

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



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Report reference: AMED-004-2019/20

Date of meeting: 10 October 2019

Portfolio: Community and Partnership Services

Subject: Economic Development Report

Responsible Officer: John Houston/Julie Chandler (01992 564094)

Democratic Services: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470)

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 27 May. 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 to give more time for public response.

Currently officers are preparing to release a revised version of the document. Content has been added to make the document more substantive in terms of actions and to accommodate issues raised by respondents in the first consultation period. A special stakeholder conference has been organized for 13 November 2019 at Theydon Village Hall to give local partners a further opportunity to influence the strategy. This will be a workshop based conference focused on the themes contained in the strategy. The new deadline for responses to the consultation will be mid-December.

2. Essex + Herts Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ)

The DIZ has recently approved and implemented a number of governance and resourcing recommendations that will enable appropriate focus and time to be committed to the delivery of its ambitious work programme and the development of a delivery plan to deliver the recommendations of its Digital Innovation Strategy. The appointment of a joint-funded Programme Manager for the DIZ on an 18-month secondment will be supported by the Council's recent appointment of a Higher Level Digital Apprentice.

A positive response has previously been received from DCMS to a DIZ bid to the Local Full Fibre Network programme. The proposed project would deliver enhanced fibre connectivity to the Essex + Herts Digital Innovation Zone based around the geographical locations of a number of public sector assets. The Programme Manager is continuing to work through a number of operational issues with partners to understand how the project might practically be delivered and once this is established a detailed process of assurance will be undertaken with DCMS before practical delivery can begin.

The DIZ website diz.org.uk will shortly undergo a series of upgrades to ensure that it acts as a vibrant and interesting single point of contact for all things digital of interest. These upgrades will enable the promotion of upcoming DIZ events including video content as well as act as a resource for all previous events the DIZ has delivered and will be supported by the concurrent development of social media presence for the DIZ.

3. Tourism and Visitor Board

Traffic to the tourism website continues to grow. Content is continually expanded and refreshed and navigation improved in line with customer demand as indicated by regular analytics reviews. The home page now contains features and links on the most requested information and menu sections have been created to reflect top areas of interest, for example countryside, museums and camping. Each Bank Holiday peak has seen a significant increase in traffic over previous years with the August Bank Holiday Sunday and Monday recording over 2,500 visitors.

Officers continue to lead on a cross-border collaboration on tourism development with Harlow, Broxbourne, East Herts and Uttlesford and the recent meeting hosted by Stansted Academy combined with a very well attended preview and workshop on the new cycle route initiative across the area. The latest value figures for the visitor and tourism economy are now available and a report for Epping Forest District is being obtained alongside reports for the other the cross-border areas. A major focus of the cross-border work going forward is developing a bid for the new Tourism Zones initiative, part of the Governments Tourism Sector Deal. The bid requirements in terms of applicants and objectives are very much in line with the work already being undertaken locally, although exact details are not being released until December.

The date for this year's Tourism Conference is 5 December 2019, and once again this is being hosted and sponsored by the Marriott Hotel Waltham Abbey. As with the 2018 conference, this will be very much a collaborative event with participation from our cross-border colleagues. In line with the imminent launch of the bidding process, our Tourism Zone development will form a major part of the conference theme and workshops. To this end, ministerial departments have been contacted with a request to provide a speaker to update the conference on the Tourism Sector Deal and launch of Tourism Zones.

4. Green Arc:

Protecting expanding and enhancing the quality of the green infrastructure of this area around the capital is an increasing concern for people. 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 was held on 12 July 2019. It was attended by representatives from the Greater London Authority (GLA) EFDC, Essex County Council, Corporation of London, Friends of Epping Forest and the Woodland Trust and a number of other organisations.

Following this, one to one meetings have been held with Brentwood Borough Council and Thames Chase Trust to build more support for a Green Arc partnership and to understand what key issues this region faces in terms of utilising green assets.

The aim of the Green Arc project is to focus on where London meets the countryside, looking at joint initiatives to increase and protect tree canopy/coverage, 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 planting programmes.

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