

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 26 April 2016

Subject: Assets and Economic Development

Portfolio Holder: Councillor A Grigg

Recommending:

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

One Business Briefing

I am very pleased to report that the Winter edition of One Business Briefing was published in late February with ten external partners contributing articles and graphics and a number of these external partners featuring the Briefing on their social media streams resulting in a wider social media reach than previously.

The direct distribution of the Briefing has again risen with this edition being sent to in excess of 1100 business contacts with social media also encouraging further direct downloads of the Briefing from the council's website. In addition to the usual digital edition of the Briefing, a short print run of copies of the Briefing was also produced for distribution to attendees at the recent Visit Epping Forest Tourism Conference, as well as to businesses and attendees at the most recent round of BEST Growth Hub digital workshops, run at the Essex Technology and Innovation Centre in Ongar.

Eastern Plateau

Economic Development has continued its representation on the Eastern Plateau Rural Development Programme's Local Action Group. As at mid-March there were several projects based within the district that were at early stages in the application process and the Programme Facilitator reported that there were also a good number of further leads across the entire project area and across all of the Fund's priority themes.

Tourism

Economic Development is working with colleagues in Planning to commission a Visitor Accommodation Needs Assessment. The Study will form a key part of the evidence base helping to inform tourism policies in the Local Plan.

I was very pleased to be able to attend the successful Visit Epping Forest 2016 Tourism Conference, which took place at the start of English Tourism Week at the beginning of March. Around ninety delegates represented a range of tourism and visitor sectors both large and small. Workshop sessions saw feedback with common themes for opportunity and growth including gaining benefits from closer joint working, awareness building by better use of social media and internet-based offers, marketing outside of the district to bring visitors from further afield and creating themed packages for specific target audiences. Once again it was a well-received event that delegates wish to remain a regular fixture.

Town Centres

A project to replace an eyesore at the front of the parade of shops in North Weald and the creation of a new Visit Epping Forest website have been approved within EFDC's Town & Village Centres Opportunities Fund. The Team is also liaising with applicants to progress a handful of further applications to the Fund.

Business Support

The Economic Development Team has been working on an exercise to improve the information and contact details it holds for local businesses within the district. This will mean we are better able to disseminate relevant information as widely as possible and encourage local awareness and take-up of the various programmes that are available e.g. funding, business support & advice, workshops.

Partner Liaison

Economic Development attended the re-opening of the Epping Forest District Museum in Waltham Abbey and was delighted to see the high quality of the heritage and tourist offer that this attraction will now bring to the district. Having seen the development and spoken to a number of local business stakeholders at the launch it is clear that the museum will also be a fantastic asset for the local and district wide business community.

Economic Development has recently met with Grangewood Investments to understand more about its investment plans at Oakwood Hill Industrial Estate, particularly in light of its Cr@te development on the Industrial Estate receiving planning consent in February. This liaison is ongoing but the Team has already introduced Grangewood to several partners such as Invest Essex where there might be the scope for mutually beneficial opportunities for business development.

Asset Management

Progress continues to be made in the delivery of a number of major asset management projects important in securing both community benefits, the Council's service requirements and providing sources of additional future revenue. Detailed reports for Members with a particular interest are received at the Asset Management Cabinet Committee on a regular basis. However, in terms of key milestones, I can report that the new depot at Oakwood Hill is due to be commissioned in mid June, at which time the remaining services i.e. Fleet Maintenance and Grounds Maintenance will relocate from Langston Road. With respect to the Epping Forest Shopping Park, after receipt and evaluation of Pre-Qualified Questionnaires, the four shortlisted contractors for the main construction of the Shopping Park are preparing their tender submissions. These are due to be returned in early May with a projected award to the successful contractor, in the last week of June 2016. Negotiations continue positively with anchor tenants, with a target opening date for the Shopping Park of Easter 2017, hoping to still be achieved.