

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2018-2021

Economic and Community Development Advisory Committee - 11 December 2018

Report of Chief Officer Communities and Business

Status For Decision

Also considered by Cabinet - 10 January 2019

Key Decision Yes

Executive Summary: The report details the responses to the consultation on the draft Economic Development Strategy 2018 -2021 and recommends adoption of the Strategy. The new Economic Development Strategy has three areas of common interest; Innovation & Technology, the Rural Economy and Sustainability and is based around five themes; Growth and Investment, Infrastructure, Visitor Economy, Skills and Enterprise.

Each theme has a series of outcomes and those cover investment and regeneration, improvements to infrastructure for digital connectivity, health and wellbeing, maintaining a strong Visitor Economy, improved skills and training and the provision of support for new and existing business.

This report supports the Key Aim of: Supporting and developing the local economy from the Corporate Plan and supporting the Dynamic and Sustainable economy priorities in the Community Plan.

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Roderick Hogarth

Contact Officer Andrew Stirling, Ext. 7099

Recommendation to Economic and Community Development Advisory Committee:
That

- (a) the Committee notes the consultation responses to the Economic Development Strategy; and
- (b) the Committee recommends to Cabinet that the Economic Development Strategy be approved.

Recommendation to Cabinet:

That the Economic Development Strategy be approved.

Reason for recommendation: The consultation with partners and stakeholders has been completed and the Strategy is now ready for formal adoption by the District Council.

Introduction and Background

- 1 The Council's current Economic Development Strategy was prepared in 2014 and has become out of date, due to national and international policy and economic changes, emerging new technologies and opportunities for growth. The new Economic Development Strategy will cover the period from 2018 to 2021.
- 2 The Strategy has three areas of common interest; Innovation & Technology, the Rural Economy and Sustainability; with five themes; Growth & Investment, Infrastructure, Visitor Economy, Skills and Enterprise.
- 3 The outcomes are for investment and regeneration, improvements to infrastructure for digital connectivity, health and wellbeing and maintaining a strong Visitor Economy. Additional outcomes are to improve skills and training and the provision of support for new and existing business.
- 4 The Strategy reflects the context in which the Council undertakes its Economic Development activity and the number of organisations and partners who are involved through setting policy, providing funding sources or controlling the ability to deliver outcomes which benefit our residents, businesses and visitors.
- 5 The Strategy has been designed to be a short document which can be used to underpin specific action plans to realise individual outcomes or be adapted to future changes in the economy arising from changes in national and international policy and financial circumstances.
- 6 The Strategy has also been prepared in parallel with the draft Local plan and in close collaboration with the Planning Policy team. The Strategy will help to achieve the growth outcomes set out in the draft Local Plan.
- 7 The development of the Strategy and the detail within the themes has been informed by the workshop session that the Committee undertook at its October 2017 meeting and by the subsequent consultation programme.

Consultation

- 8 The Consultation on the draft Strategy was completed on 26 October. The consultation was publicised in Inshape, on Twitter, the Real Business newsletter and the Town and Parish Council newsletter. A promotional video was prepared and Digital Advertising used to publicise the consultation. Presentations given to the Rural Landowners Group and Sevenoaks Town Partnership, a Business focus group was held and direct e-mail contact was made with over 450 businesses.

- 9 An online survey was created on Survey Monkey and that received 32 responses. A further 3 responses were received directly by the Economic Development team. Of the 32 survey responses received 7 were from local businesses, 15 from members of the public and 10 from a range of other respondents.
- 10 A full breakdown of the survey is attached at Appendix 2. The key points from the survey are shown below:

Of the 7 business responses 6 gave further information about their characteristics. 2 employed between 1 and 9 people and 4 employed between 10 and 19 people. 1 business has been established between 1 and 5 years, 1 business between 5 and 9 years and 4 had been established longer than 10 years.

The most important aspects of the Strategy for respondents were:

Of the three overarching themes Sustainability was ranked most important by 75% of the respondents.

Across the 5 individual themes the most important elements were as follows:

Theme	Most important to business	Highest average score of importance to business
Growth & Investment	Development of new and refurbished commercial space	Investment/regeneration in our towns and villages
Infrastructure	Improved transport infrastructure	Improved transport infrastructure
Visitor Economy	Availability of locally produced food and drink	Availability of locally produced food and drink
Skills	Work ready young people	Work ready young people
Enterprise	Access to flexible employment space	Information on potential business funding sources

Whilst the first four themes showed clear preferences about the most important themes for business, under the Enterprise theme the highest percentage scores were 3 or 4 with a single point of contact for business scoring a 4 and events and access to business support and advice scoring a 3.

- 11 The individual responses have been tabulated and comments made to each response. Those are attached at Appendix 3. Responses were drawing out specific issues which are either reflected in the Strategy, outside of the

direct control of the District Council or are being addressed within the draft Local Plan.

- 12 As part of the consultation a Business Focus Group was convened. The key issues that came from that group are set out in the table below:

Theme	Feedback from the Focus Group
Growth & Investment	<p>A map of the district would be useful for understanding where businesses are located across the District and for attracting investment. This could include the % of rural areas, a cluster map of existing employment land and a breakdown of existing employment space.</p> <p>Swanley is seen as having potential for growth and investment, need to engage better with business community in Swanley</p> <p>The supply of good quality office/industrial space is low. Consideration should be given to encouraging business hubs/flexible workspace and developing an investment strategy to deliver small industrial estates.</p> <p>Further work could be done to understand potential needs of current businesses to predict their future demand, together with the drivers for business relocations. In any regeneration or redevelopment consideration should be given to accommodating local 'service' businesses.</p>
Infrastructure	<p>The provision of Broadband is a continuing challenge for the future and it needs to be reliable.</p> <p>There is a need for flexibility in planning policy on energy efficiency measures with relation to older buildings.</p> <p>There is an opportunity to improve our Waste education about what can be recycled and re-used.</p> <p>The emergence of Car clubs and provision of electrical charging points.</p>
Visitor Economy	<p>There is a need for more hotel accommodation across the District.</p> <p>Mapping/Wayfinding at Sevenoaks Train Station to provide information including how many minutes' walk to get to the town centre and attractions.</p> <p>The opportunity exists to improve visitor 'dwell time' in the District and improve transport links for visitors</p>

Skills	<p>There are not enough people in the District with the right skills. Is there an opportunity to support businesses in developing employee skills? Upskilling of older workers or returnees to work is vital.</p> <p>Teachers do not always advise students of different career opportunities, like degree apprenticeships, and may not understand the range of different industries /careers there are or have the time.</p> <p>Jobs fairs/ events sometimes don't work as schools can select lower achieving students only to participate.</p> <p>Sports clubs and their links to career avenues in the future need local business support.</p> <p>Can FE provision be developed in Sevenoaks?</p>
Enterprise	<p>Need to think about how people are going to be working in the future, the implications of potential increased home working. Business hubs will be useful to reduce isolation for those working from home, and provides meeting space.</p> <p>There is a need to find different ways to communicate key messages to businesses.</p> <p>The self-employed need support, as well as established businesses.</p>

- 13 Additional direct consultation responses also noted the importance of the visitor economy to the District, particularly the food and drink sector, and the benefit of diverse town centres that served both those who work in them as well as visitors. The response noted the benefit of the food and drink sector to 'destination' towns such as Malton, Ludlow and Whitstable.

The provision of housing that was affordable for all and enabled businesses to attract and retain their staff was important, together with the provision of good quality employment space, as well as space available at low cost.

The lack of a Higher Education offer in the District was noted and the promotion of apprenticeships and vocational training was welcomed.

- 14 The new Strategy provides the basis for development of individual action plans or projects. From the responses the Team Around Your Business model, the identification of areas for improvement in Broadband provision and further collaboration with the Visitor Economy sector are three topics for early work arising from the adoption of the Strategy.

Key Implications

Financial

There are no financial implications for the delivery of the Strategy which is resourced through the Economic Development budget and by working in partnership with other organisations. Specific projects arising from the strategy would be subject to their own funding proposals to be agreed by the Council or partners.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

There are no legal implications for delivery of the Economic Development Strategy.

Equality Assessment

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on ends users.

Conclusions

The development of the new Economic Development Strategy reflects the significant national and international political and economic changes that have occurred since the previous Strategy was written. The Strategy reflects the vision and themes and the feedback given by the Committee at its meeting in October 2017 and aligns with the policies in the emerging Local Plan.

The consultation responses have supported the choice of themes for the Strategy and show the close relationship that exists with the policies in the draft Local Plan. Infrastructure and transport are two areas where other partners take the lead and our role is more of an influencer through our networks such as the Kent and Medway Enterprise Partnership or the West Kent Partnership.

The new Strategy provides the basis for development of individual action plans or projects. The Team Around Your Business model, Broadband service improvements and further collaboration with the Visitor Economy sector are three areas for early work arising from the Strategy.

Appendices

Appendix A - Draft Economic Development Strategy 2018-2021

Appendix B - Breakdown of the Survey

Appendix C - Individual Survey free text responses

Background Papers

None.

Lesley Bowles

Chief Officer Communities and Business