

Economy Policy Development Group – 2019/2020

Chairman's annual report

Overview

During the course of the last year the Policy Development Group has considered a wide range of issues including:

- various reports providing updates on the projects undertaken as part of the Economic Strategy first year action plan;
- updates on the Heart of the South West Industrial Strategy,
- various updates on Brexit,
- information regarding the 'Connecting the Culm' project;
- continued grant support for economic projects; and
- an informative presentation from the 'Taste of the West' organisation.

The group has also considered commercialisation opportunities and recommended to cabinet charging for economic development advice through the planning process which was subsequently approved. Funding was successfully sought from the Local Government Association to undertake some initial scoping of additional commercialisation opportunities. This work is currently underway.

In addition to the formal meetings members have also met informally to have discussions with officers to better understand existing projects and consider activities for future years.

Some of the key areas of activity throughout the last year are as follows:

Economic Development Enquiries

The PDG were encouraged to hear that more new businesses have started up in the last year and that demand for employment sites was still high. The Growth, Economy and Delivery team has continued to help signpost new and existing businesses to employment space opportunities.

Economic Strategy

Following adoption of the Economic Strategy progress was made in year one with respect to delivering projects aimed at helping to deliver the strategies objectives relating to the key themes of Employment & Skills, Place, Infrastructure, Hi Tech, Innovation & Green Energy, Agriculture and Food & Drink. There is however considerable work to be done in the coming years to achieve the desired strategy outcomes.

Re-opening of Cullompton Railway Station

During the last year the project to re-open railway stations at Cullompton and Wellington has made progress. A report will be considered by Cabinet this month regarding a proposed governance structure for taking the project through to completion of the Strategic Outline Business Case. The project is being led by the District Council in partnership with Somerset West and Taunton Council in conjunction with the two County Councils, the two Town Councils, the Local Enterprise Partnership, the local MPs and the rail industry. Both Neil Parish MP (Tiverton and Honiton) and Rebecca Pow MP (Taunton Deane) are fully supportive of the scheme and are currently backing a proposal to seek funding through the Restoring Your Railway fund.

Visit Mid Devon Website

The Visit Mid Devon Website was launched this year and provides an excellent vehicle to promote the district and offers a great resource for local businesses to promote themselves. The Website was developed in partnership with Tiverton Museum, the Tourist Information Service, Petroc and Reach Plc. The initiative was one of the last projects in the County to receive European funding. The Website can be found via the following link:

<https://www.visitmiddevon.co.uk/>

A very successful launch event was held on 26 February 2020, which was well attended by local businesses, who welcomed the new initiative warmly.

Exeter and the Heart of Devon Partnership

Officers from the District Council have continued to work with East Devon, Exeter and Teignbridge Councils. Further updates will be given by Officers throughout the coming months.

The Hydro Mills Project

This has been frequently discussed at most meetings. The Group is pleased that the scheme for Tiverton Weir is close to planning application stage. There is another report on this agenda which gives a full update of the scheme and the next steps.

Town Centre Wi-fi

The project to deliver town centre wi-fi for the three towns has moved forward and has benefitted from European funding. An initial scheme is to be delivered in Tiverton following the procurement of a provider. It is anticipated that the other towns would follow close behind.

Tiverton Town Centre Signage

A project is well underway for replacing and supplementing pedestrian signage in the town centre. This is due to be completed March/April 2020. Future phases of public realm works will provide new seating and other improved street furniture.

Cullompton Heritage Action Zone Bid

This bid to improve the heritage assets of Cullompton town centre satisfactorily passed through the first stage of assessment and Historic England is currently assessing the subsequent stage submission.

Finally, I would like to thank 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 John Downes
Chairman of the Economy Policy Development Group