

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-049-2014/15
Date of meeting: 1 December 2014



Portfolio: Asset Management & Economic Development
Subject: District Centres Economic Development Fund
Responsible Officer: Mike Warr (01992 564593)
Democratic Services: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) That a District Development Fund growth bid in the sum of £35,000 be agreed to establish a District Centres Economic Development Fund for 2015/2016;**

Executive Summary:

During 2013/14 the Council agreed to fund a £35,000 Town Centres Fund which enabled a wider set of Partners to undertake projects to support the local main High Streets. This fund was again made available during the 2014/15 financial year to enable town centre partnerships to make further project bids. It is proposed to continue the good work generated by this fund by making a further amount of £35,000 available for partnerships to bid for in 2015/16. However, it is also proposed to widen out the eligibility of the fund to enable smaller centres in the district to be included and to allow Council Economic Development Officers to propose projects. It is therefore proposed that the monies be allocated to a new District Centres Economic Development Fund for 2015/16.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

Making these funds available for the town centre partnerships to bid for, encourages them to think creatively about how they can sustainably promote their town centres and create initiatives that have a lasting impact on their town centre economy. By widening eligibility to take part in the scheme these benefits can be spread to the wider economy and have an impact on the economies of smaller centres throughout the district. By encouraging district-wide initiatives the impact of this investment can be further widened to benefit other local economies elsewhere in the district.

Other Options for Action:

To not make the funds available.

To make the funds available in some other format or via a revised scheme.

Report:

- During 2013/14 the Council agreed to fund a £35,000 Town Centres Fund which enabled town centre partnerships, including the chamber of commerce, to undertake projects to support the local main High Streets.

2. This fund was again made available during the 2014/15 financial year to enable those partnerships to make further project bids.

3. The partnerships are encouraged to propose creative local bids that can equally be applied on a district-wide basis. This can therefore create local impacts that have wider benefits as they are implemented or adopted elsewhere. They are also asked to consider the longer-term impact and sustainability of their proposals thereby using investment in the present to secure ongoing benefits for their town centres in the future. Finally the partnerships are also encouraged to put forward proposals which reflect the economic development priorities agreed by Cabinet at its meeting of 3 February 2014.

4. With the scheme having now run for two successful years it is suggested that the importance of district-wide and sustainable initiatives, plus the promotion of the Council's agreed economic development priorities be further emphasised to the partnerships for any proposals in 2015/16 and that they be actively encouraged to work collaboratively to achieve this.

5. In addition, it is proposed that the scheme be widened out into a District Centres Economic Development to also enable smaller 'village' centres to be included. This is in recognition that our smaller shopping centres, wherever they may be in the district have a crucial role to play in enhancing and developing the economy of the district. Whilst smaller than the town centres that have previously been able to bid, these centres will also have their own issues that they wish to address and will create a wider pool of ideas from which to develop potential district-wide, cross-centre initiatives.

6. It is further suggested that, as well as initiatives put forward by the partnerships and other organisations, in order to encourage district-wide projects, the scheme also be widened to allow Economic Development officers to put forward appropriate projects.

7. Projects supported in 2013/14 included:

(a) Buckhurst Hill TCP – Photography Exhibition/Fashion Show;

(b) Loughton Broadway – Christmas Shop Local, Mural Project and Debden Day 2014;

(c) Loughton High Road TCP – originally for the Loughton Summer of Fun but as that did not go ahead in summer this has been agreed for a similar project later in the year;

(d) Ongar Town Centre Forum – Multi-disciplined/faceted approach to tourism;

(e) Epping TCP – Epping Festival 2014;

(f) Epping Forest Chamber of Commerce – Marketing of One Shops Local;

(g) Golden Triangle (Buckhurst Hill, Chigwell, Loughton) – Golden Triangle "app"; and

(h) Waltham Abbey TCP - was for Cucumber Festival but now likely to be redirected towards Meridian Event.

8. The current year 2014/15 has seen further successful bids made for the following projects:

- (a) Buckhurst Hill TCP - Joining The Dots & Getting Us On the Map projects - producing promotional material for the town centre and linking up local businesses with a global research project being conducted by Manchester Metropolitan University;
- (b) Epping Forest Chamber of Commerce - project to enhance the One Shops Local website bringing closer links with the Chamber's own site;
- (c) Loughton Broadway - the Shop For Local campaign for 2014 and Debden Day 2015;
- (d) Loughton High Road TCP - funding towards the Milestones programme providing training to local businesses; and
- (e) Ongar TCP - Further funding towards the multi-disciplined tourism initiative including enhancing the Visit Ongar website and developing the town App.

9. All bidders to the scheme are asked to demonstrate how they will monitor the progress and success of their project and what the lasting effect on their centre will be. They are further asked to complete an End of Grant Report which sets out what the grant has achieved. The inclusion of these elements to measure impacts and outcomes in the bidding process and end of grant summary encourages the partnerships to consider this when designing and delivering their project.

10. By way of an example, the Ongar tourism initiative has seen increased numbers in shops and there are no empty shops in the town at present (other than for a brief period whilst they change hands). Accepting that the town's attractions themselves e.g. Epping-Ongar Railway will also have had a positive impact, the interactive map linking tourist attractions and the Business Directory directly funded by the Ongar Town Forum's bid have played their part too in driving increased footfall to the town. Loughton Broadway Partnership has stated that the funds provided towards Debden Day 2014 saw increased footfall and trade, a 95%+ positive feedback return from post-event surveys, a raised profile of the Broadway as a family shopping centre and increased levels of community cohesion.

11. We will again, as part of the 2015/16 Fund bidding process, stress the importance of being able, as far as is possible, to demonstrate the impact the projects have had and will carefully consider this element when assessing new bids and proposed projects.

12. After the first round of bids there was £13,175 left in the 2014/15 budget. The Town Centre Partnerships are currently submitting bids as part of the second round for this year (due to have been submitted by 28th November, 2014) and it is anticipated that the full budget will be taken up or allocated as a result

13. The District Centres Economic Development Fund is seen as an important means of encouraging locally driven economic development initiatives which are owned and therefore supported by the local business community. It is therefore suggested that the scheme be approved and that the same level of District Development Funding as in previous years is provided for 2015/2016.

Resource Implications:

An allocation of £35,000 will be required from the District Development Fund in 2015/16

Legal and Governance Implications:

It is not considered that any implications arise from this report. It should be noted that an agreed standard is required at application stage and a number of stages and procedures to acknowledge any funds awarded and account for any funds drawn down are imposed upon partnerships applying to the scheme. All bids are expected to further complete post-project assessments of their scheme.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

None.

Consultation Undertaken:

The partnerships have been involved at various stages in refining the application process.

Background Papers:

None.

Risk Management:

If the £35,000 funding is not secured there is a risk that appropriate district-wide and sustainable initiatives may not be able to access the vital seed funding they require to be put in place. In addition, the council may not be seen to have confidence in supporting the district's town centres and wider economy.

Due Regard Record

This page shows **which groups of people are affected** by the subject of this report. It sets out **how they are affected** and how any **unlawful discrimination** they experience can be eliminated. It also includes information about how **access to the service(s)** subject to this report can be improved for the different groups of people; and how they can be assisted to **understand each other better** as a result of the subject of this report.

S149 Equality Act 2010 requires that due regard must be paid to this information when considering the subject of this report.

Applications approved under the Economic Development Initiatives Fund provide much needed investment and the stimulation of the economy in town and village centres throughout the District.

Some of those centres are based in less affluent areas, with others located in more rural parts of the District. Consequently, local residents in those centres can sometimes experience the effects of deprivation, albeit for different reasons.

Funding through the scheme can mitigate those effects.