

**Report for: Economy and Assets PDG**

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| Date of Meeting:     | 19 September 2024                          |
| <b>Subject:</b>      | <b>Economic Development Team Update</b>    |
| 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 projects and activities undertaken by the Growth, Economy and Delivery Team during the last couple of months.

To also update Members on plans (procedure and timescale) for review of the Economic Strategy for Mid Devon.

**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 Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund**

2.1 Work continues on the delivery of the final phase of the Shared Prosperity and Rural England Prosperity Fund Delivery Plan. Following completion of the

second quarter, we will undertake the next monitoring reviews to measure progress against projected outputs and outcomes. This will be completed by the end of October and updates presented to PDG in November. Some key items to note include:

- **Funding:** The final tranche of funding arrived in July 2024; therefore we have now received our full allocation of Shared Prosperity and Rural Prosperity Funding.
- **Prosperity Grants:** The Prosperity Grants Programme is now fully committed. The Funding has supported 39 businesses/projects across all of the themes. We are now working with the Grants Management partner to monitor progress of funded project delivery and ensure defrayal of funds before year-end.
- **Flexible Workspace:** Planning Permission (24/00814/FULL) was granted for the Change of Use of the Market Centre building. A second Planning Application (24/01252/FULL) is now live for the physical amendments to the building to facilitate the improved workspace. We are tendering for the contractor to deliver the works with the aim (subject to Planning Permission being granted) of this commencing early November. In addition to the Prosperity Funding, we have secured a small 'Quick Wins' grant from Devon County of £5,000 towards this project.
- **Love Your Town Centre:** This year's final round of Vibrant Town Centres closed for applications on 31 August. We received five applications covering Bampton, Crediton, Cullompton and Tiverton. These will go to a Funding Panel mid-September for decision.
- **Field to Fork:** Work continues on Phase 2 of the Meet the Producer project. A further 14 businesses have engaged in the project this phase to date. Whereas the first phase focused primarily on the 'field' element (local produce and where to buy), this phase will focus more on the 'fork' highlighting the end-journey (food tourism). This includes food and drink experiences and hospitality businesses (in this case we are categorising hospitality under 'instagrammable locations' showcasing the beauty of the food and location). The imagery will be featured as part of promotional campaigns during January to March.
- **Visitor Economy:** We are in the final countdown phase ahead of Mid Devon's first Walking Festival (taking place 14 – 29 September). The full published programme can be viewed on the Visit Mid Devon website at: <https://www.visitmiddevon.co.uk/walking-festival/programme/>. Details of further tie-in events were received after advertised print-deadlines and all walking festival events are listed on

the What's On page (filter category for 'Walking Festival' to just see these events): <https://www.visitmiddevon.co.uk/events/>. Post project evaluation in October will collate data such as booking numbers and qualitative feedback from the organisers.

- **People and Skills:** This is a new element for Year 3, with funding under this pillar not being available the previous two years. We have used the People and Skills funding to work with Devon County Council and partner District Authorities on an 'Employment and Skills Hub'. The support includes a dedicated advisor offering free 1:1 employment and skills advice, signposting and more direct support with identifying training opportunities available. We have two hubs in Mid Devon: one in Cullompton Library each Monday and in Tiverton on Tuesdays at Old Heathcoat School Community Centre. Mid Devon residents can, however, access support from any of the hubs (including elsewhere in Devon): <https://www.devon.gov.uk/economy-enterprise-skills/skills/employment-hubs/>. A virtual offer is available to those who find it difficult to travel.
- **Business Support:** the next Mid Devon based Devon Agri-Tech Alliance events are as follows:
  - I. Early November (Date TBC): Agroforestry and Biodiversity Net Gain. This will be a mixed event including talks, a guided farm walk and resource packs for information to take away and ensure engagement post event.
  - II. 21 November at Lee Farm Services: Land Management with Regenerative Practices, looking at livestock and arable farming. The event will include a farm tour, open discussion and some food.

### 3.0 Economic Strategy Review

- 3.1 The Economic Strategy for Mid Devon (<https://www.middevon.gov.uk/media/348894/economic-strategy-final.pdf>) covers 2019 – 2024. This document outlines our direction and key priorities for focus to support sustained economic growth in Mid Devon. Although, the five priority themes in the Strategy have not changed, in the wake of COVID, the action plans were superseded by economic recovery plans and the Shared Prosperity and Rural Prosperity Fund Investment Plan.
- 3.2 With the approach of the completion of the Prosperity Fund, the Economic Strategy is due for review to direct our focus for the next five years. The role of the Economy and Assets PDG will be to steer the design and content of the new Strategy. Therefore, in a similar way to the previous review, we propose a series of informal PDG meetings as follows:

Oct

- Informal PDG
- Background / Context (Mid Devon's economy, where we are now)
- Alignment (links to Corporate Plan and other Economic plans)
- Review of previous Strategy and picking out (up to six) key themes for focused sessions

Nov

- Informal PDG: Looking at first two themes
- SWOT analysis
- Action planning, our role and ability to effect change: control, influence, accept

Dec

- Informal PDG: Looking at second two themes
- SWOT analysis
- Action planning, our role and ability to effect change: control, influence, accept

Jan

- Informal PDG: Looking at final two themes
- SWOT analysis
- Action planning, our role and ability to effect change: control, influence, accept

Feb

- Focused stakeholder conversations
- Draft Strategy

Mar

- 06/03/2025: Present draft to Economy and Assets PDG

Apr

- 01/04/2025 Present final Strategy to Cabinet

- 3.2 Dates for the Informal PDGs to be finalised with Democratic Services.
- 3.3 The Destination Management Plan is also in the process of being reviewed this year and will follow a similar timescale. A visitor survey is being undertaken by a third party on our behalf. We expect the results to be available to us in October/November, which will be fed back to PDG in the November meeting. It is proposed that more detailed action planning to be covered as part of the Economic Strategy Informal PDGs above (under the relevant corresponding theme) and will follow a similar timescale for consultation and reporting as above.

### **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:** 11.9.24

**Statutory Officer:** Maria DeLeiburne

Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer

**Date:** 11.9.24

**Chief Officer:** Richard Marsh

Agreed by Corporate Director

**Date:** 11.9.24

**Performance and risk:** Dr Steve Carr

Agreed on behalf of the Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager

**Date:** 11.9.24

**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:**