

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **ECONOMY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 29 September 2022 at 5.30 pm

Present

Councillors

J M Downes (Chairman)
Mrs C Collis, N V Davey, Mrs S Griggs, J Wright and
S J Clist

Apologies

Councillor(s)

J Buczkowski and R F Radford

Present

Officer(s):

Richard Marsh (Director of Place), Adrian Welsh (Strategic Manager for Growth, Economy and Delivery) and John Bodley-Scott (Economic Development Team Leader)

16 Apologies and Substitute Members

Apologies were received from Cllr R Radford and Cllr J Buczkowski who was substituted by Cllr S Clist.

17 Public Question Time

None received.

18 Declaration of Interests under the Code of Conduct

No interests were declared under this item.

19 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 May 2022 were confirmed as a true and accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

20 Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman invited the Director of Place to provide a brief update on the junction 27 project, to which the Director of Place explained that work had been due to be completed in September 2022, however, conversations with Eden had taken place regarding the masterplans and hoped that more details would become available at scheduled meeting with Eden.

The Chair thanked the Director of Place for their comments and agreed that it would be beneficial for Eden to attend an Economy PDG meeting. The Chair asked the Director of Place if the group could be updated on the shared prosperity fund, to which the Director of Place explained that item 7 of the agenda covered the shared prosperity fund and an update could be given then.

21 New Tiverton Shopfront Enhancement Scheme

The Group received a report of the Director of Place, which informed Members about the new Tiverton Shopfront Enhancement Scheme launching in October / November 2022. An Officer highlighted the following points:

- There had been a shopfront scheme that ran till 2020 until the funding was exhausted. Due to the pandemic a relaunch of the scheme was delayed. The proposed relaunch of the scheme and would use S106 funds already earmarked for this scheme.
- This scheme was originally for the front of buildings only but had but this had been changed to include public facing parts of the building in order to help improve the look of the buildings overall and to support footfall within the town centre.
- It would be an open application process but would be assessed based on the criteria of the scheme and passed in front of a Panel for approval. Grants would cover up to 50% of the work, with a maximum grant of £2,500.
- Depending on funds, the scheme would last for 3 years with the first year capped to spend no more than £15,000 of the budget.
- A Communication plan had been written and was due to be released upon approval of the scheme.

The Chair thanked the officers for their presentation and opened the floor to Members for questions, which were as followed:

- A Members noted that the £31,000 budget for the scheme did not seem to be a significant amount and asked if an assessment had been carried out to ascertain the amount required to get the high street to a suitable standard. An Officer explained that the scheme budget had not been based on how much was needed to get the high street to a certain standard but was more of an encouragement to keep the high street as attractive as possible and that it was more of an enhancement rather than a complete refurbishment of the high street.
- A Member of the Group sought clarification over whether these funds covered structural work or was more for signage. An Officer explained that that these funds could be used for signage ensuring that it was in line with historic features.
- A Member of the Group asked how this scheme would be communicated, to which an officer informed the Group that suggestions would be welcomed on how best to approach shop owners . The Director of Place had reassured that officers were liaising with town centre officers regarding the delivery of the scheme.
- A Member of the Group raised that the scheme was to keep shops in keeping, but raised the point that there was a mixture of old and new shopfronts and questioned how this would be balanced. An officer confirmed that this would be decided by the conservation officer's assessment or through other balanced assessments.
- The Chair noted that it was a modest amount and that there may need to be a terms of reference for the funding panel. In addition, there may be other schemes that could supplement this scheme as opposed to being seen as a standalone scheme.

- Raised by a Member of the Group it was asked if there could be at least three Ward Members on the Funding Panel, to which an officer noted that previously there were three Ward members on this panel and that 3 was a good number for this panel.
- A Member raised the point that there were a lot of shops within the area the scheme covered.

RESOLVED to recommend: That the new Tiverton Shopfront Enhancement Scheme be approved and three Tiverton Ward Members be nominated to be part of the Funding Panel for the Scheme.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

22 Economy Development Team update

The Group received a report from the Director Place which provided an update on the latest economic statistics from the Economic Development Team. An officer highlighted the following points:

- Economic unemployment had stayed at 1.9% which was still higher than pre pandemic levels.
- Two job fairs had been conducted, which included opportunities for Ukrainian guests. There were people who had gained jobs from these job fairs, with one more job fair organised for October 2022.
- The work of the team over the last few months had mostly been towards gaining bids, with a bid submitted on time for the levelling up fund, with results announced in the autumn spending review. In addition, the shared prosperity fund was submitted on time but no feedback had yet been received and was due to start in October 2022.
- There were number of work programmes from this, once approved these bids would fund programmes such as: an umbrella scheme called 'love your town centre' which would include a number of programmes over a three year period, these would be used for Crediton, Tiverton and Cullompton and would support vacant shops. Some funding for events and activities would be used to enhance highstreets and support for businesses wanting to use digital marketing. However, there was no launch date for these programmes as funding was yet to be approved.
- Field to fork was a programme which supported local producers to sell directly to consumers which would help shorten the supply chain. This would also support food tourism with Mid-Devon.
- Visitor economy included a number of projects such as better signage throughout the district to encourage visitors to Mid-Devon. There was a proposal for a pilot walking festival in the 3rd year to be held across the district. The majority of the money had bene planned to go towards local businesses, supporting work hubs (flexible working) to help encourage rural facilities such as community halls to support this and develop what work hubs could offer.
- There was an intention for a grant scheme for business innovation to be delivered. These grants would help businesses get to the next stage of their development, with an intention for a business innovation centre to be created.

- Skills support and training for people for the future labour market was estimated to be introduced in 2024/25. This considered inequalities within employment with the aim to develop skills to support initial employment. It was hoped that this work programme could be deployed once funding was approved.
- A rural uplift fund was mentioned, which aimed to support the economy in rural areas, a Government package of £817,672 had been allocated to Mid-Devon. This fund would increase the shared prosperity fund, however there was a need to write and submit a proposal by the end of November. It would be capital funding and therefore had meant that it would have to be capital projects as well as be aligned with the shared prosperity fund.

The Chair opened the floor to the Group for questions that related to the rural and shared prosperity fund, which were as followed:

- A Member sought clarification on farmers who want to sell directly from their farm. They asked if farms would need the appropriate licences to do so. An Officer explained that processing of primary products would be included under DEFRA schemes whereas the Farm to Fork scheme was aimed at non farming businesses, for example a food box scheme or a shop.

The chair explained that the field to fork scheme was most likely to be used to encourage farmers to diversify.

It was added by a Member that the term field to fork was often associated with livestock farming rather than the wider agricultural market.

The Chair thanked comments from Members and asked officers to continue their presentation on the Cullompton heritage action zone. An Officer highlighted the following:

- The project officer had resigned and an interim officer had been allocated to temporarily fill this post. Recruitment was underway so that this position could be filled and it was reassured that the scheme was to be continued.
- The second round of consultations had been completed and work was underway with Devon County Council.
- There were still strands of work that were still ongoing, particularly within the voluntary sector such as homes for Ukraine so that it is ensured that sufficient support was provided.

The Group thanked the officers for their work on economic development within the district and noted that a considerable amount of work had been undertaken. In addition, the Director of Place also noted that the good work done on the shared prosperity fund.

RESOLVED: That report be noted.

23 Identification of items for the next meeting

The items identified for the next meeting were noted, however, the Group requested the following:

- That officers liaised with Devon County Council and Stagecoach for their views on the current bus services and their economic impact. With an intention for Stagecoach to be invited to speak at the Economy Policy Development Group.
- That Officers look into a potential policy gap analysis in regards to sustainable agriculture.

(The meeting ended at 6.51 pm)

CHAIRMAN