

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Cabinet Members Cllr Richard Chesterton
Responsible Officer Head of Communities and Governance

Reason for Report: To provide members with an update on Economic Development projects.

RECOMMENDATION(S): That the Cabinet note the contents of the report

Relationship to Corporate Plan: A thriving economy is one of the Council's key corporate priorities within the Corporate Plan.

Financial Implications: None at this stage. The Government Schemes for National Non Domestic Rates (NNDR) and New Homes Bonus (NHB) encourage Councils to promote growth for financial rewards. Part of the Council's NHB money has been ring-fenced for Economic Development and the action plan coming forward as part of the Corporate Plan will include costed projects for Cabinet consideration

Legal Implications: No legal implications.

Risk Assessment: None

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This report will provide members with details of current work being undertaken in respect of Economic Development and the projects that will be worked on in the coming financial year.

2.0 LEADER funding

2.1 In late November 2014 DEFRA indicated that the Council had been successful with a bid for EU funding under the LEADER programme, submitted on our behalf by Devon County Council, subject to a contract being agreed. We are still awaiting confirmation of the exact amount that has been allocated but it should be in the order of £1.3 - £1.5 million pounds over five years.

2.2 The funding will be available to support small businesses or projects in the Mid Devon area through a grants programme. The priorities for the programme have been set by DEFRA as:

- Support for increasing farm productivity
- Support for micro and small enterprises and farm diversification
- Support rural tourism
- Provision of rural services
- Support for cultural and heritage activity
- Support for increasing forestry productivity,

but there will be local decisions on how the money is applied.

- 2.3 A shadow LAG (Local Action Group) has been formed made up of representatives from the business sector, community and voluntary sector and local authorities. This group will make decisions on how the funding will be spent.
- 2.4 DEFRA have announced that the programme start has been delayed until the end of May, due to difficulties with closing down the previous programme, and delays getting ministerial sign-off. It is extremely probable that this delay will be extended. Until the programme is officially launched we cannot work with individual businesses to help them access this funding. However, up until now we have had over 40 expressions of interest in the fund.
- 2.5 The Community and Regeneration Team will continue to play a role in respect of the LEADER project fulfilling the role of project development officers. This will mean that the team will work with small businesses to help them put together funding bids and businesses cases.

3.0 Economic Development

- 3.1 The Economic Development Officer (EDO) was brought into post on the 1st of September 2014 and has been undertaking the necessary preparation work to develop our local inward investment and economic growth strategies. It has been recognised that MDDC has previously taken a reactive approach to supporting our local businesses, and the EDO has been working to change this so that we proactively support our businesses and play a key role in developing our economy.
- 3.2 One of the primary tasks that the EDO has been undertaking is to improve the image and visibility of the local authority as one that is open for business. In order to be considered as a place for existing businesses to stay and grow, and for new businesses to want to invest, the first step was to put a suitable business support structure in place so that it can be used to market Mid Devon. Without this framework the risk would be that we would have nothing tangible to offer to those businesses looking to invest in Mid Devon meaning that they may look elsewhere outside of the District.

Heart of the South West LEP

- 3.3 The Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) is the body responsible for coordinating funding bids across the region that will draw down both European and central government pots of funding for business support projects. It is therefore fundamental that we focus on developing our relationship with the LEP so that the business support offer is suitable to the needs of our businesses and can be marketed to those looking to invest here. Since the EDO came into post our influence has been steadily increasing and we are now part of the steering and consultation groups for developing regional business support. Further to increasing the local authority's influence with the LEP, our EDO has also developed local support structures so that our business community can influence the LEP, and this has been widely welcomed.

- 3.4 The work that our EDO is undertaking with the LEP has also helped us to develop a better understanding of what funding is out there and how and when to bid for them to maximise our chances for success.

Better Business for All

- 3.5 Better Business for All (BBfA) is a process being adopted by LEPs across the whole of the country. The purpose of BBfA is to simplify regulatory processes and improve the relationships between public services and the business community. The LEP (including MDDC) are signed up to BBfA.
- 3.6 Part of the business support offer that our EDO is developing, with colleagues across the Council, is improving businesses accessibility to our services. Services need to be delivered in a joined up manner, so that a client approaching the local authority is able to access all of the services they need without having to make multiple enquiries. The EDO recently delivered a training session to officers, providing them with a better understanding of the processes that entrepreneurs go through when they are starting up a business. This was well received and will be built upon to help develop the business knowledge of our officers so that they are better equipped to deal with businesses that make enquiries.
- 3.7 The work of the EDO within the local authority aligns with the objectives of BBfA, and this has led to our EDO being invited onto the regional BBfA steering group, and for Mid Devon to be seen as a leader in adopting and developing its ethos within our services.

Work with local businesses and key sites

- 3.8 While undertaking tasks at a strategic level, the EDO has also been proactively working with local businesses to help them grow in the Mid Devon area and to bring new sites forward for economic development. Hitchcocks Farm was supported through the planning process and is now Hitchcocks Business Park. Since its planning approval, the EDO has already been able to signpost companies to the site, and 3 businesses are in negotiation to take on the commercial space that will become available over the next 18 months. The EDO has also worked with the site owner to help them tap into government funding that will make the site a better investment opportunity to businesses considering moving into the area.
- 3.9 At Mid Devon Business Park (Willand), the EDO has been advising the land owners to try to find a way to take the site forward as employment land and to develop the offer available to potential investors. This is something that MDDC has not got involved with before, but it is now recognised that we must proactively support sites that are of strategic importance for the future economic development of Mid Devon.
- 3.10 The EDO is currently working with some of our local businesses that are going through a period of significant growth. The aim is to find suitable sites within the local authority area so that we can retain the businesses and the existing jobs, while also creating new jobs and investment.

Local Plan

- 3.11 The Local Plan was approved for submission by Council in December 2014 and is currently out for consultation. This stage of consultation sets out the 'proposed submission' of the Local Plan which includes preferred policies and sites. It is a 7 week consultation running from 9 February – 30 March 2015. Following this, responses received will be analysed and submitted to an Independent Inspector for Examination later this year. The final decision on the content of the Local Plan and whether it can be adopted by the Council rests with the Inspector.
- 3.12 Once the Local Plan has been adopted the Community Development and Regeneration Team can focus on marketing and promoting the economic development sites within the Plan.

Tourism Strategy

- 3.13 During previous discussions with Councillors on economic development priorities, a number of the ideas put forward related to Tourism. Discussions have also been had with the Tiverton Attractions Group and other bodies about the strategic importance of tourism within the district. Tourism as a strategic priority within economic development will need to be verified as part of setting priorities for a revised Corporate Plan.
- 3.14 The Economic Development Manager is working on the Tourism Strategy, which will outline the plans for the District and will feed into the new Corporate Plan. Consultation on the strategic development of the strategy is currently taking place with the key tourism groups i.e. the Mid Devon Attractions Group and individual organisations and tourism businesses in the District. Consultation with the Town Teams is also in progress with business development potential of future potential resourcing and grant opportunities e.g. LEADER, that should emerge this year. The Cullompton Town Team is, in particular, looking at the potential future of tourism projects and has established a development and marketing working group to develop ideas. It is hoped that the other Town Teams will follow this lead.
- 3.15 It is currently envisaged that a draft tourism Strategy will be available for Committee discussion and approval and then public consultation in June 2015.

Town Teams

- 3.16 The Community Development and Regeneration Team are continuing to support the Tiverton Town Team, the Cullompton Town Team and Crediton Town Team.
- 3.17 The Tiverton Town Team's projects include:
- Pop up shops – Boots Opticians are now occupying the shop previously occupied by The Co-operaTiv as a temporary pop-up shop. CreaTiv on the other side of Fore Street is still functioning as a hub for a number of artistic and creative activities.

- Coach Parking – the Council has worked with the Town Team and Blakes Coaches to design and deliver the coach park in the William Street car park. The improvements to the road just outside the car park are due to be carried out in March 2015 and following this the Portas Team will market and promote the Coach Park.
- Improving the public realm – the Town Team has completed redecorating the street furniture in Phoenix Lane, and has installed a piece of art work as a focus point.
- The Feast of St James – this event took place in July 2014 and it due to take place on the 18th July 2015.

3.18 The Cullompton Town Team’s projects include:

- Shopfront scheme – this is still proving very popular in Cullompton with the option of having a small grant to make minor amendments to shop fronts and also larger grants for more major works
- Cloth trade project – This project was formally launched on the 19th February 2015 and makes history accessible to local people and tourists.
- Shoppers Map – showing what is on offer in Cullompton
- 3 Community Noticeboards have been erected – promoting what is happening in Cullompton. A further notice board is being researched for a location at the Hayridge .
- Grotspots – volunteers have continued to work on improving some of the problem areas within the town
- Welcome folders have been produced and distributed – working with the housing developers to put a pack in each new house
- Future projects currently in development include Tourism and Marketing for the Culm Valley Area. An archiving project is also being developed as well as further initiatives in the food and drink sector.

3.19 The Crediton Town Team is the youngest of the Mid Devon Town Teams. The team is up and running and now has a good cross section of representation from the business sector, voluntary and community sectors and local authorities, including the town’s arts and cultural sector, the new Trader’s Federation. The activities planned by the Town Team for 2015 have a strong arts focus, designed to make the town centre more vibrant and attractive and draw visitors into the town.

3.20 Crediton Town Team projects include:

- Crediton Festival 2015: An Intergenerational Celebration – a four week community festival between 13 June and 11 July designed to bring local agencies together to celebrate their work. Over 60 events have been organised to date, including a ‘Festival Finale’ on 11 July and linking in with the 7th Crediton Food Festival, which will be held on the 13 and 14 June.
- Feast of St. Boniface, Friday 5 June – a procession through the town to celebrate the life and works of St. Boniface, culminating in a staged re-enactment in the town square.
- Crediton Flag Project 2015 – initially a success story from the High Street Innovation Fund, the Flag Project was a triumph in 2013 and expanded to include more High Street businesses in 2014. A further Flag Project is being planned for 2015.

- 3.21 Crediton Town Team became a constituted community organisation in 2014 and is acting as a catalyst for local initiatives that improve the town, working closely with local agencies and placing a particular emphasis on the High Street. The Town Team was instrumental in helping establish the Trader's Federation, which has since gone from strength to strength, and anticipates the activities it is planning for 2015 will stimulate new community activities and events.

Other work

- 3.22 The Community Development and Regeneration team are currently working on:
- Finalising the business pages for the new website
 - Reviewing the options available for business support signposting and then considering any gaps when putting together the new specification for the Business Advice and Guidance contract
 - Branding and marketing for promoting what the Council has to offer businesses
 - Electronic working as part of the Digital Transformation project – the Community Development and Regeneration Team is scheduled for July 2015 to work with ICT and Customer First to deliver these changes and improvements
 - Working on the list of projects and actions for the next 4 years, which will feed into the new Corporate Plan

4.0 Tiverton Town Centre

- 4.1 The Town Centre Manager post is in the process of being recruited.
- 4.2 Members will be aware that some initial investigation work has been done to look at regeneration projects for Tiverton Town Centre. A project group has been set up and a report will be brought to the Cabinet in April 2015.

5.0 Future Work

- 5.1 The Community Development and Regeneration Team are currently working on projects and actions that need to feed into the new Corporate Plan as actions for the next 4 years.
- 5.2 These action plans will come back to the Cabinet as part of the work on the Corporate Plan.

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Circulation of the Report: Cllr Richard Chesterton and Management Team