

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



**Epping Forest  
District Council**

**Report reference: AMED-009-2018/19**

**Date of meeting: 18 April 2019**

**Portfolio:** Community and Partnership Services (Councillor S. Kane)

**Subject:** Economic Development – Progress Report

**Responsible Officer:** J. Houston/J. Chandler (01992 564094)

**Democratic Services Officer:** J. Leither (01992 564756)

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**Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**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:**

**Economic Strategy**

1. As reported to previous meetings officers have been working with external partners to develop a strategy for 'place' that aims to future proof economic success and enable growth in sectors that are priorities for the district. A consultation document 'Nurturing Growth' has been drafted to promote discussion and comment on the key opportunities, challenges with regards to the local economy. It also addresses the steps that the council together with its partners could take to support appropriate growth. Officers are currently finalising this report which will be circulated separately ahead of the meeting. Members are asked to comment on the issues, options and actions contained in the consultation draft and approve, subject to amendments. Officers will then consult on the document and bring a final strategy to cabinet in June for approval.

## Digital Innovation Zone

2. At the time of writing the team were waiting to hear from DCMS on the final decision on the proposed Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ) Ultrafast GPs Local Full Fibre Network Programme bid for funding. If successful this £2.1m programme would deliver fibre broadband networks to 113 GP practices throughout the DIZ geography, enabling them to take up faster speeds with greater capacity that will support the development of increasingly digital ways of delivering health care closer to the community. A team representing the DIZ presented to the DCMS Commercial Panel followed by a subsequent presentation to the DCMS Investment Panel. The team have been working since to respond to a small number of clarifications sought by DCMS and are now awaiting the outcome. This is the first cross-border, cross-sector bid of its kind to be submitted from the area. It is hoped that a verbal update can be given at the meeting.
3. The next in the ongoing series of Smart Place Seminars is due to be held on 26 April 2019. 'Empowering Community and Voluntary Services Through Digital' will take place at Fletcher's Lea in Ware and will feature a wide range of local and national speakers exploring how the voluntary and community sector can be enabled to use digital to achieve better outcomes for communities. Given the increasing role of community and voluntary groups in the provision of public services it is essential that there is clarity around what can and cannot be done through digital enablement. This seminar will look at what challenges need to be overcome to unlock the potential to enable this sector play a greater role.
4. The DIZ Digital Innovation Strategy is now progressing through its partner organisations' decision-making procedures to seek formal endorsement of the strategy. Presentations on the strategy have recently been delivered to overview and scrutiny meetings at both East Herts District Council and Broxbourne Borough Council. The strategy will be presented to the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 16<sup>th</sup> April for consideration. The Herts & Essex Digital Innovation Strategy remains unique in that it seeks to bring together the aims and objectives of a wide range of partners from health, education, local government, business and the voluntary sectors and integrate these into a combined long-term plan. A key focus of the strategy is how we future-proof our local economic prosperity through digital and collectively develop our public service offer to give better services to residents and better value to the taxpayer. The DIZ is in discussion with major private sector organisations regarding sponsorship of the programme.
5. The DIZ has recently launched its website at [www.diz.org.uk](http://www.diz.org.uk) which will act as a central point of information and contact for all current and future DIZ projects. Currently the website has details on the DIZ partners, the strategy, all the reports of the Smart Place Seminars and updates on some of the research undertaken through the group.
6. DIZ Board – In line with developing a genuine public-private partnership on digital to align and coordinate investment, the DIZ Board has been joined by senior representatives of Stansted Airport, Places for People and CGI.
7. Digital Census – In order to pursue its role as a centre for innovation and in order to generate evidence to support future funding bids the DIZ is in discussion with leading market research companies on the development of the first digital census. Initial proposals are being reviewed and discussions are ongoing with partners around funding.
8. Rural Connected Communities Programme – Following the award of up to £50m to West Midlands Combined Authority to be the Urban 5G Testbed, the DIZ has been

working closely with other partners and central government to ensure it is in a position to bid effectively for the rural 5G testbed programme. An announcement of this competitive process has been delayed but it is expected that the programme will get underway at the end of April and the DIZ partnership has indicated that it will bid. This could unlock potentially two grants of up to £25m to two areas in the United Kingdom to lead on the application of this technology on specific geographies. This will obviously be an extremely competitive process but indications are that the DIZ remains the only cross-sector, cross-border partnership that may bid.

### **Tourism and Visitor Board**

9. The Visit Epping Forest ([www.visiteppingforest.org](http://www.visiteppingforest.org)) website is the main portal for visitor information and building awareness and advertising of destinations, attractions, services and events across the district. A review of the last 12 months data of the new revised and enhanced site has shown traffic up by 31% and a total of around 150,000 users. The content has grown substantially on the website with increased information in all areas plus additional editorial features. The 'What's On' section, listing events across the district from a wide variety of providers, remains one of the sites most accessed areas.
10. The last Tourism Summit in October 2018 was attended by over 80 delegates from across the district and other partners. Outcomes of the workshops held highlighted the need to build more connections with neighbouring geographies and integrate additional and wider-ranging attractions and trails to generate more income locally. A cross-border tourism group has been established. This involves elected members and officers from Broxbourne, East Herts, Harlow, Uttlesford and Epping Forest. This group has commissioned value studies to gauge current tourism and visitor performance across the whole area. Using the standard Cambridge Model, this reveals income to the combined local economies of £880 million supporting over 15,000 jobs. £226 million of this is generated in the Epping Forest District, an increase of 7% on the previous year in a climate where other comparable areas have shown a decline in tourism-related income. However, partners are aware that our employment in this growing sector remains below the national average of 10% and are committed to working collectively to drive up performance. Partners have reached out to major private sector companies and are in discussions to secure two main sponsors for the programme going forward.

### **Green Arc**

11. The Green Arc was an initiative to promote and coordinate investment in green infrastructure running from the Thames to Barnet. The One Partnership has recently taken over the project, a consultant to lead work, commissioned using funding inherited from the Arc, has been employed and steps are being taken to establish a Steering Board to take work forward.
12. Meetings and contact have been had with the GLA, Essex CC and Herts CC and a wide range of voluntary organisations such as the Woodland Trust to encourage participation, and support joint bids for external funding. The aim of the project is to focus on where London meets the countryside, looking at joint initiatives to increase and protect canopy, explore new ways of developing corridors to allow residents and visitors to enjoy the green and unique areas in this quadrant as well innovating in community involvement in programmes.
13. The Green Arc will be looking for opportunities around productive landscapes, the links of new trails and corridors to boost the tourism and visitor economy, and the enhanced

'liveability' agenda for the area and its impact on the district's ability to compete for new business investment.

**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