

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 21 December 2017

Subject: Asset Management and Economic Development

Portfolio Holder: Councillor A Grigg

Recommending:

That the report of the Asset Management and Economic Development Portfolio Holder be noted.

1. Town Centres

Waltham Abbey Wayfinding Project – I am pleased to advise that the initial installation programme for the Waltham Abbey Wayfinding project was completed in week commencing 20 November resulting in 14 of the proposed 15 signs being installed. On the whole the installation process was undertaken very smoothly with very little disruption to the town centre, its businesses or visitors. The installation of the final sign will be completed at a future date still to be confirmed as well as the remediation of a small number of snagging issues which will be addressed by the contractors. To date, the response to the new signs has been positive.

2. Visitor Economy

2017 Tourism Conference – The Economic Development Team delivered Visit Epping Forest's 2017 Tourism and Visitor Conference on 20 October at the Marriott Hotel Waltham Abbey with sponsorship from the hotel. Over 70 delegates registered and the feedback was very positive. Speakers included Cllr Gagan Mohindra outlining Essex County Council's support for business, Andrew Keeling from Hotel Solutions presenting its findings around local visitor accommodation demand and opportunities and Caroline Jenkins from Vibrant Partnerships, and a Tourism and Visitor Board member, outlining the new Visit Epping Forest Tourism Strategy. A comprehensive report on the Conference is being published.

3. Business Support

Meet the Buyer – In conjunction with Epping Forest Chamber of Commerce, the Economic Development team organised a Meet the Buyer Conference on 23 November, to enable local businesses to meet face-to-face with some of the biggest buyers in and around the District. Small- and medium- sized enterprises were able to understand how big organisations in the public and private sector buy, what they procure, how much they procure, and opportunities available. The event attracted over 70 delegates, representing a wide variety of sectors from aviation, health, research, tourism, and education. I was pleased to attend this event and meet some of the businesses working in our area. The Team secured sponsorship from the Marriott Hotel Waltham Abbey and the event included speakers from London Stansted Airport, Public Health England, Essex County Council, Epping Forest College, and Vibrant Partnerships.

Eastern Plateau Funding - The Economic Development Team is continuing its work with the Eastern Plateau Local Area Action Group (LAG). As reported previously, the Group continues to perform well in terms of its allocation of funding to date and a request is being made to the Rural Payments Agency for the Group to access additional funds. A further project has been approved in the district for a grant of c. £175,000 towards a project exceeding £1.25m. The Team will report more detail as soon as all contract matters are

finalised. A good stream of project enquiries is also being fed through to the Eastern Plateau Team and so we are positive that more applications will be forthcoming.

4. Food Sector

Closing the Gap: State of the area's food industry – The Team has supported The Lea Valley Food Board to complete this report. It follows an interim report published in 2014, Growing the Future, which took stock of the area's food industry. It will be published shortly and launched in January 2018.

BioBoost Project - The Team continues to work with the Food Board on this. In November the nine project partners from the Netherlands, Belgium and the UK met at the National Institute of Agricultural Botany (NIAB) in Cambridge for a partners meeting. This was followed the next day by a BioBoost seminar, attended by 80 people from various public and private sector organisations in the food industry. The topic focused on getting more out of horticultural waste and showcased some of the BioBoost projects doing just that.

Major Projects

I am pleased to report that with the recent opening of Aldi and J.D Sports, and with Next due to open on the 19 December. There are only three vacant units left at the Epping Forest Shopping Park, for which we have good interest from other potential tenants. Trading has been brisk at the Shopping Park, with very positive feedback received on the retail offer. As Members may be aware, the car parking at the Shopping Park is controlled by ANPR cameras allowing shoppers 3 hours free shopping. With the opening of Aldi the cameras have been activated and enforcement is now in place.

The Section 278 Roadworks have almost reached the point of practical completion and final road safety audits are taking place. The improvement scheme appears to be working well with less congestion experienced at peak times.

I can also report that we have disposed of Lindsay House in Epping which the Council declared surplus to requirements at a sum in excess of our original valuation. In addition, progress continues to be made on the final terms of the Tri-partite agreement to bring forward the St John's Road Development. It is hoped that this will be achieved by the time of the Council meeting.