Weald Airfield

The HMRC Inland Border Facility site has now been handed back to EFDC after the reinstatement works were completed satisfactorily.

The Essex Carp Show took place at the end of January and was hugely popular with several thousand visitors over the weekend.

I am pleased to report that the North Weald Airfield Master Plan will be presented to the March Cabinet.