

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **ECONOMY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 7 March 2024 at 5.30 pm

Present

Councillors

J M Downes (Chairman)
G Cochran, A Cuddy, M Farrell (Vice
Chairman), B Fish, M Fletcher, N Letch,
R Roberts and G Westcott

Also Present

Councillors

D Broom, E Buczkowski, J Buczkowski, G Czapiewski,
G Duchesne, B Holdman, S Keable and D Wulff

Also Present

Officers

Richard Marsh (Director of Place & Economy), Matthew Page (Corporate Manager for People, Governance and Waste), Paul Deal (Corporate Manager for Finance, Property and Climate Change), Luke Howard (Environment and Enforcement Manager), Zoë Lentell (Economic Development Team Leader), Darren Beer (Operations Manager for Street Scene), Amy Dugard (Growth and Regeneration Officer), Laura Woon (Democratic Services Manager) and Sarah Lees (Democratic Services Officer)

55 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Initial apologies had been provided by Cllr G Westcott, however, shortly after the meeting commenced Cllr G Westcott arrived.

56 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No members of the public had registered to speak and none were present.

57 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT

No interests were declared under this item, however, Members were reminded of the need to make a declaration should it become relevant during the course of the meeting.

58 MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 4 January 2024, were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

59 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman stated that the meeting agenda was very long and that he wanted all contributions to be relevant to the topic in hand and not to drift off into other areas.

60 MEETING MANAGEMENT

Since there were no members of the public present for the Car Parking Consultation Working Group item, the Chairman stated that items 13 and 14 would be brought forward as the next items of business so that the officers presenting these were able to leave in good time afterwards rather than wait to the end of a long agenda.

61 TOURISM EVENTS UPDATE (00:05:00)

The Economic Development Team Leader provided the Group with a presentation regarding a number of tourism events scheduled for the near future, these included:

The Swan Trail

- There would be a launch event on 3rd April 2024.
- The trail would run from Easter until the end of the October half term.
- Free guides would be available.
- Strategic objectives included a need to increase the vibrancy in the town and encourage greater footfall.
- The trail would take 2 ½ hours to complete, there would be 12 fixed locations (across each of the town's 5 retail quarters) and the theme would be a celebration of Tiverton, its culture, history and wildlife.
- 9 local artists had engaged with the project, providing the design and painting skills. Each swan had been sprayed with anti-graffiti lacquer.
- Performance would be measured by footfall, visitor numbers, engagement with social media posts, feedback and liaison with the Town Centre Partnership.
- The intention was to hold an auction at the end of the project.

Walking Festival

- Circular and linear walks were included to increase visitor numbers and spends in the district.
- Town and Parish Councils had been involved in the Festival Programme as well as Walking Associations, attractions, organisations and businesses.
- The programme would be fully promoted via all available forums and evaluated at the conclusion of the event.

Other Funded projects

- Treasure Trails
- Egg Hunt
- Shakespeare in the Square (in Crediton)

Discussion took place regarding:

- Attractions had been approached and encouraged to advertise on the downloadable pdf walking routes.
- The swans would be fixed via metal straps to heavy concrete plinths making it very difficult for them to be vandalised, stolen or relocated.
- The locations for the swans had been risk assessed.
- The need to grasp every promotional opportunity.
- The Communications team had been asked to liaise with external media colleagues to bring a focus to the Swan Trail launch via their platforms.

The Economic Development Team were thanked and congratulated on the content of the presentation. The Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration said that it had been an ‘...immense privilege’ to work with the Economic Development Team on the use of this funding and for coming up with such an impressive range of schemes.

62 FIELD TO FORK: MEET THE PRODUCER PROJECT UPDATE (00:20:00)

The Group received a presentation from the Economic Development Team Leader regarding the Field to Fork project. This included the following information:

- The scheme was about supporting local producers and encouraging shoppers to buy local.
- There had been a spotlight on the supply chain.
- A key aim was to strengthen local entrepreneurial ecosystems.
- There was a need to develop and promote the visitor economy.
- A photographer / videographer had been commissioned.
- There had been a spread of projects across the district.
- Having gathered data from Facebook and Instagram, the metrics were very encouraging showing all targets being exceeded.

63 PARKING CONSULTATION WORKING GROUP - PROPOSALS REGARDING LONG STAY TARIFFS (00:37:00)

The Group had before it a report * from the Environment and Enforcement Manager and the Corporate Manager for People, Governance and Waste providing recommendations from the Parking Consultation Working Group. The group had been working through proposals to amend tariff functions in order to better support local community demand.

The contents of the report were outlined with particular reference to the following:

- The Parking Consultation Working Group was formed to work with local communities and business groups to better understand the parking requirements of towns in Mid Devon. Members, Local business owners, Town Council and Officers represented the District through attending group meetings and these had been productive.

- In order to determine the scope of the group and better understand what proposals could be explored, terms of reference were discussed and agreed by officers and representative members at its first meeting.
- The group prioritised looking at long term stay tariffs and what could be done to potentially increase resident and visitor presence in our town centres. In particular, the group felt and aired the view that more needed to be done to incentivise the purchase of 3 hour parking tickets over purchasing 2 hour tickets. This would encourage people to spend longer periods of time when shopping and meeting family and friends in the community.
- The group put forward new proposals regarding additional tariffs relevant to long stay car parks for consideration by the Economy Policy Development Group and, if seen as a viable option, by Cabinet for ratification. The priority for looking at this issue had come from representatives wanting the tariffs to be revised to encourage more visitors to stay longer in our town centres. It was felt by the group that this was a priority for consideration. By enabling users to have a varied choice in tariff options it would assist town centre business and encourage longer stays.
- The proposals put forward by the group regarding Long Stay parking tariffs had been carefully deliberated and all aspects considered regarding how they supported the community, local businesses and the Council. The Council was praised by group members at its last meeting for taking steps to merge the gap between the Council and local communities when making decisions and for building greater collaboration and shared working.
- The group was proposing to implement some additional tariff bands in Long Stay carparks throughout the district. The group was also proposing to implement a 3 hour tariff in Market Place, Tiverton, to support medium stay visitors in the centre of town. The group had also requested this PDG to consider five free Saturdays in the Multi Storey Car Park, Tiverton, High Street, Crediton and Station Road, Cullompton to support Christmas 2024. The proposed dates were:
 - 23 November 2024
 - 30 November 2024
 - 7 December 2024
 - 14 December 2024
 - 21 December 2024
- Further explorative discussions had been held about the possibility of offering free Sunday parking to compliment the Saturdays. This would be further looked into regarding funding and viability.
- The proposals had been costed based on vends from the financial year 2022/23. However, due to the nature of the proposals which were implementing new tariff bands, it was extremely difficult to compare any relative data in respect of what the likely user take up would be. The costings were therefore best estimates based on knowledge of vends for the other tariff bands currently and were available on request.
- The proposals in Appendix 1 of the report included the inflation increase of 6.7% approved by Cabinet to support the budget setting process.

Discussion took place with regard to:

- The Chairman congratulated the Working Group on its work, praising the collaborative working ethos across all participating representatives.
- The Council's Finance officers were content with the proposals being made.
- The Chairman hoped that the Working Group would continue to engage with local stakeholders in all such discussions in the future.
- Feedback from the consultees to the Group had been very positive and had stated that this would be a good example of working with the public to achieve desired aims for the local community.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet that:

- a) The proposed tariff changes be approved.
- b) Approval be given for five free Saturday's parking at the Multi Storey Car Park Tiverton, High Street (St Saviours), Crediton and Station Road, Cullompton, in the lead up to Christmas 2024.

(Proposed by Cllr G Cochran and seconded by Cllr N Letch)

Reasons for the decision

Parking generated substantial revenue and proposals from the group were expected to help the council balance income against community requests. The group also explored opportunities to increase revenue streams.

The group considered how decisions impact on the climate, with special consideration given to improving climate impacts of parking through the implementation of technology such as EV Charging.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

64 **THE BIODIVERSITY DUTY (00:47:00)**

The Group had before it a briefing paper * from the Climate and Sustainability Specialist and the Director of Place and Economy setting out the need for all of the Council's operating areas to be fully aware of their responsibility in needing to meet the biodiversity duty.

The following was highlighted within the paper:

- The importance of this obligation.
- There was a distinction between what the Council could do in terms of 'planning' and what the Council could do in terms of everything else, for example, being a landowner, waste collector and managing car parks.
- The report set out what the Council was currently doing to exercise its Biodiversity duty but also what more could be done.
- A joined up approach was needed, with all Policy Development Group comments and suggestions being collated and then forwarded to Cabinet as recommendations.

Discussion took place regarding:

- There needed to be an embedded mind-set that everything the Council did had to have regard to the Biodiversity duty placed upon it.
- The intention was to monitor actions through an audit plan, rather like the Risk Register thereby monitoring progress against targets.
- A suggestion was made that the 'donut' economic model be used as a way to assess and monitor this duty, however, this had not received much support in the past.
- It was also suggested that the Committee report template have an additional section in it asking for Biodiversity consideration to be given to all issues coming to Committee.

Note: * Briefing paper previously circulated.

65 **PERFORMANCE DASHBOARD Q3 (01:00:00)**

The Group were presented with the Performance Dashboard for quarter 3 showing performance against target in the current year to date.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Why the Culm Garden Village and the Cullompton Relief Road were still 'both' not risk rated as 25? It was explained that the risk rating in relation to the Garden Village was 20 and not 25 because there was slightly lower level of risk compared to the Relief Road due to the fact that this was reliant on J28 and there was still engagement with the Government over funding.
- Slippage in relation to retail outlets in Westex, car parks and the Cullompton Relief Road. Redevelopment at Market walk had also slipped.
- The fact that projects had stalled did not mean the Council was losing money but that the delay was holding up growth.
- Pressure may need to be brought by the Group on the Cabinet regarding J28, the Garden Village and the Crediton Masterplan.
- It was confirmed that there were 253 empty properties falling under the Business Rate Scheme.

Note: * Performance Dashboard previously circulated.

66 **JUNCTION 27 AND JUNCTION 28 UPDATE (01:15:00)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Director of Place and Economy updating Members on the current position in relation to development at both Junction 27 and Junction 28 of the M5 in Mid Devon.

The following was highlighted within the report and discussion took place with regard to:

- Both motorway junctions had been identified in the Local Plan and had presented significant opportunities for economic growth.
- J27 had had a long history with mixed results. The Eden Project work had commenced and been reported to the Group but had ended up not being a

viable prospect for them to pursue. There would be a need to consider that allocation in the new Local Plan.

- The demand for tourism and leisure continued to be assessed and any proposals would be presented to the Planning Policy Advisory Group and eventually this Group.
- Covid had had a significant effect on the development of proposals.
- There was a lot of development ambition at J28. Proposals regarding Cullompton continued with every aspiration that they would succeed, however, without the Cullompton Relief Road, the Culm Garden Village could not happen. Much was dependent on the outcome of funding bids
- A draft business case was going to Devon County Councils Cabinet meeting on 13/3 for decision as they were the Highways Authority.
- A lot of public consultation had taken place with 92% of respondees supporting the Relief Road intervention. Public support was there which would help with any bids to central Government. Development here would unlock employment potential as well as other economic benefits.
- The Cullompton Railway project was progressing positively.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

67 **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TEAM UPDATE (01:40:00)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Director of Place and Economy updating Members on town centre health, projects and activities undertaken by the Growth, Economy and Delivery Team during the last two months.

Discussion took place with regard to:

- Why there was a drop in footfall figures during December when traditionally this was a key trading period? The statistics were being analysed and the details would be brought to the next meeting.
- It was also requested that the data be compared with that collected nationally and brought to the next meeting since it was likely the national cost of living crisis was having an affect up and down the country.
- The closure of Bampton Street in Tiverton in December, having an effect on trading figures.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

68 **MID DEVON'S PROSPERITY PROGRAMME UPDATE (01:49:00)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Director of Place and Economy updating Members on the progress made under the Shared Prosperity Investment Plan (Year 2: 2023/24 and informing Members of the Year 3 (2024/25) Delivery Plan for Mid Devon's Prosperity Programmes.

Discussion took place regarding:

- There were currently no replacement funding streams announced once the Prosperity Programme came to an end.
- Devon had been one of the lowest recipients of SPF monies.

- It was anticipated that the Council would have to enter into a bids process again.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

69 FLEXIBLE WORKSPACE PROVISION UPDATE (02:00:00)

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report from the Director of Place and Economy updating Members on the viability study for the provision of flexible workspace in Tiverton town centre.

The following was highlighted in the report and discussion took place regarding:

- There had been a visible gap in the Tiverton area regarding this sort of facility therefore the Economic Development Team had been keen to explore the opportunity. Shared Prosperity Fund funding had been used.
- There had been a strong ambition to draw people into the town with disposable income and a desire to increase footfall.
- The report provided an overview of the different types of work facility. This was based on an 'office when needed' concept with people coming and going as they wished.
- The idea was for a well-managed hub facility providing opportunities to build up a collaborative environment.
- There were competing aspirations for this building, however, a community based drop in facility was needed with broad needs.
- The provision of high speed internet would be critical.
- The Council needed to make sure this new opportunity was not identified with previous attempts to provide work space hubs.
- There had been some previous negative social media which it was hoped would cease with the new proposals.
- The direction of travel was viewed as being positive and the proposals were supported by the Group.
- There were very few buildings which suited this type of use.
- The model had been developed to work for a minimum of 45 users, 4 officers, 10 memberships with fixed desks.
- This provided an opportunity that could not be missed. It was the role of the Policy Development Group to support and encourage economic development where it could.

Note: (i) * Report previously circulated.

(ii) Cllr Beckett Fish declared a personal interest as he worked for a Telecoms Company.

70 INCOME GENERATION (02:34:00)

The Chairman stated that he felt this item was best discussed in the first meeting of the new municipal year therefore he proposed that this item be deferred until the June meeting. This was supported.

One of the suggestions would be to discuss advertising on Council owned vehicles.

71 CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2023/2024 (02:36:00)

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, the Annual Report * from the Chairman of the Policy Development Group summarising the work of the Group during 2023/24.

There being no discussion on this item, the report would now go forward to full Council to note at its meeting on 24th April.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

72 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (02:37:00)

In addition to the items already listed the following was requested by the Group to be on an agenda either for the following or a future meeting:

- Income generation, including advertising on Council owned vehicles.

(The meeting ended at 8.08 pm)

CHAIRMAN