

Economic Development Service Update

Cabinet Member(s): Cllr Richard Chesterton
Responsible Officer: Stephen Walford, Director for Growth

Reason for Report: To update members on progress with key Economic Development Service Priorities

RECOMMENDATION: That the report be noted

Relationship to Corporate Plan: It supports the corporate objectives for the economy.

Financial Implications: There are no additional financial implications arising from the report

Legal Implications: None

Risk Assessment: None

Equality Impact Assessment: None anticipated

1.0 Introduction

This report provides an update on the progress of key projects and initiatives developed or supported by the Economic Development & Regeneration team.

2.0 Devon Hydro and Smart Grid Project ('Mills Project')

We are expecting to hear the outcome of our bid to DCLG for funding under the ESIF Low Carbon Programme by the end of October. If this decision is forthcoming as scheduled, a verbal update will be provided at the Economy PDG meeting. We are continuing to develop the project by undertaking preparatory work that will help us submit a full application if our outline bid is successful. If unsuccessful, there are a number of other funding opportunities that can be explored for this project. The Economy team is encouraged by the Government's recent and ongoing consultation on the Clean Growth Strategy (see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/clean-growth-strategy>), which seems to align very closely to the wider activities of the economy team. It indicates that in the near future funding could be made available to support growth in this sector, and to bring forward wider environmentally conscious initiatives. This could lead to a number of related low carbon industry activities being developed in Mid Devon in parallel with the Mills Project, and project opportunities are being explored which could dovetail with our existing work.

3.0 Commercialisation of Regulatory Services

The project has received a lot of interest from a number of local authorities in the Heart of the South West region, and is supported by BEIS. The initial report on the

business case lacked the necessary detail to justify delivering a pilot service at this point. However, local authorities are now considering the best method to develop a fully detailed business plan that will address all of the core issues surrounding the potential delivery of added value services (services above and beyond our statutory duties) to the business community service. The Economy team is in discussion with other Council services to help develop ideas and to seek a mutually productive way forward for the project.

4.0 Rural Broadband

Though we have not received any official update, it would appear that the Expression of Interest we submitted to the Local Full Fibre Network programme was not successful. However, this should not deter us from developing a full bid for the early part of 2018, and officers have been meeting with a number of interested parties with the aim of establishing a stakeholder group which will pull together the expertise necessary to develop a detailed funding bid.

5.0 Enquiries & Investments

The economy team has been dealing with a number of enquiries from businesses looking to locate and grow within Mid Devon. Working with our planning team and other services across the local authority, we have been able to find solutions for most of these. Examples include:

Goonvean Fibres are locating their new facilities at the Venn Farm site in Cullompton. This will unlock an employment site which has been awaiting development for several years. The initial phase will see the development of over 60,000 sqft of employment space, with a phase 2 proposed to be delivered in the future that will bring the total development to 129,000 sqft.

Hitchcock's Business Park has had approval for the erection of a 35,000 sqft unit, and is negotiating with potential occupiers with support from MDDC. A verbal update on this will be given at the Economy PDG meeting if available.

There are applications being decided on the 3rd of November on which a verbal update will be provided to the PDG. These include sites at Hitchcock's Business Park, Tiverton and near Crediton.

6.0 Cullompton Townscape Heritage Scheme

We met with the Heritage Lottery in early September to discuss the re-submission of a bid to the Townscape Heritage Programme for £1.2 million to support restoration and refurbishment work in the Cullompton Conservation Area. Once again they reiterated that the previous bid was a strong bid and was only pipped at the post by previous submissions. They advised that with updating and some minor tweaks it would be ready for re-submission. It is likely to be the only application from the SW region. We are working towards the deadline of the 8th December. We will only hear the outcome of this application in May 2018.

7.0 Crediton Update

Crediton High Street – continues to have healthy occupancy rates with vacant retail premises consisting of less than 10% of premises available in the High Street. A

recent development that may have significance for Crediton High Street is the number of antique and bric-a-brac shops that have opened over the last twelve months, bringing the number of antique shops between St. Saviours Way and Union Terrace to four.

Crediton Chamber of Commerce – holds its Annual General Meeting on Thursday 26 October. The Chamber is pro-actively seeking to develop in a way that enables it to assume leadership responsibility for the economic health and well-being of the community as a whole.

Crediton Town Team – after a successful 2017 Community Festival, the Town Team is looking to stage a few events in 2018 before planning the next Community Festival for 2019. The Town Team sees itself as complementary to the Town Council and Chamber of Commerce, providing a specific role of making the High Street vibrant and attractive through events and activities such as the Flags Project, St. Boniface related projects, the Crediton Festival and Crediton Food Festival, now in its 10th year. With the district council's assistance, the Town Team has recently drawn down funds to support the Active Mums Cycling Project and is helping resource the town's "Get Out" magazine. The Community Hub project is benefiting from the support of regeneration specialists The Onion Collective, funded by the district council.

Crediton Farmers Market – again won the award for 'Best Farmers Market' in the 2017 Food and Drink Devon Awards: <http://foodanddrinkdevon.co.uk/awards/2017-food-drink-devon-award-winners-announced>

Crediton Business Support – district council officers are continuing to work with a number of businesses across the town, including an innovative digital High Street project and guiding several business expansions through the LEADER programme.

8.0 Tiverton Shopfront Scheme

We have received seven applications for funding this financial year for a total of £5,308. Shopfronts benefitting from this scheme this year include - Courtenay's Bar, Mademoiselle Mojo's, Frou Frou, Jo Amor, former jojo's, GW Pack. There is now £6,088 remaining uncommitted in the scheme.

9.0 LEADER update

The REAL LEADER programme covering the Mid Devon area had an open evening on the 19th October, which was well attended by businesses from across the area looking for funding. We are expecting an influx of enquiries and applications from small businesses over the next couple of weeks. Up to now, the LEADER programme has committed £325,068 to date. It has funded 15 applicants - 10 of these are farm businesses, 4 are non-agricultural businesses and 1 charity.

10.0 Exe Valley AONB

The Economy Team was asked to look into the possibility of getting AONB designation for the Exe Valley. The Economic Development Team Leader has scoped the project and done some preliminary work in bringing together the available evidence, including creating an initial concept map based on the main Exe valley and tributary headwaters from the county boundary to the boundary with East Devon District.

As part of this process he has had a series of meetings with relevant bodies including Natural England, Devon County Council Environment Service, Blackdown Hills AONB and Exmoor National Park to discuss the process of designation and the mutual benefits with neighbouring authorities and other stakeholders of pursuing AONB status for the Exe Valley. Advice from these meetings is that there may well be a case for the designation of the Exe Valley as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, but to progress this project forward will need a significant investment of officer time, to collect and collate the evidence, both technical and non-technical, necessary to substantiate a bid.

The Economic Development Team Leader will be reporting back to the working group in November and its recommendations will be brought to a future meeting of this committee.

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Circulation of the Report: Cllr Richard Chesterton
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List of Background Papers: None