

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **ECONOMY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 17 March 2022 at 5.30 pm

Present

Councillors

J M Downes (Chairman)
Mrs C Collis, Mrs S Griggs, B Holdman,
D F Pugsley and R F Radford

Apologies

Councillor(s)

N V Davey, Mrs E J Lloyd and J Wright

Also Present

Councillor(s)

R J Chesterton, Mrs C P Daw, R M Deed and
B G J Warren

Also Present

Officer(s):

Richard Marsh (Director of Place), John Bodley-Scott (Economic Development Team Leader), Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer) and Jessica Watts (Member Services Apprentice)

48 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from Cllrs N V Davey, E Lloyd and J Wright.

49 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public present and none had registered to ask a question in advance.

50 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT

No interests were declared under this item.

51 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2022 were confirmed as a true and accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

52 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman stated that whilst the J27 / J28 report being presented today was useful in terms of confirming the current position, for the next meeting he wanted the PDG to discuss the potential economic benefits of junction development and for this to be a focus for the Group going forwards. He referred to 'blue sky thinking' and Members of the PDG giving officers a steer as to what the Council could achieve. It was accepted that this discussion may need to be held in Part II due to the commercially sensitive nature of the topics discussed.

53 JUNCTION 27 AND 28 REPORT (00:08:00)

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Director of Place. At the January 2022 meeting, a request was made for an update on work being undertaken to progress opportunities for business growth by development at the motorway junctions in Mid Devon. This report presented an update in relation to work underway in relation to Junctions 27 and 28 and opportunities that existed therein.

The following was highlighted within the report:

- The Council had a stated ambition to see development around Junctions 27 and 28 of the M5. The Policy guiding development of the allocated sites is contained within the Local Plan and were supported by other planning documents.
- Progress on the scheme had been slower than anticipated being heavily influenced by the pandemic.
- Discussions with some landowners had shown that there was still some development interest but also some doubt as to whether this was as originally envisaged.
- Interest remains from Eden for the 'Eden Grounds' project but any masterplan would need to cover the whole of the site and be adopted as an SPD prior to determination of any planning application. It would therefore be necessary for Eden to work with MDDC and landowners in order to develop proposals for the site.
- The Council was taking a proactive role in trying to achieve the development aspiration. In due course engagement with relevant parties would widen. Engagement with the new Local Plan would also take into account any new aspirations.
- Regarding J28, key projects were progressing such as the Cullompton railway station project and the Culm Garden Village project. As part of this the Council had commissioned an employment and skills study to consider how the Culm Garden Village could support and contribute to further employment.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The need for consideration towards the likely salaries of potential employees and house prices locally.
- How new businesses would be attracted? It was explained that the Council was in a strong position to engage with businesses more widely.
- The Local Plan set out a mix of development on the site, it could not be amended to switch from 'retail' to 'housing' for example.
- The precise location of the areas being referred to which were set out in the Local Plan.
- Concerns regarding the need to improve connectivity and transport connections.
- A reminder not to focus purely on development at the junctions but for any development there to also provide visitor signposting to local towns and other local attractions.
- The need for a co-ordinated and integrated approach at J28 so as not to create a 'hodge podge' of projects with no overarching vision.

- The need to remember that J27 also fed Willand and parts of Halberton whose business interests needed to be protected.
- The need to ensure that businesses within local town centres were not detrimentally affected by development at the junctions.
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It was **AGREED** that a report would be brought back to the next meeting providing an update and allowing an opportunity for the Group to discuss ideas further.

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

54 **WORKSHOP SUMMARY (00:45:00)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a summary of the work * which had been undertaken at recent workshops.

The Chairman stated that the workshops had been very useful and had provided an opportunity for Members to direct officers as to their thoughts, concerns and aspiration but they had also presented a challenge for the Economic Development team who were experiencing resource problems. He hoped that there would be less presentations going forward and more policy and development work so that available resource could be focussed where it was needed.

Note: * Workshop summary previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes.

55 **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TEAM VERBAL UPDATE :00:16:00)**

The Group received a verbal update from the Economic Development Team Leader regarding work undertaken by the team. This included the following information:

The workload of the team had been dominated by a series of unforeseen challenges. At the beginning of January there had been a fire at the Tiverton Business Park and a need to respond and find accommodation for three Mid Devon businesses at short notice.

The period had also been dominated by:

Business Grants

Over the last couple of months, the team had been asked to prioritise the administration and management of the latest Covid 19 related Business Grants.

- Omicron Scheme
- Additional Restrictions Grants, Omicron
- Additional Restrictions Grants, Covid Recovery

All three grants schemes were now coming to an end, but they had generated a huge amount of administrative and work

	OMI	ARG2 (Covid Recovery)	ARG3 (OMI)
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	£1.6 million	£160k +	£187k
Received:	340 (1 to be assessed)	32	103
Processed:	339 (25 awaiting pre-payment checks or further info)	25 (1 to be paid)	103
Approved:	302	15	97
Declined:	12	9	0
Distributed	£904k	£140k	£158k

Visit Mid Devon – This was a partnership with the TIC / Museum for 2 years managing the website and social media channels.

This Committee received a report in September last year about the work of the team on the Taste Mid Devon campaign in support of local food producers and hospitality businesses. The team had hoped to bring an update report to this committee, but due to the unexpected demands on the teams time this had not been possible.

The website had been a useful tool to support the leisure, tourism and hospitality businesses this year. In order to help businesses through the recovery period the Council had offered free business listings on the website. It had enabled the team to build a good relationship with the sector and identify how the team could help them going forward. The team had recruited 136 Mid Devon businesses to date, including eateries, attractions and accommodation providers, which was the sector hit hardest by the pandemic.

The team had secured funding from the ‘Welcome Back’ grant to create, design and install four visitor boards across the district. One unique board for each of the main towns sits in the long-stay car park and provides information about the local area, promoting the facilities and town centre businesses e.g retail and eateries (town centre focused).

The team were planning a business event for our leisure, tourism and hospitality businesses in May, with a number of guest speakers promoting support services and tips for the future (trends following the pandemic).

Community Support Activities

Over this period the team had continued to co-ordinate various strands of support for residents impacted by Covid19 or by the increasing squeeze on household incomes. This had included co-ordinating the Government funded Household Support Fund, Self-Isolation Support and Monday and Debt Advice

Asylum Seekers Initial Accommodation

In January, and at extremely short notice, the team were informed that Mid Devon would be hosting an Asylum Seekers Initial Accommodation Facility at Tiverton Best Western Hotel. Initially 72 asylum seekers including two families were housed at the hotel. This had involved working with local and regional community groups to co-ordinate various areas of support.

Throughout this period the team had worked flexibly, tirelessly and professionally, to meet the demands of the new pieces of work, often working over and above contracted hours to meet the challenges as they appeared. With the majority of the schemes coming to an end at the end of March, and with hopefully the Group Manager for Economy Growth and Delivery returning, the team was expected to be back to some sort of normality by the middle of April, albeit the team had not been able to recruit to the post of Economic Development Officer yet.

The Group wished to thank the entire team for their hard work and perseverance during a difficult two year period.

56 CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2021 - 2022 (00:58:00)

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a draft report * from the Chairman summarising the work of the Group and the Economic Development Team over the past 12 months. A copy of the final report would be submitted to full Council at their meeting on 27 April 2022.

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

57 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (00:59:00)

The items identified for the next meeting were noted, however, the Chairman reiterated a request for future meetings to be more focussed and proactive in terms of policy development particularly in relation to J27 and J28 development.

(The meeting ended at 6.30 pm)

CHAIRMAN