

Economy & Assets Policy Development Group – 2024/2025

Chairman's Annual Report

This report provides a brief look back on the work of the Economy & Assets Policy Development Group (PDG) over the last year, along with a summary of activities undertaken by the Economic Development team, who support the policy development group.

The Economy Group have again continued to successfully gain and administer funds for the District. As ever the Group and I are indebted to the work and support of Richard, Adrian and Zoe and all of the Economic Development team.

The main focus of the Economic Development team over the last year has been the Shared Prosperity and the Rural England Prosperity programmes. The Policy Development Group has played an important role in the formulation of Shared Prosperity Investment Plans as part of the District's successful submissions to government.

PDG Overview of Meetings

During 2024/25 the Group considered a number of issues. In summary these included:

- Various UK Shared Prosperity Fund & Rural England Prosperity Fund reports
- Economic Development Team updates
- COTIE presentation on the Business Innovation Centre
- Draft Corporate Plan – PDG made comments under each of the sections of the Economy & Assets area which were incorporated into the final plan
- Green Enterprise Grants Updates
- Apricot Centre (agricultural training) presentation – Guest Speaker (Rachel Phillips)
- Car parking working group updates
- Town Centre Health updates
- Various Budget updates and financial discussions

In addition, throughout the year members have been provided with a number of reports and presentations providing data and analysis regarding the current economic position nationally and locally.

The Shared prosperity programme

As referred to above the Economic Development Team has been overseeing the third year of lead delivery of the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) scheme and the final year of the Rural England Prosperity Fund Scheme (REPF).

In 2024/25 so far to date, the team has:

- Supported 331 enterprises (non-financial support)
- Supported 37 organisations (non-financial support)

- Supported 24 potential entrepreneurs (non-financial support)
- Supported 4 tourism festivals/strategic events across Mid Devon and 111 town centre cultural and or tourism events and activities (across Bampton, Crediton, Cullompton and Tiverton)

As part of the SPF/REPF programmes, this year the team has:

- Delivered the highly successful Tiverton Swan Trail, which ran from Easter through to October half-term culminating in the swan auction event, which raised circa £7k for future tourism projects.
- Facilitated and coordinated the inaugural Mid Devon Walking Festival, seeing 35 walking events supported and promoted through the festival
- Attended the Mid Devon Show 2024 with our own “Mid Devon Producers” tent featuring 7 of our producers
- Supported 20 local producers and eateries with a series of “Meet the Producer” posts on our Visit Mid Devon Facebook page
- Installed new visitor signage at our three Mid Devon leisure sites highlighting the array of attractions and visitor experiences in Mid Devon
- Facilitated a package of support for our farm and food businesses including specialist sectoral workshops with Devon Agri-Tech Alliance (12 farms engaged) and membership support for 22 businesses this year with Food Drink Devon
- Delivered a series of town centre grant schemes supporting shopfront enhancements, fit-outs (moving into new units), digital enhancements and vibrant town centre projects.
- Delivered a series of digital, radio and printed promotional campaigns to support the visitor economy and promote Mid Devon as a destination

Other Achievements in 2024/25

In addition to the SPF/REPF programme the team has:

- Completed the **High Streets Heritage Action Zone (HAZ)** programme for Cullompton. Cullompton was one of only 10 successful high streets in the South West region to secure this funding. The £1.1m Historic England grant was matched with support from Mid Devon District Council, Devon County Council, and Cullompton Town Council, the project provided a programme of improvement works to reinvigorate the town centre and attract investment. The package of projects that have been delivered, include:
 - Public realm improvements at the Higher Bullring (with Devon County Council) to create an enhanced public space which enhances the setting of the war memorial, provides an increased area for the local markets, special events and increased dwell time. Since completion the area has been utilised regularly by market traders and used for special events;
 - A grants scheme for building repairs and historic support structural and historic reinstatement work, focused on Fore Street, has enabled several historic properties to benefit from improvements; and
 - A hugely successful cultural programme of activities to align with the town centre’s heritage. Notable achievements included special events, such as the Roman festival, various public art projects involving local

schools and local residents, poetry and talks provided by the new Cullompton History Group.

- Developed a Crediton Masterplan through to adoption in September 2024 drawing on valuable input from the local community. The masterplan provides a comprehensive strategy to help Crediton unlock its full potential as an attractive, vibrant, and sustainable town with a strong economic foundation. The finalised masterplan has been adopted as a supplementary planning document, ensuring its influence in guiding future planning decisions. The masterplan has already demonstrated its impact by securing funding from Great Western Railway's Customer and Community Improvement Fund. This funding will be used to enhance cycling and pedestrian connections between Crediton town centre and the railway station - one of many projects that will contribute towards achieving the masterplan's objectives.
- Continued to seek funding and facilitate delivery of key Infrastructure Projects. The most notable achievement being successfully securing a funding package to enable delivery of the **Cullompton Town Centre Relief Road** in August 2024. The funding package, includes £33.5m being provided by Homes England, which will allow Mid Devon to progress the delivery of the relief road in close conjunction with Devon County Council as delivery partner. Completion of the road is forecast for 2028 with the major focus of work in the short term being to finalise designs, complete the acquisition of land and fully relocate the cricket club – the new cricket square having been prepared and seeded during the summer (2024). In addition to the relief road the District Council also secured funding in previous years to develop a business case for improvements to **Junction 28 of the M5 motorway**. During this last year this has been submitted to the Department for Transport for consideration under the Large Local Majors Programme. It should also be noted that the project to reopen Cullompton Railway station is also well advanced and is awaiting a final decision from government to fund its construction.
- Established a new **strategic business forum** for Mid Devon, working with our local employers.
- Secured and administered £25k funding towards a phase one **Green Grants Scheme** for businesses, which supported five businesses resulting in a saving of 13,402.24 kgCo2e.

Over the last few months the Policy Development Group, along with others from the wider Council membership, have been actively involved through informal workshops in the formulation of the **next Economic Strategy**. It is intended that this document will help raise the profile of the District and the key challenges our businesses face. In addition to seeing this process to its conclusion, the PDG also will continue to play an important role in overseeing the delivery of SP4 plans over the next year.

Cllr John Downes
Chairman of the Economy Policy Development Group