

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



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Report reference: AMED-006-2019/20

Date of meeting: 16 January 2019

Portfolio: Community and Partnership Services

Subject: Economic Development – Progress 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 regarding Economic Development issues.

Other Options for Action:

None, as this monitoring report is for information not action.

Report:

Economic Strategy

1. The revised version of the Economic Strategy consultation paper was published on the council's website on 9 October 2019 and distribution to named external contacts began at the end of September. The consultation closed on 16 December 2019. During this period hard copies of the document were distributed to over 250 local residents and organisations and were emailed to approximately 180 key local public, private and voluntary sector partners. The document was promoted on the council's website as well as through the Council's Facebook page.

2. A number of events have been organised to support greater discussion on 'Nurturing Growth'. This includes an Economic Stakeholder Conference on 13 November 2019, attended by approximately 60 partners (see Appendix 1). This workshop-based conference firstly received presentations from a wide range of partners on the key themes of the economic strategy. These partners included business start-up owners, Essex Highways, Tourism attractions, Health employers, the Chamber of Commerce and the Rural Community Council of Essex. The conference then broke into smaller groups to review evidence and look at effective responses to the key issues raised by the speakers.

3. The Economic Strategy was also a key theme of the Chairman's annual Business Networking Event attended by over 60 partners on 28 November 2019. The annual Tourism Conference on 5 December 2019 also focused on the economic strategy and sought feedback from businesses in this sector. It was an element of a presentation to the Youth Council on 10 December 2019. The evidence from these events and all the responses received by the deadline of 16 December 2019 will be collated and used to shape the final strategy, which will be presented to the Cabinet in February for approval.

Essex + Herts Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ)

4. Work continues on the £2.1m DCMS funded DIZ Local Full Fibre Network Project led by EFDC to take it through the DCMS Assurance process. On 14 November 2019, the BDUK Projects Assurance Board formally assured Checkpoint A - 'Agree Plan' Checkpoint following evidence submitted by the DIZ team and the Checkpoint was approved with no resulting conditions or actions. Work is now focused on preparing for the Checkpoint B Assurance Board on 9 January 2020 and preparing the project to be 'Ready to Procure'.

5. On 4 November 2019, the Strategic Projects Portfolio Holder and Strategic Partnership Specialist delivered a presentation to the LGA Annual Digital Showcase alongside The Chief Digital Officer MHCLG, the Manchester Combined Authority, Norfolk County Council and West Sussex County Council on the council's development and leadership of the Essex + Herts Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ). Highlighting the work of the DIZ to adopt a 'place-based' approach and establish the local geography as a go-to area for digital innovation, the presentation has already led to a number of new engagement opportunities from a number of local authorities keen to learn more about the approach. As a follow up to that presentation the Portfolio Holder and Strategic Partnership Specialist have met with the Chair of the LGA Improvement & Innovation Board to discuss further opportunities for the DIZ to work more closely with the LGA and in particular to support other councils on their own digital innovation journey.

6. The DIZ is working with the LSCC and North London Chamber of Commerce and Enterprise to deliver a conference on 25 February 2020 at BT Tower. Sponsored by BT the "Be Part of the Next Generation of Digital Adoption" conference will include a showcase of initiatives around digital adoption - covering technology, infrastructure, investment and skills.

7. The Council, has recently had an application to the MHCLG Digital Declaration programme approved and has been published as a signatory to the declaration on the MHCLG Digital Declaration website <https://localdigital.gov.uk/commitments/>. The application was centred on two projects, firstly the DIZ Common Asset Register project that is creating a mapping tool across the five districts of the DIZ to illustrate the extent and location of the public-sector estate, and, secondly, the EFDC Citizens Online project to address digital exclusion within the Epping Forest District.

8. The 'Digital First' team, an internal council working group, has been established to promote and coordinate the use of technology and applications within the council and to ensure digital initiatives are coordinated. Thereby maximising the opportunity for shared developments.

Tourism and Visitor Board

9. The latest Tourism Value report for the District shows that the number of visitors and employment has risen once again and the total value to our economy has reached £232,766,600. The District's performance contrasts favourably with the national and regional picture where holidays decreased by 4% in England and the East of England saw a 12% drop in overnight stays with an expenditure drop of 8%.

10. The Annual Tourism Conference on 5 December 2019 brought together colleagues from tourism attractions, local businesses and other partners from across Epping Forest, Broxbourne, East Hertfordshire, Harlow and Uttlesford (see Appendix 2). This conference was again sponsored by the Marriott Hotel and Epping Forest DC/Broxbourne BC. The key theme of the workshop was preparation to submit a bid to the soon to be announced new government 'Tourism Zone' programme. Officers have also been in discussion with neighbouring London boroughs to seek their participation in the bid.

11. Following the conference officers are now establishing a cross border team to prepare a bid for the Government's new Tourism Zone programme.

12. The Visit Epping Forest website continues to grow and develop, recording its busiest Autumn day on Fireworks night when it received almost 2000 visitors to its 'What's On' pages promoting organised events across the District. A review of the last twelve months shows over 160,000 visitors to the website.

13. Having found the ideal location for the BBC's latest sitcom, "King Gary" in the district, interest in further local film location opportunities is being followed up to investigate what would be required to meet the industry's needs and expectations of a local authority and the direct and indirect economic benefits this could bring.

Skills

14. Following discussion with New City College, the Council has helped to progress the establishment of a local advisory board for the Epping Forest Campus. This advisory board will be chaired by Cllr Richard Bassett and officers are supporting New City College in the recruitment of key local businesses to participate in its work. Following an initial meeting, the terms of reference and remit has been agreed and a list of suitable local businesses representatives put forward. These will be contacted and offered the opportunity to join the group. A wider range of local businesses is also being considered, to be consulted on an ad hoc basis.

15. Officers are working with Planning colleagues to look at the requirements for skills needs that can be reflected in the council's response to planning applications, starting with the warehouse development at Dowding Way in Waltham Abbey. An initial working group has been created including input from the Business Engagement arm of New City College and the DWP.

Green Arc

16. Following Essex County Council's launch of an ambitious new program to fund an extensive program of tree planting officers are continuing to work with colleagues on the London fringes to establish a joint program to resource a major new planting program on public and private land. One to one discussions are being held with government agencies and charities such as the Woodland Trust to confirm commitment to launch a joint program on this increasingly critical subject.

17. Work is now being undertaken to revise a strategic document 'Green Arc- Issues and Options' which assesses how the Green Arc can position itself moving forward. In 2020, the intention is to hold steering group meetings with a core group of organisations seen as key to pursuing the work of the Green Arc. It is also planned to launch a Green Arc Stakeholder conference in March 2020. The conference would look at how to develop actionable priorities for the Green Arc moving forward. Members are asked for their thoughts and Ideas on planting and promoting Green spaces, these and many other Ideas will be discussed at the Green Arc conference in March 2020.

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.