

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **ECONOMY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 13 July 2017 at 5.30 pm

Present

Councillors Mrs A R Berry, Mrs C Collis, R Evans,
S G Flaws and F J Rosamond

Apology

Councillor Mrs B M Hull

Also Present

Councillor R J Chesterton

Also Present Officers

Stephen Walford (Chief Executive), Adrian Welsh (Group Manager Growth, Economy and Delivery), John Bodley-Scott (Economic Development Team Leader), Catherine Yandle (Internal Audit Team Leader), Roderick Hewson (Principal Accountant) and Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer)

17 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies were received from Councillor Mrs B M Hull.

The Vice Chairman, Councillor R Evans, chaired the meeting.

18 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no members of the public present.

19 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 May 2017 were confirmed as a true and accurate record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

20 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman had the following announcements to make:

- a) There would be an informal meeting of the Group on Thursday 20 July at 5.30pm with the Director and lead officers to discuss the future approach to policy development.
- b) He introduced Adrian Welsh who had recently been appointed as Group Manager for Growth, Economy and Delivery. Mr Welsh explained that, following a reorganisation of the service and taking into account recent reviews to ensure service improvement, there would be a greater emphasis on delivery going forwards. It was further explained that John Bodley-Scott, who

was now the Economic Development Team Leader and Chris Shears, the Economic Development Officer, would continue to attend future Group meetings.

- c) Since this Group met in the evenings and following a suggestion from the Chief Executive, it was **AGREED** that future finance and performance and risk reports should be first on the agenda in future to avoid the officers presenting them having to stay late into the evening.

21 MID DEVON ATTRACTIONS ASSOCIATION

Mr Phil Brind from the Mid Devon Attractions Association attended the meeting to provide a presentation on the background to the organisation and its future aspirations.

The following was reported:

- He was the proprietor of one of the last horse drawn barges in the country and he was proud of it being a successful tourist attraction. However, he had felt deep frustration at Mid Devon not being marketed as a valuable tourist destination whilst other districts within Devon had strong brands.
- He had initially joined the Heart of Devon group but had felt that this was very Exeter centric. He was now Chairman of the Mid Devon Attractions Association (MDAA) which had a large membership of stake-holders including local attractions providers such as Knightshayes. The establishment of this group had been helped by funding from the TAP (Town and Parish) fund for which he was extremely grateful.
- A Visit Devon website was now up and running with links to a large number of tourist attractions within Mid Devon. This was still in the developmental stage and would be improved upon as time progressed.
- Social media and web content was very important and the MDAA were going to work hard to organise and promote themed events such as a possible Mid Devon raft race.
- Partnership working was of paramount importance especially with partners such as Petroc who had experience in trying to attract students and businesses to the locality.
- It was hoped that a branding for Mid Devon would form a large part of phase 2 since this was currently missing.
- The services of Amy Dugard, the Growth and Regeneration Officer, had been vital in getting the Association up and running. They were extremely grateful for her creative and strategic thinking. She had proved a crucial link.
- Support was still very much needed in terms of funding and partnership working across all the stakeholder groups to get the Mid Devon Brand up and running.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The Visit Devon website and having to click on the 'Explore' button rather than seeing something immediately pop up about Mid Devon on the front page. It was explained that these were skeleton pages at the moment displaying minimum information but with input from all the interested organisations this would be improved.

- Existing residents within Mid Devon also needed to appreciate the benefits of living in in such a beautiful locality with all that it had to offer, not just tourists visiting the area.

The Chairman thanked Mr Brind for his passionate and informative presentation which had provoked a lot of thought.

22 TOURISM INITIATIVES

The Economic Development Team Leader provided the following update on various tourism initiatives:

- As explained in the previous item the Visit Devon website had now gone live and suggestions for improvements had already been submitted. A free listing for 400 businesses had managed to be secured. The attractions were only one element, accommodation, food and drink and the natural beauty of the Mid Devon countryside also needed to be strongly promoted.
- A bid to the LEADER funding programme had been submitted and by November the Council would know whether or not it had been successful.
- The deadline for the Destination Management Plan consultation had been extended to the end of July. Feedback would also be sought from the Tiverton Hotel and Petroc and this would inform the action plan which would come back to the Group for consideration at the next meeting.
- A Branding for Mid Devon would need to be put forward as a partnership strategy and the Council would need to be key players in any approval process.

23 PERFORMANCE AND RISK

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report from the Director of Growth and Chief Executive providing Members with an update on performance against the Corporate Plan and local service targets for 2017/18 as well as providing an update on the key business risks.

It was explained that the 'return on commercial portfolio' had been identified as a new measure under the Economy area and would provide useful information going forwards.

Note: * Report previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes.

24 REVENUE AND CAPITAL OUTTURN 2016/17

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report from the Director of Finance, Assets & Resources presenting the revenue and capital outturn figures for the financial year 2016/17.

The closing cash position on both the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account was explained. Reference was also made to the Market Walk and Fore Street Shops, Tiverton. The return on investment had dropped slightly compared to 2015/16 (4.5%) due to an increase in vacant units during 2016/17. The net income for the year was showing as £172k.

A brief discussion took place regarding the capital programme and the need to strike a balance between putting projects forward and having a realistic time frame.

Note: * Report previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes.

25 MILLS PROJECT

The Economic Development Team Leader provided the Group with an update on the recent Mills Projects which included the following:

- An outline application was about to be submitted to the European Structural and Investment Fund. If approved it would need a full application. If successful this would significantly aid future development of the Tiverton Weir, Thorverton Weir and Flock Mill. Tiverton Weir could potentially produce enough energy to cover the energy costs of Phoenix House and provide electric car points in the town. Thorverton Mill was one of the biggest mills in Devon and could potentially house 30 business units. Without significant funding the cost was currently prohibitive.
- Projects were very dependent on working well with partners such as South West Water and Exeter University. Other partners working in river management were also of vital importance.

Consideration was given to:

- Maximising the opportunity to link in with tourism, for example, allowing visitors to view the internal workings of a water mill.
- Potentially all of the money applied for could be awarded or just a small part of it.

26 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SERVICE UPDATE

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Director of Growth and Chief Executive updating members on progress with key Economic Development Service priorities.

This included the following:

- The commercialisation project was gaining significant interest from across the UK.
- The Economic Development Team had been working closely with the Planning team over issues arising at Lowman Works which was the industrial site adjacent to TESCO in Tiverton.
- Recently the team had been asked to provide an article for the Western Morning News Annual Business Guide which listed the top 150 companies in Mid Devon. It was suggested that it might be worth while doing an exercise to compare such data across other districts within Devon such as Teignbridge.

Note: * Report previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes.

27 **GROWTH, ECONOMY & DELIVERY BUSINESS PLAN 2017-18**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Director for Growth and Chief Executive informing Members of the updated service plan for 2017-18

Consideration was given to the following:

- The development of an Economic Strategy would be an important priority for this Group and would require full Member involvement. This would be discussed at the forthcoming informal meeting.
- Master planning exercises in each of the three major towns would be an important objective going forwards.
- It was confirmed that there was enough land allocated within Mid Devon for business growth but some of it may not be suitable for requirements.
- A Heritage bid for Cullompton would need to be submitted again later this year which might help to address the concerns regarding the number of empty shops. Vacant shop grants were also available. The situation could also be helped by a relief road which would improve air quality and the current planning aspirations for future development of the garden village.
- Plans for a railway station in Cullompton were progressing well with local MP's, councils and the rail industry having had a recent successful meeting.
- The recent Electric Nights events had done a lot to raise the profile of the market. The events did not raise any money for the Council but were perceived to have important additional value and benefits. The events brought a different demographic to the town and this needed to be maintained.

Note: * Report previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes.

28 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING**

In addition to the items already listed in the work programme the following was requested to be on the agenda for the next meeting:

- Performance and Risk

(The meeting ended at 7.20 pm)

CHAIRMAN