

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 28 July 2015

Subject: Assets and Economic Development

Portfolio Holder: Councillor A Grigg

Recommending:

That the report of the Assets and Economic Development Portfolio Holder be noted.

Staffing – A new Assistant Asset Management & Economic Development officer started in mid-May.

Eastern Plateau – The Eastern Plateau has now been officially confirmed as one of the Local Action Groups (LAG) to receive EU LEADER funding via Defra / RPA and is beginning its marketing to ensure rural businesses are aware of its existence and the opportunities they offer for businesses to access funding for growth. The programme is part of the Rural Development Program for England (RDPE) and will be managed by East Hertfordshire Council on behalf of the Eastern Plateau Local Action Group (LAG) which is made up of local rural sector representatives including Epping Forest District Council.

The Eastern Plateau LAG have been awarded approx. £1.8m (subject to £/€ exchange rates) and the aim of the funding is to create jobs and promote business growth in rural areas. It will focus on projects covering farm productivity, rural tourism, the provision of rural services, culture and heritage forest/woodland productivity and small business growth.

The Economic Development team have already met with a potential project located within the district that is interested in securing LEADER funding and it is hoped that many more of our local rural businesses will look into this scheme and access vital funding.

One Business Briefing – The Economic Development Team has launched a new 'look and feel' business newsletter. The bumper Spring 2015 edition provides information on the Eastern Plateau scheme; an update of the rollout of Superfast broadband across Essex and Epping Forest district; a top 10 tips feature for creative businesses; details of award schemes and competitions that our district's businesses might want to enter; and a host of other interesting information and articles. The Briefing is sent to hundreds of local businesses and partners with circulation increasing with each edition. Early feedback on the Spring edition has been very positive.

District Centres Economic Development Fund – The Economic Development Team is working with colleagues in Democratic Services to finalise and launch this fund for 2015/16. In previous years a similar fund has existed to enable partners to bid to undertake projects to support the local main high streets. This year's scheme is to be widened to enable smaller centres to bid as well as Economic Development Officers to propose projects. The scheme aims to encourage partners to think creatively about how they can sustainably promote their own town centres and create initiatives that have a lasting impact on their town/ village centre economy.

Business Survey – As reported previously, Essex County Council has now completed its business survey. The Economic Development Team has recently received the raw data for Epping Forest District and is analysing this and will report further.

Tourism Development – As a result of the recent Tourism Conference, a number of local visitor-related businesses have asked to become more involved in the work of the tourism board. The conference also put a number of local businesses in contact with Eastern Plateau with a view to gaining funding for tourism-related business expansion projects.

The visiteppingforest.org website continues to be a major source of information for those interested in the district and the number of information requests continues to grow in line with the hits on the site.

Work is being carried out on a proposal to stage a major event at North Weald Airfield in 2016 to celebrate its centenary. This would combine an air and vehicle show with a major event on the Epping Ongar Railway.

A stand has been booked for the important Excursions Show at Alexandra Palace, early next year.

Branding and awareness will be the focus of a leaflet push starting this summer, which will see branded leaflet holders sited in heavy foot-fall outlets across the district.

Other projects at an early stage include a Jazz Festival and a resident's summer offer reward card/ voucher.

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)
- Invest Essex and Essex Innovation Programme
- 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 & Visitor Board
- West Essex Skills & Learning Forum
- Waltham Abbey Town Partnership

The Team has been busy with enquiries from individuals looking to set up in business locally and existing businesses looking to invest in the district. Team members have also attended the following key events in recent weeks - Harlow Business Exhibition, the launch of the SELEP Rural Strategy, workshops at Essex level on European Funding and Inward Investment and a visit (with Planning Policy colleagues) to Abbey View Produce glasshouses and packhouse to understand more about its operation.

Major Projects – Epping Forest Shopping Park

We are making good progress on the development of the Epping Forest Shopping Park. As a result of the decision taken at the Extraordinary Council on the 23 June, the purchase of Polofind's interest in the scheme was completed on Friday 3 July 2015. The design team who now have the Council as their sole clients, have been developing all the necessary procurement documentation for the retail park, which must now be tendered in accordance with OEJU Regulations. The Highways design is awaiting final sign-off by the County

Council, but should be soon proceeding also to tender. Marketing activity is ongoing with for key anchor tenants expressing a good level of interest, giving confidence in the ability to pre-let to a good level.

Oakwood Hill Depot

With respect to Oakwood Hill Depot, the Tender for Construction of the new facility was agreed by Cabinet on the 11 June and the contractor is currently mobilising on site. Target date for completion is April 2016.

St John's Road, Epping

A sale price has been agreed with the County Council for the Junior School site. The Council has requested further legal advice with respect to State Aid. Contract documentation is nearing completion and Essex County Council's Cabinet are due to formally consider the final terms of the disposal in early September. The mixed use scheme being promoted by Frontier Estates will be subject to a Full Planning Application with the necessary consultation.

North Weald Airfield

As a result of the marketing exercise undertaken by the Council's consultants Savills, three expressions of interest have been received from potential partners to support the Council in promoting aviation related activities. The proposals are due to be evaluated and the outcome reported to the next Asset Management Cabinet Committee in October 2015.

Ongar Academy

Planning permission has been granted for the temporary school facilities at the rear of the Leisure Centre with the supporting Licence arrangements completed. The Academy is currently bringing in the demountable accommodation to host the first intake of pupils due to start in September.

Hillhouse Community Hub

The proposal to relocate Waltham Abbey Swimming Pool to the Hillhouse Site, bringing together a new GP Surgery and supported housing accommodation for older people has been subject to an initial financial assessment. A more detailed masterplanning exercise is due to commence exploring potential layouts. At this point the work is at a feasibility stage and options will be brought forward for formal consideration.

Town Mead Depot

Further advice from the Environment Agency confirms that due to flood risk, the site is unlikely to progress for any form of residential development and therefore alternative uses may need to be considered.