

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



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Report reference: AMED-001-2016/17

Date of meeting: 30 June 2016

Portfolio: Asset Management and Economic Development

Subject: Economic Development Report

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Democratic Services: 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:

1. Visitor Economy

Economic Development has been working with colleagues in Planning to commission a Visitor Accommodation Needs Assessment for the district. This work will look at all forms of visitor accommodation, including serviced (hotels, pub accommodation etc) and non-serviced accommodation (self-catering, camping, moorings etc). As reported previously, the main driver of this work is the preparation of the new Local Plan and the Study will form a key part of the evidence base helping to inform tourism policies in the Local Plan.

Beyond planning policy though, the Study potentially has the scope to inform broader interventions within the Council e.g. through the Economic and Tourism Development Teams and perhaps in the consideration of the future use of the Council's own assets etc. At the time of writing this update, interviews have been undertaken with potential consultants with the final decision on appointment to be made imminently.

A presentation has also been received from a potential provider of a new tourism website under the Visit Epping Forest banner. Work will now commence to realise the vision for a

dynamic new website which is intended to greater promote and support the district's valuable visitor economy. The initial procurement and build of the website is being funded through monies awarded by the Town and Village Centres Opportunities Fund.

Following representation from the Tourism and Visitor Board members that a tourism conference towards the end of the year might be more useful than during English Tourism Week in March as staged currently, a decision was made to host a second conference this year on 14th October and this will once again take place at the Waltham Abbey Marriott Hotel.

Addressing previously raised concerns around local public transport, the Tourism and Visitor Board discussed the idea of a tourism bus travelling between attractions. It was felt that this would be welcomed and especially effective when major events were being held. It was agreed that members would use the forthcoming tourism conference to see if dates for major events could be synchronised making the case for transport even more compelling. It was also agreed that opportunities to access funding for such a scheme should also be investigated.

The Visit Epping Forest leaflet has recently been enlarged, updated and reprinted. As part of an awareness building campaign, leaflet holders have been purchased and the new leaflets placed in high-traffic visitor outlets across the district. The leaflets feature our major attractions plus information on destination towns and villages in the district and will help drive traffic to the Visit Epping Forest website, particularly important in view of the planned refresh of the website mentioned above.

2. Town Centres

The next Town Teams meeting is scheduled to take place on 27th June. A number of presentations are planned for that meeting looking at town centre evacuation plans as well as findings from a recent Future of Town Centres seminar.

It is hoped to also soft-launch the 2016/17 Town & Village Centres Opportunities Fund to the town teams present at that meeting. A report presenting a new policy document for the fund, setting out the parameters within which a wider range of organisations can apply to the fund, is due to be presented to Cabinet for review as part of the next cabinet cycle and subject to this being approved a wider and more concerted launch and promotional campaign for the fund will then take place.

3. Business Support

Pop Up Cafe

The Economic Development Team is pleased to be testing a new format business event in the district in July. The Pop Up Business Café will be held at the newly-refurbished Epping Forest District Museum in Waltham Abbey on Wednesday 13 July, 10am to 1pm. BEST Growth Hub (which provides business support across the Greater Essex area) will be helping to coordinate and ran a similar event in Southend earlier this year which was very successful.

The basic concept is to draw together a small number of business support and local business professionals in an informal setting and to invite local businesses and those looking to start-up in business. The businesses will be attracted by the chance to speak with a business professional (say marketing, accounting, HR etc) for 10/15 minutes, networking and of course tea and cake. Whilst we are unable to pay the local business professionals for their time we would hope that they may see benefit in terms of getting promotion for themselves. We currently have three local businesses signed-up to provide advice and have approached several others.

Database

The Team's exercise to improve the information and contact information it holds for local businesses within the district has progressed well. The work is helping in the delivery of a number of the Team's current projects and means that its regular email updates (on business events, funding, training opportunities, awards etc) are reaching a bigger audience locally and similarly, so too will One Business Briefing from now on. Although still to be confirmed at present, it is likely that there will be a further phase to the recent tele-research exercise to collect further details to be conducted in July.

4. Broadband

Business Breakfast

To further promote take-up by businesses of the ultrafast fibre broadband network being built within Epping Forest District by Gigaclear plc as part of the Superfast Essex Rural Challenge Project (RCP), the Economic Development team will be hosting a business breakfast aimed at the businesses within the RCP as well as businesses from outside the area whose services may be more effectively utilised with an ultrafast network.

It is planned that as well as a number of speakers presenting to the audience about the opportunities an ultrafast network makes possible, the event will also represent an excellent opportunity for local businesses to network with key Business to Business (B2B) providers, both local and national and make useful connections. The event will take place at Mulberry House, High Ongar on September 13th at 7.00am and promotion of the event will shortly begin in earnest. Liaison with local parish councils will also take place to ensure awareness of the event reaches as many businesses as possible in the RCP area.

Ultrafast Network

The physical build of the RCP network continues at pace and to date, over 61km of network has been built, installing connection points outside over 800 premises. Having started in Bobbingworth, the network has moved on through Moreton, Fyfield, Norton Heath, Abbess Roding and Toot Hill and will continue throughout the remainder of the year to areas such as Willingale, The Lavers, Sheering, Ongar and North Weald. The project has experienced some delays but remains due to be completed in early 2017.

5. 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 (SE LEP)
- Invest Essex and Essex Innovation Programme
- Lea Valley Food Taskforce
- 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

The Economic Development team have also attended the Superfast Essex Super-Connected Business Conference at Chelmsford City Racecourse.

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

Due Regard Record

This page shows **which groups of people are affected** by the subject of this report. It sets out **how they are affected** and how any **unlawful discrimination** they experience can be eliminated. It also includes information about how **access to the service(s)** subject to this report can be improved for the different groups of people; and how they can be assisted to **understand each other better** as a result of the subject of this report.

S149 Equality Act 2010 requires that due regard must be paid to this information when considering the subject of this report.

None as this is a monitoring report.