

Economic Development Update Report

Cabinet Member(s): Cllr Richard Chesterton
Responsible Officer: John Bodley Scott,
Economic Development & Regeneration Manager

Reason for Report: To update members on the progress of key Economic Development Projects

RECOMMENDATION: That the report be noted

Relationship to Corporate Plan: It supports the corporate objectives for the economy.

Financial Implications: There are no additional financial implications arising from the report

Legal Implications: None

Risk Assessment: None

1.0 Introduction

At the inception of the Economy Policy Development Group it was agreed to provide members with a quarterly update on the key projects being developed or supported by the Economic Development team.

1.1 Growth Hub

This is a national programme providing business advice and support, mainly funded through ERDF funding. The Heart of the South West Growth Hub bid is awaiting the contract to be signed between Devon County Council and the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG). Delivery is expected to start in January.

The project, once running, will offer a detailed diagnostic for businesses to identify their needs and all of the services that could be of use to help them grow. The business advisors undertaking these diagnostics will then pull together packages of support for the business clients, and coordinate the support delivered to them, acting as a single point of contact for the business.

Through Mid Devon's involvement, we have ensured that the Heart of the South West bid is led by local authorities and clearly linked to the needs of businesses within every local authority area. Our support for the project has

also been able to lever in £312,000 for business support in the EHOD area. This is a leverage of nearly £7 for every £1 of match funding.

1.2 Broadband project

MDDC recognises that broadband access and speeds are a significant factor in making the district more attractive to potential investors, an enabling factor in helping businesses grow, and a key factor in making the area an attractive place to live. Over the last 8 months we have been exploring an opportunity to drive forward the rollout of super-fast broadband in partnership with a local business. This work has been undertaken by the Director of Finance and Resources and the Economic Development Officer, who were recently asked by Cabinet to produce a risk assessment of the proposal. However, a decision has now been taken not to pursue this project, as there was deemed to be too much risk to the Council. We are now awaiting the announcement of the Connecting Devon and Somerset contract winner, and will meet with them to discuss opportunities to enhance the local rollout of broadband that they will be contracted to deliver.

1.3 Mills Project update

This is a project to bring a number of historic watermills, weirs and leats back into use creating local hydro-electricity schemes to power local businesses and communities.

The Mills project has been moving forward and is keeping its momentum high. The group is now developing the business plan for the Hydro Mills Group, and will be using this to further a number of funding bids throughout January. Two smaller bids have so far been successful in bringing in fully funded consultancy support to help the development of a business plan and to help tighten up the legal structure of the group.

There is now an open call for low carbon bids to European funds through a pot known as ESIF, which we are hoping to bid for. The deadline for bidding to the fund is the 17th of February 2017, and we will be developing a proposal to support the pilot phase of the project, which will see three sites brought back into use.

There is also the opportunity for Mid Devon District Council to look into developing Tiverton Weir for hydroelectricity generation. A preliminary feasibility study has been undertaken and demonstrates that it could be a financially viable option. If European funding could also be drawn down for

this project, it would significantly reduce the cost of developing the site, and reduce the payback period to just a few years.

1.4 LEADER update

Following the Autumn Statement and a long moratorium on publicity, we are once again able to promote the LEADER programme to local businesses. Since November, we have had six new enquiries and the team will be working to support these businesses to develop their funding applications further. The last of the previous wave of projects was approved at the beginning of December. Room4U, a community project to provide a day-care facility for vulnerable residents in Silverton, has received £57,828 towards the development of the facility.

1.5 Other Projects

With support from Mid Devon, Crediton Community Bookshop have been awarded £150k from the Power to Change funding programme, which has allowed them to move to a larger and more central premises at 21 High Street, Crediton. They intend to develop the site as a community resource including an event space for literary and arts exhibitions, and a variety of workshops. This has had a beneficial effect on local businesses in the heart of the town with reports of new customers and increased trade.

Following a visit by the regional director of the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to Cullompton at the beginning of November we await the outcome from the HLF National Board for the Townscape Heritage Scheme in Cullompton. We expect a decision in January.

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Circulation of the Report: Cllr Richard Chesterton
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List of Background Papers: None