

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference:

C-037-2019/20

Date of meeting:

26th March 2020



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Community and Partnerships – Cllr N Bedford

**Subject: Nurturing Growth- Delivering an Economic Development Plan
for Epping Forest District**

Responsible Officer:

John Houston (01992 564094).

Democratic Services:

Adrian Hendry (01992 564246).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) That Members note the results of the consultation on the Council's Economic Development Strategy 'Nurturing Growth' and agree the adoption of the revised strategy as set out in Appendix 1;**
- (2) That Members agree to the development of a delivery plan for Nurturing Growth, setting out a phased implementation programme that will be monitored as part of the revised corporate strategy.**
- (3) That Members agree to prioritise 4 key actions over the course of the delivery plan;**
 - i) Local High Streets**
 - ii) Rural Strategy**
 - iii) North Weald Airfield as a location of economic growth**
 - iv) Infrastructure**
- (4) That Members agree to allocate District Development Funding of £35,000 in 2020/21 and £50,000 in 2021/22 as already earmarked, for the appointment of a member of staff on a fixed term basis to deliver actions identified in the strategy including work to support the sustainability of local high streets.**

Executive Summary:

This strategy was drafted in advance of the current situation with coronavirus and ahead of the significant package of measures to support the economy announced by the Chancellor in the budget. Officers will be ensuring that the prioritization of the Delivery Plan actions align with central government guidance and the needs of the local economy.

It was agreed that the Council would produce an economic strategy following the adoption of the District's Local Plan. A strategy consultation document 'Nurturing Growth' was produced, which outlines a clear and long-term direction for economic growth across the Epping Forest District and identifies key priorities and actions that could be adopted by stakeholders across the district to achieve this. Nurturing Growth was released in draft, for consultation to a wide

range of stakeholders in April 2019 and again in September 2019. Aggregated responses to the consultation are included with this report (Appendix 2) for Members to note, along with a proposed, revised strategy document for Cabinet agreement (Appendix 1).

This report seeks Cabinet approval for the development and delivery of a five -year Economic Development Action Plan to enable the aspirations of Nurturing Growth to be realised and associated resourcing to enable this work to be undertaken, and seeks Cabinet agreement to four priorities within the Action Plan of: Local High Streets (recommendations from the Task & Finish Review), Rural Strategy, North Weald Airfield (Economic Growth) and infrastructure.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

The Nurturing Growth Strategy has been developed to provide a clear statement on the priorities and ambition of the district in terms of economic growth, at a time when the local economy faces sustained and dynamic change. A clear statement on the priorities and support for local economic growth will influence the policy and investment of a wide range of stakeholders in order to make Epping Forest 'a great place to live, work, study and do business'.

Other Options for Action:

Not to adopt the strategy in its revised form. Currently the district has no long-term plan to guide or support the local economy and the economic aspirations in the Local Plan. A series of operational priorities have been pursued over recent years and although these have been effective in the short term, there is no clear direction of travel or detailed understanding of areas of opportunity linked to regional and national plans and as such, this hampers the district's ability to bid for external economic support and funding.

Report:

- Unlike many of its neighbouring councils Epping Forest District does not have a clear, long-term strategic plan for supporting economic growth in the district and to underpin and direct bids for external or inward investment.
- With Member direction the Nurturing Growth Economic Development consultation document was therefore produced in order to support debate on the economic choices facing the district. A decision was taken early on, to provide consultation based on 'place' as opposed to economic development related to the activities of the District Council alone.
- Nurturing Growth therefore focussed on a long-term strategic vision for 'place' and outlined key priorities and a range of actions that could be undertaken. The document was produced following initial discussions with a wide range of partners from across the public and private sectors active within and outside of the district.
- Two consultation programmes were undertaken. The initial consultation in April and May 2019, based primarily on written responses, was deemed by respondents and the Members to be too short. A second consultation was launched in late September lasting until 16 December, using an amended document which was shaped by feedback from the initial consultation. The second consultation also focused more on interactive events. Presentations

were made to a specially convened Economic Stakeholder Conference in November attended by 70 local partners. (see Appendix 3) In addition presentations were made to the Chairman's Business Networking Event and the Annual Tourism conference in December. A separate event was also held with Youth Councillors. These views have helped shape the final strategy attached at (Appendix 1)

- The revised strategy is fully compliant with provisions in the local plan and offers an agreed long-term approach to managing and supporting the local economy and addressing new challenges and opportunities.

The four consistent areas highlighted in the consultation were the importance of:

- Infrastructure, the need to keep the district on the move eg transport
- Digital connectivity investment and application to keep our place competitive
- Rural and urban economic vibrancy and,
- The need to embrace work to reduce carbon emissions and grow the economy sustainably.

The revised strategy sets out a clear outcome for delivery, to 'make the district a great place to live work study and do business'. The vision from the Economic Strategy expresses this below:

"We will work hard together to make Epping Forest a great place to live, work, study and do business. A place where we create prosperity that everyone can share investing in our resident's skills and supporting our businesses to grow and thrive getting the most out of our location next to London and in the Cambridge corridor. We will become a place of ambition and innovation, recognised for its digital infrastructure and investment, its work to meet challenging carbon reduction targets and its support to its existing and new businesses. Providing the right space for growth and keeping taxes low."

A number of specific priorities for work are set out in the revised strategy to direct work and investment, building on the work of the local plan these include:

- **Vibrant, diverse and resilient high streets** - Maintaining and developing the offer from, and footfall on, our high streets, to meet the challenges of online retailing and the expectations of shoppers and residents.
- **Helping rural areas thrive** - Developing a new Rural Strategy to ensure our rural communities are sustainable in the long-term and can share fully in the district's growth and prosperity.
- **A place for entrepreneurs and businesses to thrive** - Finding new spaces and new opportunities and approaches to support business start-ups through intensifying the use of existing industrial, retail and employment land and accessing external grants.
- **Delivering 21st century infrastructure making this the best place in Essex to do business**- Securing further investment from public and private sectors in enhancements to our road, rail, tube, digital networks and employment sites and delivering integrated transport plans.
- **Exploiting opportunities and developments outside the district** - Making sure workers and businesses can sustainably access jobs, contracts and investment from growth in London, Stansted Airport, Harlow, Cambridge and

beyond.

- **Building partnerships that deliver** - Working more closely with investors such as government, Local Enterprise Partnerships, neighbouring councils and research and innovation bodies to coordinate activity and better support cross-border and cross-sector working and fast track delivery on our climate change commitments.
- **Meeting the skills challenge together** - Giving all our residents and local businesses access to first rate education, skills and training opportunities throughout life, to support their ability to access the best jobs, and respond effectively through up-skilling to changing employment opportunities both within and outside the district.

The consultation also set out a number of specific actions and programmes that could form the core of a delivery programme, and these were included following discussion with external stakeholders. These actions have not been significantly challenged through the consultation process and will therefore form the starting point for the proposed delivery plan, which will be brought before Cabinet at the earliest opportunity.

- Following member approval of the overall strategy, officers will prepare a detailed delivery plan which sets out phasing and resourcing and key milestones for approval. This will include items from the findings of the Local High Streets Task & Finish Review Panel.

Resource Implications:

The strategy will be delivered primarily through existing resources, although funding from the District Development Fund is requested to enable a particular focus on work to develop sustainable local High Streets. In addition, work will be undertaken with neighbouring partners to target external investment and grants.

Legal and Governance Implications:

There are none arising directly from this report. Delivery of the strategy and its' programmes will be managed through AMED, Cabinet and the One Epping Forest Partnership. However, as a key council plan, formal approval for this strategy should be given by council.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

A core element of the strategy is the need to generate economic growth and prosperity while protecting the green and unique character of the district and meeting climate change responsibilities. It also aims to increase prosperity and challenge some of the economic determinants of health inequality.

Consultation Undertaken:

The revised strategy has been subject to intensive consultation as set out in this report.

Background Papers:

See Appendices

Risk Management:

The strategy has been drafted with resourcing and capacity constraints in mind. However, much of the work will be dependent on the ability to bid for and secure funding from external organisations such as central government, SELEP, Herts LEP and neighbouring statutory and private sector bodies. The strategy is designed to be a plan for 'place' and this necessarily means contributions from other organisations will be at the core of the plan. This will require that the council works more in a partnership manner to build coalitions that can deliver and support joint programs and joint investment.