

## **MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**MINUTES** of a **MEETING** of the **ECONOMY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 21 July 2016 at 6.00 pm

### **Present**

**Councillors** Mrs B M Hull (Chairman), Mrs A R Berry, K Busch, J M Downes, R Evans, Mrs S Griggs, T G Hughes, F J Rosamond and Mrs N Woollatt

### **Present**

**Officers** Stephen Walford (Chief Executive), Amy Tregellas (Head of Communities and Governance and Monitoring Officer), John Bodley-Scott (Community Development and Regeneration Manager), Chris Shears (Economic Development Officer), Alan Ottey (Tiverton Market Manager) and Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer)

## **15 Apologies and Substitute Members**

There were no apologies for absence.

## **16 Public Question Time**

There were no members of the public present.

## **17 Minutes**

The Minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed as a true and accurate record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

## **18 Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman welcomed Alan Ottey, the Tiverton Market Manager, to the meeting and the Members introduced themselves.

## **19 Inward Investment Strategy**

The Economic Development Officer provided a verbal update regarding the joint Inward Investment Strategy. It was explained that the Inward Investment Strategy formed a part of a joint Economic Strategy being developed between Mid Devon, East Devon, Exeter and Teignbridge. A working draft of the document had been drawn up. The first workshop had been held in June where employment skills were discussed. Exeter University had been asked to comment on what they considered should be in the strategy. The intention was that the strategy would be aligned to other activities such as the Local Plan. Another two workshops were planned, the next one having an emphasis on planning. It was hoped that a final draft of the strategy would be brought before this Group at the end of the year.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The need to be proactive and ascertain how to convert interest from investors into commitment.
- The authorities involved were working a lot more collaboratively whilst at the same time not trying to undermine their unique local area status.
- In twelve months there had been significant growth.
- The need for trust between the authorities ensuring that the 'right businesses' go to the 'right place'. Interested investors needed to be aware of all the options. It was not a race and authorities were not looking to undercut each other.
- There was a commercial register which had previously been Exeter centric but was now broken down so interested businesses could do a detailed search. This was receiving hundreds of hits a month. It was true that Exeter got the bulk of foreign enquiries but that was to be expected, however, overall this represented a huge opportunity for Mid Devon as the Council was able to get enquiries where it hadn't done so previously.
- Higher level apprenticeship schemes were being considered. There was a need to work at 'notching' up aspirations.
- Land availability was also of paramount importance as well as the 'appropriateness' of the land for a particular business. Sites needed to be viable in order to attract inward investment. This issue will be considered by the Greater Exeter Growth & Development Board as a key priority as well as the need for high quality jobs.
- The Economic Development Officer had been working with local landowners and had knowledge of what potential parcels of land would be coming forward.
- Being on Exeter's doorstep, which wanted to be a world leader in terms of technology and digitalisation, presented a tremendous opportunity for Mid Devon.

## 20 Update on the picture for high streets going forwards

The Head of Communities and Governance provided the Group with a presentation providing information in relation to the transformation of town centres having attended a recent conference.

Key points to note within the presentation regarding the issues and challenges facing the high street were described as follows:

- The global economic crisis and the effects of Brexit. In addition to this there was fragile customer confidence and a concern about unemployment.
- The departure of national chains such as Clintons and Waterstones from Tiverton High Street and the risk of further national chains leaving the High Street if the economy struggles.
- Business rates were an issue as were high rents.
- Increasing the footfall was crucial.
- On a positive note vacant units within the towns of Mid Devon were bucking the national trend being considerably lower.
- There was competition from one stop, out of town, developments.
- A culture of convenience existed whereby people were working longer hours and shopping from the comfort of their own homes. Many consumers were time constrained.

- The South West had higher than average number of people over the age of 65.

Information was presented regarding current shopping habits:

- 92% of the population were active internet users, 62% through a mobile device.
- Average daily use of digital devices was 3 hours 47 minutes.
- Town centres needed to be colourful, attractive and vibrant. The key unique selling points needed to be teased out and a sense of community fostered.
- The digital agenda needed to be embraced where possible providing a seamless shopping experience. The click and collect option needed to be explored.
- Sustainability was key as was a need to be flexible.
- Ethical choices were important as was the whole 'farm to table' experience.
- There was not a one size fits all, each town had its own personality.
- There needed to be leadership and vision, partnership working, quick wins, milestones for longer projects, open and inclusive communication and most important of all access to funding.

Discussion took place regarding:

- For a town to be successful there needed to be a reason for going there. In Crediton food had become a focus. There had been a noticeable change in recent years with more people visiting the town because of food events.
- Food was a common theme across all of the towns. Arts and crafts also needed to be promoted where possible.
- Shoppers were now more discriminating.
- The 'multiplier' effect. Coming into the towns for one reason often leads to greater economic activity all round.
- Sometimes car park charges and an inability to place furniture on pavements for licensing reasons had a negative effect for traders.
- Tapping into events run by 'Taste of the West' should be further explored. A lot of businesses in Mid Devon had already won awards for food and drink. The Cullompton Food Festival had worked with the Michelin starred chef's youth academy.
- The need to tap into the business skills and knowledge of professional people who had retired to the area.
- The option of having items delivered to a collection may be preferable to waiting in at home for a delivery. This needed to be further explored.

## 21 Tiverton Town Centre Action Plan

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report \* from the Head of Communities and Governance providing it with the first draft of the Tiverton Town Centre Action Plan giving it the opportunity to shape the plan before it went out for consultation.

The contents of the action plan were outlined with particular reference to the fact that the draft plan would now go out for a 6 week consultation period to all interested parties as well as Members giving them an opportunity to comment. A final version with a recommendation would be presented to the Group at their September meeting.

Discussion took place regarding:

- It would not be possible to dictate to businesses where they should go, the location needed to be right for the trader as well as the landowner.
- The Council needed to work with other groups in the town who had experience at putting on events, utilising the best skills in the most effective way regardless of where they came from.
- Lessons needed to be learnt from events that were not as successful as had been hoped.
- Collaborative working was the key.
- An audit of the signage in the town had taken place as improvements needed to be made to direct visitors to the market or the Tourist Information Centre for example.
- Proposal within the action plan needed to link in with the Masterplan for Tiverton.
- The need for Phoenix Lane to look attractive to people visiting the town especially those arriving by coach to the bus station. This was equally important for people staying at the proposed Premier Inn.
- A lot of actions identified within the plan were already being worked upon.
- Funding for the projects in the plan continued to be sought from outside of the Council's finances.
- CCTV within the town had been upgraded and the Police were working collaboratively with the Town Team.
- The position of the Tiverton and District Community Transport facility within the Multi Storey Car Park. It was suggested that this was not the correct place for disabled people to access, however, it had been difficult to find an alternative venue nearer the centre of the town that could be accessed by vehicles and at an attractive rent.

It was **AGREED** that the Action Plan ought to give more consideration to disabled people and the fact that the area had a higher than average aging population.

Note: \* Report previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes.

## 22 Tiverton Market Strategy

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report \* from the Head of Communities and Governance providing it with the first draft of the Tiverton Market Strategy giving it the opportunity to shape the strategy before it went out for consultation.

The contents of the strategy were outlined by the Market Manager with particular reference to:

- The first draft of the strategy had been drawn up bearing in mind the national perspective on markets as well as analysing market surveys and customer tastes.
- 40% of people visited a town because there was a market there. For every pound spent in a market, two pounds was spent in the local shops.
- 86% of all money spent was still shop based. Over 40% of businesses did not have internet access or card facilities and still dealt in cash.

- A future vision was key, this led to a strategy and the action plan led to outcomes.
- Markets were often in the heart of a town and this needed to be promoted.
- The community needed to be involved as this had the effect of producing loyal customers.
- Branding was important as was the environment in which the market was situated, for example, waste should be removed.
- More contact was needed with the schools. Children needed to learn about food trails.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The length of time it took to set up a successful market. Often there was a lot of opposition.
- It was suggested that contact be made with the National Farmers Union and the 'Taste of the West' organisers as there were a lot of small farmers for whom farmers markets were an important source of income.
- The entrance into the market needed improvement as well as clear signage.
- There were plans to improve the appearance of the market itself with a deep clean and re-decoration. There were also plans to introduce brightly coloured awnings, canopies, umbrellas and sails to separate off individual units within the market that were non-permanent should the venue be needed for a bigger event.
- Competition from local supermarkets that could provide local produce at low cost.
- The need for Members to understand the costs involved in running a market and to have sight of all the relevant facts before making a recommendation. The Head of Communities and Governance commented that they were working with the accounts department to separate out the costs in relation to each market so that relevant financial information could be brought to the Group in the future.

Note: \* Report previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes.

## 23 Identification of items for the next meeting

In addition to the items already listed in the work programme, the following was requested to be on the agenda for the next meeting:

- Final version of the Tiverton Town Centre Action Plan following consultation
- Final version of the Tiverton Market Strategy following consultation
- Possible incentivising initiatives for businesses
- Business Rates Consultation response

(The meeting ended at 7.57 pm)

**CHAIRMAN**