

Report for: Economy and Assets PDG

Date of Meeting: 20 June 2024

Subject: Economic Development Team Update

Cabinet Member: Cllr Steve Keable, Planning & Regeneration

Responsible Officer: Richard Marsh, Director of Place and Economy

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 couple of months.

Recommendation(s):

That members note the contents of the report.

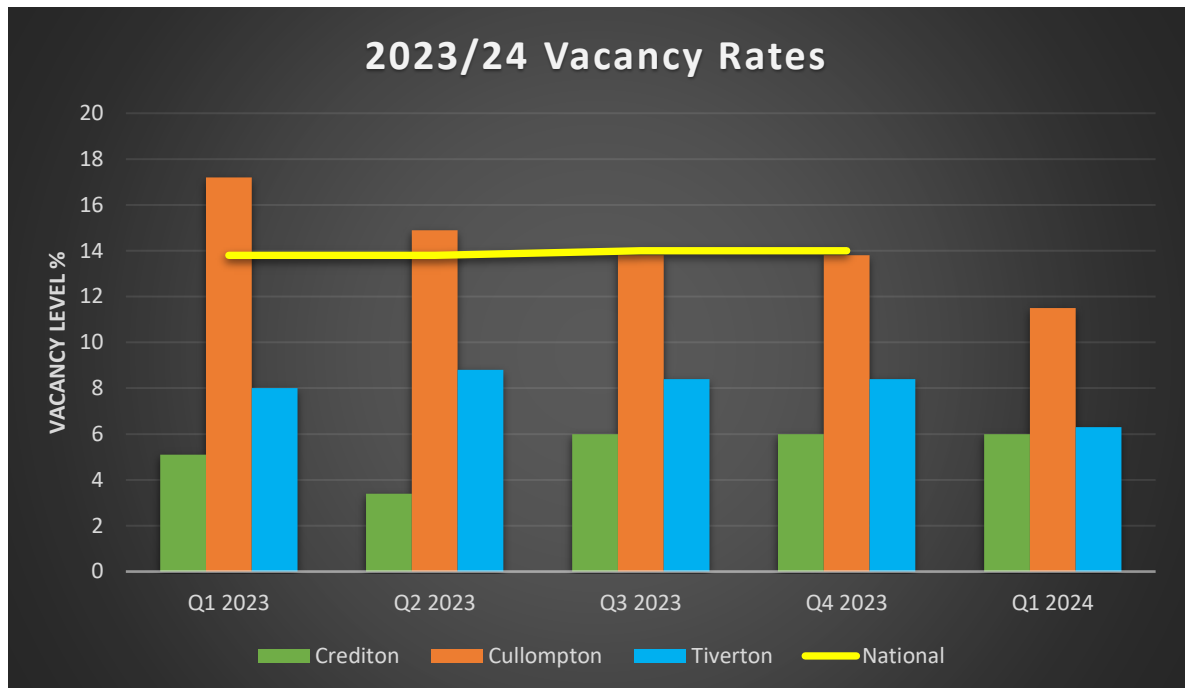
Section 2 – Report

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This report provides an update on activities carried out by the Growth, Economy and Delivery Team since the last committee meeting.

2.0 Town Centre Health

2.1 Quarter 1 shopfront surveys took place in April 2024 and we have footfall data up to Quarter 4 (March 2024).



2.2 All three town centres have vacancy levels below the national average between quarters 3 and 4. Crediton has sustained its vacancies at 6%, with Cullompton and Tiverton both seeing a decrease in empty units by 2.3% and 2.1% respectively. National high street vacancy figures have not yet been published for Q1 2024.

2.3 Following the previous PDG, where we reported anomalies with the footfall data, we have received updated (rectified) figures from the provider, which show that:

- In 2023/24, Tiverton had higher footfall year-on-year in Summer and Winter months but lower in Spring and Autumn months. Overall, it saw a footfall increase of 2% from 2022/23.
- Crediton had similar footfall patterns throughout the year but with an overall footfall increase of 4% from 2022/23.
- Apart from October, November and January, Cullompton has seen a consistent increase from 2022/23 with an overall increase of 5%.

2.4 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. Following the completion of the Cullompton Heritage Action Zone project, there was an underspend on the Cullompton Shopfront project of £5,127.08. Our intention is to reallocate this budget to a new Cullompton Shopfront Scheme that mirrors the existing schemes in Tiverton and Crediton.

3.0 Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund

3.1 The Team has commenced delivery of the final year of the Shared and Rural England Prosperity Fund projects. A separate presentation will outline the review of 2023/24 and outline the Year 3 Delivery Plan. Some highlight points for Members' awareness include:

- We have been advised by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities that we should receive this year's funding in early July.
- The Prosperity Grants Programme has closed to new Expressions of Interest. We are in the final round (Round 4) of the Programme and expect to fully allocate the funding. Round 3 saw a further 12 businesses offered grants (an additional 2 have tentative decisions at the time of this report and a further 18 businesses have been invited to submit Full Applications under Round 4).
- A Planning Application has been submitted for the Change of Use of the Market Centre building while initial building surveyors and architects are being contracted for initial work on the Tiverton Work Hub project.
- Round 1 of this year's Vibrant Town Centre Fund saw a flurry of applications and several projects across the District were supported including: the Big Boniface Bash and Crediton Arts in the Park, Tiverton Literary Festival, Arty Party and Cullompton Cultural Festivals, The Grand Western Canal's 50th Anniversary and Cullompton Farmers; Market.
- We held three Business Support Surgeries in April and May in collaboration with the Revenues Team with an event held each in Crediton, Cullompton and Tiverton. Although we received interest in the events, sadly they were poorly attended. We are reviewing alternative formats for providing surgery style engagement opportunities for businesses.
- Through the Field to Fork Project, we supported Food Drink Devon bring their Spring networking event to Mid Devon. Hosted at the Corn Barn near Cullompton in April: the event offered an afternoon Food and Drink Forum that included a presentation by Amanda Stansfield from Mid Devon's Granny Gothards and an expert panel Q&A session that included Harriet Said, MDDC's Lead Officer in the Public Health (Commercial) Team. This was followed by Food Drink Devon's spring networking and meet the maker evening that included producers Thunderflower, Rull Orchard, Quicke's Cheese, Wellhayes Vineyard and Waterhouse Fayre.
- Preparation continues for the Mid Devon Walking Festival with the programme drafted and being finalised.

4.0 Green Enterprise Grants Scheme

4.1 The new Green Enterprise Grants scheme launched for applications in April. Total funding available is £25,000 (that must achieve at least a 50% match). £24,245 of this is funded by the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership using Local Growth Deal funding from Government, enabling us to award up to 5 maximum value grants if appropriate. We are accepting applications up to midday on 10 June 2024. All projects must be delivered by 31 December 2024. The application window will only reopen if there is still funding available to be allocated. At the time of this report, 14 businesses requested the application form, although 1 is ineligible as out-of-area.

5.0 General Updates

5.1 Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP)

5.1.1 The bid for a Devon LVEP was successfully approved by Visit England. Devon County Council are acting as the accountable body for the LVEP and is in the process of setting up a steering group.

5.1.2 It is likely it will take around 12 months for the LVEP to get up and running, therefore the Economic Development Team will continue to progress the review of our Destination Management Plan (DMP) with the intention of linking this into the LVEP's Destination Plan once published. As part of the DMP research, we have commissioned a visitor survey which is being conducted over the May and Summer school holiday periods; the results of this will be fed back to Members later in the year.

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: 11th June 2024

Statutory Officer: Maria DeLeburne

Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer

Date: 11th June 2024

Chief Officer: Richard Marsh

Agreed by Corporate Director

Date: 11th June 2024

Performance and risk: Steve Carr

Agreed on behalf of the Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager
Date: 11 June 2024

Cabinet member notified: Yes

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Zoë Lentell, Economic Development Team Leader
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Telephone: 01884 234298

Background papers: