

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



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Report reference: *AMED-002-2019/20*

Date of meeting: *27 June 2019*

Portfolio: Commercial and Regulatory Services

Subject: Economic Development Report

Responsible Officer: J Houston / J Chandler (01992 564094)

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Recommendations/Decisions Required:

(1) To note the progress and work programme of the Council's Economic Development Section and provide feedback if Members wish.

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. Economic Strategy

Consultation on 'Nurturing Growth' (a discussion paper on developing an economic strategy) closed on 27th May. The consultation involved direct mailings to 150 recipients plus copies to key stakeholders and presentations to a special meeting of the local Chamber of Commerce and to the One Partnership Board. It was also published on the council's website with a supporting social media campaign.

Over 30 responses were received. However, a concern highlighted in the responses was related to the limited duration of the consultation period and a general lack of awareness of the process. Therefore, following Members' direction, it has been suggested that the consultation period be extended for two months, to enable greater engagement and to host a major stakeholder conference in September to review responses, amend the document and begin the production of a delivery plan. However, this will subject to a presentation to Cabinet Committee on the Economic Development resourcing proposals, before its meeting in July.

2. Digital Innovation Zone

The most recent of the ongoing series of Smart Place Seminars was held on Friday 26th April. 'Empowering Community and Voluntary Services Through Digital' took place at Fletcher's Lea in Ware and attracted both a wide range of local and national speakers and numerous delegates from charity and voluntary sector organisations, service commissioners and interested businesses from across the DIZ. The event explored how the voluntary and community sector can be enabled to use digital to achieve better outcomes for communities and delegates were also introduced to the design-led approach of the Centre for the Acceleration of Social Technology (CAST) who are delivering a follow-up workshop on June 21st to develop this design-led training further. A further follow-up event is planned for September to pull together the outcomes of these two events and to work with organisations to both further develop their ideas and to access additional support and funding to deliver them. An Executive Report from the seminar has been produced and will be available from the Resources Section of the DIZ website www.diz.org.uk

The DIZ Digital Innovation Strategy is continuing its progress through its partner organisations' decision-making procedures to seek formal endorsement of the strategy. At the time of writing the strategy was due to be considered by Cabinet on 13th June and has also been formally considered and adopted by East Herts DC, Uttlesford DC and Harlow Council. Formal letters of support are also being sought from non-local authority partners such as the community and voluntary sector organisations and a number of these have already been received. Presentations on the strategy have recently been delivered to the Hertfordshire Infrastructure Planning Partnership and the Six Authorities Leaders Group.

Digital Census – The DIZ is continuing discussions with a leading market research company on the development of a digital census that will enable the DIZ to ensure future technology initiatives are focused around the needs of the customer and end-user.

Rural Connected Communities Programme (RCCP) – An exploratory initial workshop, facilitated by CGI, was recently held with partners from across the DIZ to begin the development of use-cases that might form part of a DIZ bid to the DCMS Rural Connected Communities Programme to establish a 5G testbed within the DIZ. Very well attended and producing lots of interesting ideas this workshop will be followed up with a second event in July to develop the potential bid in the light of the DCMS RCCP workshops which will be attended by officers and the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Projects on 25th June.

3. Tourism and Visitor Board

The visiteppingforest.org website continues to grow in content and number of visitors. A section dedicated to Countrycare has recently been added with details of all their reserves and walks together with ten downloadable guides in PDF form. Other areas added include a focus on the district's markets and the start of a section listing famous people and blue plaques.

Analysis of traffic to the website over the recent bank holidays, and in-depth analysis of the longest at Easter, has shown a 40% increase in visitors and 60% increase in the number of pages visited comparing 2019 with 2018. Over the Easter weekend this equated to a daily count of just under 1000 visitors and 2,300 page views. Weather played a part in the increase with Easter 2019 being unseasonably warm whilst the same period in 2018 was unseasonably cold. However, taking this into account and looking at the overall increases this year as we approach the summer season, we are targeting 182,000 visitors and 500,000 pageviews by the end of 2019 against 2018 figures of 60,000 and 133,000 respectively.

In line with the recommendations of the last Tourism and Visitor Conference, officers are

leading in the development of cross-border working on tourism development across the five districts (Epping Forest, Broxbourne, Harlow, East Herts and Uttlesford). The latest economic value studies have been compiled for all the districts and combined to reveal a total income of £879,826,100 (EF £226,210,600) from 14,218,100 visits (EF 3,878,100) supporting 15,645 jobs (EF 2,899) accounting for an average of 7% of employment (EF 8.4%). For Epping Forest, the latest figures equate to an over 7% increase in numbers of trips, value of tourism and increase in jobs over the previous year. Officers will be leading a major workshop with partners from the private and public sectors, at Stansted on June 18th, looking at proposals for investment in enabling infrastructure and investment into joint promotion and coordination. Outcomes and recommendations will be reported to the next AMED meeting.

4. Tourism

The Green Arc was an initiative to promote and coordinate investment in green infrastructure running from the Thames to Barnet. The One Partnership has recently taken over the project, a consultant to lead work, commissioned using funding inherited from the Arc, has been employed and steps are being taken to establish a Steering Board to take work forward. The first of these steering board meetings has been arranged for the 12th of July. It is expected that there will be representatives and members attending from the Greater London Authority (GLA) EFDC, Essex County Council, Corporation of London, Friends of Epping Forest and the Woodland Trust.

The aim of the Green Arc project is to focus on where London meets the countryside, looking at joint initiatives to increase and protect canopy, explore new ways of developing corridors to allow residents and visitors to enjoy the green and unique areas in this quadrant as well as innovating in community involvement in programmes. A meeting with the GIS team at EFDC has seen the Green Arc begin work to properly map the green assets that exist in this quadrant.

5. Skills

Officers are continuing to work closely with the new management team at New City College, Epping Forest Campus. In line with member direction, officers have been working to expand representation for the district within the New City College governance structures and are instrumental in establishing a local governance body to ensure effective representation from the local community and employers. Officers have also had a series of meetings with senior figures at New City College in order to progress the local initiative. It is hoped that this work will come to fruition over the next few weeks and a further report can be brought to the next AMED meeting.

6. Bioboost

Officers continue to work on the delivery of the EU-funded Bioboost programme in cooperation with colleagues in Belgium and Holland. In May the UK Partners hosted an event within the Epping Forest District for colleagues from businesses and universities from both these countries. A key area of discussion was around securing funding for the proposed Cucumber and Food Festival in Waltham Abbey, which will allow Bioboost partners to engage with the public to test the viability of products they are developing using surplus products produced as a by-product of the glasshouse growing industry. EU Partners have agreed that up to £15k can be reserved for this event scheduled for Saturday 26th September. A working group from the Waltham Abbey Town Partnership, Vibrant Partners and local businesses are currently working on this event with the local growing industry.

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.

Equality Analysis:

The Equality Act 2010 requires that the Public Sector Equality Duty is actively applied in decision-making. This means that the equality information provided to accompany this report is essential reading for all members involved in the consideration of this report. The equality information is provided as an Appendix to this report.