

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



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Report reference: **AMED-001-2014/15**

Date of meeting: **14 July 2014**

Portfolio: **Asset Management & Economic Development**

Subject: **Economic Development Team Progress Report**

Responsible Officer: **Mike Warr** (01992 564593)

Democratic Services Officer: **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:

Subject: **Economic Development Team Progress Report**

1. Economic Development Strategy - A draft Economic Development Strategy document has been compiled to act as a high-level framework within which the work of the Economic Development section will be guided. It is intended to be a light-touch document which highlights the broad economic development priorities adopted by Cabinet and acts as a catalyst to look in more detail at the specific Economic Development Plans (EDPs) which will sit behind it. It will be brought forward for adoption by members later in the year, once further work to develop the EDPs has been undertaken.

2. Economic Development Priorities and Plans - As mentioned above a range of economic development priorities have previously adopted by Cabinet. In terms of setting out a work programme for the Economic Development team over the course of the year further prioritisation has taken place enabling us to break down the higher level priorities into specific tasks and actions. It is intended to produce a suite of Economic Development Plans (EDPs), each addressing a specific area of focus, which will provide the finer detail of what is planned to address the needs of those places, sectors or themes.

We are in liaison with our colleagues in Forward Planning and are aware of the report currently being undertaken by Hardisty Jones consultants, looking at the Economic and Employment Evidence to Support the Epping Forest Local Plan and Economic Development Strategy. As well as the inception meeting for this report subsequent meetings have also been attended with the consultants.

A greater understanding of our Town Centres and their needs has been identified as a key first stage for us and within this, the current status and needs of Waltham Abbey Town Centre has been further identified as our key priority and our lead project.

3. Waltham Abbey Town Centre - Specifically in terms of Waltham Abbey Town Centre a number of initiatives are already underway. A firm of surveyors (Colliers) are being commissioned to review and identify the physical capacity and level of demand for improved retail development in the high street, both on land owned by the council and on land in the town centre more generally. In addition to this, we are commissioning an economic consultant to review the available unemployment data for Waltham Abbey and further advise us on the present status, patterns emerging, and need for intervention etc. as regards unemployment within the town. It is hoped that this will highlight any particular problem areas within the town which may not currently be visible in higher-level statistics.

In conjunction with the Waltham Abbey Town Centre Partnership (TCP) the Economic Development team is supporting the upcoming (15th July) Waltham Abbey High Street Summit which will seek to gather the views and thoughts of the town's businesses and residents on what the High Street needs to both survive and thrive. The TCP are organising the event but a number of officers from both Epping Forest DC & Essex CC are intending to give very short talks or presentations to hopefully generate debate and discussion around the future of the High Street.

In advance of the summit we have started to look at available resources to assist the businesses of Waltham Abbey and equip them with the knowledge and skills they will need to push their businesses on. Using both the EFDC website, future editions of our business briefings and liaison with the Town Centre Partnerships we would hope to be able to draw businesses attention to these resources such as online courses and seminars, local college courses and freely available guides to a variety of business activities.

4. Town Centres - It is intended that once the Waltham Abbey Town Centre EDP has been formalised in terms of layout and content, each town centre in the district will receive the same level of attention following the established format but making each one bespoke to the particular location where appropriate.

We are also commissioning consultants to refresh the Town Centres Study completed for us in 2010. Peter Brett associates will undertake this work which will look at all six of our town centres and report back both on the status of the centres and opportunities which exist to develop them. To supplement this knowledge we are also intending to purchase updated Experian GOAD plans where available for town centres along with a range of analyses of the make-up of the centres. Where GOAD plans are not available we have commenced a programme of town centre visits to update our in-house maps of the centres to ensure we are aware of any significant shop unit vacancies.

A meeting of the Town Team (EFDC, TCP chairs and the Chamber of Commerce) has recently taken place at which the outcomes of the first round of applications to the EFDC Town Centres Enhancement Initiative was revealed. A total of 5 applications were received with over £21000 being awarded for projects. In addition 5 out of the 6 TCPs have now received their annual admin grant, the remaining TCP not having yet submitted their

paperwork.

Finally, to further enhance our understanding of the businesses we have in and around our towns we are meeting with Burrows Communications Ltd to discuss the production of a verified business database for EFDC at zero financial cost. This would give us both a deeper understanding of what businesses exist in the district and also enable us to effectively communicate with our businesses when the need arises.

5. Marketing and Promotion - The boosting of the Economic Development team with an Administration Assistant has enabled the team to make rapid progress in developing the social media / online workstream. Beginning in early June it has been possible for the facebook pages for both One Shops Local and Visit Epping Forest to be given regular, if not daily, attention. This has resulted not only in a noticeable increase in the level of traffic to the pages but also the level to which we are able to engage with online communities. Our online reach (the extent to which we are getting our message out into the online domain) has also significantly increased.

The latest edition of the One Business Briefing has also been published. This promotes much of the work of the LSP One Epping Forest in driving certain elements of the economic development programme forward but also was used to highlight opportunities for local businesses arising out of the Tour de France and focus in on Business Support initiatives such as the Visit Waltham Abbey app.

6. Partner Liaison - The Economic Development team continue to liaise, support and attend meetings with a number of Partner Organisations. These include, at varying intervals:

- Lea Valley Food Taskforce
- Essex Economic Development Officer group
- Essex Tourism Officer Group
- Epping Forest Town Team
- Eastern Plateau Local Action Group
- Stansted Airport Local Authority Forum
- Tourism Taskforce
- West Essex Skills & Learning Forum
- Waltham Abbey Town Centre Partnership (previously we had attended meetings of the Waltham Abbey 'Portas' Town Team and this has now been merged into the TCP.)

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

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management - N/A

Equality and Diversity - N/A

Did the initial assessment of the proposals contained in this report for relevance to the Council's general equality duties, reveal any potentially adverse equality implications? N/A

Where equality implications were identified through the initial assessment process, has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? N/A

What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process?

N/A

How have the equality implications identified through the Equality Impact Assessment been addressed in this report in order to avoid discrimination against any particular group?

N/A