

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **ECONOMY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 29 January 2019 at 5.30 pm

Present

Councillors

Mrs B M Hull (Chairman)
A Bush, S G Flaws, Mrs S Griggs,
F J Rosamond and Mrs N Woollatt

Apologies

Councillor(s)

Mrs A R Berry, Mrs C Collis and J M Downes

Also Present

Councillor(s)

R J Chesterton

Also Present

Officer(s):

Stephen Walford (Chief Executive), Jenny Clifford (Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration), John Bodley-Scott (Economic Development Team Leader), Chris Shears (Economic Development Officer) and Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer)

60 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies were received from Cllrs Mrs A R Berry, Mrs C A Collis and J M Downes.

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

Cllr Mrs N Woollatt declared a personal interest in that she is an owner of a mill.

62 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no questions from the member of the public in attendance.

63 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2019 were confirmed as a true and accurate record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman subject to the following amendment:

Minute number 50 to be amended to say that Cllr Mrs Woollatt 'is' an owner of a water mill and not 'was' an owner of a water mill.

64 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman made the following announcement:

- She congratulated the officers who had travelled to London recently as shortlisted candidates for the LGC 'Driving Economic Growth' Awards. They

had given a presentation and the results would be announced on 13th March 2019.

65 **ECONOMIC STRATEGY**

The Group had before it a report * from the Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration presenting the Council's draft Economic Strategy.

The report was introduced by the Economic Development Team Leader who reminded the Policy Development Group that a series of informal workshops had been held with them, giving the PDG Members the opportunity to shape the 'end product'. A presentation followed under the following headings and at each stage the PDG Members were encouraged to ask questions and to comment:

Economic Profile

What we know about Mid Devon, including:

- A growing and increasingly aging population
- High rates of employment
- High levels of commuting out of the district for work
- Low average wages
- A preponderance of low productivity sectors

National challenges

- Brexit
- Low productivity
- Changing Business Environment
- National Grand Challenges

Global Context

- Post-Brexit
- Economic Fragility
- Automation
- Climate change

Overarching Objectives

- Increasing Wages
- Increasing skill levels
- Delivering a Growth Agenda
- Increasing Productivity

A brief discussion followed regarding possible competition with other local authorities sharing the same economic objectives. It was explained that different local authorities had different strengths. Mid Devon benefited from its natural environment, there were many opportunities for investment and it already had a number of strong core businesses. The question was asked as to how to ensure skills could be delivered and what and where were the high paid jobs referred to in the report? It was stated

that the Council was not a skills provider but could act as a facilitator building strong relationships with organisations that could provide skills training, for example, there were possibilities with the Garden Village to create a skills innovation hub along with other partners. There was a need to recognise and acknowledge the Council's strategic position. It would focus on its 'broker' role going forwards. Certain sectors were recognised as having high valued jobs and the team would focus on liaising with those businesses. The key message to promote would be that Mid Devon was a great place to live, work and run a business.

It was felt important not to forget the importance of apprenticeships and the positive effect businesses could have by making visits to schools.

The document as it currently stood was felt to be slightly town centred, however, it was vital not to forget the parishes and to include them in future considerations.

Sixth form provision was also an important factor in considering skills training for the future as was the importance of public transport in non-urban areas.

Five Key themes had been identified:

- Employment & Skills
- Place
- Infrastructure
- Hi-tech, Innovation & Green Energy
- Agriculture, Food & Drink

Employment and Skills

- To increase the number of higher skilled, higher waged jobs in the district
- To work with Exeter and Heart of Devon partners to identify initiatives to increase skill levels within the district
- To work closely with Education and Training providers
- To engage with employers about their employment needs
- To attract centres of training excellence to the District

Place

- To increase the viability and vitality of town centres
- To nurture a sense of pride in our local towns
- To reduce the number of vacant town centre properties
- To increase the number of people living in our town centres
- To increase the number of visitors to Mid Devon

Consideration was given to the difficulties in 'nurturing a sense of pride' within some town centres as a lot of problems stemmed from absentee shop owners. Care needed to be taken in selecting the types of accommodation for development and adequate facilities needed to be provided. If the accommodation offered was of a low quality it would be difficult to foster a feeling of pride. It was confirmed that the master planning process would consider these factors and there would be a need to comply with relevant rules and regulations. Towns would need to be considered on an individual basis and it would be necessary to talk to Historic England in the case of

Cullompton for example so that older properties could be brought back into use as accommodation.

It was hoped that the Shop Front Enhancement Scheme would do much to improve the appearance of some shops in each of the three towns. In addition to this, within Tiverton, there was a Town Centre Partnership and the possibility of offering more pop-up shops and temporary exhibitions.

The master planning process was a key starting point in terms of identifying a realistic aspiration for the future, everything else would follow from this.

Infrastructure

- Improved digital infrastructure
- Improved transport
- Increase built-out commercial space for businesses
- Increase in the availability of incubator space
- Increase in the availability of 'next step' space, for those outgrowing incubator spaces

Section 106 monies had been provided by Lidl as part of their recent planning approval which would facilitate the provision of WiFi within Tiverton Town Centre.

Concern was raised regarding the provision of adequate public transport in the future and the need to consider supplying electric charging points, shared transport and electric bicycles. The Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration explained that the County Council as the Highway Authority produced a local transport plan and this would address those issues. The plan talked about working with public transport providers and where necessary financial contributions would be sought.

Hi-Tech, Innovation & Green Energy

- Increase proportion of new jobs in high paid and high skilled roles
- Achieve a higher proportion of hi-tech businesses registered in the district
- Increase number of Mid Devon residents on Hi-Tech, Innovation based or Green Energy related courses
- Increase implementation of Hi-Tech businesses through partnership development
- Promote Mid Devon as a hub for Hi-Tech businesses

Consideration was given to the self-employed and people working from home. There could be opportunities to deliver some incubator space where collaborative activities could be encouraged.

Heathcoat's Factory was a good example of a local company trying to use green energy where it could by having solar panels and by using hydro generation. Further Government initiatives in terms of funding to support such schemes were anticipated in the future although none were available at the moment.

Agriculture, Food & Drink

- Raise the profile of the Mid Devon food and drink offer to enable local business growth
- Increase engagement and support for food, drink and agri-businesses
- Develop new channels through which local food and drink businesses could be promoted
- Retain specialist skills within the Mid Devon area

It was suggested that a food and drink festival would be a good idea in the locality and that it might be possible to co-ordinate this with the already planned local event for food producers.

Key interventions were listed as follows:

- Develop core business offer and sector-specific investment packages to support business growth and inward investment by April 2020
- Develop a detailed business plan for an incubation / flexible work space project by September 2019
- Set up a Business Champions group by December 2019
- Ensure a functioning commercial property register by December 2019
- Work with partners to launch a Mid Devon Business Awards by December 2019
- Deliver early milestone of Tiverton Town Centre Masterplan by April 2020
- Complete a masterplanning process in Cullompton, with the adoption of the masterplan in June 2020
- Define scope and staging of Crediton Masterplan project by June 2019
- Set up shopfront enhancement schemes in Crediton and Cullompton by December 2019
- Develop a detailed business plan to deliver a free public Wi-Fi network in Tiverton by September 2019
- Develop a partnership scheme for Cullompton with Heritage England to commence April 2020
- Work with partners to create two food and drink campaigns to drive through the website / guide and social media feeds e.g. food trail / field to fork by June 2020

The Group considered that launching the Business Awards was an excellent idea.

As part of the final discussion Members considered the overall ambition of the strategy. Greater productivity was seen as key, as was raising the level of pride and realistic aspiration. There was so much the Council could do from large scale strategic allocations to individual business support. There needed to be a cultural shift change across the whole of the Council with all officers working to support these goals not just the Economic Development team.

Members of the Policy Development Group commented that they had appreciated the opportunity to contribute to the whole process through a number of workshops and it was evident in the draft document that their ideas had been listened to and had shaped the future vision.

Once approved, a summarised version of the strategy would be available for businesses to access in the future.

It would be the responsibility of this Policy Development Group to monitor whether or not the action plan was being delivered in the immediate years to come.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet that:

- a) The Economic Strategy and year 1 action plan be approved.
- b) Delegated authority be granted to the Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration in consultation with the Chairman of the Economy Policy Development Group and Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration to finalise the document for publication (document appearance such as formatting, illustrative material and minor changes).
- c) Delegated authority be granted to Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration in consultation with the Chairman of the Economy Policy Development Group and Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration to add an appendix to include key employment sites.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

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

66 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

No additional items were identified for the next meeting other than those already listed in the work programme.

(The meeting ended at 7.00 pm)

CHAIRMAN