

Economy Policy Development Group – 2018 / 2019

Chairman's annual report

Economy of Mid Devon

The PDG were encouraged to hear that more new businesses have started up in the last year. The continuing development of Hitchcocks Business Park in Willand is going from strength to strength creating more employment. We were encouraged to hear that Hitchcocks beat a number of the South West's best construction and property development businesses to win in the 'Best Commercial Development' category during 2018.

A proposal has been put forward to reinstate railway stations at Cullompton and Wellington but discussion is still in the early stages.

MDDC has been working with three other local authorities on specific projects, these include EHOD (Exeter & Heart of Devon) Strategy and the GESP (Greater Exeter Strategic Plan). Those authorities include East Devon, Exeter and Teignbridge. Further updates will be given by the Chief Executive and Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration in due course.

MDDC has been shortlisted for a national award by the Local Government Chronicle as an example of a council pushing forward economic growth. Officers were invited to undertake a presentation in London; the final outcome is expected on 13th March 2019.

Mills & Hydro Power Project

This is a topic that has been discussed at most meetings. Although the original bid for funding to progress the Tiverton Weir site failed, alternative sources of funding have been sought. The project continues to be developed and refined and we now have more of a detailed understanding of what might be acceptable to the Environment Agency.

Broadband

Broadband is another ongoing topic with little progress made in the rural areas since last year. We need faster Broadband speeds to encourage more businesses to operate in Mid Devon. Businesses are able to apply to the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme for vouchers up to the value of £2.5k to help with the cost of installation. The Growth, Economy and Delivery team is currently promoting the government's voucher scheme and have been distributing information to businesses within Mid Devon regarding this opportunity. The Scrutiny Committee will be meeting with Connecting Devon and Somerset in March to update themselves on the current situation with the continuing roll-out of superfast broadband.

Tiverton Market and Town Centre

There have been a number of successful events held in the market throughout the year. Plans are in place to widen the entrance from Fore Street. This will improve access to and from the market, increasing the market's visibility and enabling more housing and small retail outlets to be delivered.

The Town Centre Masterplan for Tiverton is underway. These will be followed by masterplanning for Cullompton & Crediton. Cullompton's bid to the Heritage Lottery for a Townscape Heritage Scheme was once again unsuccessful. It is understood that the government will be launching a heritage element to the Future High Streets Fund in the near future and Cullompton will be well placed to pursue this funding as a result of the previous bid preparation. Other funding opportunities will be explored following the masterplan work for all three towns.

A small amount of money, £15k, has been allocated by MDDC to maintain / reinstate shop front enhancements for the 3 main towns. This could hopefully attract additional funding from elsewhere.

AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)

The PDG considered whether or not AONB status should be sought for Exe Valley. After much consideration the consensus was that no further action should be taken at this stage. The Government is reviewing national parks and AONB's and we should not move forward until the review has been concluded.

Economic Strategy

Over several months the Group has attended a number of informal workshops in order to refine the Economic Strategy for Mid Devon. Officers and Councillors have spent a considerable amount of time on the subject. The outcome is that the Strategy contains five key themes:

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

Finally I would like to thank the Chief Executive, who has attended all of our meetings, the officers and the councillors for their commitment and hard work. I must also thank our Committee Clerk for her continued help & support through the year.

Cllr Brenda Hull
Chairman of the Economy Policy Development Group