

# ***Report to the Council***

**Committee:** Cabinet

**Date:** 24 April 2018

**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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## **Visitor Economy**

**Strategy and joint working** - I am pleased to report that the Tourism and Visitor Strategy has been finalised and agreed by the Tourism and Visitor Board and will be launched 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.

**Visit Epping Forest website** – this 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.

**Events** - A proposed Food Fair is being organised for the Waltham Abbey and Lee Valley area and an initial meeting of interested parties has been organised. It is proposed to run the event within Waltham Abbey and to feature local shops and businesses. 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.

## **Economic Development Strategy**

Following significant input into the employment aspects of the Local Plan, the Team is to now 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. 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.

## **Town Centres**

**Waltham Abbey Wayfinding Project** – As reported previously, the installation of all 15 signs is now complete. 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.

### **Business Support**

**Business Briefing** - I reported at the last meeting that the Economic Development team has produced a mini version of its One Business Briefing and this was issued alongside Business Rates bills in March 2018 to just under 4,000 contacts within the District. 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) – this is 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 been recently 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).

### **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.

### **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.

### **Major Development Projects**

Members will be aware that nine of the twelve retail units at Epping Forest Shopping Park have been trading successfully since the opening of the main anchor store Next, in December 2017. Feedback from shoppers is excellent. I can now report that a further unit has been let to outdoor clothing and equipment supplier, Mountain Warehouse. The remaining last two units are currently under offer and I will advise Members of their details when the commercial negotiations have concluded. It is hoped to have all three units open by the end of May 2018.

I am also pleased to report that Heads of Terms have also been agreed with potential tenants for the Council's retail space in the Landmark Building (former Winston Churchill Public House), Debden Broadway. The line-up is currently a public house, restaurant, coffee shop and a convenience store. Progress has been delayed by the late handover of the space from the residential developer and the need to provide services to the units. There has also been delay caused by the slow completion of the overarching lease back document to allow sub-leases to the commercial tenants to be entered into. This has now been provided and it is hoped that the units, which will encourage additional footfall to the area, will be open in the summer.