

**Report to the Asset Management and
Economic Development Cabinet
Committee**



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Report reference: AMED-006-2017/18

Date of meeting: 19 April 2018

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:

(1) To note the progress and work programme of the Council's Economic Development Section and provide feedback if Members wish;

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

The Tourism and Visitor Strategy has been finalised and agreed by the Tourism and Visitor Board (see Appendix 1) and a print version created. It is planned to launch the Strategy during the summer.

Representatives of the Borough of Broxbourne now attend Board meetings and a meeting has taken place with the Cabinet Member responsible for Economic Development at Broxbourne. This identified common ground and looked at opportunities to extend joint working to East Herts and Harlow.

A Food Fair is proposed for the Waltham Abbey and Lee Valley area and an initial meeting of interested parties has been organised. It is suggested the event is held in Waltham Abbey and will feature local shops and businesses.

The Visit Epping Forest website continues to grow both in content and audience. For 2018 to

date, figures have grown between a third and a half over the same period in 2017. For the start of the 2018 tourism season during the week covering Easter, the audience doubled compared with the previous week with 4,064 visitors viewing 8655 pages.

A locally based company is progressing its planning for a major destination event to be held at North Weald Airfield during the summer of 2019.

2. Economic Development Strategy

Following significant input into the employment aspects of the Local Plan, the Team is now to focus on the delivery of a new long term Economic Development Strategy. It is currently anticipated that a draft strategy will be put forward for approval by the end of the calendar year. Attached in Appendix 2 is a 'work in progress' current project delivery plan. Of particular note, is that the Strategy will not be EFDC's alone but a partner document looking at the district as a 'place' and recognising the involvement, influence and role of many stakeholders in the local economy. Work to develop the strategy will be fully cognisant of the wider context and the Team is involved in a number of current workstreams appreciating different economic geographies, for instance at the Functional Economic Market Area (FEMA) level, including Harlow and Gilston Garden Communities and the London Stansted Cambridge Corridor level. The Strategy will comprise 3 key elements – a robust evidence base setting the scene on where the district is now, the actual strategy document and then the Delivery Plan. These reflect discussion held previously at AMED on the need to evidence and quantify the existing economy and for specificity in defining outcomes and in the measuring of success.

3. Town Centres

Waltham Abbey Wayfinding Project

The installation of all 15 signs is now complete and response to date has been very positive. A recent survey of local stakeholders revealed that 75% of them had noticed the new signs and when asked to rate the signs the average score was 4.33 out of 5 (where 5 was excellent and 4 was Very Good). In terms of helpfulness the score was even higher at 4.38 whilst a score of 4.09 was achieved for their improvement of the town's appearance.

Town & Village Centres / District Economic Opportunities Fund

A bid has recently been approved within the Fund from Buckhurst Hill Village Forum in respect of a project to deliver a website and professional social media plan for Buckhurst Hill Parish. The project will develop the digital presence of Buckhurst Hill in order to promote businesses in the three main shopping areas of the Parish and to highlight the role of the Forum and promote its activities. A deemed key strength of the bid is how the Forum is already working closely with interested businesses in terms of how they can use social media to drive footfall into shops.

4. Business Support

Business Briefing

The Economic Development team has produced a mini version of its One Business Briefing and this was issued alongside Business Rates bills to just under 4,000 contacts within the District in March 2018. This short publication highlights various funding streams and support open to businesses within our area as well as website and contact details for businesses to find out more. A hardcopy should recently have reached every Councillor for information. The Team will also use these mini Briefings over the next few months or so, when it visits businesses, at events and will make available at the Civic Offices and other venues around the district i.e. libraries. If any Members would like further copies for use in their activities please let the Team know.

External Funding

The Team continues to work to attract external grant funding for businesses within the District. A few examples of this work are highlighted below:

South East Business Boost (SEBB) - One of the Funds referenced in the above Briefing is SEBB, a capital grants scheme for business growth that is offering grants of £1,000 to £10,000 for up to 30% of total project costs. The Economic Development Team is working closely with SEBB in promoting the Fund and hosted and promoted two days of informal one-to-one meetings with businesses in February at the Civic Offices. 16 local businesses met with SEBB on these days and the Team has passed a good number of further leads to SEBB i.e. people who received our communication about the Fund but who could not make these particular dates. A first grant has recently been approved in the district to a business in Ongar that attended one of these sessions and we are informed there are a number more in the pipeline.

Low Carbon Across the South East (LoCASE) - The Team continues to help in the promotion of this scheme which assists SMEs in reducing business costs by cutting emissions and seeks to increase awareness of opportunities in the low carbon market. As at early March 2018 seven grants have been approved at a total of nearly £62,000. Two interesting points to note are that the funding is open to home-based businesses (i.e. we have been advised of a hairdresser that received assistance with a new water heating system) and that also the funding is open beyond businesses to the charitable sector (i.e. sports clubs, village halls).

Support for the Creative sector

South East Creative, Culture and Digital Sector (SECCADS) is a new ERDF project that will be launching shortly. The Team has started discussions with partners and contacts to begin to explore any potential opportunities etc. In brief, the project will work with SMEs in the Creative and Cultural and Digital sector to encourage new business start-ups, increase the sustainability of micro businesses and to promote business growth. On 28 March the Government announced an investment of £150m in the creative industries and the Team will be examining this also.

5. Epping Forest District Skills Board

The next meeting of the Skills Board is scheduled for 25 April and will be hosted by Epping Forest College and Chaired by the Principal, Saboohi Famili. Following suggestions by those at the previous meeting, a number of additional people have been invited to expand the sectors and stakeholders represented. The next meeting will have presentations on skills and training needs and opportunities from Princess Alexandra Hospital, LSCC and the Harlow Enterprise Zone.

6. Digital Innovation Programme

Having successfully submitted an application in November to the LGA / Design Council 'Design in the Public Sector' programme, an Economic Development Officer as part of a team that includes Princess Alexandra Hospital, Essex Partnership University Trust and West Essex CCG, is now working closely with the LGA and Design Council to deploy the latest design tools and approaches to service redesign to enable residents to remain at home with ongoing medical conditions rather than in the emergency department of the local hospital. The team has already received positive feedback on its efforts to date which have seen members accompany an ambulance crew on a day of emergency calls as well as observing and interviewing visitors to the A&E department of Princess Alexandra Hospital. The training programme is due to be completed by May 2018 although it is anticipated that the project will continue to be developed beyond that date and the skills acquired used in future projects.

The third Smart Places Seminar focusing on Digital Skills for future jobs took place on 09 February 2018 at Haileybury College in Broxbourne Borough. The event delivered a programme of excellent speakers from the private and public sectors. Almost 60 partners came together to share their thoughts on where we are currently and what needed to happen to make sure that there is a supply chain of digitally skilled people in place to enable business to grow, public services to develop and local people to get the opportunities to secure the great jobs that this would inevitably bring. An executive report of the event has been produced and circulated to all attendees. This report will be used to further raise awareness and understanding of the digital work programme.

ARUP consultants, one of the leading consultancies on digital innovation has been selected to work with the DIZ to develop a long term strategy for digital development in the area. The aim of the strategy, which will be completed by July, is to give a clear picture of what digital infrastructure and approaches already exist across the geographies and sectors that make up the DIZ and to set out the key challenges facing an area like this to become a Beacon for digitally enabled service delivery and economic development. The project is jointly funded by 11 organisations including private sector, health sector, local authorities and economic development organisations.

Digital Catapult, working on behalf of central government, has approached the partnership to take part in its Things Connected innovation programme exploring the use of LPWAN (Low Powered Wide Area Network) technology to solve service challenges Epping Forest DC has agreed to coordinate a joint response as part of the DIZ programme. Funding has been identified and Digital Catapult has confirmed that the DIZ will be one of the four areas nationally that will take part in the next wave. Partners have suggested that the challenge could focus on parking and particularly disabled parking spaces to provide up-to-the minute information on free spaces.

7. Superfast Broadband

As at March 2018 the network build had reached just over 4100 premises passed as it closes in on completion. A number of properties around the intervention area remain to be built as and when wayleave negotiations and some fault finding is completed. The most significant number to be completed are in the Hastingwood cabinet area as negotiations to facilitate Gigaclear to build part of its network across North Weald Airfield continue. It is still hoped that all remaining properties will be reached by the end of April 2018.

A report has been submitted to Cabinet 10 April 2018 seeking the utilisation of the existing capital provision of £350,000 for Phase 4 of the Superfast Essex broadband rollout which is match funded by contributions from BDUK and with an additional contribution from Essex County Council. A competitive procurement process has been undertaken by Essex County Council to commission a suitable provider to deliver additional broadband coverage in Epping Forest District. This competitive process has now been completed and the preferred bidder has been selected. Essex County Council is therefore seeking, prior to formalisation of the contract award, a written agreement with the Council to commit the additional funding of £350,000 in full. The Cabinet report is therefore seeking approval that such a written agreement may be entered into.

7. Food Sector

Closing the Gap: State of the area's food industry

The Team is coordinating a launch event for the final report of the Lea Valley Food Board. This will take place at the House of Commons hosted by the Rt Hon Eleanor Laing MP on 23 May 2018. This report sets out the findings on local productivity and opportunities and sets

out a series of recommendations to expand and sustain future growth.

BioBoost Project

The Team continues to work with the Food Board on this. In March the project partners met in Holland to review progress in the workstreams being led in each country around recycling and carbon reduction in the glasshouse industry.

8. 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 (SELEP)
- London Stansted Cambridge Consortium (LSCC)
- Invest Essex and Essex Innovation Programme
- Lea Valley Food Board
- Co-op Officer Group/ workstreams of Harlow and Gilston Garden Town
- 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
- Princess Alexandra Hospital
- West Essex CCG
- Essex Partnership University Trust
- Rainbow Services, Harlow
- Anglia Ruskin University

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