

**REPORT ON THE PORTFOLIO OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR PLANNING
AND ECONOMIC REGENERATION.**

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

1.1 Heart of the SW Partnership Productivity Plan

The Heart of the SW Partnership (including the LEP, 17 local authorities, 2 national parks and 3 Clinical Commissioner Groups) have recently published a jointly agreed green paper 'Driving productivity in the Heart of the South West' in order to stimulate debate about how we can drive economic growth in the area. This green paper is itself a response to the Government's Industrial Strategy which focuses on narrowing the productivity gap between the UK and other G7 countries. The LEP will be working with partners to finalise a Productivity Plan by the autumn which will replace its Economic Strategy. MDDC is the lead district on the Business Group for the development of the productivity plan, reflecting the work we are doing locally and regionally to influence business support priorities.

1.2 Business Transformation

Under the Exeter and Heart of Devon (EHOD) banner we have been working with our neighbouring local authorities (East Devon, Exeter and Teignbridge) to develop a joint economic strategy, focusing on delivering joint services to businesses. Within this, MDDC is leading on the theme of "Business Transformation". This includes a number of key activities:

- The pooling of business support resources across councils to enable economies of scale and greater access to match funding.
- The procurement of a joint business support service, which offers advice ranging from business planning support for potential entrepreneurs, to growth advice for young companies.
- Development of a successful local authority led Growth Hub bid in partnership with Devon County Council.
- Taking a leading role on the Better Business for All group, which focuses on the commercialisation of regulatory services and connecting regulatory services with other business support activities
- Working directly with other areas within our local authority to help them to become more commercially minded

BUSINESS – Supporting Business Growth and Job Creation

2.0 Inward Investment – *Attracting new business into the area*

The Economic Development Officer is currently in early discussions with commercial developers bringing forward schemes on four business development sites in Mid Devon. However, due to commercial sensitivity we are unable to reveal details at this stage.

He has also had approaches from a number of businesses on plans for expansion in Mid Devon. Even though these plans may not materialise, it is hoped that our input will help facilitate the process.

2.1 Developing Business Infrastructure - Broadband

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 actively exploring opportunities to drive forward the rollout of super-fast broadband locally. However, this particular scheme has not come to fruition. We are currently working with the Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) contract winner to identify opportunities to improve coverage in Mid Devon, and will look beyond the CDS funded projects for other opportunities as they emerge.

2.2 Joint Procurement of Business Support

During this financial year we have been jointly funding Business Information Point (BIP) together with other EHOD partners to deliver business advice and support in the area

The Heart of the South West Growth Hub contract has now been signed between Devon County Council and the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG). This is a national programme providing business advice and support, mainly funded through ERDF funding.

The project 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.

This will mitigate the need to fund business support separately, and we are looking to see what specialist support could be provided to enhance the Growth Hub offer.

2.3 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 Hydro Mills Group, who are leading on this project, are developing their business plan, which will be used to further a number of funding bids. Two smaller bids have so far been successful, 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. We are now looking to submit an application to EU funded Low Carbon Programme by the summer of 2017 to support the pilot phase of the project. This would see three sites being brought back into use, including an opportunity for Mid Devon District Council to develop

Tiverton Weir for hydroelectricity generation. A preliminary feasibility study has already been undertaken and demonstrates that it could be a financially viable option.

2.4 Helping businesses access funding - LEADER update

Following the Brexit vote and then the Autumn Statement, there was a long moratorium on publicising the LEADER programme to local businesses. The programme is now re-open, and there have been six new enquiries from local businesses and the team will be working to help them develop their funding applications.

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.

PLACE – Town Centre Management and attracting visitors to the district.

3.0 Cullompton Townscape Heritage Initiative

In January we heard from the Heritage Lottery Fund that the Council was unsuccessful in its application to the Townscape Heritage Programme. Feedback from the Heritage Lottery said that it was a very strong bid and there was little we could have done to improve it, but there was fierce competition for funding in this round and the programme was over three times subscribed. We had previously been advised that first time bids hardly ever get through on their first submission and indeed the national board prioritised re-submissions over first-time bids. We are being encouraged to re-submit for the next annual round in December of this year.

3.1 Power to Change

With support from the EDR team, 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.

3.2 Tiverton Town Centre and Market Strategy and Tiverton Town Centre Masterplan

Cabinet have recently approved 'A Strategy for Tiverton' which sets out a direction for town centre management and the market over the next ten years. The current focus is on:

- Ensuring market policies and procedures are up to date
- Enhancing the physical environment of the town and market
- Maximising the market offer by attracting more traders and organising events.

The Scrutiny Committee has recently received an update from the Market Manager on the current situation at Tiverton Market.

The Council has commissioned the preparation of a Tiverton Town Centre Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document. This is at an early stage of preparation with an initial stakeholder workshop having taken place recently. More information on the masterplan including anticipated timescale for its production is to be found within the separate report on this agenda.

3.3 Destination Management Plan for Tourism

The results of a visitor survey have recently been published and discussed at Economy PDG and Cabinet. We are currently finalising the Mid Devon Survey Report before going out to consultation with key partners to develop a joint action plan with tourism businesses in order to attract more visitors into the area, and increase visitor spend.

PLANNING SERVICE.

1.0 Local Plan Review.

The Forward Planning team continues to concentrate upon finalising the Local Plan Review. Public consultation on the proposed submission plan incorporating the proposed modifications was completed on the 14th February 2017. The approximately 800 representations are being logged, indexed and assessed prior to submission of the plan with associated documents to the Planning Inspectorate by the end of March 2017. The plan is still on track to meet this timescale, but it will be tight. The Examination into the plan could be as early as July 2017, but no clarification over dates is currently available. The timescale will be set by the Planning Inspectorate. The Programme Officer that works with the Inspector over the administration of the Examination process is due to start shortly. An updated Local Development Scheme identifying plan timetable has recently been agreed.

The flood modelling work commissioned to support the plan at J28 of the M5 (Cullompton) is progressing and the model is now complete and is in testing stage in order to provide a baseline against which early highway design can be assessed. Sign off by the Environment Agency of the flood model is anticipated within the next couple of weeks. Early stage highway work has also been looking at junction upgrade in conjunction with the proposed town centre relief road. This is an iterative process, allowing for flood modelling and highway design to have regard to each other. This work will form part of the evidence base supporting the Local Plan Review.

2.0 Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

A revised draft CIL charging schedule has been prepared and was also subject to recent public consultation in tandem with the Local Plan Review. The updated charging schedule takes account of the proposed allocation at J27 as well as minor changes to add clarity. It is proposed that CIL documentation will be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate together with the plan so that a joint Examination may be held.

3.0 Greater Exeter Strategic Plan (GESP).

Early work continues on the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan jointly with East Devon, Exeter City and Teignbridge Councils. An update report including emerging timescale for the plan was considered at Council on 22nd February 2017. Consultation on the vision, themes and scope of the plan is currently taking place until 10th April 2017 together with a call for sites to be considered as part of the plan. The proposed timescale indicates the production of a draft plan for consultation in early 2018. A Local Development Scheme for the GESP has been agreed setting out the timescale for the plan.

4.0 Neighbourhood Planning.

Neighbourhood plans are currently being prepared with four parts of the District having designated neighbourhood plan areas:

- Cullompton - designated on 30th April 2014 (looking at making allocations)
- Crediton - designated on 2nd July 2014
- Silverton - designated on 3rd July 2014 (looking at making allocations)
- Tiverton and Halberton - designated on 28th July 2015

None have yet progressed to the stage of referendum.

5.0 Garden Village project.

An expression of interest for the creation of a garden village for up to 5,000 dwellings east of Cullompton gained Government backing early this year and will represent a significant long term project. It is the subject of a separate briefing note on this agenda.

In order to project plan, coordinate and drive forward progress towards the delivery of the Garden Village, the Council proposes shortly to commission a project lead / project manager resource funded by Government grant.

6.0 Major project work.

Tiverton Eastern Urban Extension – A range of work streams are currently addressing infrastructure provision including the new junction to the A361, assessing gypsy and traveller requirements as part of the allocation, negotiating on the S106 agreement for the major outline planning application by Chettiscombe Trust, pre-application discussions prior to reserved matters application submission and the first stage public consultation on the Area B masterplan is due to start this month.

Approximately 1,000 houses are in the planning system, a masterplan has been adopted, a design guide agreed and the first stage of the traffic calming / environmental enhancement of Blundell's Road has been installed.

NW Cullompton Urban Extension – A masterplan for the site has been adopted. Discussions have subsequently been taking place with the land promoters /developers and Devon County Council over highway and transport considerations. Early stage discussions over viability have also been taking place. The first planning applications are expected to be submitted this month and to include an application for the new road connecting Willand Road with Tiverton Road.

J27 M5 – Pre-application discussions have taken place with the promoters of development on this site and involved local Ward Members. Such discussions are still ongoing with consultees on technical issues including transport matters. The promoters are undertaking further public consultation prior to application submission. The timescale for application submission is not yet clear.

7.0 Housing land supply.

The Inspector considering the appeal for 60 dwellings on the west side of Uffculme, found that the Council was not been able to demonstrate the required five year housing land supply (together with a 20% buffer). This has been the subject of a separate report to Scrutiny Committee in May 2016. A range of speculative housing applications on non-allocated sites have either been submitted or are subject to pre-application discussions and the Council is currently vulnerable to such proposals. Advancing the Local Plan Review to adoption remains the key means of re-establishing the required housing land supply. Officers also continue in their efforts to bring forward residential development on sites that has been planned for or on appropriate windfall sites. Residential planning permissions granted are at a 10 year high, but are not being translated into completions in sufficient numbers. The recent Housing White Paper sets out a direction of travel for councils to take more control of the delivery aspects of planning and growth including intervention. How this might be best achieved and associated measures is currently the subject of a Government consultation.

8.0 Planning productivity review.

A review has recently been undertaken with support from the Local Government Association as part of their productivity expert programme. A separate report on this agenda provides more detail on the scope of the review, outcomes and next steps.

9.0 Other planning policy matters.

Although policy related work within the service has focused upon the Local Plan Review, other documents produced or commissioned include a review of the Statement of Common Ground, Local Enforcement Plan, Landscape Implications of Solar PV Proposals Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and Refuse Storage for New Residential Properties SPD.

10.0 Building Control

The new partnership arrangements for the delivery of this service with North Devon Council are progressing with a 'go live' date of 3rd April 2017. Agreement was given at the Council meeting of 22nd February to progress the partnership.

11.0 Performance.

The Government sets a range of additional performance targets for planning authorities in order to drive performance. Although financial year end figures are not yet available, those reported to Planning Committee at the end of quarter 3 of 16/17 indicate that application determination results are in the main meeting the national planning performance indicators on speed and quality of decision making, with the exception being within the 'other' application category which has slipped below the 80% determination rate in 8 weeks. ('Other' applications comprise changes of use, certificates of lawful development, listed building consent, demolition in conservation areas, householder and advert consent applications).

The Planning Service is still currently carrying several vacant posts in development management, pending a review of its staffing structure. This restructure is progressing with the aim of being implemented early in the new financial year.

Building Control performance in plan checking and for full applications has missed local performance targets in quarter 3 of 2016/17. However all targets have been met over the past 2 months with concerned efforts made to ensure that backlogs have been successfully addressed ready for the launch of the partnership in early April.

12.0 Housing White Paper.

The recent Housing White Paper 2017 seeks to set out how to 'fix our broken housing market' and contains a range of measures and themes of direct relevance to this part of council and not least, confirms the Government's thrust to deliver growth in housing supply at an accelerated rate. It confirms a direction of travel that Local Authorities should take a more interventionist approach in the housing market in order to ensure delivery of high quality housing, in the right place and on an accelerated basis. It reaffirms the need for an up the date plan. Many of the specific proposals within the White Paper are currently out to consultation. One of the measures is for the introduction of a 20% rise in nationally set planning fees providing extra fee income is invested into increasing the capacity and capability of planning departments. A £2.3 billion Housing Infrastructure Fund has also been announced which will be focused on enabling housing delivery.

The Government has also recently announced that the review of developer financial contributions via S106 agreements and the Community Infrastructure Levy will be addressed within the Autumn Statement.