

Economy & Assets Policy Development Group

Thursday, 6 March 2025 at 5.30 pm
Phoenix Chambers, Phoenix House, Tiverton

Next meeting
Thursday, 19 June 2025 at 5.30 pm

Please Note: This meeting will take place at Phoenix House and members of the public and press are able to attend via Teams. If you are intending to attend in person please contact the committee clerk in advance, in order that numbers of people can be appropriately managed in physical meeting rooms.

The meeting will be hybrid and an audio recording made and published on the website after the meeting.

[To join the meeting online, click here](#)

Meeting ID: 337 858 905 909
Passcode: 4vFpR2

Membership

Cllr G Cochran
Cllr J M Downes (Chair)
Cllr M Farrell
Cllr M Fletcher
Cllr L Knight
Cllr N Letch
Cllr J Poynton
Cllr R Roberts
Cllr A Stirling

AGENDA

Members are reminded of the need to make declarations of interest prior to any discussion which may take place

- 1 **Apologies and Substitute Members**
To receive any apologies for absence and notice of appointment of substitutes.
- 2 **Public Question Time**
To receive any questions from members of the public and replies thereto.
- 3 **Declaration of Interests under the Code of Conduct**
To record any interests on agenda matters.
- 4 **Minutes** (*Pages 5 - 10*)
To consider whether to approve the minutes as a correct record of the meeting held on 28 November 2024.
- 5 **Chair's Announcements**
To receive any announcements that the Chair may wish to make.
- 6 **Employment and Skills Hub project presentation**
To receive a presentation from Devon County Council regarding the Employment and Skills Hub Project.
- 7 **Performance Dashboard Q3** (*Pages 11 - 12*)
To receive performance information for the areas falling under the remit of this Policy Development Group for quarter 3 of 2024/2025.
- 8 **Economic Development Team Update** (*Pages 13 - 20*)
To receive a report from the Director of Place updating Members on projects and activities undertaken by Growth, Economy and Delivery Team during the last couple of months. The report also updates Members on the review of the Economic Strategy for Mid Devon.
- 9 **Chair's Annual Report 2024/2025** (*Pages 21 - 24*)
To receive the Chair's Annual Report for 2024/2025. The report provides an opportunity to recognise the achievements of the previous year whilst also allowing discussion to take place regarding aspirations for the coming year.

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

Members are asked to note that the following items are already identified in the work programme for the next meeting:

- Election of Chair for 2025/2026
- Election of Vice Chair for 2025/2026
- Start time of meetings for 2025/2026
- Performance Dashboard for Q4
- Economic Development Team Update
- Asset Management Plan
- Destination Management Plan
- Economic Development Strategy

Note: This item is limited to 10 minutes. There should be no discussion on the items raised.

Stephen Walford
Chief Executive
Wednesday, 26 February 2025

Guidance notes for meetings of Mid Devon District Council

From 7 May 2021, the law requires all councils to hold formal meetings in person. The Council will enable all people to continue to participate in meetings via Teams.

If the Council experience technology difficulties at a committee meeting the Chairman may make the decision to continue the meeting 'in-person' only to conclude the business on the agenda.

1. Inspection of Papers

Any person wishing to inspect minutes, reports, or the background papers for any item on the agenda should contact Democratic Services at Committee@middevon.gov.uk

They can also be accessed via the council's website [Click Here](#)

Printed agendas can also be viewed in reception at the Council offices at Phoenix House, Phoenix Lane, Tiverton, EX16 6PP.

2. Members' Code of Conduct requirements

When considering the declaration of interests and their actions as a councillor, Members are reminded of the requirements of the Members' Code of Conduct and the underpinning Principles of Public Life: Honesty; Integrity; Selflessness; Objectivity; Accountability; Openness; Leadership.

The Code of Conduct can be [viewed here](#).

3. Minutes of the Meeting

Details of the issues discussed, and recommendations made at the meeting will be set out in the minutes, which the Committee will be asked to approve as a correct record at its next meeting. Minutes of meetings are not verbatim.

4. Public Question Time

Residents, electors or business rate payers of the District wishing to raise a question and/or statement under public question time are asked to provide their written questions to the Democratic Services team by 5pm three clear working days before the meeting to ensure that a response can be provided at the meeting. You will be invited to ask your question and or statement at the meeting and will receive the answer prior to, or as part of, the debate on that item. Alternatively, if you are content to receive an answer after the item has been debated, you can register to speak by emailing your full name to Committee@middevon.gov.uk by no later than 4pm on the day before the meeting. You will be invited to speak at the meeting and will receive a written response within 10 clear working days following the meeting. Notification in this way will ensure the meeting runs as smoothly as possible

5. Meeting Etiquette for participants

- Only speak when invited to do so by the Chair.
- If you're referring to a specific page, mention the page number.

For those joining the meeting virtually:

- Mute your microphone when you are not talking.
- Switch off your camera if you are not speaking.
- Speak clearly (if you are not using camera then please state your name)
- Switch off your camera and microphone after you have spoken.
- There is a facility in Microsoft Teams under the ellipsis button called “turn on live captions” which provides subtitles on the screen.

6. Exclusion of Press & Public

When considering an item on the agenda, the Committee may consider it appropriate to pass a resolution under Section 100A (4) Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 that the press and public be excluded from the meeting on the basis that if they were present during the business to be transacted there would be a likelihood of disclosure of exempt information, as defined under the terms of the Act. If there are members of the public and press listening to the open part of the meeting, then the Democratic Services Officer will, at the appropriate time, ask participants to leave the meeting when any exempt or confidential information is about to be discussed. They will be invited to return as soon as the meeting returns to open session.

7. Recording of meetings

All media, including radio and TV journalists, and members of the public may attend Council, Cabinet, PDG and Committee meetings (apart from items Media and Social Media Policy - 2023 page 22 where the public is excluded) you can view our Media and Social Media Policy [here](#). They may record, film or use social media before, during or after the meeting, so long as this does not distract from or interfere unduly with the smooth running of the meeting. Anyone proposing to film during the meeting is requested to make this known to the Chairman in advance. The Council also makes audio recordings of meetings which are published on our website [Browse Meetings, 2024 - MIDDEVON.GOV.UK](#).

8. Fire Drill Procedure

If you hear the fire alarm you should leave the building by the marked fire exits, follow the direction signs and assemble at the master point outside the entrance. Do not use the lifts or the main staircase. You must wait there until directed otherwise by a senior officer. If anybody present is likely to need assistance in exiting the building in the event of an emergency, please ensure you have let a member of Democratic Services know before the meeting begins and arrangements will be made should an emergency occur.

9. WIFI

An open, publicly available Wi-Fi network is normally available for meetings held in the Phoenix Chambers at Phoenix House.

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MINUTES of a MEETING of the ECONOMY & ASSETS POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP held on 28 November 2024 at 5.30 pm

Present

Councillors M Farrell (Vice-Chair), G Cochran, M Fletcher, B Holdman, L Knight, N Letch, R Roberts and A Stirling

Apology

Councillor J M Downes

Also Present

Councillor G Westcott

Also Present Officers

Richard Marsh (Director of Place & Economy), Paul Deal (Head of Finance, Property & Climate Resilience), Adrian Welsh (Strategic Manager for Growth, Economy and Delivery), Zoë Lentell (Economic Development Team Leader) and Sarah Lees (Democratic Services Officer)

Councillors Online

E Buczkowski, J Buczkowski and S Keable

Officers Online

Dr Stephen Carr (Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager), Linda Perry (Economic Development Manager) and Laura Woon (Democratic Services Manager)

Also in

Attendance Rachel Phillips from the Apricot Centre

26 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from Cllr J Downes who was substituted by Cllr B Holdman.

Note: The meeting was chaired by Cllr M Farrell, the Vice Chair.

27 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No members of the public asked questions.

28 **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT**

No interests were declared under this item.

29 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 19th September 2024, were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chair.

30 **CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair had no announcements to make.

31 **PRESENTATION FROM THE APRICOT CENTRE (00:05:00)**

Rachel Phillips from the Apricot Centre provided the Group with a presentation which included the following information:

- They were a bio-organic farm which as well as growing and selling produce offered an education service, training opportunities and a well-being service. Their aim was to work with as many farms across Devon as possible.
- They had applied for and been successful in obtaining, Shared Prosperity Funding from the Council and were thriving in all of their ventures.
- The farm spread across 200 acres.
- They offered different training opportunities, such as knowledge sharing workshops, with community focus being very much at the heart of what they did.
- Increasing biodiversity and reducing carbon impacts were key priorities.
- They worked a lot with new entrant farmers and provided free consultancy and mentoring services in such areas as farm design and farm book keeping.
- Some farmers needed the validation of a professional qualification and the Apricot Centre offered this. The centre offered a wide range of respected qualifications.
- They were trail blazers and grateful for the support from the District Council who in helping to provide the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) funding they needed were helping them to create rural skills for rural communities.
- Long term funding was needed however to facilitate the continuation of this good work.
- Soil testing was another area of focus trying to establish how soils capture carbon through soil symbiosis and the study of this in a laboratory.
- The Centre also offered clinical therapy in a 'non-clinical' setting to a range of age groups.

Consideration was given to:

- There were 22 core members of staff and the Centre currently had a £1.5m turnover figure.
- They would be able to continue without funding from the SPF as they had secured some funding for next year, however, they would not be able to offer as much education. They aimed to offer courses free of charge to farmers in

particular as it did not seem fair to set framers off with a huge training debt before they had even started their careers.

- The importance of children knowing where their food comes from.
- Wildlife tracking was also important, people and wildlife all being part of the same ecosystem.
- They had worked with primary schools to create poly tunnels and raised vegetable areas. It was important to get the whole community involved. Also, involvement at an early age was vital. The Centre worked with schools to ensure they fitted in with the school curriculum.

The Chair thanked the representatives from the Apricot Centre for their attendance and for providing an interesting presentation. The information was **NOTED**.

Note: Cllr A Stirling declared a personal interest (subsequent to the meeting) in that he had attended a course with the Apricot Centre prior to them being in receipt of any SPF funding via the Council. He had paid for the course himself several years ago.

32 **PERFORMANCE DASHBOARD Q2 (00:33:00)**

The Group were presented with, and **NOTED**, a slide * showing performance information in the Economy & Assets area under the General Fund.

Since the Dashboard was last presented to this meeting, work had been ongoing to create a glossary. This contained all the measures used as part of the Dashboards and provided a definition for each. The definitions aimed to provide a fuller understanding of what was being measured and how. This was available on the Council's website.

There was one red measure and that was Capital Slippage of Projects. There were 5 projects slipping either fully or partially into 2025/26 the largest of which was the Cullompton Relief Road but this had recently received full funding approval.

Discussion took place with regard to:

- What was being done to support struggling small businesses given the number of empty properties was shown as 224? It was explained that this would depend on which ones were owned by the Council and a more thorough analysis of the Business Rates data would be needed to fully answer that question where it was possible.
- The Tiverton Pannier Market Strategy would be reviewed in the near future and the Council would work closely with the traders in order to do this.
- It was hoped the new glossary which had been circulated through the Members Weekly Information Sheet and on the website would help Members better understand the Dashboards.
- There was a full expectation that developers would continue to financially contribute to the infrastructure needed to support the Culm Garden Village.
- There was no further news on Cullompton Railway Station at this stage other than to say that its delivery was vital to the successful outcome of the other projects taking place in Cullompton. Interventions should be seen as interdependent rather than as individual projects.

Note: * Slide previously circulated.

33 **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2025/2026 (00:45:00)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Deputy Chief Executive (S151 Officer) presenting the options to update the 2025/2026 budget for consideration / approval.

The following was highlighted within the report:

- The report provided a 'refresh' of the service areas falling under the umbrella of this Policy Development Group and showed the movement to date in the process of trying to set the budget for 2025/2026 and beyond. The budget gap for 2025/26 was currently £397k. It was hoped that the Government funding settlement expected just before Christmas and finalisation of 'corporate budgets' would help to plug this gap.
- Appendix 1 listed the service areas falling under the remit of this Policy Development Group and the officer talked the Group through each line.
- A lot of work would be needed in respect of the funding announcements expected just before Christmas and to finalise business rates in the final week before the budget was approved for next year.
- It was hoped there would be good news regarding Council Tax and Business Rates, however, the rise in National Insurance would negatively affect the Council's finances if not fully offset as Government have indicated.
- It would be a while before the full effect of the housing rents error was known on the Council's finances.
- The Group was reminded that there was still a significant gap predicted for future years.
- Membership of the Capital Strategy Asset Group was clarified.
- A report going to Cabinet in December 2024 would present the very latest position ahead of Council needing to agree a budget in February 2025.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

34 **SHARED PROSPERITY FUND: YEAR 4 OUTLINE DELIVERY PLAN (2025/26) (01:17:00)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report from the Director of Place and Economy providing an Outline Delivery Plan for a potential extension to the Shared Prosperity Fund programme (2025/26).

The following was referred to in the report:

- Details regarding the potential extension for a further year were yet to be received. A final Delivery Plan would be presented to this Group once those details had been received and understood.
- The team were working on an initial assumption based on previous years.
- The recent and on-going Economic Development Strategy workshops would help to inform the Delivery Plan going forwards in terms of focus and direction.

Discussion took place with regard to whether there was an evaluation on the local nature and sustainability of supported projects. It was explained that this very much came into play under the Rural England Prosperity Fund, for example projects

needed to demonstrate that economic advantage to one project/business didn't disadvantage another one. They also needed to demonstrate that the project had no negative impact upon the environment.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

35 **SHARED PROSPERITY FUND YEAR 3 Q2 UPDATE (01:22:00)**

The Group received, and **NOTED**, a presentation from the Economic Development Team Leader providing an update on the Shared Prosperity Fund Year 3, Quarter 2 position.

The following summary was provided:

- Key activities under the 'Love Your Town Centre' project had been the Shopfront Enhancement Scheme and the Business Growth Fit-Out Schemes. Key objectives had been to improve commercial buildings, reduce vacant units, support businesses, arts, cultural and heritage events. Next steps included a continuation of shopfront match funded scheme and new schemes planned for 2025/26. Challenges included a low application rate and weather impacting event delivery.
- Field to Fork: Meet the Producer Campaign. Showcasing Events, including the Mid Devon Show 2024 and the Devon County Show 2024. Food and drink businesses supported were listed in the presentation.
- Visitor Economy: Promoting Mid Devon Tourism Events and Activities, including the Tiverton Swan Trail and the Mid Devon Walking Festival.
- Other Projects included People and Skills: Employment Skills Hub project with Devon County Council, Business Innovation Centre and Outreach Programme with Petroc College. Business Support through the Prosper Support Programme with Devon County Council. Further Business Support through Devon Agri-Tech Alliance.
- Much had been achieved in terms of Business Support and Outreach.
- Prosperity Programme: Grant scheme supporting applications under various themes.
- Work Hub Scheme: The Hubs supported were listed and the next steps were works to the Market Centre which would commence in December 2024 and advertising for 'Expressions of Interest' from prospective operators.
- Prosperity Grants: Prosperity Programme completed and ongoing monitoring underway. Higher interest in adopting new technologies and reaching new markets versus lower interest in job creation. Business support was being promoted to encourage more take-up.

Discussion took place regarding:

- It was not yet known which areas of Mid Devon would receive funding for particular projects. It was hoped that there would be a fair distribution across the district.
- More innovative ideas were needed to support town centre business premises.
- How footfall data was collected was explained. This took place through the use of a facilitator called 'Visitor Insights' which used geolocation data from

digital devices and was 97% accurate. This data was shared with Town Councils and other service areas within the Council.

- 80% of customers searched online for products first therefore businesses were strongly encouraged to create an online presence.
- The Prosper Programme provided advice and support and businesses were encouraged to tap into this.
- The appearance of some shop fronts in town centres was putting some people off from visiting. Tiverton in particular had a significant problem with absentee landlords so it was very difficult to seek engagement from them. The Shopfront Enhancement Scheme existed to help support the improvement of some shopfronts but this needed to be applied for and engagement with the landlord was vital.
- The Government had started to introduce high street rental auctions. The Council needed to understand what opportunities that might provide going forwards.

36 **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TEAM UPDATE (02:05:00)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report from the Director of Place and Economy providing an update on activities carried out by the Growth, Economy and Delivery Team since the last Policy Development Group meeting.

The contents of the report were outlined.

Consideration was given to:

- A need to remind Ward Members about the support that Prosper offered and how to go about putting businesses in touch with the right people.
- The majority of the external works to the Market Walk property would commence next month.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

37 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (02:11:00)**

The items already listed in the work programme for the next meeting were **NOTED**.

A brief discussion took place regarding the current situation regarding Broadband provision in Mid Devon. It was requested that details regarding a sister scheme to 'Connecting Devon and Somerset' be circulated to all Members. This was in relation to boosting mobile phone coverage.

(The meeting ended at 7.44 pm)

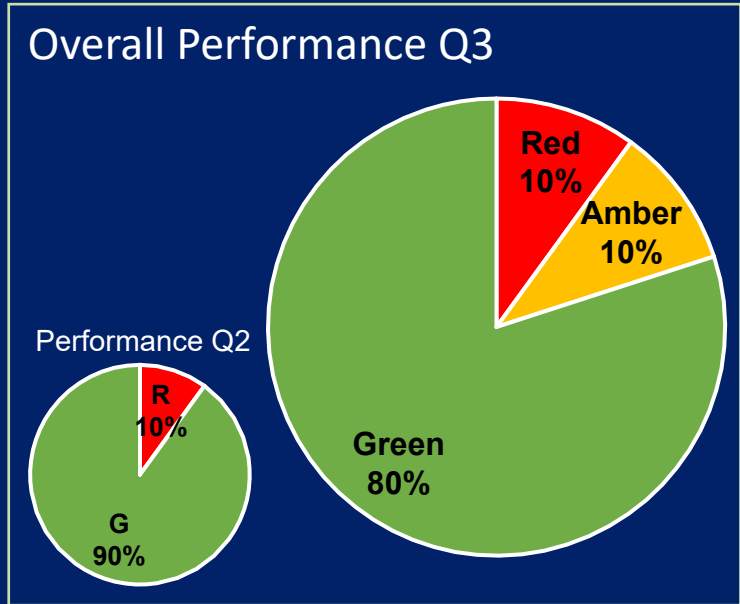
CHAIR

Economy & Assets PDG Performance Dashboard – Quarter 3 2024/25

Performance Measures	Performance	Annual Target	Rating
Pannier market occupancy rate (Average YTD)	85%	85%	G
Businesses supported – non financial support (YTD)	491	250	G
Commercial property voids (YTD)	1.7%	5%	G
Events supported in our town centres (YTD)	111	6	G
Tourism events supported (YTD)	4	2	G
Business rateable value (Current)	£54,765,252	N/A	
Empty business properties (Current)	225	N/A	
Funding secured to support economic projects (YTD)	£1,318,995	£400,000	G

Finance Measures	Performance	Annual Target	Rating
E&A PDG – Projected Outturn	£1,570k	£1,631k	G
Car Parking Income – Projected Outturn	(£1,062k)	(£1,102k)	A
Pannier Market Income – Projected Outturn	(£108k)	(£108k)	G
E&A PDG – Capital Slippage % of projects (Current)	50%	0%	R

Corporate Risk	Risk Rating (Trajectory)
Culm Garden Village – Loss of capacity funding	9 (Decreasing)
Culm Garden Village – Project delays/ impacts due to infrastructure delays	15 (No change)
Cullompton Town Centre Relief Road	15 (No change)



In Focus

Pannier market occupancy:

	2023/24	2024/25
Q1	89%	87%
Q2	85%	84%
Q3	88%	85%
Q4	81%	

Regular traders at the Pannier market can also be considered by trading day. For Quarter 3 2024/25, the occupancy rate was: Tuesday (80%); Friday (87%); and Saturday (88%).

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Report for: Economy and Assets PDG

Date of Meeting:	6 March 2025
Subject:	Economic Development Team Update
Cabinet Member:	Cllr Steve Keable, Planning & Regeneration
Responsible Officer:	Richard Marsh, Director of Place
Exempt:	N/A
Wards Affected:	All wards
Enclosures:	N/A

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendation(s)

To update Members on projects and activities undertaken by the Growth, Economy and Delivery Team during the last couple of months.

To also update Members on the review of the Economic Strategy for Mid Devon.

Recommendation(s):

That members note the contents of the report.

Section 2 – Report

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This report provides an update on activities carried out by the Growth, Economy and Delivery Team since the last meeting of this group.

2.0 Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund

2.1 Work continues on the delivery of the final phase of the Shared Prosperity and Rural England Prosperity Fund Delivery Plan. Some key items to note include:

- **Flexible Workspace:** Works on the Tiverton work hub commenced on 2 December 2024 and are due for completion by 11 March 2025. Progress is good. No complaints have been received from users of the carpark and the contractor continues to minimise disruption. Expression of Interest have been sought from potential operators and these are being considered.
- **Field to Fork:** The Field to Fork photography project, has so far, successfully supported 10 businesses, showcasing their images and posts across our social media platforms, accompanied by a dedicated blog on our Visit Mid Devon website. At the time of writing there were 7 businesses remaining in the project, and we will promote a new business each week with their unique content. As we approach the conclusion of the project, we have a finale reel that will highlight images and footage collected throughout the entire initiative, providing a fitting finish for the overall project. The businesses involved have expressed their gratitude for the positive experiences with our photographer and have appreciated the quality of the footage received.

Business involved and supported:

- Bickleigh Mill
 - Sandford Orchards
 - Canal Tea Rooms
 - Thunderflower
 - Culm Valley Inn
 - The Duck at Yeoford
 - The Lost Kitchen
 - Quicke's Cheese
 - UK BBQ School
 - Devon Cookery School
 - Hanlons Brewery
 - Quoit at Cros
 - Hartnoll hotel
 - Rull Orchard
 - Thorne Farm Shop
 - Wellhayes
 - Crediton Food Festival (will be promoted later in the year)
 - Electric Nights (will be promoted later in the year)
- **Visitor Economy:** The Visit Mid Devon campaigns have been actively promoting the region as a prime destination for visitors, showcasing its scenic walks, attractions, events, and accommodation options. Collaboration with local businesses has led to successful competitions that have increased the area's visibility. Additionally, several new businesses have joined the initiative, further strengthening the campaign. The Field to Fork project has also contributed to enhancing visual content, enriching the overall promotional efforts. Over the Christmas period, we conducted a 'Shop Local' campaign to encourage support for local businesses. This was

complemented by the promotion of free parking, which was advertised through online channels, radio and press, ensuring widespread awareness and engagement.

Devon and Partners Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) is a recently formed public/private sector partnership between the county's local authorities, destination management organisations and regional businesses. We sit on the advisory board for this partnership. The LVEP is currently forming their growth plan for Devon.

Main objectives are:

- Grow Visitor Spend - Create new growth by pivoting the visitor economy from day to stay
 - Spread the Benefits - Spreading visitors across Devon for more local income and greener benefits
 - Create a Year-round Economic Driver - Develop and present a year-round offer, attracting across the seasons
-
- **People and Skills:** The Skills Employment Hub has relocated its Monday services from Cullompton to Crediton. This decision was made in response to accessibility challenges faced by their clients, particularly those in Crediton where the caseload was been steadily increasing. We are pleased to announce that they will be utilising a room in the Bookery, a community space we supported and funded in the initial phase of the Work Hub Development Scheme. Additionally, they have Learn Devon advisors available in both Hubs (Tiverton and Crediton), dedicated to promoting adult learning opportunities.
 - **Business Support:** The Prosper business support programme continues. The Prosper programme offers free support to potential entrepreneurs, new and existing businesses seeking to grow as well as specialist support for green innovation or those seeking to become employers. Take up remains lower than anticipated.

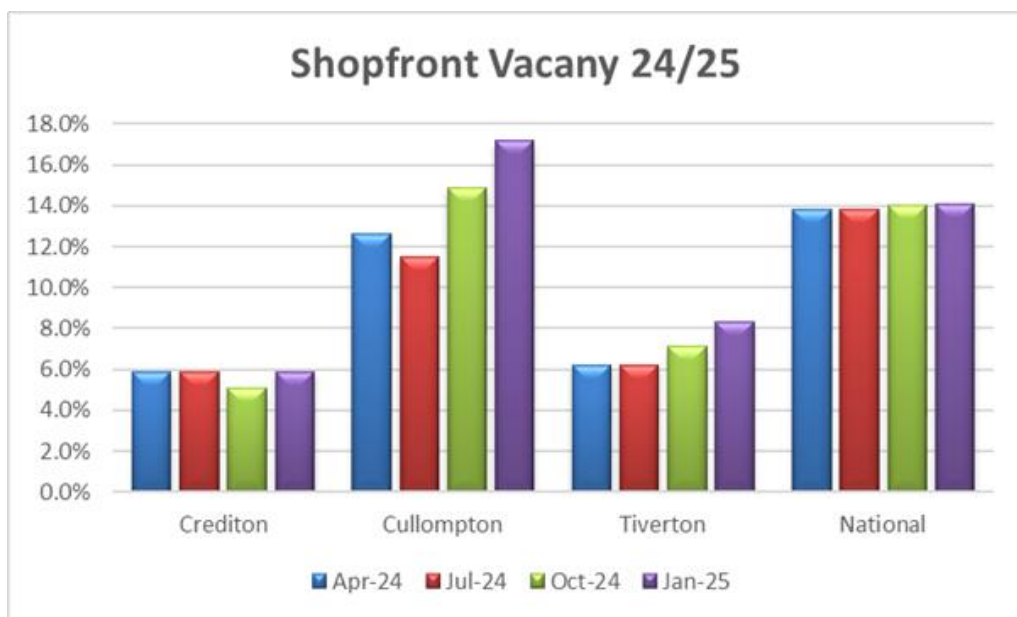
As part of the Devon Agri-Tech Alliance (DA-TA) project delivery – the following three events have been held in February and were available, free of charge, to Mid Devon farm businesses:

- An Inheritance Tax Workshop/ webinar - Tuesday, 4th February 2025;
- An Agroforestry Workshop at Elston Farm, Copplestone - Monday, 10th February 2025; and
- A Regenerative Farming Workshop hosted at the Devon Rural Hub Building in Cheriton Bishop - Tuesday, 18th February 2025

2.2 Following the Government’s announcement of a year’s extension to the SPF programme, the group at its last meeting considered proposals for a Year 4 Delivery Plan. It should be noted however that the monitoring of this fund will now sit with the County Council and that our allocation is much reduced.

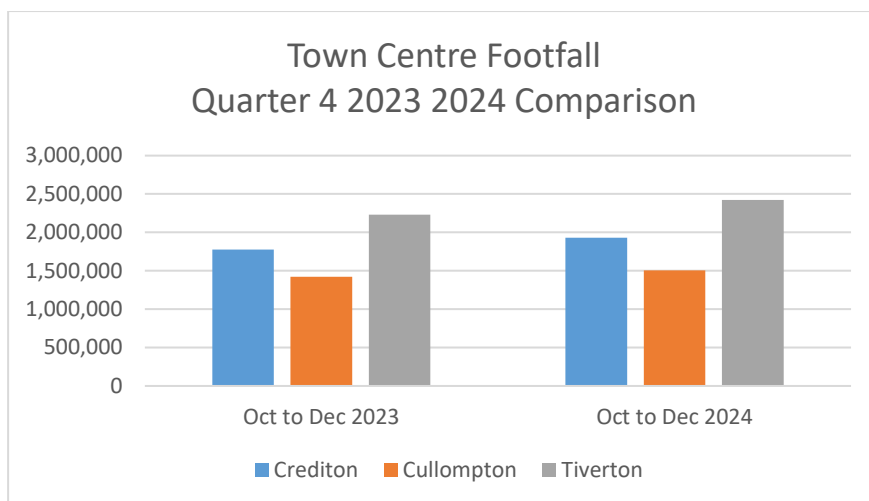
3.0 Town Centre Health

3.1 Quarter 4 shopfront surveys took place in January 2025. All three towns have seen an increase in the number of vacant units since the Quarter 3 report, albeit Crediton has only seen a marginal increase bringing it back to where it was in preceding quarters. Both Crediton and Tiverton are performing better than the national average (reported at 14.1% for January 25).



3.2 With regards to footfall, all three towns have reported a year-on-year increase.

- Tiverton, October to December has recorded a total footfall in 2024 of 2,421,000 compared to 2,231,000 for the same months the previous year. This is a (9.2)% increase.
- Crediton, October to December has recorded a total footfall in 2024 of 1,932,000 compared to 1,776,000 for the same months the previous year. This is a (7.4)% increase.
- Cullompton, October to December has recorded a total footfall in 2024 of 1,505,000 compared to 1,424,000 for the same months the previous year. This is a (9.5)% increase.



4.0 Business Rate Relief Drop in Session

4.1 Upcoming changes to Business Rates Relief will impact particularly on some businesses that receive Retail, Hospitality and Leisure relief. With this in mind, in partnership with the Business Rates Team, Economic Development are holding a drop in information session at Phoenix House from between 11:30 – 19:00 on Thursday, 20th March, 2025. This will be supported by a communications plan that will go live before the bills are issued and will continue until the date of the drop in session.

5.0 Economic Strategy Review

5.1 Three Informal PDG sessions have now taken place on 24 October 2024, 12 December 2024 and 23 January 2025. These sessions have been run as a series of workshops considering topics such as business growth, innovation and skills, thriving places and business engagement. The next session (3 April 2025) will be based around the theme of Infrastructure (including land and property). Through these discussions there has been recognition of the importance to utilise the next Economic Strategy as a means of raising the profile of the District and the matters of key interest to our businesses. This is important given the changing landscape of potential opportunities and will also assist in ensuring that the needs of mid devon businesses are reflected through local government reorganisation. The Strategy will also be informed by a business survey which is shortly to be undertaken.

Financial Implications

The report is an information report and does not of itself have any financial implications and require any decisions.

It is hoped that the report demonstrates that the Economy and Growth team is achieving in line with expectations in terms of the successful utilisation of grant monies and other financial resources.

Legal Implications

There are no legal implications arising from this information report.

Risk Assessment

There are no further risks associated with the updates in this report that have not already been reported.

Impact on Climate Change

The impact of individual projects on climate change has been included in the individual reports that will have already been presented to committee.

Equalities Impact Assessment

It is acknowledged that there is a relationship between economy and equality whereby disadvantaged groups of people can have greater or lesser opportunities for economic advantage depending on the climate and growth potential. Economically disadvantaged individuals are socially disadvantaged individuals whose ability to compete in the free enterprise system has been impaired due to diminished capital or credit opportunities as compared to others in the same or similar line of business who are not socially disadvantaged. There are unfortunate intersections between socioeconomic status and those with protected characteristics or from marginalised or minority communities putting them at greater risk of social and therefore economic disadvantage. Social and digital isolation issues across a rural district has the potential to exacerbate these risks.

Mid Devon's Prosperity Programme and the Economic Strategy outline key projects to tackle these risks and grow the economy. They are supported by equality assessments and communication plans.

Key strands of the work of the Economy and Growth team continue to seek to address and tackle causes of inequality and deprivation.

Relationship to Corporate Plan

The work of the Growth, Economy and Delivery team supports the corporate objectives for the economy:

- Bringing new businesses into the District
- Business development and growth
- Improving and regenerating our town centres
- Growing the tourism sector

Section 3 – Statutory Officer sign-off/mandatory checks

Statutory Officer: Andrew Jarrett

Agreed by or on behalf of the Section 151

Date: 18.2.25

Statutory Officer: Maria DeLeiburne
Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date: 18.2.25

Chief Officer: Richard Marsh
Agreed by Corporate Director
Date: 18.2.25

Performance and risk: Dr Steve Carr
Agreed on behalf of the Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager
Date: 21/02/2025

Cabinet member notified: (yes)

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Adrian Welsh, Strategic Manager for Growth, Economy & Delivery
Email: awelsh@middevon.gov.uk
Telephone: 01884 234398

Background papers:

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Economy & Assets Policy Development Group – 2024/2025

Chairman's Annual Report

This report provides a brief look back on the work of the Economy & Assets Policy Development Group (PDG) over the last year, along with a summary of activities undertaken by the Economic Development team, who support the policy development group.

The Economy Group have again continued to successfully gain and administer funds for the District. As ever the Group and I are indebted to the work and support of Richard, Adrian and Zoe and all of the Economic Development team.

The main focus of the Economic Development team over the last year has been the Shared Prosperity and the Rural England Prosperity programmes. The Policy Development Group has played an important role in the formulation of Shared Prosperity Investment Plans as part of the District's successful submissions to government.

PDG Overview of Meetings

During 2024/25 the Group considered a number of issues. In summary these included:

- Various UK Shared Prosperity Fund & Rural England Prosperity Fund reports
- Economic Development Team updates
- COTIE presentation on the Business Innovation Centre
- Draft Corporate Plan – PDG made comments under each of the sections of the Economy & Assets area which were incorporated into the final plan
- Green Enterprise Grants Updates
- Apricot Centre (agricultural training) presentation – Guest Speaker (Rachel Phillips)
- Car parking working group updates
- Town Centre Health updates
- Various Budget updates and financial discussions

In addition, throughout the year members have been provided with a number of reports and presentations providing data and analysis regarding the current economic position nationally and locally.

The Shared prosperity programme

As referred to above the Economic Development Team has been overseeing the third year of lead delivery of the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) scheme and the final year of the Rural England Prosperity Fund Scheme (REPF).

In 2024/25 so far to date, the team has:

- Supported 331 enterprises (non-financial support)
- Supported 37 organisations (non-financial support)

- Supported 24 potential entrepreneurs (non-financial support)
- Supported 4 tourism festivals/strategic events across Mid Devon and 111 town centre cultural and or tourism events and activities (across Bampton, Crediton, Cullompton and Tiverton)

As part of the SPF/REPF programmes, this year the team has:

- Delivered the highly successful Tiverton Swan Trail, which ran from Easter through to October half-term culminating in the swan auction event, which raised circa £7k for future tourism projects.
- Facilitated and coordinated the inaugural Mid Devon Walking Festival, seeing 35 walking events supported and promoted through the festival
- Attended the Mid Devon Show 2024 with our own “Mid Devon Producers” tent featuring 7 of our producers
- Supported 20 local producers and eateries with a series of “Meet the Producer” posts on our Visit Mid Devon Facebook page
- Installed new visitor signage at our three Mid Devon leisure sites highlighting the array of attractions and visitor experiences in Mid Devon
- Facilitated a package of support for our farm and food businesses including specialist sectoral workshops with Devon Agri-Tech Alliance (12 farms engaged) and membership support for 22 businesses this year with Food Drink Devon
- Delivered a series of town centre grant schemes supporting shopfront enhancements, fit-outs (moving into new units), digital enhancements and vibrant town centre projects.
- Delivered a series of digital, radio and printed promotional campaigns to support the visitor economy and promote Mid Devon as a destination

Other Achievements in 2024/25

In addition to the SPF/REPF programme the team has:

- Completed the **High Streets Heritage Action Zone (HAZ)** programme for Cullompton. Cullompton was one of only 10 successful high streets in the South West region to secure this funding. The £1.1m Historic England grant was matched with support from Mid Devon District Council, Devon County Council, and Cullompton Town Council, the project provided a programme of improvement works to reinvigorate the town centre and attract investment. The package of projects that have been delivered, include:
 - Public realm improvements at the Higher Bullring (with Devon County Council) to create an enhanced public space which enhances the setting of the war memorial, provides an increased area for the local markets, special events and increased dwell time. Since completion the area has been utilised regularly by market traders and used for special events;
 - A grants scheme for building repairs and historic support structural and historic reinstatement work, focused on Fore Street, has enabled several historic properties to benefit from improvements; and
 - A hugely successful cultural programme of activities to align with the town centre’s heritage. Notable achievements included special events, such as the Roman festival, various public art projects involving local

schools and local residents, poetry and talks provided by the new Cullompton History Group.

- Developed a Crediton Masterplan through to adoption in September 2024 drawing on valuable input from the local community. The masterplan provides a comprehensive strategy to help Crediton unlock its full potential as an attractive, vibrant, and sustainable town with a strong economic foundation. The finalised masterplan has been adopted as a supplementary planning document, ensuring its influence in guiding future planning decisions. The masterplan has already demonstrated its impact by securing funding from Great Western Railway's Customer and Community Improvement Fund. This funding will be used to enhance cycling and pedestrian connections between Crediton town centre and the railway station - one of many projects that will contribute towards achieving the masterplan's objectives.
- Continued to seek funding and facilitate delivery of key Infrastructure Projects. The most notable achievement being successfully securing a funding package to enable delivery of the **Cullompton Town Centre Relief Road** in August 2024. The funding package, includes £33.5m being provided by Homes England, which will allow Mid Devon to progress the delivery of the relief road in close conjunction with Devon County Council as delivery partner. Completion of the road is forecast for 2028 with the major focus of work in the short term being to finalise designs, complete the acquisition of land and fully relocate the cricket club – the new cricket square having been prepared and seeded during the summer (2024). In addition to the relief road the District Council also secured funding in previous years to develop a business case for improvements to **Junction 28 of the M5 motorway**. During this last year this has been submitted to the Department for Transport for consideration under the Large Local Majors Programme. It should also be noted that the project to reopen Cullompton Railway station is also well advanced and is awaiting a final decision from government to fund its construction.
- Established a new **strategic business forum** for Mid Devon, working with our local employers.
- Secured and administered £25k funding towards a phase one **Green Grants Scheme** for businesses, which supported five businesses resulting in a saving of 13,402.24 kgCo2e.

Over the last few months the Policy Development Group, along with others from the wider Council membership, have been actively involved through informal workshops in the formulation of the **next Economic Strategy**. It is intended that this document will help raise the profile of the District and the key challenges our businesses face. In addition to seeing this process to its conclusion, the PDG also will continue to play an important role in overseeing the delivery of SP4 plans over the next year.

Cllr John Downes
Chairman of the Economy Policy Development Group

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