

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY – MEMBERS’ INPUT**

### **Economic & Community Development Advisory Committee – 24 October 2013**

Report of                      Chief Officer, Communities and Business

Status:                      For consideration

Key Decision:              No

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**Executive Summary:** This report summarises Members’ input to the Economic Development Strategy workshop held for Economic & Community Development Advisory Committee Members on 15 August 2013.

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**This report supports the Key Aim of a** Dynamic Economy

**Portfolio Holder**        Cllr. Hogarth

**Contact Officer(s)**      Lesley Bowles (Ext: 7268)

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**Recommendation:** Members’ views are sought.

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**Reason for recommendation:** Members’ views will inform the draft Economic Development Strategy.

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#### **Introduction and Background**

- 1        Members of the Advisory Committee were invited to a workshop to help set the priorities for the District’s Economic Development Strategy. They considered the economic needs of the District under the 5 keys actions of the Community Plan’s Dynamic Economy theme as follows:

##### **Maintain a supply of employment land and premises**

- 2        Members considered the most important sites for redevelopment of employment land in the District.
- 3        There was agreement that Fort Halstead and the Broom Hill site in Swanley were important areas of employment land. In addition, sites have been identified in the draft Allocations & Development Management Plan for intensification and regeneration. The two largest of these were the Vestry Estate, on the outskirts of Sevenoaks and Station Road, Edenbridge.
- 4        Members thought that a robust attitude to keeping commercial land was necessary with a need for persistent advertising of land before approval was given to convert it to residential. It was felt that the high residential values were a problem in the District, contributing to the loss of employment land.

- 5 Members identified additional infrastructure needs as follows:
- Parking (Sevenoaks town specific)
  - Edenbridge railway bridge (north side)
  - Improved access to Vestry estate
  - Growth without Gridlock proposal - reliable and improved service for rail commuters into London
- 6 In terms of encouraging vibrant and viable town centres, the following were considered to be priorities:
- New Ash Green village centre regeneration
  - Swanley town centre regeneration
  - Assisting local stakeholders to make shop fronts more attractive.
  - Assisting local stakeholders to get empty shops occupied with a possible local bye-law to enforce action on unco-operative landlords.

#### **Retain existing businesses and encourage new businesses**

- 7 In order to help retain existing and encourage new businesses:
- There is a need for 'fit for purpose' move on business accommodation. Members felt there was a need for attractive, top quality office space.
  - There is a need to encourage inward investment and there must be a co-ordinated 'locate in Sevenoaks' approach
  - Support businesses and encourage growth
  - Support for microbusinesses and homeworkers
  - Support the rural economy
  - Encourage and support tourism, focusing on accommodation and local pubs
  - Make the environment look attractive
  - Hold investment open days for the District to attract more businesses
  - Adopt a 'soft landings' approach to make it easier for businesses to locate in the District
  - Undertake further consultation with the business community to find out what they want

- Make links with local businesses to develop employment opportunities
- Hold jobs fairs

#### **Improve skills for employment**

8 In order to improvement employment skills:

- Reduce unemployment in partnership with Job Centre Plus
- Encourage apprenticeships in the District
- Encourage appropriate training to help people to become ready for work
- Locate Job Centre Plus in more rural communities
- Reduce unemployment in specific locations

#### **Improve sustainability of the business economy**

9 In order to improvement energy efficiency

- Promote energy efficiency among local businesses

#### **Improve broadband connectivity**

10 Broadband connectivity was considered to be an urgent priority

- Lobby for faster broadband
- Support local communities to obtain the provision of faster broadband

#### **Other Economic Development Strategy proposals**

11 Other proposals that have come forward for inclusion in the Economic Development Strategy include:

- The inclusion of Swanley in London's Zone 6 transport arrangements, encouraging people to locate in Swanley
- Lobby for improvements at Swanley Train Station
- The development of a traffic management control system and introduce Intelligent Transport Systems that cover the high volume main road network in Sevenoaks district and Sevenoaks urban area and Swanley Town Centre.
- Lobby for improved transport services e.g. to mitigate the negative effects of the London Bridge rail development
- Set up a Community Interest Company to deliver superfast broadband to local communities

- Deliver a series of workshops to enable local businesses to increase energy efficiency
- Supplying businesses in the District with commercial sustainability packs to increase awareness of schemes and opportunities which they can take advantage of.
- Deliver actions in the Climate Local Kent framework
- Support and deliver the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) project offering sustainability grants to SMEs (Small and Medium Sized Businesses)
- Support and encourage local businesses to access the £5.5million Regional Growth Fund Escalate zero interest loan scheme arranged in partnership between Sevenoaks District Council, other West Kent partners and Kent County Council
- Compile an investment prospectus and DVD marketing Sevenoaks District as a place to set up and grow
- Develop start up units and work hubs
- Develop a consistent programme of business support

## **Key Implications**

### Financial

Whilst it may be necessary to seed fund major initiatives such as broadband provision or support from the District Council, these items would be separately submitted for approval by Members. No other financial implications are anticipated at this stage. The financial implications of the Economic Development Strategy will be assessed alongside the drafting of the Strategy.

### Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

These will be considered alongside the drafting of the Strategy.

### Equality Impacts

These will be considered alongside the drafting of the Strategy.

## **Conclusions**

Members views will be taken into account in the drafting of the Economic Development Strategy.

**Lesley Bowles**  
**Chief Officer Communities & Business**