

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

From: Councillor Gerard Brewster Cabinet Member for Economic Growth	Report Number: <big>CMU14</big>
To: Council	Date of meeting: 23 January 2020

TO PROVIDE AN UPDATE FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH

1.0 Overview of Portfolio

- 1.1 The Economic Growth Portfolio includes Economy and Business, Regeneration and Housing Development. Since October we have moved forward a number of large Economic Growth and Regeneration projects and initiatives whilst undertaking a complete review of the team structure to ensure we have the correct skills and experience to be able to deliver ambitious and exciting future priorities. A summary of activity that has taken place across the Growth agenda over the last few months is as follows.

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 That Council notes the report.

3.0 Key activities since October 19

3.1 *Economy and Business*

- 3.2 The team have been developing a robust economic evidence base since August in order to facilitate the development of a refreshed Economic Strategy. Work on a framework for the revised strategy has commenced and will be brought to Cabinet in the Spring.
- 3.3 We have been developing stronger relationships with our businesses in the District, with ongoing work to visit the top 20 businesses both in terms of turnover and staff numbers. We have listened to some of the issues businesses tell us they are experiencing such as lack of good quality business space, lack of fast broadband speeds and other infrastructure issues. We will ensure our new strategy seeks to address these challenges to business growth.
- 3.4 We have now completed an Incubator and Grow On space study to better understand the challenges our business face with poor quality or a complete lack of suitable business premises. The report is now on our website <https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/business/economic-development/business-news-and-events/> and we are reviewing options to address the supply issues in our areas.

- 3.5 We have also been reviewing the Business Grants programme across both Districts. Whilst Babergh has a limited grants programme, Mid Suffolk has limited take up of its existing schemes so we are seeking to develop a comprehensive programme of support which covers both districts and widens the range of business uses which can be considered for grants. We anticipate bringing back a formal business case for a new grants programme across both Districts in the Spring.
- 3.6 We have continued to work with major employers who are relocating from the District to ensure that existing employment sites stay in employment use. We have been working with Bosch following their announcement to reduce the manufacturing function in Stowmarket to ensure the current workforce secure alternative local jobs and have been working with a number of growing businesses to ensure they can stay in the town as they grow.
- 3.7. Linked to the above work we have been part of an ongoing partnership to develop an Innovation cluster in Stowmarket and were delighted to support the launch of Innovation Labs in November, a new AI and tech based centre for entrepreneurs and innovators in the District. The centre has hot desking spaces with programmes of business support and skills development running throughout the year and is also supported by Tech East, the local Chamber of Commerce and the Local Enterprise Partnership. We continue to work with the Gateway 14 Company to create the right conditions for an Innovation Cluster to flourish on the site and become a regional centre of excellence.
- 3.8 We continue to market the area for inward investment and promote the scale of our economic ambition with partners such as Suffolk County Council and the Local Enterprise Partnership, being active through roles in a range of economic growth forums eg Suffolk Growth Programme Board. However in September we jointly facilitated the launch of the Central Suffolk Chamber of Commerce which will provide a new resource in the District to support and help to grow our businesses.

4.0 *Regeneration and Capital Projects*

- 4.1 We have been working hard to bring forward the much anticipated Needham Lake visitor centre and café and the project is now well on track with planning permission granted in December. We have also announced a new tenant for the facility and are currently working to secure a contractor for the scheme.
- 4.2 In addition we have been working with Network Rail, Greater Anglia and a range of other partners, including the local access group, to secure the right solution for disabled access to the platforms at Needham Station. We are waiting on the outcome of a bid to the Department of Transport.
- 4.3 The Regeneration team are also supporting the Town Council in bringing forward the development of the Regal Theatre to create 2 new cinema screens. A tender exercise is now nearing completion and work should start in the Spring. This exciting development sits at one of the gateways to the Town Centre and such investment in the place will encourage further private inward investment and grow footfall into Stowmarket

- 4.4 Working with the Performance and Finance teams we have developed new ways of monitoring and managing capital projects including the establishment of an internal Growth Programme Board, development of a high level programme and risk register for each project and a capital monitoring sheet which allows us to monitor capital spend and commitments more effectively. We will use these tools for each project going forward.
- 4.5 Part of our ongoing work on project delivery will take account of climate change and in December we submitted a bid to the Government department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to secure funding for a comprehensive heat mapping exercise on the Gateway 14 site. This is the first part of feasibility funding which will look at whether alternative heat and power sources could be delivered on the site as part of the development coming forward. We will know in the spring if this bid has been successful.
- 5.0 ***Town Centre Vision work***
- 5.1 Our key towns vision work continues in both Stowmarket, Needham Market and Eye and since the public workshops earlier in the summer we have collated and reviewed the findings and will be talking to local people about next steps.
- 5.2 The Stowmarket Project Group has been running for a few months and benefits from cross working between the public and private sector with companies such as Orbital Media and organisations such as the Mix and the Museum of East Anglian Life round the table with the District and Town Council. We are also working with other Cultural organisations such as the John Peel Centre and talking to new investors such as the purchasers of Old Fox Yard about their plans for creative workspace in the heart of the town centre. We are in the process of setting up the Stowmarket Vision Steering Group, with our first meeting planned for February and together continue to develop the Vision and activities which sit below it to ensure a joined up approach to renaissance of Stowmarket as a Cultural and Technology hub in the East.
- 5.3 As part of the Needham Vision work we went to meet with students at Stowmarket High school and ran a workshop with them to understand how they would like to see their town of Needham Market develop in the future.
- 5.4 With all of our partners we will continue to drive forward the vision work and monitor the wide range of projects in all towns to ensure interdependencies are managed to ensure the best possible outcomes for businesses and residents.