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West Devon
Borough
Council

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Dear Councillor

WEST DEVON OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - TUESDAY, 14TH FEBRUARY, 2023

I refer to the agenda for the above meeting and attach papers in connection with the following item(s).

Agenda No	Item
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| 9. | <u>A Plan for West Devon Thematic Update: Thriving Economy (Pages 1 - 10)</u> |
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Yours sincerely

Darryl White
Democratic Services Manager

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Thriving Economy

Thematic Progress Update
February 2023



Lead Member Introduction

It has been another busy 12 months for our Thriving Economy workstream which has seen us progress many plans and secure significant investment in our area through the Government UK Shared Prosperity Fund.



Cllr Peter Crozier
Lead Member
for stimulating
a thriving
economy

We have had to reprioritise some of the deliverables we set out in 2021 based on the funding that we have been able to secure from Government with some of the key achievements since the last update in 2022 including:-

- Delivering a #MyPlace campaign of co-ordinated marketing and branding
- Developing a new Visit West Devon website
- Continued monthly engagement with broadband providers to ensure the area is as prioritised as possible – 137 households in Sydenham Damerel are now connected to full fibre
- Secured £1m of funding through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to provide bespoke business support and also secured funding to progress Okehampton Transport Hub
- Progressed plans with Okehampton Town Council and businesses for a business forum in the town

Activities on Track	Activities off track	Activities at risk of not completing
11	0	1

One activity is not able to be progressed as originally planned and that is the delivery of an Eco-Museum for West Devon. This relied upon securing Community Renewal Funding which was unsuccessful. Some elements of the scheme will be picked up elsewhere but it will not deliver as planned.

There is another busy period ahead as we commence delivery of some key projects and await the outcome of our bid for £838k of Rural England Prosperity Funding which, if successful, would provide capital grants for businesses to improve their resilience, adopt new technologies and install renewable / energy efficiency measure

Cllr Peter Crozier

Cllr Peter Crozier

Lead Hub Member for Thriving Economy



Action TE1.1 Develop a West Devon Visitor Economy Plan

Key Highlights

A draft marketing plan was developed in 2022 involving both the Placemaking and Communications teams. Town and Parish Councils have helped to inform the plan through engagement earlier that year. The aim for the plan is for it to be developed into a fully-fledged marketing strategy for the whole of South Hams and West Devon. This was anticipated for year two of the corporate strategy (2022/23) and quotes were obtained from consultancies to carry out this work. However, it is currently on hold.

The draft marketing plan is an evolving document due to the rapidly changing economic environment in which we find ourselves. The following activities have been undertaken to meet the key objectives of the draft marketing plan:

- Tourism data is secured annually through an external contract to measure success
- Town centre health reports are being developed to include car parking stats, vacancy rates and in due course we also hope to commission footfall data
- Partnership agreements have been developed with both Visit Devon and Visit South Devon
- A new Visit West Devon website has been developed to showcase the region and will be ready to launch in Spring
- Ongoing MyPlace promotional activity continues throughout the year to promote shopping, leisure and key events

Key Risks / Issues

N/a

Looking ahead to the next 6 months

- Engagement with Members on the draft marketing plan

Overall Rating

Green – On Track

Action TE1.2 Support place-based public realm enhancements in West Devon

Key Highlights

This objective is deemed to be complete – the previous update highlighted the measures that various towns had been able to put into place through accessing a variety of funding streams.

There are likely to be future opportunities to improve infrastructure in and around our town centres, but this is likely to be delivered through the objectives around active and inclusive travel support.

Key Risks / Issues

N/a

Looking ahead to the next 6 months

- Objective to be reviewed and updated as UK Shared Prosperity Fund programme advances

Overall Rating

GREEN – ON TRACK

Action TE1.3 Promote active travel, cycling, horse riding and walking routes across West Devon

Key Highlights



The Economy and Place Team has successfully accessed the Government’s UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The approved investment plan includes £0.5m of support for active and inclusive travel, including funding for an Active and Inclusive Travel Officer for the next 2 years.

A Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan is being commissioned and will see significant engagement with communities from across the Borough to establish local strategic priorities to enhance active travel infrastructure.

The funding will also support the delivery of quick win infrastructure improvements and projects to encourage participation in active and inclusive travel options.

Key Risks / Issues

N/a

Looking ahead to the next 6 months

Objective will be updated as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund activities advance

Overall Rating **GREEN – ON TRACK**

Action TE1.4 Progress plans for an ecomuseum across West Devon to maximise the assets of the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Dartmoor National Park and Tamar Valley AONB

Key Highlights

Despite the ecomuseum concept not moving forward as a bespoke project, the programme of activities within the Council’s UK Shared Prosperity Fund will enhance opportunities for people to engage with our natural capital using sustainable transportation and in an environmentally conscious manner which will protect our countryside.

Significant work is also being delivered through the Visit West Devon website (which is still being populated), to promote our green tourism infrastructure, active and inclusive travel routes, and natural capital.

We will continue to identify opportunities to take this project forward, but until such a fund becomes available, it will not be possible to proceed at this time.

Key Risks / Issues

- The key issue is that the CRF bid was not successful and so at this stage the plans cannot proceed as originally set out.

Looking ahead to the next 6 months

- Ongoing work to enable us to bid for any future relevant funding opportunities

Overall Rating **Red – the project cannot proceed as planned due to us not securing Community Renewal Funding.**



Action TE1.5 Champion Improved Digital (Broadband and Mobile Phone) Connectivity across West Devon

Key Highlights

- Monthly engagement with main broadband suppliers (Airband, Openreach, Jurassic) and CDS
- Completion of Community Fibre Partnership project in Sydenham Damerel that WDBC underwrote. 137 residents now connected to full fibre, funded through the Gigabit Voucher scheme delivered by Openreach.
- Airband delivery delays – pushing for updates from CDS/Airband
- Local Government Association (LGA) report on the evaluation of the creation of a ‘digital champion’ within a district level council to be published later this month.
- Awaiting outcome of further central funding from Project Gigabit to increase full fibre in Devon and Somerset. The contract would be managed by Building Digital UK (an arm of DCMC). Results expected March/April.
- Web tool to help residents/businesses identify ways to improve their broadband to be launched, w/c 20th Feb. Discussions with LEP to develop this tool further and provide support for potential alternative digital connectivity options.

Key Risks / Issues

- WDBC very limited influence Airband delivery of fibre contract
- WDBC unable to influence outcome of Project Gigabit procurements.
- Treating all communities asking for financial support for digital connectivity projects from WDBC equally
- A large number of queries following the launch of web tool may exceed capacity of digital connectivity officer.

Looking ahead to the next 6 months

- Developing/supporting LEP in an improved web tool
- Developing a funding scheme to support communities who do not benefit from Project Gigabit (potential further funding from LEP available)
- Post Project Gigabit outcome- supporting communities with community fibre projects that are now viable due to increased voucher funding and a wider fibre network across parts of WD.

Overall Rating

GREEN – ON TRACK

Action TE1.6 Offer business advice services for existing, expanding and new businesses

Key Highlights

Business Info Point (BIP) has been delivering a programme of business support activities to our business communities.

We have also secured £1m of funding through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund which will deliver a bespoke package of support to our business communities including:



- Regenerative farming and support for farming businesses to adopt new and emerging technologies
- Support for businesses to develop decarbonisation plans to determine a pathway to reduce their carbon footprints
- Support for our community energy groups to expand their activities and further the rollout of renewable technologies in our communities
- Support for the construction sector and its supply chain, improving local capacity to deliver low carbon and carbon neutral development

We will continue to develop our business support programme as opportunities arise. We also have our live bid for £838k of Rural England Prosperity Funding which would provide capital grants for businesses to improve their resilience, adopt new technologies and install renewable / energy efficiency measures.

The economy team has also been meeting with a range of businesses from across the Borough and providing information, advice and guidance on an ad-hoc basis.

Key Risks / Issues

N/a

Looking ahead to the next 6 months

- BIP will continue their work programme
- We shall continue to engage with businesses and develop our business database

Overall Rating **GREEN – ON Track**

Action TE1.7 Remain prepared to respond to any future government business grants (Covid-19 or other)

Key Highlights

The Economy and Place Team has successfully accessed the Government's Levelling Up Fund (£13.4m) and UK Shared Prosperity Fund (£1m), and has a live funding proposal for the Rural England Prosperity Fund (£838k) for which the outcome is expected by March 2023.

The team will continue to identify and apply for funding opportunities to enhance our ability to deliver business and community support initiatives.

Key Risks / Issues

N/a

Looking ahead to the next 6 months

- We shall continue to look out for new grants to bid for
- We shall look to update the Corporate Strategy objectives to reflect the activities that will be delivered through the funding programmes we have been awarded.

Overall Rating **GREEN – ON Track**

Action TE1.8 Deliver an Inward Investment Campaign aimed at attracting new businesses to West Devon

Key Highlights



West Devon businesses have been included within the Devon County Council led Devon Delivers inward investment programme, and this campaign has been running since July 2021.

There is an opportunity to commission an inward investment strategy for the Borough which would establish our unique opportunities to attract investment into the Borough and set out a pathway for improving our ability to attract new businesses. This piece of work could also inform the refresh of the Joint Local Plan, identifying areas and specific sites that could be brought forward for commercial development.

The Economy and Place Team continues to respond to inward investment enquiries as and when they are received by the local authority.

Key Risks / Issues

A lack of available commercial units and a poor mix of unit types makes it difficult to market the Borough, as there is little opportunity to accommodate new businesses and to facilitate the growth of local businesses.

Looking ahead to the next 6 months

Quotes are being obtained for the delivery of an inward investment strategy for the Borough. There is potential for this piece of work to be joint funded with the South Hams to improve cost effectiveness without compromising our ability to identify unique inward investment opportunities for West Devon.

Overall Rating **GREEN – ON Track**

Action TE1.9 Continue to support the Tavistock Business Improvement District (BID)

Key Highlights

The Economy and Place Team has regular catch ups with the BID Manager. Site visits have been undertaken with the BID Manager and have included introductions with some of the businesses which are BID members within the town centre. We have been working with the BID to move forward other objectives such as their own funding bids and town centre focused project development.

Key Risks / Issues

N/a

Looking ahead to the next 6 months

- Continue supporting the Tavistock BID manager as and when required.

Overall Rating **GREEN – ON Track**

Action TE1.10 Establish a new business forum within Okehampton

Key Highlights

Work on the development of a potential Business Improvement District has been ongoing in Okehampton.

A consultancy firm, Locus, has been working with the Borough Council and Town Council, to move the project forward. The initial consultation activity has produced positive results, and the work is



now entering its final stage of consultation before it is decided whether or not to proceed to a referendum.

The results of this stage of activity will be presented by Locus at the end of May. If it is agreed to go to referendum, this would be completed by the end of the calendar year.

The cost of the work has been split between the Borough Council and Town Council.

Key Risks / Issues

- N/A

Looking ahead to the next 6 months

- At the end of May we shall know whether the proposal will advance to referendum.

Overall Rating **GREEN – ON Track**

Action TE1.11 Deliver a West Devon Transport Hub through the Government Levelling Up Fund

Key Highlights

The Round 2 Levelling-Up Fund bid has been successful, resulting in the Council securing £13.4m to deliver the West Devon Transport Hub in Okehampton.

This work will begin in the new financial year and the construction activities will be completed by the end of March 2025.

The West Devon Transport Hub will provide a service for Okehampton and the surrounding towns and villages with a catchment area stretching as far as Launceston.

Along with the LUF monies, we have also managed to allocate £120k of our UKSPF funding to use as our match contribution to the development and ensuring that the new station will maximise the active and inclusive travel infrastructure provided within the town. This significantly reduces the financial exposure of West Devon Borough Council (as the funding would have otherwise needed to be provided from our reserves).

The Council is the accountable body for the project, but delivery will be led by Devon County Council and their partner organisations.

Key Risks / Issues

Time constraints to deliver the station could make it challenging to meet the March 2025 delivery deadline.

Looking ahead to the next 6 months

We will be working closely with DCC and other partner organisations to ensure the timely delivery of the project.

Overall Rating **GREEN – ON Track**

Action TE1.12 Submit a bid to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund

Key Highlights

WDBC has had its UK Shared Prosperity Fund investment plan approved by government and the first tranche of funding has been released to the Council.



Some delivery is expected to begin this financial year while the majority of activities will begin from April 2023 onwards.

It is proposed that the Corporate Strategy delivery plan objectives be updated to reflect the projects included within the investment plan and that these be reported back to Members on a regular basis.

Key Risks / Issues

N/A – funding has been secured.

Looking ahead to the next 6 months

- Development of thematic groups to oversee project delivery
- Procurement of projects to ensure timely delivery of activities

Overall Rating **GREEN – ON Track**



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