

# ***Report to the Council***

**Committee:** Cabinet

**Date:** 20 December 2016

**Subject:** Assets and Economic Development

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor A Grigg

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**Recommending:**

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

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## **1. Town and Village Centres Opportunities Fund**

Following a Cabinet decision in November 2016 the Town and Village Centres Opportunities Fund has been expanded to now include non-town centre focused and non-village centre focused proposals and ideas which have a broader economic development impact across the district. As a result the scheme will be renamed the Epping Forest District Economic Opportunities Fund and a revised policy document to support the fund will be produced. In recent weeks a number of exciting proposals for projects have come forward and economic development officers are in discussion with the groups to assist them in preparing their bids.

## **2. Business Support**

### **Eastern Plateau**

After a period of uncertainty we are pleased to confirm that it is now business as usual for the Eastern Plateau programme which is part of the Rural Development Plan for England. This funding is open to projects in certain areas of East Herts, North Herts, Uttlesford and Epping Forest Districts. The aim of the funding is to create jobs and promote business growth in rural areas and it focuses on small business growth, projects covering farm productivity, rural tourism, the provision of rural services, culture and heritage forest/woodland productivity. Economic Development Officers are working with the Eastern Plateau to identify the best routes to publicise the programme and maximise the impact within our district and the programme facilitator has met with economic development officers to connect the programme with potential projects in the district.

## **3. Visitor Economy**

### **Tourism Website**

Work continues on the refresh and enhancement of the new district tourism website. Data is being sought from the district's attractions and accommodation establishments to populate the website with useful content in advance of a soft launch in the New Year and a planned wider launch during Tourism Week 2017.

### **Accommodation Study**

Economic Development is working with selected consultants, Hotel Solutions, on phase 2 of the Visitor Accommodation Needs work. The 2nd phase of work is more substantial than the first and will provide a clearer picture of how existing visitor accommodation providers are performing, seek to ascertain if proposed developments (i.e. schemes with planning permission) are likely to be progressed and gauge wider developer interest in the district. It will also progress liaison with bodies such as Lee Valley Regional Park around any potential

future visitor accommodation development and further consider how it might be possible to meet the market need for additional budget hotel provision in some of the district's larger town centres.

#### **4. Major Projects**

The main contractor for the Epping Forest Shopping Park, McLaughlin and Harvey are making good progress and are now slightly ahead of programme. The retaining wall to the rear of the site providing access to service the retail units, is largely complete with the main steelwork for the retail units now being erected.

Work to the car park is underway with kerbing largely complete and the base coat of tarmac due to be laid in mid-December. The Highways work is proceeding but has been delayed due to an element of re-design required to accommodate utilities and attenuation tanks for surface water. Work on the highway will cease over the Christmas period to avoid any disturbance to local shopping centres.

After a protracted period of negotiation, I can now report that the Council exchanged on the purchase of the Epping Junior School on the 6 December with completion a few days later. Now that the site is within the District Council's ownership, it is hoped to proceed with our development partner and the Town Council to bring forward the mixed use scheme sought to be delivered through the design and development brief. I will keep Members updated on progress.

#### **5. SELEP Chairman Tours the District**

The new Chairman of SELEP, Chris Brodie enjoyed a familiarisation tour of the district at the end of November, accompanied by senior elected members of the District Council. The tour was designed to highlight the wide range of opportunities and attractions in the district and raise some of the challenges in supporting the economy in an area on the border of three Enterprise partnerships. The tour began with briefing session led by the Leader and Chief Executive of the District Council before moving on to a trip on a London Underground maintenance train on the heritage line from Ongar to North Weald and a pilot's eye view from the cockpits of Weald Aviation's Spitfire and Mustang at North Weald Airfield. They were also taken on a guided tour of Epping Forest College, a royal view over Epping Forest from Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge and a lunch meeting with the Lee Valley White Water Centre as a backdrop. At each stop, representatives of the District's key organisations, businesses and elected members were able to brief Mr Keiffer on their vision and opportunities for future growth. It was agreed with all parties that the tour will be followed up with additional information expanding on the areas of interest and projects touched upon during the visit.

#### **6. Site Visit Harlow Enterprise Zone**

On December 5th a delegation of members and officers from the district council with a role in Economic Development visited the Harlow Enterprise Zone accompanied by the Leader of Harlow council. Members wished to see at first hand the ongoing build on site and talk to some of the new companies that had moved in as well as receiving briefings on how the next phase was progressing. Members were particularly interested in how the zone could help boost trade and investment across the west Essex area and explore opportunities for closer joint working, particularly around sector clusters and supply chain.