

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **ECONOMY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 10 November 2022 at 5.30 pm

Present

Councillors

J M Downes (Chairman)
Mrs C Collis, N V Davey, R J Dolley, Mrs S Griggs,
R F Radford, J Wright, R Evans and A White

Apologies

Councillor(s)

J Buczkowski

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)

24 Apologies and Substitute Members

Apologies were received from Cllr J Buczkowski, who was substituted by Cllr A White.

25 Public Question Time

There were no members of the public present and none had registered to ask a question in advance.

26 Declaration of Interests under the Code of Conduct

No interests were declared under this item.

27 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2022 were confirmed as a true and accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

28 Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman thanked officer John Bodley-Scott for their service to Mid Devon District Council and that his experience, knowledge and input had been invaluable.

29 Presentation from Eden

A presentation was given by a representative of Eden which provided an update on the Eden grounds project. The representative highlighted the following:

- In 2016 the Eden Westwood was created and this became part of Mid Devon District Council's local plan. However, this project was stalled due to the Pandemic.

- Since the last update the site and masterplan had been reviewed, which included the possible outdoor activities, employment opportunities and informal and formal communications with landowners.
- It was considered if the project could be bought forward in a phased approach.
- There was an opportunity for more visitors to be attracted to Mid Devon.
- It was believed that this project would need to generate 180 jobs which would generate circa 200 indirect jobs.
- It was believed that there would be sufficient footfall for this project to be supported.
- The retail element of this project was critical in terms of driving land value.
- Increased costs had a detrimental impact on the project, which had put the project on hold but there was a desire for the project to be continued.

The Chair thanked the Eden representative for their presentation, consideration was given to:

- Pausing the project was a missed opportunity to attract footfall to Mid Devon. The representative noted that though the project had stalled there was still an opportunity for this project, however the current economic crisis had made this a challenge.
- It was asked if the jobs created would be well paid, to which the representative mentioned that these jobs would cover a variety of roles and sectors and that Eden's aspiration was to pay at least the living wage.
- Asked if a lake would need to be created for the wild swimming activity, the Eden representative confirmed that a lake would need to be created.
- The local plan was delayed in 2016 for this project to be included and it was raised where the drive and focus for this project would come from. The Eden representative explained that Eden would work with investors to drive the project.

The Director of Place added that although the local plan was still in place the update provided had not shown how this project could be delivered moving forward. This raised questions over what would happen to the sight in the short term, however Mid Devon District Council (MDDC) continued to liaise with land owners. That the motorway service element could be an early part of that delivery, in addition, a retail, leisure and tourism study was due to take place for Mid Devon. MDDC would continue to identify deliverable opportunities to the benefit of the district.

- That land ownership was a challenge and that a phased delivery seemed logical, but was concerned that the tourist and leisure elements of this project might not be delivered for a long time.
- Shops in towns were already struggling and to regenerate those would prove to be challenging if a shopping centre were to be built, detracting footfall from the shops in those areas.

RESOLVED: That the presentation be noted.

30 **Local Economy Update**

An officer presented a report which provided the PDG with an update on the local economy.

The officer stated:

- That there were turbulent economic times, combined with a weakened pound which proved difficult for businesses and communities.
- Mid Devon had a low or equal capita per head when compared to Cornwall and Mid Devon deserved the necessary support.
- Productivity was a key metric and that charts had shown the Mid Devon was underperforming when compared to other rural regions.

Members Considered:

- Gross median pay weekly, Mid Devon seems to have benefited recently when compared to other rural regions.

In response to this an officer explained that it was an interesting result this had not occurred with the other indicators.

The Director of Place added that there were large companies within this area, for example there was an uptake in HGV Drivers salaries, but would liaise with Devon County Council to find out more details.

- That with more houses built, an increase in the number of incomes followed.
- It was raised that if more houses were to be built then more people would be brought to Mid Devon.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

31 **Economic Recovery - the Shared Prosperity and Rural England Prosperity Funds**

An officer presented a report which provided an update for Members on activities undertaken as part of the Devon Economic Recovery Plan and progress with the Shared Prosperity Fund Implementation Plan, this included the initiatives proposed under the Rural England Prosperity Fund.

The officer stated:

- The allocation received through the shared prosperity fund would be the main funding mechanism for funding local economic interventions. Mid Devon received circa £1million of funding.
- Funding was expected to be received in October 2022, however, this had been delayed.

- Mid Devon had also received an additional £800k from the Rural England Prosperity Fund. This was a capital grants only programme which meant that there were limits to what this funding could be used for.
- There were two main priorities under the Rural England Prosperity Fund, which included, to support rural businesses and farm diversification and for community infrastructure to be supported.
- Community work hubs were a potential opportunity to support.

Members considered:

- When this funding would be received. An officer explained that it was hoped the projects could be started soon after Christmas 2022.
- Mid Devon District Council had a capacity issue and the delayed funding would make implementation challenging.
- Mid Devon would benefit from this funding, however, what due diligence would be carried out when awarding grants to businesses. An officer reassured that the application process would contain sufficient due diligence.
- How the split between investment priorities was determined. An officer explained that these were indicative figures and that it would be used as flexibly as possible. The percentages indicated was a preference and the number of applications could influence the funding split.

RESOLVED: That the PDG recommend to the Cabinet approval of the direction and level of investment proposed for the Rural England Prosperity Fund.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

Reason for decision: as stated in the report.

32 **New Crediton Shopfront Enhancement Scheme**

An officer present a report which informed Members about the new Crediton Shopfront Enhancement Scheme which was due to be launched in December 2022, the report also requested approval for the revised Scheme.

An officer stated:

- That this would be used to improve the shopfronts in Crediton.
- Further funding would be sought after so that this scheme could be extended.

Members considered:

- That this scheme was very much the same as the Tiverton Shopfront scheme.

RESOLVED: That Economy PDG recommends that the new Crediton Shopfront Enhancement Scheme be approved by the Cabinet and three Crediton Ward Members are nominated to be part of the Funding Panel for the Scheme.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

Reason for decision: As stated in the report.

33 Economic Development Team Update Report

An officer presented a report which updated Members on activities undertaken by the Economic Development Team during the last quarter.

An officer stated:

- The Shared Prosperity Fund and the Rural England Prosperity Fund had taken up the majority of the team's time over the past few months.
- Job fairs had been supported alongside Job Centre Plus. A couple of job fairs had been carried out one specifically for Ukrainian Refugees and one for those with disabilities.
- There had been a steady increase in the number of shop vacancies over the past year in Cullompton and Tiverton.
- Initiatives were underway within Cullompton under the Heritage Action Zone.
- Support continued to be provided to refugees under the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

Members considered:

- Cullompton is in a worrying position regarding shopfront vacancies, it was asked if this had been over a sustained period. An officer explained that it was suspected that the vacancy rate had been quite high for a while.
- Crediton had done well on the shopfront vacancy rate.
- Crediton shops were quite niche and there was concern over their susceptibility.

RESOLVED: That report be noted.

34 Access to Information - Exclusion of the Press and Public

The Chairman indicated that discussion with regard to the next item, may require the Committee to pass the following resolution to exclude the press and public having reflected on Article 12 12.02(d) (a presumption in favour of openness) of the Constitution. This decision may be required because consideration of this matter in public may disclose information falling within one of the descriptions of exempt information in Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972. The Committee would need to decide whether, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption, outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

35 Medium Term Financial Plan - Options

The Group had before it and **NOTED**, a *report from the Deputy Chief Executive providing the Medium Term Financial Plan.

RESOLVED that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the next item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 respectively of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

(Proposed by the Chairman)

Members then reviewed the options included within the Part 2 appendices and made recommendations to the Cabinet on the options preferred.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

Note: *report previously circulated and attached to the minutes

The meeting then returned to open session

36 **Identification of items for the next meeting**

No further items were identified to be on the agenda for the next meeting other than those already listed. However, officers acknowledged that work was underway regarding items that related to the Agricultural gap Analysis and Stagecoach Buses.

(The meeting ended at 8.07 pm)

CHAIRMAN