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**Report for: Economy and Assets PDG**

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Date of Meeting: 19 June 2025

**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 meeting of this group.

#### **2.0 Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund**

2.1 At the previous PDG meeting, the Chairman reported some of the headline achievements of delivering the first three years of the SPF programme and the first two years of the REPF programme. Since then, the 2024/25 year

Government reporting has formally been concluded. A report is due for consideration by Cabinet on the 17<sup>th</sup> June 2025 which summarises the highly successful delivery of projects and which provides a summary of the financial closure.

2.2 Some key items to note with regard to last year's SPF/REPF programme which occurred since the previous meeting of this group include:

- **Flexible Workspace:** Works on the Tiverton work hub were completed in March 2025 as planned. A process to select an operator for the facility has been undertaken and it is hoped/expected that an announcement about this will be made imminently.
- **Visitor Economy:** Since the last report, Visit Mid Devon has made significant progress in promoting tourism, supporting local businesses, and enhancing the visibility of the region. Key achievements and initiatives over the past quarter include:

**1. Support for Local Food and Drink Tourism**

As part of Phase 2 of the *Field to Fork* initiative, Visit Mid Devon has actively collaborated with a range of local producers and venues. Promotional efforts have spotlighted the following businesses: Quoit at Cross, Hartnoll Hotel and Spa, Thunderflower Distillery, Rull Orchard, Thornes Farm Shop, Wellhayes Vineyard, and Quicke's Cheese. These features have strengthened the profile of Mid Devon's food and drink sector.

**2. Enhancement of Digital Presence**

A new Mid Devon destination page has been launched on the Visit Devon website, providing enhanced digital visibility for the region. This marks the first time Mid Devon has had a prominent presence on the Visit Devon platform. The new page complements the existing Visit Mid Devon website and broadens the reach of key business promotions to new and wider audiences.

**3. Enhancement of Digital Presence**

Two Instagram workshops were delivered for Mid Devon-based businesses, each attracting over 25 registrants. The sessions were tailored to help businesses better understand how to effectively use Instagram to grow their reach, engagement, and customer base.

**4. Marketing and Campaign Activity**

A number of seasonal and national campaigns were delivered, including promotional activity in the lead-up to Easter, May half-term, and Mother's Day. Visit Mid Devon also participated in two national campaigns:

- **English Tourism Week:** Highlighted the people behind the region's tourism sector while showcasing Mid Devon's natural beauty and tourism potential.

- Love Your Local Market: Delivered in collaboration with local town and farmers' markets to spotlight their contribution to high streets and to support new and emerging traders. The campaign included trader promotions and targeted features developed in collaboration with four local traders.

## **5. New Membership**

Two new businesses joined the Visit Mid Devon membership network this quarter, further expanding the region's collaborative tourism efforts.

2.3 To summarise the success of the SPF and REPF programmes within the District over the last three years, the following is a brief description of the significant achievements and outputs realised through the programme and the work of the Economic Development team, supported by the Economy and Assets PDG. At a headline level, the programme has:

- Supported 550 enterprises (non-financial support)
- Supported 37 organisations (non-financial support)
- Supported 24 potential entrepreneurs (non-financial support)
- Supported 38 enterprises (receiving grants)
- Supported 25 organisations (receiving grants)
- Supported 4 tourism festivals/strategic events across Mid Devon, and;
- Supported 111 town centre cultural and or tourism events and activities (across Bampton, Crediton, Cullompton and Tiverton)

2.4 To illustrate this further, the following are examples of some of the notable achievements through the SPF/REPF programme:

- Delivery of the Tiverton Swan Trail, which ran from Easter 2024, through to October 2024 half-term culminating in the Swan Auction event, which raised circa £7k for future tourism projects;
- Facilitation and coordination of the inaugural Mid Devon Walking Festival, seeing 35 walking events supported and promoted through the festival;
- Attendance at the Mid Devon Show 2023 and 2024 with our own "Mid Devon Producers" tent featuring 17 of the District's producers over the two years;
- Working with Food Drink Devon to offer 27 Mid Devon's Food and Drink businesses network membership and access to specialist business support, marketing and events;
- Supported 20 local producers and eateries with a series of "Meet the Producer" posts on our Visit Mid Devon Facebook page;
- Installation of new visitor signage at our three Mid Devon leisure sites highlighting the array of attractions and visitor experiences in Mid Devon;
- Facilitation of a package of support for our farm businesses including specialist sectoral workshops with Devon Agri-Tech Alliance (12 farms engaged);
- Delivery of the Tiverton Work Hub;

- Delivery of the Cotie Innovation Centre at Petroc, Tiverton (Created by Petroc College);
- Delivery of a series of town centre grant schemes supporting shopfront enhancements, fit-outs (moving into new units), digital enhancements and vibrant town centre projects; and
- Delivery of a series of digital, radio and printed promotional campaigns to support the visitor economy and promote Mid Devon as a destination

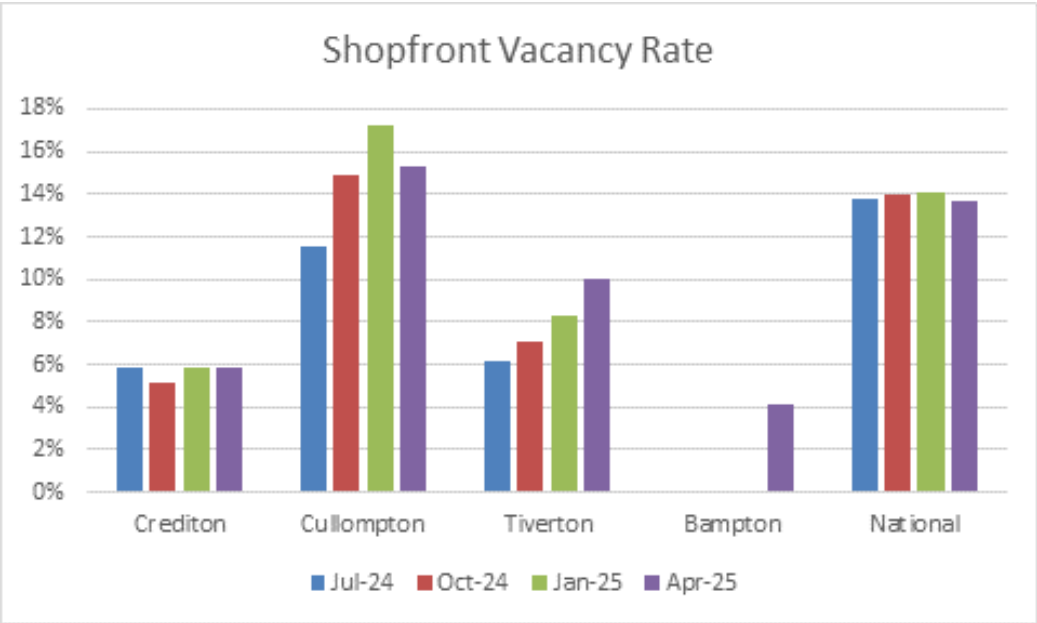
### **3.0 SPF/REPF 2025/2026**

- 3.1 Members may recall that the Government indicated in the Autumn Statement 2024 that it would offer an additional year of Shared Prosperity Funding; subsequently it was announced that there would also be an additional year of Rural England Prosperity Funding. As this funding flows to upper tier Authorities, this 2025/26 funding will be administered by the County Council on behalf of the Combined County Authority – although it has been agreed that delivery will continue to principally be directed through the District Authorities. In November 2024, the PDG considered potential delivery plan options for SPF funds for 2025/2026. This was informed by the Corporate Aims, Strategic Objectives and the previously prepared investment plans submitted to the Government at the beginning of the UKSPF programme. This work also drew on experience gained from the first three years of delivery. Cabinet will consider Delivery Plans for both SPF and REPF for this financial year at its 17th June 2025 meeting. A verbal update will be provided to members at the PDG meeting.
- 3.2 It should be noted that there are a number of restrictions with regard to these funding streams. Importantly, funds need to be spent and projects delivered by 31st March 2026. There is therefore a very short window for delivery from a relatively standing-start. It is also understood that we cannot “double count” outputs (e.g. a business recorded as an ‘Enterprises Receiving Non-Financial Support’ output in 2024/25 cannot be recorded again for a new project in 2025/26). Given the success of the previous years’ activities this means that we have significant saturation in a number of areas which therefore restrict options for this year. It should also be noted that given the short timescale a particular challenge for capital projects is the need for other approvals such as planning permission to be in place, which again reduces the options for delivery during this year.

### **4.0 Town Centre Health**

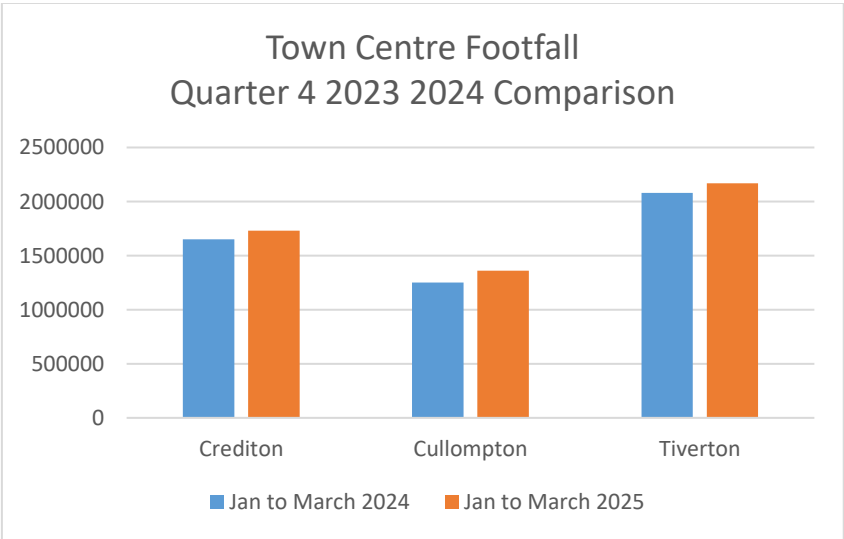
- 4.1 Quarter 1 shopfront surveys took place in April 2025. Tiverton and Cullompton have seen the most change this period. Tiverton has increased in the number of vacant units since the Quarter 4 report due to a couple of regional store closures. Cullompton (15.3%) has seen a marginal change with a couple new openings on the high street, bringing it back closer to quarter 3’s report. Crediton (5.9%), Tiverton (10%) and Bampton (4.16%) are performing better than the national average (13.7%). We have started to collect data for Bampton this year, which

will provide us with more insight regarding Mid Devon’s town centre health checks.



4.2 With regards to footfall, as reported by our data contractor Visitor Insights, all three towns have reported a year-on-year increase.

- Tiverton, January to March has recorded a total footfall in 2025 of 2,170,000 compared to 2,080,000 for the same months in the previous year.
- Crediton, January to March has recorded a total footfall in 2025 of 1,730,000 compared to 1,650,000 for the same months in the previous year.
- Cullompton, January to March has recorded a total footfall in 2025 of 1,360,000 compared to 1,250,000 for the same months in the previous year.



## **5.0 Business Rate Relief Drop in Session**

- 5.1 Changes to Business Rates Relief, which come into effect on April 1, meant that a number of Mid Devon businesses would see a larger than usual increase to how much they pay in 2025/26; the biggest change being the reduction in retail hospitality and leisure relief from 75% to 40%.
- 5.2 To help businesses understand why they would see changes to their bills, Economic Development, in partnership with the Business Rates Team, held a drop-in information session at Phoenix House between 11:30 and 19:00 on Thursday, 20th March 2025. The session was attended by 13 businesses who were able to discuss their Business Rates directly with Officers. The event was underpinned by a communication plan, which launched prior to the issuance of the bills and continued up to the date of the session.

## **6.0 Economic Strategy Review**

- 6.1 Three Informal PDG sessions have now taken place (24 October 2024, 12 December 2024 and 23 January 2025). These sessions have been run as a series of workshops considering topics such as business growth, innovation and skills, thriving places and business engagement. Through these discussions there has been recognition of the importance to utilise the next Economic Strategy as a means of raising the profile of the District and the matters of key interest to our businesses. This is important given the changing landscape of potential opportunities and will also assist in ensuring that the needs of mid devon businesses are reflected through local government reorganisation.
- 6.2 The next session (16 July 2025) will be based around the theme of Infrastructure (including land and property). It is intended that this will take place at the Tiverton Work Hub and provide members with an opportunity to view the new facility. The Strategy will also be informed by a business survey which is also on the agenda for this meeting.

### **Financial Implications**

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

### **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. The key risk is failure to spend the optimum amount of funding as it is understood that unspent monies will be reclaimed by the Government and therefore timely delivery is key. It is for this reason that schemes are proposed which seek to give most assurance on spend within the financial year as this is our key risk mitigation. Individual projects will be subject to their own risk management processes.

### **Impact on Climate Change**

Climate will be an underlying theme through many of the proposed projects and every endeavour will be made to support projects which create positive climate and environmental outcomes (in the broadest sense).

### **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.

Mid Devon's Prosperity Programme and the Economic Strategy outline key projects to tackle these risks and grow the economy. Whilst many grants are to private businesses, the potential to prioritise projects that have positive externalities/ wider public benefits are optimised.

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 June 2025

**Statutory Officer:** Maria DeLeiburne

Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer

**Date:** 11 June 2025

**Chief Officer:** Richard Marsh

Agreed by Corporate Director

**Date:** 10 June 2025

**Performance and risk:** Dr Steve Carr

Agreed on behalf of the Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager

**Date:** 09 June 2025

**Cabinet member notified:** (yes)

#### **Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers**

**Contact:** Adrian Welsh, Strategic Manager for Growth, Economy & Delivery

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Telephone: 01884 234398

**Background papers:**