

Report for: Economy PDG

Date of Meeting: 7 March 2024

Subject: Economic Development Team Update

Cabinet Member: Cllr Steve Keable, Planning & Regeneration

Responsible Officer: Richard Marsh, Director of Place

Exempt: N/A

Wards Affected: All wards

Enclosures: N/A

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendation(s)

To update members on town centre health, projects and activities undertaken by the Growth, Economy and Delivery Team during the last two months.

Recommendation(s):

That members note the contents of the report.

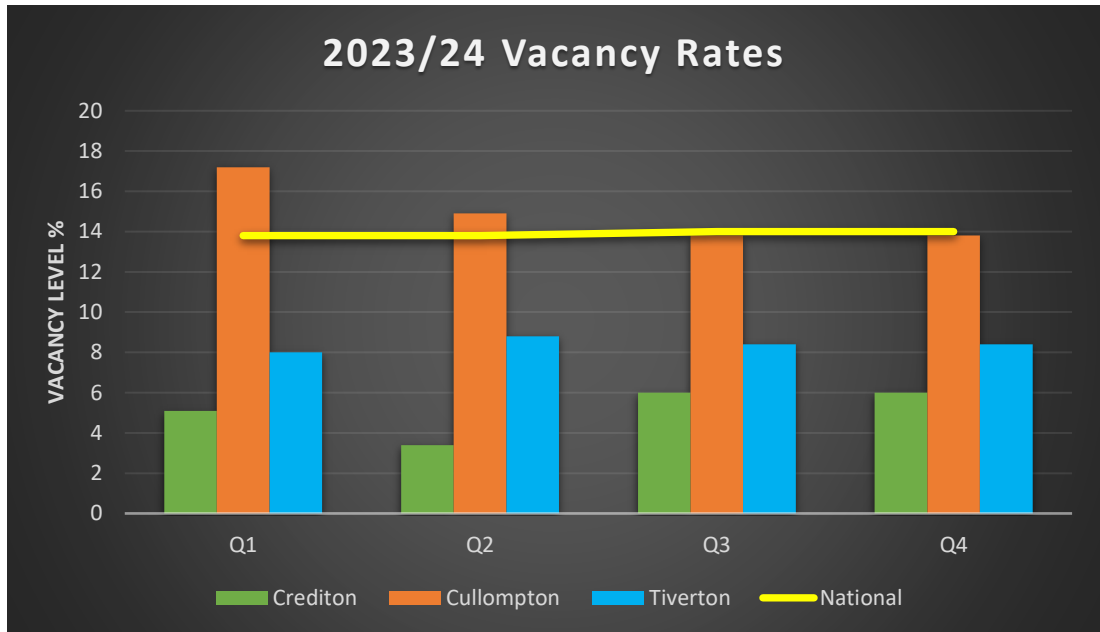
Section 2 – Report

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This report provides an update on activities carried out by the Growth, Economy and Delivery Team over the last two months, since the last committee meeting. Projects being delivered through the Shared Prosperity Fund will be reported separately to the Committee.

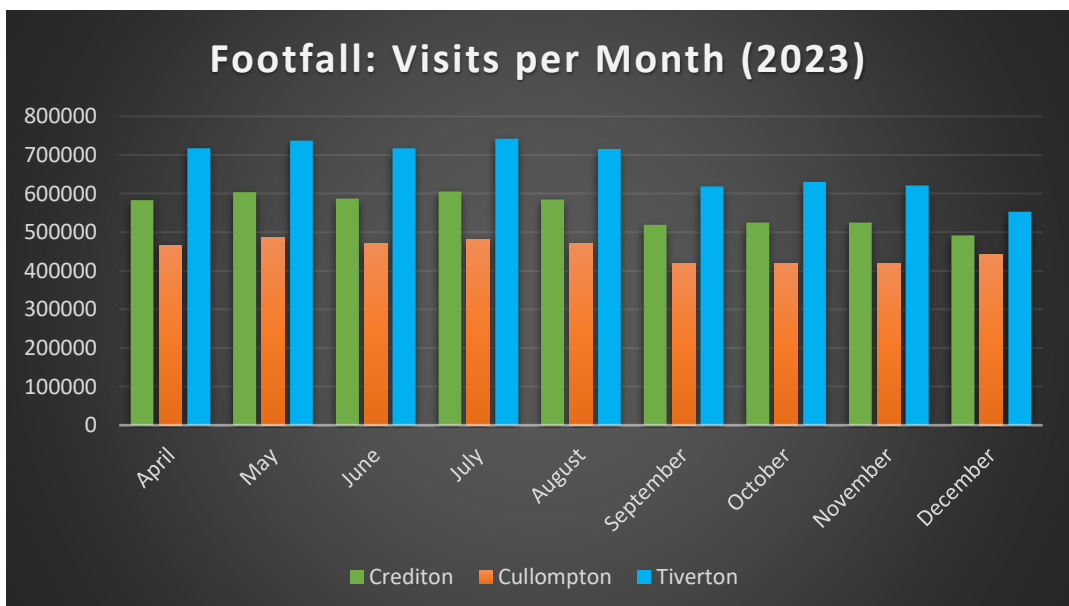
2.0 Town Centre Health

2.1 Quarter 4 shopfront surveys took place in January and we have footfall data up to Quarter 3 (December 2023).

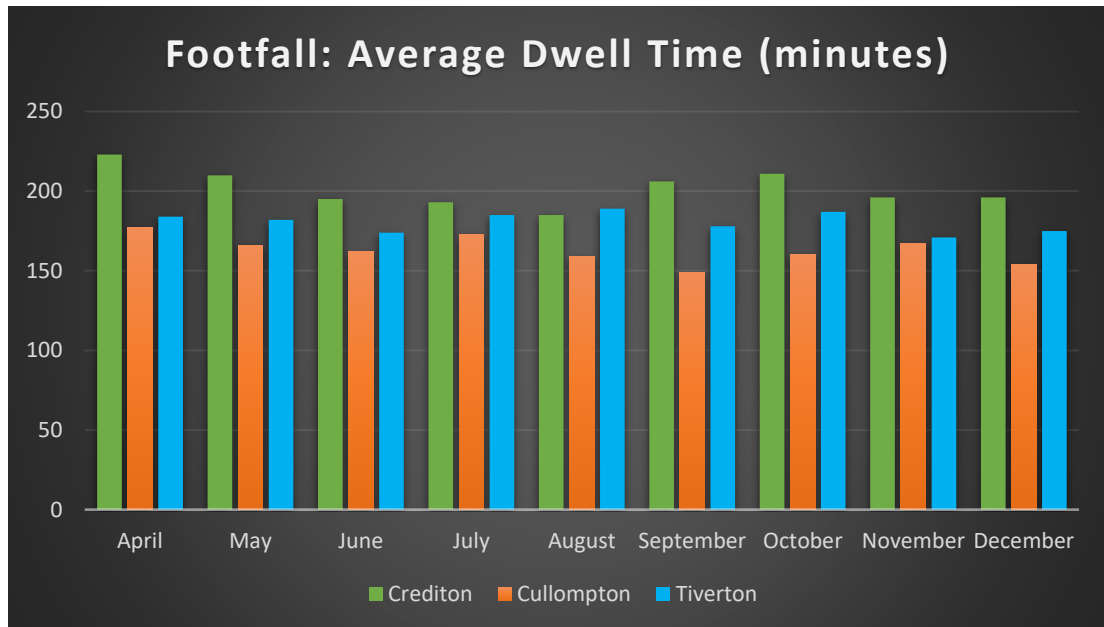


2.2 All three town centres have sustained vacancy levels below the national average between quarters 3 and 4. Although there have been occupancy changes in the three towns, these changes have balanced out resulting in nil change to occupancy levels overall.

2.3 Nationally, the UK saw a year-on-year decline on town centre footfall in December by 4.2%. However, our towns all saw a much larger year-on-year drop in footfall (21% for Crediton, 13% for Cullompton and 31% for Tiverton). We are checking this data with the supplier but as it currently presents, this is a significant decline.



- 2.4 With regards to dwell time, the majority of visits last less than half an hour (quick drop-ins such as for prescriptions, banking, Post Office, Library) with the second highest for visitors staying more than five hours. The average dwell time across the three towns is around the three-hour mark. Leisure offers will encourage longer dwell-time.



- 2.5 Through the Love Your Town Centres Scheme, we are supporting a number of grant funding initiatives to support and boost the vitality of our town centres. The next round of Vibrant Town Centres Funding launches in March with funding awards in April.

3.0 Cullompton Heritage Action Zone

- 3.1 The High Street Heritage Action Zone programme is a national project aiming to unlock the potential of high streets across England, fuelling economic, social and cultural recovery. Cullompton is one of only 10 successful High Streets in the South West region, and 68 nationally, to benefit from this funding, following a successful bid by the District Council to Homes England in 2019. Five years on this programme is now nearing completion.
- 3.2 Works to enhance the public realm are now completed with an opening ceremony held on the 14th February 2024. The opening ceremony went well and it was pleasing to see the space well used with market stalls enjoying the benefits of the enhanced and extended public realm area. The improvements have significantly enhanced the setting of the war memorial in this historic part of the town.

- 3.3 The grants for property owners, focused around Fore Street, to improve their properties are now nearing completion. In total 13 properties and businesses have benefitted from the scheme, some from both the Shopfront Grant and larger Structural & Reinstatement Grants, altogether, totalling 19 grants awarded.
- 3.4 The Cultural programme element has now concluded. This has been a huge success. Notable achievements include special events, such as the Roman festival, various public art projects involving local schools and local residents, poetry and a programme of talks arranged up to April 2024 provided by the new Cullompton History Group.
- 3.5 Officers are currently engaged in the closure of this project and will reflect on legacy opportunities and lessons learnt from this initiative that could benefit other parts of the District should other similar funding opportunities present themselves in the future.

4.0 Crediton Masterplan

- 4.1 The aim of this masterplan is to provide a clear strategy ensuring that Crediton town centre meets its full potential as an attractive, vibrant, and sustainable place with a strong economic function, now and into the future. The role of the masterplan is to provide principles and strategies that bring together the design and future delivery of development, public realm improvements, green infrastructure, and active travel and transport projects in Crediton.
- 4.2 The draft Crediton Masterplan has recently been the subject of public consultation which ran from Monday 15 January 2024 until Monday 26 February 2024. This draft draws on earlier stakeholder engagement in May 2023 and a first round of formal public consultation between the 21 July 2023 and 4 September 2023.
- 4.3 It is envisaged that the plan will be considered by Cabinet in June, once the results of the consultation are analysed and any proposed amendments made. Subject to Cabinet's recommendation it would then be considered by Council in July 2024 for adoption as a Supplementary Planning Document.

5.0 Infrastructure Projects

- 5.1 In Autumn 2023 the Government announced support for both the Cullompton Railway Station and works to address capacity constraints at Junction 28 of the M5 Motorway. The Railway Station is currently programmed for delivery in 2025. The District Council has been instrumental in progressing this scheme which is currently being led by Network Rail.

5.2 Junction 28 improvements are needed to address capacity issues at the junction and facilitate planned growth in the area. This scheme has recently been the subject of public consultation and a Strategic Outline Business Case will be considered by the County Council's Cabinet in March, with a view to submission to Government for funding for the next part of its development. The Cullompton Town Centre Relief Road remains a priority. It is intended that the relief road, which is so important to address the problems associated with through traffic in the town centre, will be implemented as a first stage before any wider junction 28 improvements are made. District Council Officers, in partnership with the County, continue to seek funding to deliver this scheme.

6.0 General Updates

6.1 Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP)

6.1.1 The bid for a Devon LVEP has been submitted to Visit England for approval. This project is being led by the Heart of the South West Growth Hub and Devon Local Authorities, Destination Management Organisations and other key stakeholders have had the opportunity to feed into the consultation for the development of the bid.

6.1.2 Confirmation of the bid outcome should be received by the end of April, by which point the project leads intend to form a Governance Board with (subject to approval) launch of the new LVEP and a Destination Management Framework by August 2024.

6.1.3 The Economic Development Team will be reviewing Mid Devon District Council's Destination Management Plan over the course of 2024/25 and the outcome of the Devon LVEP bid and its Framework are key to helping us shape our new plan.

Financial Implications

The report is an information report and does not of itself have any financial implications and require any decisions.

It is hoped that the report demonstrates that the Economy and Growth team is achieving in line with expectations in terms of the successful utilisation of grant monies and other financial resources.

Legal Implications

There are no legal implications arising from this information report.

Risk Assessment

There are no further risks associated with the updates in this report that have not already been reported.

Impact on Climate Change

The impact of individual projects on climate change has been included in the individual reports that will have already been presented to committee.

Equalities Impact Assessment

It is acknowledged that there is a relationship between economy and equality whereby disadvantaged groups of people can have greater or lesser opportunities for economic advantage depending on the climate and growth potential. Economically disadvantaged individuals are socially disadvantaged individuals whose ability to compete in the free enterprise system has been impaired due to diminished capital or credit opportunities as compared to others in the same or similar line of business who are not socially disadvantaged. There are unfortunate intersections between socioeconomic status and those with protected characteristics or from marginalised or minority communities putting them at greater risk of social and therefore economic disadvantage. Social and digital isolation issues across a rural district has the potential to exacerbate these risks.

Mid Devon's Prosperity Programme and the Economic Strategy outline key projects to tackle these risks and grow the economy. They are supported by equality assessments and communication plans.

Key strands of the work of the Economy and Growth team continue to seek to address and tackle causes of inequality and deprivation.

Relationship to Corporate Plan

The work of the Growth, Economy and Delivery team supports the corporate objectives for the economy:

- Bringing new businesses into the District
- Business development and growth
- Improving and regenerating our town centres
- Growing the tourism sector

Section 3 – Statutory Officer sign-off/mandatory checks

Statutory Officer: Andrew Jarrett

Agreed by or on behalf of the Section 151

Date: 27 Feb 2024

Statutory Officer: Maria DeLeiburne

Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer

Date: 27 Feb 2024

Chief Officer: Richard Marsh

Agreed by Corporate Director

Date: 27 Feb 2024

Performance and risk: Steve Carr

Agreed on behalf of the Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager

Date: 27 Feb 2024

Cabinet member notified: (yes)

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Zoë Lentell, Economic Development Team Leader

Email: zlentell@middevon.gov.uk

Telephone: 01884 234298

Background papers: