

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date 21 February 2017

Subject: Assets & Economic Development

Portfolio Holder: Councillor A Grigg

Recommending:

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

1. Visitor Economy

Tourism Website

Work is well advanced on the new district tourism website with a launch planned to coincide with Tourism Week 2017 in late March.

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 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. This work is scheduled for completion in March 2017.

2. Town Centres

Waltham Abbey Wayfinding Project

Economic Development has appointed Mödel Signage Solutions to design, manufacture and install a new pedestrian wayfinding system in Waltham Abbey Town Centre. Mödel has already undertaken a stakeholder presentation and consultation event in the town and has subsequently set up an online survey to enable those stakeholders, including businesses, unable to attend the meeting to have their say. It is intended that a proposed design for the scheme be presented to the key stakeholders in February in order that the finalised design can be agreed before the end of the current financial year.

3. Business Support

Eastern Plateau/ European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)

As reported at the last meeting, it is now business as usual for the Eastern Plateau programme which is part of the Rural Development Plan for England. Economic Development Officers are therefore working to identify the best routes to publicise the programme and maximise the impact within our district (recognising though that it only extends into certain areas of the district). Added to this, SELEP launched a call for applications under the EAFRD programme at the beginning of February 2017 with support

for rural tourism, food processing and business development for micro businesses and SMEs. As with Eastern Plateau, the Team is working to ensure the effective dissemination of this information locally.

4. Broadband

Smart Places

With the ongoing rollout of ultrafast and superfast broadband infrastructure throughout the district continuing to deliver greater levels of connectivity, attention has turned to the wide range of applications that can be applied through this infrastructure and the opportunities for transformed service provision that the networks offer. The Economic Development Team is supporting the exploration of such initiatives and opportunities and an initial meeting has been held of the Epping Forest Smart Places Project Steering Group. This EFDC lead group will work closely with Essex County Council in the first instance and then appropriate additional external partners to explore the potential for Smart Place projects and to position the district as a forward thinking and innovative place to live, study, work and do business.

Ultrafast Network

The Rural Challenge Project to deliver ultrafast broadband to rural parts of the district continues to make progress. Almost 200km of network has now been built with in excess of 2,800 connection pots installed at the property edges in readiness for live connection. A recent press event was held at the Animal Country Club in the rural village of Moreton recognising the connection of the 2000th premise to the live Gigaclear network.

3. Major Projects

Good progress continues to be made with the main construction contract for the Epping Forest Shopping Park. McLaughlin and Harvey are on programme with the steel frame erected, the roofing largely complete and significant progress on the external wall cladding and glazing. Delays have been experienced on the S278 Highways Works in relation to utilities, however, the programme has picked up. As much care as possible is being taken to minimise disturbance to road users. Final details are being agreed with the main anchor tenants and the Shopping Park is still on schedule to open in September 2017.

The Cabinet recently agreed a marketing strategy for the sale of Lindsay House, which is now proceeding for disposal as no operation requirement was identified for the building by either the District or County Councils. Now that the District Council secured the ownership of the former school site at St John's Road, the partners are working towards the submission of the planning application. At this point, the timing of the application is yet to be determined but I will endeavour to keep Members advised.

Elsewhere on the agenda is a report on a commercial transaction regarding a car dealership site in Waltham Abbey. This is a good example of our continued efforts to implement the Council's agreed policy of investing capital to deliver ongoing revenue benefits.