

Report to the Asset Management and Economic Development Cabinet Committee



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Report reference: AMED-007-2016/17

Date of meeting: 27 October 2016

Portfolio: Asset Management and Economic Development

Subject: Economic Development Report

Responsible Officer: Mike Warr / Vicki Willis (01992 564472 / 564593)

Democratic Services: Jackie Leither (01992 564756)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

To note the progress and work programme of the Council's Economic Development Section;

Executive Summary:

This report updates the Cabinet Committee on a number of projects, themes and issues being explored by the Economic Development Team.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To appraise the Committee on progress made with regard to Economic Development issues.

Other Options for Action:

None, as this monitoring report is for information not action.

Report:

1. Visitor Economy

Economic Development along with colleagues in Planning has commissioned Hotel Solutions to undertake a Visitor Accommodation Needs Assessment for the district. The first phase of this study took place in August 2016 with work informing the visitor accommodation policy in the draft Local Plan. This stage of work comprised an audit of current visitor accommodation supply; a review of past and current proposals for visitor accommodation; a review of national trends in hotel and visitor accommodation development; initial consultation with Officers, Members and key stakeholders and review of approaches to tourist accommodation planning policies elsewhere. Phase 2 of the study is currently being refined in light of the first stage findings and will hopefully commence in November 2016. This will provide more evidence around the need and potential for the development of visitor accommodation with the District.

2. Town Centres

The most recent Town Teams Meeting was very well attended and was a very positive

experience with a sense of energy and enthusiasm coming across from the town partnerships.

The Town and Village Centres Opportunities Fund has been launched for 2016/17 accompanied by a new policy document for the current year which will hopefully enable a wider range of organisations to apply and access the funding, generating a wider range of initiatives to support our local economic centres. Several projects have been delivered in recent months with assistance from the Fund including, environmental improvements to the shopping area in North Weald with new flower beds and planting and separate promotional maps produced to promote Buckhurst Hill and Loughton Broadway town centres. The Economic Development Team is in contact with a number of partners in connection with the Fund, including a number of non-town partnership groups. Further bids and proposals are in the pipeline and will be reported to Members in due course.

3. Business Support

Pop Up Business Café

On 13th July the newly refurbished Epping Forest District Museum was very pleased to host a different kind of event - the district's first ever Pop-Up Business Café. Co-ordinated by the Economic Development Team in partnership with BEST Growth Hub, the aim of the session was to provide established and start-up businesses with the opportunity to access informal advice on a wide range of subjects vital to a business's success. The event attracted more than 30 local businesses and start-ups from across the District, many of which Economic Development and the Growth Hub had not had active contact with before. These included, a baking school, bookkeepers, an antiques auctioneer, a hotelier, café operators, property professionals and a dog whisperer. Most of the six voluntary advisers were from businesses based in the local area and all were very positive after the event and said they would participate in similar activities in the future. They are also now contacts that the Team may approach to potentially support different projects in the future.

There was positive comment on social media about the event and the Team has made direct follow-ups with six of the businesses and has also received expressions of interest from further businesses that would be interested in giving their time and advice at similar events in the future. BEST Growth Hub's monitoring shows a hike in local activity following the event with close to one third of its total 'engagements' to date in the district happening in the two months after the event (notwithstanding that this was peak holiday season also). We continue to work closely with BEST to try and increase take-up of its services locally. This will include spreading the word about a new programme of business workshops and assisting them in potentially establishing surgery sessions in the local area.

Low Carbon Across the South East (LoCASE)

LoCASE is a new EU funded project set up to help small or medium enterprise businesses across the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) region to tackle and adapt to climate change, aiming to reduce business costs by cutting emissions and to promote the opportunities of the low carbon market. The scheme is not stalled by Brexit and the Economic Development Team has met with the Delivery Manager to discuss how we can work with them to help spread the word locally e.g. promoting in person when meeting local businesses and partners, inviting LoCASE to attend local business events, promoting in our Business Briefing, news updates and via EFDC social media etc. The Delivery Team is already engaging with a number of businesses in our district and at least two businesses are well advanced in their applications. Economic Development will report further on individual business awards and work with LoCASE to ensure the promotion of successful applicants to encourage more applicants to come forward.

Eastern Plateau Rural Development Programme

The continuation of the Eastern Plateau Programme funded by the European Commission and Defra has been a little less certain since Brexit. The current position is that it is 'business as usual' with the Fund pending any announcement that might be made as part of the Autumn Statement. The key objective of the programme is to grow the rural economy of the Eastern Plateau area with a focus on business growth and job creation. The scheme covers a defined geographical area of rural East Herts, North Herts, Uttlesford & Epping Forest districts. It is possible that a project within Epping Forest District may be considered by the Panel prior to the Autumn Statement and if the Eastern Plateau programme is permitted to continue the Economic Development Team will continue to promote it and support the assessment process.

4. Broadband

Business Breakfast

In September, a very successful Broadband Business Breakfast was held at Mulberry House in High Ongar. This attracted a number of local businesses from across the Epping Forest District as well as a number of key local stakeholders and industry representatives.

Delegates heard a number of presentations highlighting opportunities for business growth that were made possible by the building of the ultrafast and superfast broadband networks throughout the district.

A number of useful introductions were made at the event and many businesses and stakeholders took advantage of having a range of key industry representatives in the same room to discuss their individual situations and requirements. In an attempt to measure the effectiveness of the event and learn from the experience for future events feedback was sought from delegates. Although the number of delegates submitting feedback was limited, all of the responses were positive about the variety and quality of the programme of speakers. The majority of responses were also positive about the venue and catering as well as the balance between the formal presentations and the opportunities for networking and engagement. Useful suggestions for the format of future events as well as how to publicise events and generate greater levels of interest were also received. Finally, the event sponsors and participating speakers all spoke positively about the event and the opportunity to speak directly to businesses.

Ultrafast Network

The Rural Challenge Project continues to make progress across the district. In excess of 140km of ultrafast fibre broadband network has now been built with over 1800 customer pots installed at the edge of premises. Cabinets in Bobbingworth, Fyfield, Norton Heath, Abbess Roding and Toot Hill are now live with a further four cabinets in the build phase.

5. Partner Liaison

The Economic Development team continues to liaise with, support and attend meetings with a number of Partner Organisations. These include, at varying intervals:

- Essex County Council
- South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SE LEP)
- Invest Essex and Essex Innovation Programme
- Lea Valley Food Taskforce
- Essex Economic Development Officer group
- Essex Tourism Officer Group
- Epping Forest District Town Team
- Eastern Plateau Local Action Group

- Stansted Airport Local Authority Forum
- Tourism & Visitor Board
- West Essex Skills & Learning Forum
- Waltham Abbey Town Partnership
- One Epping Forest
- Superfast Essex

Resource Implications:

None as this is a progress report.

Legal and Governance Implications:

None as this is a progress report.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

None as this is a progress report.

Consultation Undertaken:

None as this is a progress report.

Background Papers:

None

Risk Management:

N/A

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.

There are no implications to consider as this report is a progress report.