

Report for: Economy and Assets PDG

Date of Meeting:	28 November 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 projects and activities undertaken by the Growth, Economy and Delivery Team during the last couple of months.

To also update Members on the 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 Policy Development Group meeting.

2.0 Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund

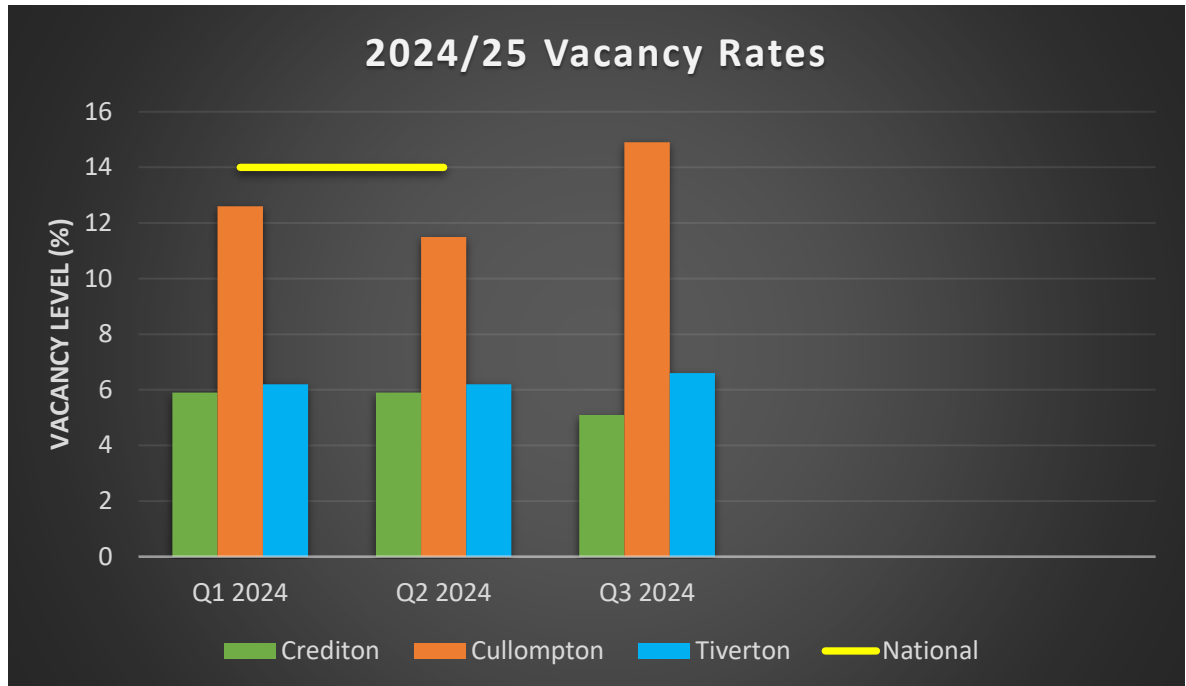
2.1 Work continues on the delivery of the final phase of the Shared Prosperity and Rural England Prosperity Fund Delivery Plan. A separate presentation outlines the highlights for the second quarter. Some key items to note include:

- **Flexible Workspace:** Planning Permission (24/01252/FULL) was granted for the physical amendments to the former Market Centre building to facilitate the improved workspace. Following a tender exercise, a contractor has been appointed to deliver the works with a mobilisation date of 02 December. The contractor has prioritised internal works over external works for the early phase and is timing deliveries to minimise disruption to car park users so as to not impact on Christmas shopping in the town.
- **Field to Fork:** Imagery for the second phase of the Meet the Producer project is scheduled to post on the @VisitMidDevon Facebook and Instagram accounts from 25 November 2024 through to the end of March 2025. This project aims to meet outputs for “non-financial support to businesses” and “raising awareness of Mid Devon” with the ultimate goal of encouraging people to support local producers and eateries.
- **Visitor Economy:** The Tiverton Swan Trail closed on 3 November and culminated with a successful auction event on 7 November. The swans raised £6,710 at auction plus an additional £494 for the raffled swan. Continuing the legacy of the trail, the swan decorated in traditional ‘roses and castles’ narrowboat-style artwork will remain at the Canal Basin for visitors and locals to continue to treasure. The Visitor Signage project (under the Rural England Prosperity Fund Delivery Plan) is underway with new “Welcome to Mid Devon” visitor boards to be installed at our three Mid Devon Leisure sites. The Team is also exploring other gateway locations (in liaison with the landowners) for these signs such as J27 and the Tiverton Parkway and Crediton Railway Stations.
- **People and Skills:** The Employment and Skills Hub is seeing good numbers of engagement with (as of the end of October), a caseload of 25 and further referrals. The Tiverton hub has relocated to the Tiverton Library (still taking place on Fridays).
- **Business Support:** We are seeing a lower than expected take-up for the Prosper business support offer. The Prosper programme offers free support to potential entrepreneurs, new and existing businesses seeking to grow as well as specialist support for green innovation or those seeking to become employers. The Team are liaising with the Prosper Team on communication strategies to encourage further take-up and monitoring progress.

2.2 As part of the Autumn Statement, the Government announced intentions to extend the Shared Prosperity Funding by one year. We have not received any direct communication from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government about this yet. However, the Team is preparing a draft outline for a potential Year 4 Delivery Plan (reported separately).

3.0 Town Centre Health

3.1 Quarter 3 shopfront surveys took place in October 2024 and we have footfall data up to Quarter 2 (September 2024).

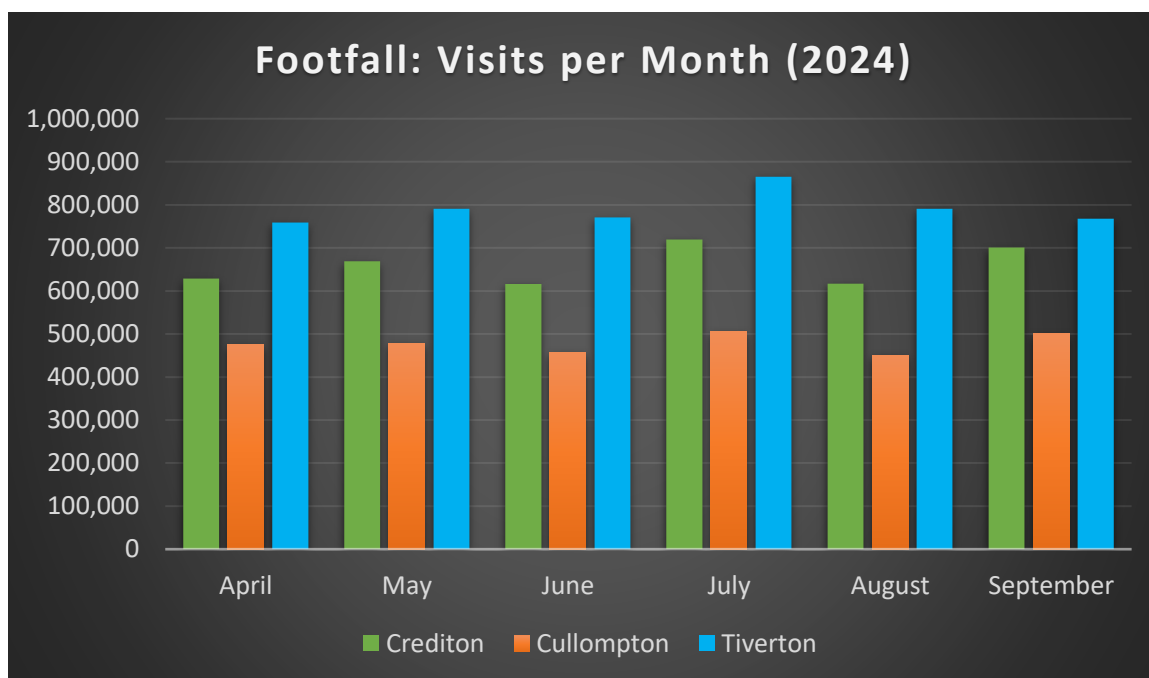


3.2 Cullompton and Tiverton have both seen an increase in the number of vacant units since the Quarter 2 report, whereas Crediton has seen a decrease. Both Crediton and Tiverton are performing better than the national average (reported at 14% for the end of September).

3.3 With regards to footfall, all three towns have reported a year-on-year increase.

- Cullompton, April to September has recorded a total footfall in 2024 of 2,866,000 compared to 2,732,000 for the same months last year. This is a 4.9% increase.
- Tiverton, April to September has recorded a total footfall in 2024 of 4,802,000 compared to 4,263,000 for the same months last year. This is a 12.6% increase.
- Crediton, April to September has recorded a total footfall in 2024 of 3,951,000 compared to 3,420,000 for the same months last year. This is a 15.5% increase.

3.4 The Shared Prosperity Programme has supported initiatives to encourage increased footfall including the Tiverton Swan Trail, Treasure Trails, the Walking Festival and supporting town centre events (such as the Boniface Bash, Shakespeare in the Square, Arty Party and Cullompton Autumn Fest and Tiverton Book Festival, amongst others).



4.0 Economic Strategy Review

4.1 The first Informal PDG session took place on 24 October 2024, looking at Mid Devon's economic profile and outline vision-setting. Members noted the skills and wage gaps and discussed opportunities to address these. The initial emerging themes for focus include (please note: these could change as the Strategy is further developed):

- Skills and Business Support
- Infrastructure, Land and Property
- Place, Tourism and Town Centres
- Business Engagement
- Business Growth, Innovation and Efficiency

4.2 The second Informal PDG will take place on 21 November focusing on two themes (Place and Business Engagement) with a view to undertaking a more focused SWOT analysis and forming an initial draft action plan. A further two Informal PDGs will look at the remaining themes before a final action plan is presented to Members as part of a draft Strategy.

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: 20 November 2024

Statutory Officer: Maria DeLeiburne
Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date: 20 November 2024

Chief Officer: Richard Marsh
Agreed by Corporate Director
Date: 20 November 2024

Performance and risk: Steve Carr
Agreed on behalf of the Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager
Date: 19 November 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: