

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Subject: Asset Management and Economic Development Portfolio **Date: 18 December 2012**

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Anne Grigg

Recommending:

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

Economic Development

The Council continues to be very active in promoting and supporting the local business community.

A new set of economic development priorities is being drafted to help shape, direct and lead the work of the Council and its partners over the short and medium term. The first draft of these priorities which has been put together following initial discussions with local business organisations, will be brought before Cabinet early in the New Year.

While looking to the strategic the Council and its partners have not lost sight of the practical. At this difficult economic time the Council has managed to find £35,000 of funding to enable Town Centre Partnerships and other bodies to put into place practical schemes to enhance High Street viability. Support has also been given to the Chamber of Commerce to enable them to rebuild their website, while the Council continues to support Free HMRC seminars with Tax and VAT guidance to local business start-ups.

Superfast Broadband will be a critical factor in ensuring the competitiveness of local businesses in the future. Epping Forest District will be hosting a Free Superfast Broadband event on 18 December on behalf of the West Essex Alliance. This will enable local business to hear at first hand how this technology might benefit them, and ask questions about access and roll out across the district.

Tourism is already a significant sector in the local economy with the potential for further growth. A tourism Task Force, run with the support of the Council has just launched a new website www.visiteppingforest.org. The major tourism and visitor attractions in the district have come together to build this website, which has already been visited by over 2,000 people while it was under development. A new joint leaflet will be printed soon and a tourism summit will be held on 31 January to enable businesses right across the sector to help shape future plans and strategies in this important area.

One Shops Local is nearing its first anniversary and has almost 250 local businesses signed up and is visited by over 700 people per month. This site, which has been developed in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses is being looked at by a number of other local authorities in order to promote their High Streets.