

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 29 September 2015

Subject: Asset and Economic Development

Portfolio Holder: Councillor A Grigg

Recommending:

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

Business Support / Growth Hub

The brand new online business support, advice and growth hub has now been launched for businesses in Greater Essex. The BEST (Business Essex, Southend, & Thurrock) Growth Hub is being provided by the South East Local Enterprise Partnership and acts as a portal to enable local businesses to access the support they require. A tender exercise is nearing completion to procure a contractor to offer one-to-one business support as part of the Growth Hub package. We will be running a feature on the Growth Hub in the next edition of One Business Briefing and will be working with partners to capitalise on other opportunities to raise awareness of the Growth Hub's offer. New business enquiries received by the Economic Development team are being directed to the Hub for support.

Stakeholder Engagement

The Economic Development team has been actively engaging with local stakeholders to understand some of the issues they are facing. Meetings have been held with representatives of Buckhurst Hill and Loughton High Road town partnerships. Economic Development in conjunction with Waltham Abbey Town Partnership has been invited to submit a full application to the Essex County Council Community Infrastructure Fund (CIF) in respect of a wayfinding project in Waltham Abbey Town Centre after a successful Expression of Interest. Considerable efforts have also been made to promote the Town & Village Centres Opportunities Fund to the various town partnerships and to encourage some positive applications.

Superfast Broadband

A more detailed breakdown of the current position has been included within the Technology & Support Services Portfolio Holder's report. To sum up, the detailed design stage and subsequent rollout of the Rural Challenge Project has now begun in earnest and will hopefully see the first residents and businesses benefiting by the year-end.

Major Projects

The Cabinet are in receipt of regular monitoring reports on progress on the Epping Forest Shopping Park, which provide Members with a considerable amount of detail regarding the key issues and programme. However, I can advise Council, that since the Council purchased the interest of our previous development partner, the Project Team has maintained good momentum. The next most significant milestone is the competitive tender of the Section 278 Highways Works, which when completed will not only facilitate access to the Shopping Park, but should have a wider benefit in improving congestion in the wider locality.

Work has commenced on site on the new Depot at Oakwood Hill, which will accommodate both Grounds Maintenance and Fleet Operations relocated from Langston Road. It is hoped that the new depot will be ready for occupancy by May 2016. In the intervening period, the Museum Collection has been temporarily moved from Langston Road to a rented unit on the Oakwood Hill Estate, prior to final transfer on the opening of the refurbished District Museum in Sun Street, Waltham Abbey.

Essex County Council has made an application to the Secretary of State regarding the issue of State Aid. The Secretary of State has requested additional information which may delay this approval to the purchase until the end of September 2015. Dialogue is ongoing with Epping Town Council and Frontier Estates to facilitate their relocation. The other current user of the site, the Council's Housing Repairs Service, are actively exploring options for alternative accommodation.

As a result of a marketing exercise undertaken by the Council's Consultants Savills, four Expressions of Interest in partnering with the Council to maximise aviation activity have been received. Interviews are currently being held with the interested parties and an evaluation being undertaken, the results of which, will be reported to the Asset Management Cabinet Committee in October.

Finally, I can report that the Ongar Academy, who have leased an area of land to the rear of Ongar Leisure Centre, (prior to their purchase of the playing fields to provide a new Secondary School), successfully opened their new interim premises earlier this month. The temporary school are utilising facilities in the adjacent Leisure Centre to deliver their physical education curriculum. The new permanent school will be subject to a full planning application later this year.