

## MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

<b>TO:</b> Cabinet	<b>REPORT NUMBER:</b> MCa/21/38
<b>FROM:</b> Cabinet Member for Economic Growth	<b>DATE OF MEETING:</b> 7 <sup>th</sup> February 2022
<b>OFFICER:</b> Fiona Duhamel, Assistant Director for Economy and Regeneration	<b>KEY DECISION REF NO.</b> CAB332

### HAVEN GATEWAY PARTNERSHIP

#### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 Cabinet are asked to consider whether or not the Council should retain its membership of the Haven Gateway Partnership beyond 31st March 2022.

#### 2. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Option 1 – To remain within the partnership from end of March 2022 working with the Haven Gateway team to review a new vision for the future
- 2.2 Option 2 – To decide not to remain within the Haven Gateway Partnership and to withdraw from membership at end of March 2022

#### 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That the key information in this report which outlines the current economic funding and policy landscape and the range of partnerships which now exist across the East of England which support the Babergh/Mid Suffolk economy, be noted.
- 3.2 That the withdrawal of the Council's membership of the Haven Gateway Partnership from 31 March 2022 be approved.
- 3.3 That delegated authority be given to the Assistant Director Economic Development and Regeneration in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth to finalise any legal documents associated with a withdrawal from the Partnership.

#### REASON FOR DECISION

To ensure future resources are diverted to areas and partnerships to drive greatest growth and support, especially as part of covid 19 recovery.

#### 4. KEY INFORMATION

- 4.1 The Council was a founder member of the Haven Gateway Partnership when it was established in 2001. It was then and remains now, an unincorporated partnership based upon voluntary membership. It undertakes its activities through its Chairman and a small executive, facilitated through its Accountable Body - Essex County Council.
- 4.2 The Partnership came into existence to support the interests of what its partners believed at the time to be a distinct economic sub-region, based upon a study

undertaken by Dr Peter Townoe, a visiting professor at the University of Essex. His work and the collective efforts of the Partnership eventually achieved recognition in 2003/04 when the Haven Gateway was specifically identified as a policy area in documents such as the Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England. This was later supported by its designation as a "Growth Point" by the Government and the award of substantial development funding.

- 4.3 Today the funding and regional policy landscape has significantly changed, due in part to the winding-up of Government Office East, the East of England Regional Development Agency and the East of England Regional Assembly and following the establishment of Local Enterprise Partnerships and more lately the ongoing discussions around Freeport East and possible Devolution.
- 4.4 Aside than successfully securing key funding through Growth Point status, the Partnership has delivered some notable successes, particularly strong lobbying to secure enhancements to the A120 between Colchester and Harwich.
- 4.5 In recent years the business of the Partnership has been mostly confined to securing support for two ERDF funded projects (I-Construct and TALE), which are managed by the Partnership's small executive. The Partnership has also played a role (chairing Project Board meetings and contributing to some of the work streams) in the development of the February 2021 Freeport East application, which has led to the successful confirmation of Freeport status.
- 4.6 However, at a time when there are competing priorities for staff resources and local authority funding and taking note that cross border projects and collaboration are naturally increasing across the East, it has been appropriate to review the future vision and purpose of the Haven Gateway Partnership.
- 4.7 The cost of £7k pa each from Babergh and Mid Suffolk and the current and future work proposed by the Partnership have been reviewed against other strong partnerships for the Districts such as the Suffolk Growth Economic Partnership and the Local Enterprise Partnership, plus new and emerging collaborations such as the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership. These existing and new partnerships appear to have stronger links to businesses in our Districts, provide new opportunities for routes into funding and are built upon strong governance and a united vision for the future for Suffolk and the East.
- 4.8 Whilst the HGP does provide a unique link to Essex and in particular, North Essex, the emergence of Freeport East has led to strong collaboration between Suffolk and Essex Authorities which will be in place for at least the next 25 years and will seek to provide access to funding for delivery of cross boundary projects for many years to come.
- 4.9 During the pandemic there has been limited support for our businesses from the HGP, largely due to the small nature of the resource in its executive. As we edge towards recovery from covid, it is important to focus our resources and time on partnerships which can help our businesses to rebuild and become more resilient in the face of future possible waves. Strengthening partnerships with our local and Suffolk chambers and other local stakeholders and continuing the strong relationship with partners mentioned above, especially with the Growth Hub will all help our businesses to grow and bounce back from these difficult times. Supporting new

initiatives such as Innovation Labs has already delivered growth in innovation business start ups and had led to small business growth.

- 4.10 Within Essex the North Essex Economic Board (NEEB) has been established and is proactively working to establish a programme of interventions designed to assist businesses in Central/North Essex recover from the economic ravages of the pandemic, whilst also focussing on the structural transformation of the Central/North Essex economy – interventions that will bring about a long term sustainable change by focussing on productivity and the sub-regions key growth, and opportunity sectors. There continue to be opportunities for Mid Suffolk to work alongside and share learning with authorities within the North Essex Economic Board on a range of projects and initiatives, for example the Stowmarket Health, Leisure and education project can learn lessons from the Colchester Borough Council delivery of the Northern Gateway Leisure project.
- 4.11 The growth and importance in the Greater South East Energy Hub (GSEEH) has led to close working and sharing of information across not just Suffolk districts but also from Norfolk, Cambridgeshire, Essex and Kent. The GSEEH, funded by BEIS have provided invaluable guidance, access to funding and support to our districts for a range of net zero and low carbon projects including the solar car ports, the G14 Net Zero study and GSEEH representatives presented at the Districts' first Local Energy showcase event.
- 4.12 Having fully assessed the current value to the District of the Haven Gateway Partnership, particularly having reviewed as set out above the growing number of other partnership opportunities in the East, that it is proposed that the Council expresses its thanks for the good work and strong relationships that have been fostered since its inception but withdraw from the Partnership from end of March 2022 whilst continuing to maintain a strong relationship with Haven Gateway going forward and continue to foster collaboration with other authorities and large businesses in North Essex and Suffolk.
- 4.13 While the decision to withdraw is recommended to Babergh and Mid Suffolk having considered the factors above, it should be noted that other partners have also decided to withdraw from the Partnership in a similar timescale; notably the University of Essex, Colchester Borough Council and Tendring District Council. The University of Essex already have executive approval to withdraw and Tendring District Council have Portfolio Holder approval. Colchester Borough will be taking a report to its executive shortly. Essex County Council, whilst remaining as accountable body, withdraw from the Partnership a number of years ago.
- 4.14 It is important therefore to provide the HGP executive with sufficient time to review the future of the Partnership and to consider next steps, both for the Partnership but also for the withdrawal process. We expect to hear further detail on the any terms for withdrawal at the next Board meeting.

## **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The Council pays £7k per year for membership. By providing notice now it is expected that these payments will cease upon withdrawal on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022.

Any costs arising from the impact of the District's decision not to renew for further years are expected to be met by Essex County Council as accountable body.

**6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no expected legal implications from withdrawal of the partnership

**7. RISK MANAGEMENT**

7.1 There are no identified risks from withdrawal from the Partnership.

**8. CONSULTATIONS**

N/A

**9. EQUALITY ANALYSIS**

N/A

**10. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 N/A

**11. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Original HGP papers