

AYLESBURY VALE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Democratic Services

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Our Ref:
Your Ref:

16 January, 2014

ECONOMY & BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Economy and Business Development Scrutiny Committee will be held at **6.30 pm on 29 January, 2014**, in **The Olympic Room at The Gateway, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury**, when your attendance is requested.

Membership: Councillor Miss P Lewis (Chairman); Councillors Mrs Bloom, Mrs Davies, Mrs Glover, Hawkett, Lambert, Monger, Poll, Richards, M Smith, Strachan, Stuchbury, Thompson and Tyndall. One Vacancy.

Contact Officer: Derek Willmer (01296) 585060

L White
Head of Administration

Members:

Committee Clerk (Generic Author), Cllr Avril Davies, Cllr Netta Glover, Cllr Mike Hawkett, Cllr Steven Lambert, Cllr Pearl Lewis, Cllr Llew Monger, Cllr Chris Poll, Cllr Mike Smith, Cllr Robin Stuchbury, Cllr Brian Tyndall, Cllr Peter Strachan, Mr Douglas Gray (Audit), Mr David Lamb (Audit), Cllr Jenny Bloom, Cllr Chris Richards, Cllr David Thompson, Cllr Michael Edmonds,

AGENDA

1 **APOLOGIES**

2 **TEMPORARY CHANGES TO MEMBERSHIP**


Any changes to be reported to the meeting.

3

MINUTES

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meetings held on 11 December, 2013, copy attached as Appendix A.

Documents Attached:

 economy minutes 11 12 2013.pdf

4

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members to declare any personal or prejudicial interests.

5

NOTICE OF MOTION: SUPPORT FOR TOWN CENTRE BUSINESSES

To consider the report attached as Appendix B coloured pink.

Contact Officers: Andrew Small (01296) 585507, Tracey Aldworth (01296) 585003 and Teresa Lane (01296) 585006

Documents Attached:

 App B - NOM Business Support - Economy Scrutiny 29 Jan.pdf

6


ECONOMY AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME

To consider the programme attached as Appendix C coloured grey.

Members to consider items for the period to 17 March 2015

Contact Officer: Derek Willmer (01296) 585060

Documents Attached:

 App C - EBD SC work prog 2013 - 2015.pdf

ECONOMY AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

11 December, 2013

PRESENT: Councillor Miss P Lewis (Chairman), Councillors Mrs Davies, Foster (in place of Mrs Bloom), Mrs Glover, Hawkett, Lambert, Monger, Poll, Richards, Strachan, Stuchbury, Thompson and Tyndall.

1. **APOLOGIES:** Councillors Mrs Bloom, Roberts (Cabinet Member for Civic Amenities) and Smith.

2. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 28 October, 2013, be approved as a correct record.

3. **UPDATE ON THE WORK OF THE AYLESBURY TOWN CENTRE PARTNERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF MARKETS.**

A report was received that provided Members with an update on work of the Aylesbury Town Centre Partnership (the Partnership) over the last year and an overview of the improvement plan for the markets managed by Aylesbury Vale District Council.

Members heard that the Partnership had a budget of £173,000, offset by £42,800 of income, from a variety of sources, with Aylesbury Vale District Council funding the balance.

The Partnership's annual business plan had five key headings:

- I Partnership and Communications
- ii A clean and attractive town
- iii A safe place
- iv Marketing and promoting the town
- v Support for independent businesses

The Partnership business plan was closely aligned to (but not replaced by) the recently published Draft Improvement Plan for Aylesbury Town Centre and would be reviewed again once the feedback on the Improvement Plan had been considered.

The wide range of local groups which the Partnership interacted with reflected the size and breadth of its expanding membership which now stood at over 80 and included retailers, estate agents, Thames Valley, Police, Chiltern Rail, Arriva, Aylesbury College, resident groups and the three local Councils.

All members benefitted from a regular flow of communication on Town Centre issues and the networking opportunities via quarterly meetings and the bi-annual Partnership meetings.

As the use of town centres change and socialising became a more important requirement, the cleanliness and attractiveness of the town had become an increasingly significant part of the business plan. Improvements to these aspects required ownership by everyone so work was very much a partnership and on-going effort with the Town Centre Manager liaising closely with others to coordinate a range of improvements which included:

- improvements to the High Street, George Street and Market Square
- cleaning of the war memorial and seating
- identifying and arranging the removal of rubbish from grot spots
- removal of posters, illegal notices
- repainting street furniture
- encouraging outside street trading
- organising window wraps to improve the appearance of vacant units
- managing and regulating buskers and charity collectors
- working with AVDC on extending Christmas lights to new locations e.g. Cambridge Street
- removing unpopular, excess street furniture
- coordinating the snow clearance

In 2011, Aylesbury secured the much coveted Purple Flag award, signalling that it was judged, through a rigorous, independent assessment, to be a safe and welcoming place in the evening. The accreditation was awarded again in 2012 and had just been re-awarded for 2013.

The marketing and promotion of Aylesbury worked on a number of levels. Overall responsibility for the strategic marketing and positioning of the town is the responsibility of AVDC, but the Town Centre Manager was helping to deliver a dynamic marketing and promotional plan locally.

.A programme of some 450 free events throughout the year provided essential credibility and support for the town's vision to develop its unique selling point as a town of performance and the arts. A significant element of the AVDC funding contributed towards the events programme and one of the challenges for 2014 would be to consider ways in which the programme can be maintained and balanced with savings which may have to be made.

The importance of retaining and attracting independent town centre businesses is a priority appreciated by all stakeholders including the multiple retailers.

In the last 12 months, the town centre team had increased its efforts in this area and many more independent traders had now joined the Partnership.

The culmination of the support for independent businesses in 2013, had been the launch of the Retail Lift-off - an innovative project which gained momentum after Aylesbury was unsuccessful in its bid to become a Portas town. This project gave five local entrepreneurs the opportunity to start their own retail business in the town and

had attracted national and regional publicity. Plans were now underway to extend the scheme in 2014 using the 2013 experience to make adjustments/improvements.

Markets:-

The management of the Aylesbury markets and the Winslow general market was now undertaken by the Town Centre Manager with the support of a part-time Markets' Officer with the key tasks focusing on managing the trader relationship, improving the customer experience and generating income from the markets to at least break even.

Nationally, markets were facing tough challenges and many continued to be subsidised, or were experiencing falling numbers or closure. Even much esteemed markets, such as the covered market at Oxford, were facing difficulties and are under threat. Aylesbury in particular had its own challenges which would take time to address so the work in progress is with a view to the long term sustainability of the markets rather than short-term quick fixes.

Given this approach, during the last 12 months, much of the work programme had concentrated on reviewing and improving the basic operation of the markets in Aylesbury and Winslow. New terms and conditions were being developed, new processes put in place and the communication between traders and AVDC market staff enhanced and improved. Draft business plans had been developed with input from both traders and in Winslow, the Winslow Town Council.

In Aylesbury, where the stalls are provided, one of the priorities was the replacement of the stalls, with a number of new designs currently being trialled. The challenge was to find replacement stalls which looked attractive in the historic location of the market square, were practical from a trading viewpoint and could also withstand the very high degree of erecting and dismantling required during four days trading per week.

Work had also begun on improving the Tuesday market which had moved some way from its original antiques and collectibles format. New terms and conditions would limit the type of goods which could be sold and how they could be displayed with the intention of uplifting the attractiveness and appeal of the market.

The promotion of the markets continued to be an important part of the business plans for both markets.

A priority in the New Year would be to end cash rent collections by the Market's Officer. This was not best practice for a number of reasons.

Whilst there was undoubtedly a long way to go, the work so far was paying off and for the first time in many years, the Aylesbury general market was full to capacity and the number of traders in Winslow had doubled to six.

Members were generally supportive of the direction of work being carried. However, there were a number of issues concerning which Members expressed a view on or commented generally, including the following:-

- Members commented on the problems that were being caused by groups of youths causing problems in the Town Centre during the evenings and the small groups of homeless persons that had an intimidating presence

Members were advised that Thames Valley Police (TVP) were aware of these groups and had acted on the situation by changing their rotas to suit. All persons caught stealing were excluded from the shops that used the Shop Watch service. The problems of homeless were being dealt with by the relevant services.

- Questions were asked on the economics of the events that were staged across the Vale.

AVDC actually funded 42 of their own events, mainly in Aylesbury Town Centre, with an overall cost of £67,000. Each event had averaged around £2000 to produce and realised about £1, per person attending, in consumer sales. Footfall figures indicated that most events realised attendances of over 2000. In total the Town Centre Partnership had helped in the co-ordination of 450 events during the past twelve months.

- Information was requested on how the impact of large supermarkets on town centres was assessed.

Members were advised that the Aylesbury Town Centre Partnership could only comment on applications relating to Aylesbury but in respect of the Gateway Sainsbury's application, the Town Centre Manager explained that Sainsbury's were invited to give a presentation to the Partnership at the pre-planning application stage. Members were given the opportunity to ask questions after which the Partnership met in private to discuss its views which were then passed onto the planning service. As part of the planning process, the impact of all out of town applications had been assessed..

- Information was requested on spend of the £173,000 service budget and whether this was money well spent.

A breakdown was provided as follows:-

Salaries - £58,400
 Copying - £1,200
 Window wraps etc. - £17,000
 Event promotion - £7,400
 42 large events - £67,000
 Contributions to other events - £2,200.

Members were reminded that improvement of the Town Centre was part of the Corporate Plan agreed by Council and more recently the draft improvement plan for the town centre had been considered and agreed by both cabinet and the scrutiny committee. The Town Centre Partnership worked with many partners, including Aylesbury Town Council, and the private sector who all contributed to the common aim of making the Town vibrant and safe. Many Town Centre shops had responded

to the request to invest in new shop fronts to improve the look of the Town Centre at no cost to AVDC.

With regard to the viability of the AVDC part of the service, the Committee was advised that the service would be reviewed like all other AVDC services as part of the new business model programme.

- With regard to the Aylesbury markets, information was requested on funding for the replacement stalls.

Members were advised that the Markets had their own budget of £113,000 which included the cost of salaries and business rates. Income at present amounted to £105,000 per year.

- Observations were made that there was a general perception that AVDC was the only partner that contributed funding to Town Centre improvements.

Members were advised that the value in kind from partners was huge with the benefits being Vale wide rather than just Aylesbury Town Centre, so often were not readily apparent.

Officers were asked to report back further on the contributions in kind by partners to give greater context to the AVDC funding.

- Comments were made on the quality of the shops in the Town Centre and how buildings had been spoilt by inappropriate changes.

It was explained that Aylesbury Town Centre comprised of a mix of very old traditional shops that had changed through time and newer development that reflected their use. A lot of the buildings were owned by private landlords that resided some distance from Aylesbury. It would be very difficult to change the vista over a short period of time. One advantage of having a traditional Town Centre was that film crews found it a very attractive location.

Following further discussion it was –

RESOLVED –

1. That the Committee notes the report.
2. That the feedback and comments of Members be acted upon as appropriate.
3. That the appropriate Cabinet Member(s) be invited to attend all meetings of the Economy and Business Development Committee.

4. ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME 2013 - 2014

A Work Programme for the period to end March 2015 was presented for Members approval and for Members to suggest new topics for inclusion. Following a short discussion it was

RESOLVED –

That the Work Programme as presented be approved with the following additions:-

1. The review report on the previous 12 month's scrutiny items to be deleted from the 29 January 2014 meeting and presented to Members, in due course, as an information item.
2. A report on the Council Notice of Motion on help for Businesses to be inserted for the 29 January 2014 meeting.
3. The report on Major Employment Sites to be deleted from the 29 January 2014 meeting and reinserted for the 17 March 2014 meeting.
4. A report on the future of the LEPs to be inserted once there is sufficient progress to warrant a discussion.
5. Reports on the Skills agenda to be inserted as and when required.
6. A report on the Development of East West Rail and the advantages to Aylesbury Vale to be inserted once more information was available. It would be advantageous for Bucks County Council to attend for this item.
7. Other items to be considered for inclusion were:-
 - Utilisation of redundant airfields
 - Growth of Westcott Business Park
 - Businesses that have been lost and the reasons why.

NOTICE OF MOTION ON SUPPORT FOR BUSINESS

1 Purpose

- 1.1 At its meeting on 4th December 2013 Council received a report from Cabinet considering the Notice of Motion put forward by Cllr Vick proposing that the Council should do more to support business.
- 1.2 After debate, it was resolved that the matter would be passed to Economy Scrutiny to consider. This report presents the information considered by Council and Cabinet and asks Scrutiny to consider what else the Council might do to support business.

2 Recommendations/for decision

- | | |
|-----|---|
| 2.1 | Scrutiny are asked to note the report and consider if there is anything further the Council should investigate in response to the notice of motion. |
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3 Background

- 3.1 On the 16 October 2013 Councillor Vick made the following Motion to Council:

“Town centres and high streets in the Vale are struggling to keep retailers in place during this protracted economic downturn.

All business sectors are struggling with ever increasing overheads and historically high premises rental costs.

The most optimistic forecasts are for this financial downturn to continue for a considerable number of years.

This Council is committed to supporting the retail and business sector.

This Council is committed to supporting the development of a healthy and vibrant retail and general business sector.

This Council is committed to supporting town centres and high streets in Aylesbury Vale.

Therefore this Council resolves to:-

- (1) Investigate changes that can be made to the overhead running costs for retailers and the general business sector in Aylesbury Vale.
 - (2) Consider reducing business rents charged to retailers and the general business sector in Aylesbury Vale.
 - (3) Engage with other landlords to promote a reduction in the retail and business rents charged in Aylesbury Vale
- 3.2 This Motion has been passed to Cabinet for debate and was considered on the 19th November.

- 3.3 Cabinet recommended that the motion not be supported because it believed that it could not influence points 1 and 2 of the proposed resolution and that it was already engaging with Landlords as proposed under point 3.
- 3.4 Cabinet did not disagree with the sentiment of the motion and believed that it was supporting business via many initiatives. These initiatives were listed in the report and a copy of the report considered by Council has been reproduced as Appendix 1 to this report.
- 3.5 During the course of the debate at Council it was proposed and duly seconded that the Motion be referred to the Economy and Business Development Scrutiny Committee to enable more detailed consideration to be given to all the possible options for assisting local businesses.

4 Supporting information

- 4.1 The attached report to Council contains most of the information relevant to this subject and so has largely not been reproduced within this report.
- 4.2 Instead members of the Committee are invited to identify any other mechanisms not contained within that report or to explore the content of that report in more detail at this meeting.
- 4.3 Since the last report was written the Chancellor of the Exchequer gave his Autumn Statement and, underlining the national nature of the business rate scheme, this contained some additional reliefs for businesses and in particular town centre businesses. These changes are explained below.

5 Business Rates

- 5.1 The current extension of the 100% relief given to Small Businesses within the Business Rate Scheme was due to end on the 31st March 2014. At that time small businesses would only receive a 50% relief, being the core relief contained within the national scheme.
- 5.2 The Chancellor, recognising the importance of the relief to small businesses and the difficult trading conditions being experienced by many high street retailers, announced that he would extend this relief by a further 12 months.
- 5.3 Out of nearly 5,000 individually registered business premises in the Vale approximately 60% will be eligible for some level of discount under the revised Small Business Rate scheme, with approximately 40% receiving 100% discount. The cost of this relief averages around £3 million per annum.
- 5.4 As part of the cost of extending this relief would be borne by local Council Tax payers, the Chancellor also announced a compensatory payment to Councils to offset the cost of his decision to extend it.
- 5.5 In addition the Chancellor announced 2 new reliefs under the Business Rates system. These being a re-occupation relief and a £1,000 discount for all retail units, pubs, restaurants, etc. with a rateable liability of less than £50,000.
- 5.6 The reoccupation relief was specifically aimed at high streets suffering from decline and large numbers of vacant shops and will offer an 18 month relief to businesses occupying premises which had been previously occupied.
- 5.7 These represent tangible reliefs which the Government will fund and emphasises the fact that only the Government has the levers to effectively use the Business Rate system to support targeted business sectors.

6 AVDC Budget Development

- 6.1 Members of the Committee should also be aware that contained within the draft budget papers is a proposal to increase Council Tax by 1.99% on the 1st April and use the income created by this to support business within the Vale.
- 6.2 The precise nature of this support is still to be worked up but may take the form of a further business rate discount, as alluded to within the attached Council report.

7 Economic Development

- 7.1 If approved this will effectively double the operating budget for Economic Development, even if it is targeted to a specific scheme.
- 7.2 This raises the further question of what constitutes spend by the Council on Economic Development. For example, Town Centre management support is not normally considered in context of Economic Development, but its function is clearly in support of that purpose.
- 7.3 Similarly, time spent by Planners, the work of the Senior Managers, the work of the Business Rates Team in minimising liability where it can be, our joint work with Aylesbury Vale Estates and the Council's investment in Waitrose and the Town Centre is all specifically targeted at supporting business.
- 7.4 If spend on these activities is added to that specifically designated as Economic Development then the Council's total commitment is magnified many times.
- 7.5 In addition to this, there is also the wider contribution that this Council makes to creating and enhancing the right economic conditions to enable and encourage economic growth and development that needs to be taken into account.
- 7.6 AVDC has been a key influencer and direct investor for many years into the local economy, whether that is through direct investments in new facilities such as the theatre, leisure and shopping facilities and car parks etc. or through the role we play in terms of enabling affordable housing. Our capital investment programme over the last 5 years has totalled in excess of £80 million and the multiplier effect of this investment is significant for the local economy.
- 7.7 There are also likely to be further benefits that will arise from planned investments in projects like East-West Rail, to which AVDC is making a contribution, as well as proposed schemes which AVDC is the lead investor including Aylesbury Academy, Swan Pool and the Waterside North scheme.
- 7.8 Our role in this place making and shaping activity is crucial to the economic development of the Vale and has and will continue to make a major contribution to supporting the local economy and local businesses.

8 Aylesbury Vale Estates

- 8.1 It was raised at Council that Aylesbury Vale District Council, as joint owners of Aylesbury Vale Estates, could influence these vehicles to reduce rental payments paid by tenants.
- 8.2 The Articles of Association covering AVE require the Council's Board members to specifically operate in a manner consistent with the best interests of AVE. This requires decisions taken to be commercial in their outlook.

Specifically, this prevents the Board members taking decisions which might seek to deliver the Council's wider objectives.

- 8.3 Where the Councils and AVE objectives are aligned this does not create an issue, but where there is a divergence of interests the Council is prevented from using its influence to disadvantage AVE.
- 8.4 However, it should be remembered that AVE's interested are not served by having vacant units or struggling tenants. It is in AVE's interest to occupy all available units with fee paying tenants. In this respect, as with all Town Centre property, the economic rules of Supply and Demand apply.

9 Private Sector Commercial Rental Sector

- 9.1 As highlighted in the previous paragraph commercial property is in itself a competitive market place. Currently there is an excess of supply, demonstrated by vacant units. Landlords must pay empty business rates on vacant properties (above a minimum size). This in itself acts as a disincentive to keep properties empty.
- 9.2 If a landlord can find a suitable tenant then not only will they avoid the empty property rates associated with it, but they will also receive a rental income. Landlords are effectively already incentivised to occupy their vacant properties.
- 9.3 In a market place with excess supply, each landlord is in competition with the others to find tenants and this effectively drives down prices, as each landlord tries to undercut the others or offer better terms through rent free periods, etc.
- 9.4 It is, therefore, in no ones interests to keep a property vacant. However, it does mean that many of the lets are short term and do not always reflect aspirations to improve the tenant mix across the town. A letting agent is being appointed to help develop the relationship with landlords, particularly remote landlords. Rental levels and terms and conditions will form part of the discussions.
- 9.5 This applies equally to tenants currently in occupation as landlords will have to negotiate on rental rates with their tenants in order to retain them.
- 9.6 It therefore does not necessarily follow that the fault lies with the landlords. It is equally likely to be the result of an inadequate supply of prospective tenants.

10 Direct Subsidisation of Businesses

- 10.1 The Council has powers within the Communities Act to support business through business rates discounts. This is likely to shortly form the basis of a proposal to Cabinet and this might be an area that the scrutiny committee can assist with informing before Cabinet formally considers it.
- 10.2 However, the costs of any discount awarded will likely be a cost on the Council Tax payers of the District. Effectively, it therefore represents the passporting of tax liabilities from one group of taxpayers on to another.
- 10.3 In consider any proposals in this respect it must therefore be considered whether the tax liability is being borne by the right taxpayers and whether tax liability is spread evenly in accordance with the prospective benefits.

11 Options considered

- 11.1 Members of the Scrutiny Committee are requested to consider the report presented to Council and the additional information presented within this report and, in accordance with the intention of the original motion, consider what could be done to further support business.

12 Resource implications

- 12.1 These are covered within the report.
- 12.2 The Council benefits from business rate growth under the new Business Rate Retention mechanism included within the new Local Government Finance System.

13 Response to Key Aims and Objectives

- 13.1 Please type none if there is no response to Key Aims and Objectives

Contact Officer Andrew Small (01296 58507)
 Tracey Aldworth (01296 58503)
 Teresa Lane (01296 585006)

Background Documents

NOTICE OF MOTION: SUPPORT FOR TOWN CENTRE BUSINESSES

1 Purpose

- | | |
|-----|--|
| 1.1 | This report advises Council on how it should respond to the Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Vick to Council on 16 October, 2013. The Motion was seconded by Councillor Lambert. |
|-----|--|

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Motion be rejected in the light of the fact that although having little influence over the commercial issues raised specifically by the Motion, the Council is nevertheless devoting significant resources to town centre regeneration for the benefit of all those who live or work or visit the Vale, and will continue to support any initiatives designed to deliver this objective.

3 Supporting Information

- 3.1 On 16 October, 2013, Councillor Vick submitted a Notice of Motion concerning support for town centre businesses. The full text of the motion is contained in the Appendix to this report, which is in effect the report submitted to Cabinet on 19 November 2013.
- 3.2 The Cabinet report sets out the information taken into account by Cabinet in reaching the conclusion referred to in 2.1 above.
- 3.3 The procedure for dealing with this matter will be as follows:-
(The Motion has already been moved and seconded)
- Councillor Vick will speak first (maximum of 5 minutes).
 - The Leader of the Council (Councillor N Blake) will then speak explaining Cabinet's view and will recommend Council to vote against the Motion. (maximum of 5 minutes).
 - The Motion is then open to debate.
 - Councillor Vick has a right of reply at the end of the debate.
 - A vote will then be taken.

Contact Officer: Andrew Small (01296) 585507
Background Documents: None

NOTICE OF MOTION - SUPPORT FOR TOWN CENTRE BUSINESSES

Councillor Neil Blake
Leader of the Council

1 Purpose

- 1.1 At Council on the 16 October 2013, a notice of motion was put forward by Councillor Vick. This motion related to the subject of support for businesses in the town centre and held over to the next meeting of Cabinet for debate.

2 Recommendations/for decision

- | |
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| 2.1 Cabinet is requested to consider the contents of this report and decide whether or not to recommend its adoption to Council. |
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3 Supporting information

- 3.1 On the 16 October 2013 Councillor Vick made the following Motion to Council:

“Town centres and high streets in the Vale are struggling to keep retailers in place during this protracted economic downturn.

All business sectors are struggling with ever increasing overheads and historically high premises rental costs.

The most optimistic forecasts are for this financial downturn to continue for a considerable number of years.

This Council is committed to supporting the retail and business sector.

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Therefore this Council resolves to:-

- (1) Investigate changes that can be made to the overhead running costs for retailers and the general business sector in Aylesbury Vale.
 - (2) Consider reducing business rents charged to retailers and the general business sector in Aylesbury Vale.
 - (3) Engage with other landlords to promote a reduction in the retail and business rents charged in Aylesbury Vale
- 3.2 This Motion has been passed to Cabinet for debate so that a recommendation can be agreed and made to Council on the 4th December 2013.
- 3.3 The various elements of the proposal are examined in more detail within this report and examples of ways the Council is currently helping business or proposes to in the future are also set out.

4 Business Overheads

- 4.1 The overheads incurred by businesses are normally those costs associated with being in business which are incidental to the direct manufacture or sale (assuming that this is the principal function of the business) of the product or service.
- 4.2 In relation to this Notice of Motion it is assumed that this refers primarily to the costs associated with the physical location of the business, i.e. rent, rates and utilities. Even more specifically, those costs within this grouping that the Council can directly influence.
- 4.3 In practice there are relatively few of these costs that the Council can influence in any substantive way and none (which can be thought of) that the Council directly controls.
- 4.4 The Council is not directly landlord for any retail, office, commercial or industrial premises anywhere within the Vale. However, it is the joint owner of Aylesbury Vale Estates which does own a significant retail and commercial holding.
- 4.5 The vast majority of all Town Centre retail and commercial property is in private ownership over which the Council has no control. Many landlords are not local to the area and are London based. Unfortunately this is sometimes reflected in their interest in the town and their willingness to engage on issues such as the long term sustainability and viability of the town centre. However, the Town Centre Manager, when appropriate (see para 4.6 below) will also seek to develop a dialogue with landlords to encourage reasonable rents or rent reductions to support tenants. She has done this on several occasions at the request of an existing tenant when the rent or a proposed increase is likely to lead to closure. A proactive approach is also taken when a lease is about to expire or a unit becomes vacant. By explaining the vision and plans for the town, we try influence the choice of tenant to help provide the right mix of retailers.
- 4.6 An action is identified in the Aylesbury town centre improvement plan to extend our work with landlords by setting a landlord forum to build relationships and encourage a more sustainable and longer term approach to rent levels and tenancies.
- 4.7 Despite being joint owner AVDC is specifically prevented from manipulating Aylesbury Vale Estates to operate in any way which is non commercial in order to deliver the Council's aims and objectives. This was an important requirement by the private sector when AVE was created as they were concerned that the Council would erode or forgo income in order to further its non commercial agenda.
- 4.8 The Council cannot, therefore, influence or reduce the rental for any property within the ownership of Aylesbury Vale Estates unless it was originally designated as a social asset.
- 4.9 However, having rent paying tenants is clearly in the interests of AVE and it proactively works to retain and attract new tenants into its premises through competitive rental levels and rent free periods where appropriate.
- 4.10 Most individuals and organisations will associate the Council with Business Rates and the changes to the Local Government Finance system introduced from the 1 April 2013 imply via the title of Business Rate Retention that the Council has increased control over how much and who business rates are levied upon.

- 4.11 In practice this is deeply misleading. Business Rates are still fundamentally a national tax which are levied and controlled by central Government. The Government controls how much is payable, what increases are applied and whom has to pay the tax.
- 4.12 Aylesbury Vale District Council is the local collection agent on the Government's behalf. It cannot waive or reduce Business Rates at its discretion. However, the changes introduced from the 1 April 2013 do enable the Council to benefit in a small way from real business rate growth above the rate of inflation. Importantly, the Council is also financially penalised as a consequence of any reduction in business rate income.
- 4.13 The Council is therefore financially incentivised to grow new and maintain existing business rate income. However, even without this added incentive it has always been a Council priority, for many reasons, to improve the economic wellbeing of the Vale and to see the provision of healthy and vibrant town centres and high streets.
- 4.14 The constraining factor is that without direct control over business rates, rents or utilities it has only a few limited levers which it can exercise in order to achieve this.

5 The Council's broader support for Business and commitment to the town centre

- 5.1 One initiative which the Cabinet is currently developing to assist is a business rate discount scheme proposal which takes advantage of powers awarded under the Localism Act 2011 and the changes to the Local Government Finance system to help attract new businesses into the Vale and to improve the occupancy of Town Centres.
- 5.2 As a new initiative this will have a real cost to the Council but a Cabinet report is being prepared which sets out the options for wider consideration.
- 5.3 It is intended that if agreed this initiative will be just one element of a wider commitment to attract new businesses and retain existing employers within the Vale. Attracting and retaining employers is a key focus of the Council's Economic Development Team
- 5.4 Within Town Centres the Council has a long history of supporting the retail and business sectors. It does this in a number of ways:
- It is the major funder (£130,000 representing over 75% of total funding) of the Aylesbury Town Centre Partnership which employs a Town Centre Manager and events officer.
 - Delivery of the Town Centre Partnership business Plan is led primarily by the Town Centre Manager, Diana Fawcett, either with support or in liaison with a range of other AVDC, BCC and Town Council services.
 - The list attached as Appendix A gives an overview of some of the key activities undertaken:
- 5.5 In addition to the work carried out under the Town Centre Partnership business plan, AVDC is also:
- Investing significantly in improving the town centre to encourage more visitors/businesses by leading the redevelopment of the town - the theatre, Waitrose, Travelodge, new car parking and public realm.

- AVDC is now working with other partners to deliver the next phase of re-development which includes the planned Aylesbury Education Centre at the head of the canal basin and a phased mixed-use scheme for Waterside north.

Whilst not directly benefiting existing retailers this is a recognition that Aylesbury's success will be as a result of providing the right mix of retail, retailers, leisure and food and beverage establishments. Through creating the right environment and interest in the Town Centre it is hoped that the whole Town Centre can eventually be revitalised.

- Working with the commercial sector such as Grosvenor Estates to support improvements to the Friars Square Shopping Centre.
- Proactively promoting the town centre to secure new retailers and restaurants for the town.
- Reinvesting in the markets having taken back the management of the service from the private sector. Implementation of a new business plan to improve the markets and encourage more customers has already begun. The Annual Love Your Local Market fortnight and regular annual events eg Valentine's Day on the market are part of the promotion plan for the markets.
- Supporting the town centre trade by offering free parking at certain times in the run-up to Christmas.
- Leading the development and coordinating the delivery of the Aylesbury town improvement plan which for the first time sets out an agreed Vision for the town, principles to guide future development and an action plan to bring private and public sector delivery partners together.

6 Reasons for Recommendation

- 6.1 The report sets out that the contrary to the intention of the motion the Council in practice has little influence that it can exert in the areas included within the motion.
- 6.2 However, despite this the Council strongly recognises the value to the Vale and its residents of successful businesses and vibrant Town Centre and consequently is devoting significant resources in to improving conditions where it can.
- 6.3 Given this, Cabinet is requested to consider the report and make a recommendation to Council as to whether or not to support the motion.

7 Resource implications

- 7.1 These are set out within the report.

8 Response to Key Aims and Objectives

- 8.1 Improving business and Town Centres and both Corporate Plan priorities.

Supporting the Aylesbury Town Centre Partnerships and building communications with businesses

- Provides business to business briefings: weekly, monthly, quarterly, bi-yearly and assists others in networking
- Over 80 members in the partnership compared to five in 2010
- One stop shop for businesses – promotion, licensing, planning, waste disposal
- Close working with Chiltern Railways, Mix 96, BBC 3 Counties and Bucks Herald to promote the town
- Increase in social networking to promote the town

A clean and attractive town

- Improvements made along High Street, George Street & Market Square
- Cleaning: Bus station mural, War Memorial, seating
- Busking policy established
- Management and regulation of charity collectors
- Encourage outside street trading
- Design and erect window wraps for vacant units
- Identify and improve grot spots
- Removal of posters, illegal notices etc.
- Organise repainting of street furniture

A safe place

- Set up and on the Board for Aylesbury Business Against Crime
- Members of Aylesbury Neighbourhood Action Group
- Key player in the securing Purple Flag accreditation
- Set up and manage the Night time economy group
- Reinforce pedestrianisation in the upper High Street
- Work with the Police on town centre anti-social behaviour issues
- Support and work with the Chaplaincy and Street Angels teams

Support for local independent businesses

- Retail- lift off launched in September to support new independent business start ups
- Quarterly networking meetings
- Provide monthly updates about town centre information
- “Keep It Local” bags, flyers and decals distributed in conjunction with the Federation of Small Businesses

- Personal visits to traders affected by any developments/works outside their premises
- Flyers handed out promoting their individual business at key events
- A new project to attract, support and train brand new independent traders
- Work with independent traders to assist them in applying for and signing off a street trading license
- Free advertising of their events
- Help new independents source premises

Marketing and promoting the town

- 450 free events co-ordinated for 2013 with our team organising over 53 events.
- Production and distribution of monthly posters, 20,000 Event Guides, 47,000 Festive Fun leaflets, 27000 Aylesbury Alive leaflets
- Regular updates of town centre activities on social websites

**ECONOMY AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE –
WORK PROGRAMME 2013 – 2014**

Note:- for items pending meeting dates see last page

Date of meeting	Item	Reports due	Requested by	Purpose of Review (Responsible Officer / Member)	Expected Outcome	Relevant Cabinet Member
4/2/2013 Lead Officer Tracey Aldworth	Economic Development Strategy refresh and progress update including information on grants and business start-up help	22/1/2013	Committee	To allow scrutiny to comment on the strategy refresh and Action Plan (Mark Wathen)	To make recommendations to the Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Economic Development
4/2/2013 Lead Officer Tracey Aldworth	Skills provision – scoping report	22/1/2013	Committee	To set the scene leading to a review of skills provision at the meeting of 25/3/2013 (Mark Wathen)	For recommendations to be made regarding specific skills provision that satisfy the needs of the Vale	Cabinet Member for Economic Development
25/3/2013 Lead Officer Tracey Aldworth	Skills provision – Aylesbury Business Needs - update on latest findings and to hear from skills providers and users.	12/3/2013	Committee	To review the skill set requirements of Aylesbury Vale and how these skills would be provided (Mark Wathen)	For recommendations to be made regarding specific skills provision that satisfy the needs of the Vale	Cabinet Member for Economic Development
25/3/2013 Lead Officer Tracey Aldworth	Broadband delivery. Include input from BRAG	12/3/2013	Committee	To review an update of Broadband delivery. (Mark Wathen)	To make suggestions on any further action to be pursued.	Cabinet Member for Economic Development

Date of meeting	Item	Reports due	Requested by	Purpose of Review (Responsible Officer / Member)	Expected Outcome	Relevant Cabinet Member
4/6/2013 Lead Officer Tracey Aldworth	Aylesbury Vale Estates update	21/5/2013	Committee	To monitor the performance of the joint commercial property partnership (Jon McGinty)	1. Monitor performance 2. To make recommendation to the Cabinet Member, as appropriate	Cabinet Member for Economic Development
4/6/2013 Lead Officer Tracey Aldworth	Refresh and update of Olympic legacy programme	21/5/2013	Committee	To update and allow scrutiny to comment on the programme (Ian Barham)	To make recommendations to the Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Leisure
4/6/2013 Lead Officer Tracey Aldworth	Skills Provision – round up following the meeting of 25/3/2013	21/5/2013	Committee	To update and allow scrutiny to comment (Mark Wathen)	To make recommendations to the Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Economic Development
26/6/2013 Lead Officer Teresa Lane	To review the draft Improvement Plan for Aylesbury Town Centre	12/6/2013	Committee	To allow scrutiny to comment (Teresa Lane)	To make recommendations to the Cabinet Member	The Leader of the Council

Date of meeting	Item	Reports due	Requested by	Purpose of Review (Responsible Officer / Member)	Expected Outcome	Relevant Cabinet Member
3/9/2013 Lead Officer Tracey Aldworth	Skills Provision – to report on the findings of the Task and Finish Group following the meeting of 4/6/2013	20/8/2013	Committee	To discuss the presentation by BCC (Cllr Miss Lewis)	To make suggestions on further action that could be recommended to BCC	Cabinet Member for Economic Development
3/9/2013 Lead Officer Tracey Aldworth	Aylesbury Vale Estates Business Plan update	20/8/2013	Committee	To monitor the performance of the joint commercial property partnership (Jon McGinty or Maria Memoli)	3. Monitor performance 4. To make recommendation to the Cabinet Member, as appropriate	Cabinet Member for Economic Development
					5.	

Date of meeting	Item	Reports due	Requested by	Purpose of Review (Responsible Officer / Member)	Expected Outcome	Relevant Cabinet Member
28/10/2013 Lead Officer Tracey Aldworth	Skills update report following working group meeting on 23/9/13	15/10/2013	Committee		To make recommendations to the Cabinet Member/Officers	Cabinet Members for Economic Development and Strategic Planning
28/10/2013 Lead Officer Tracey Aldworth	Rural Economy, look at implications of planning rules, impact on the economy, diversification uses and needs	15/10/2013	Committee	To review whether AVDC is doing all it can to promote and give help to expansion of the rural economy. (Mark Wathen/John Byrne)	To make suggestions on any further action to be pursued.	Cabinet Member for Economic Development
28/10/2013 Lead Officer Tracey Aldworth	Update on LEPs	15/10/2013	Committee		To make recommendations to the Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Economic Development

Date of meeting	Item	Reports due	Requested by	Purpose of Review (Responsible Officer / Member)	Expected Outcome	Relevant Cabinet Member
<p>11/12/2013 Lead Officer Tracey Aldworth</p>	<p>Update on Aylesbury Town Centre Partnership and Management of the Town Centre. Update on usage and plans for the Markets. How the findings of the Mary Portas review might be linked to Aylesbury Vale's villages.</p>	<p>26/11/2013</p>	<p>Committee</p>	<p>To look at how Aylesbury Town Centre is performing (Diana Fawcett & Teresa Lane)</p>	<p>To make suggestions on any further action that they would like to see pursued.</p>	<p>Cabinet Member for Civic Amenities</p>

Date of meeting	Item	Reports due	Requested by	Purpose of Review (Responsible Officer / Member)	Expected Outcome	Relevant Cabinet Member
29/1/2014 Lead Officer Tracey Aldworth	Notice of Motion – Support for Town Centre Businesses	14/1/2014	Council	To recommend to Cabinet and then Council of how this should be taken forward. (Andrew Small)	To make recommendations to Cabinet	Councillor Neil Blake

Date of meeting	Item	Reports due	Requested by	Purpose of Review (Responsible Officer / Member)	Expected Outcome	Relevant Cabinet Member
17/3/2014 Lead Officer Tracey Aldworth	Update on Broadband provision for Aylesbury Vale	4/3/2014	Committee	To update and allow scrutiny to comment (Mark Wathen)	To make suggestions on any further action to be pursued.	Cabinet Member for Economic Development
17/3/2014 Lead Officer Tracey Aldworth	Inward Investment in the Vale – Steps being taken to deliver employment on sites already planned.	4/3/2014	Committee	To update and allow scrutiny to comment (Mark Wathen)	To make suggestions on any further action to be pursued.	Cabinet Member for Economic Development
17/3/2014 Lead Officer Tracey Aldworth	Major Employment Sites, including an update on Silverstone growth	4/3/2014	Committee	To look at designated sites and how to get them up and running and the planned growth of Silverstone	To make recommendations to the Cabinet Member/Officers	Cabinet Members for Economic Development and Strategic Planning

				(John Byrne)		
Date of meeting	Item	Reports due	Requested by	Purpose of Review (Responsible Officer / Member)	Expected Outcome	Relevant Cabinet Member
3/6/2014 Lead Officer Tracey Aldworth		20/5/2014				

Date of meeting	Item	Reports due	Requested by	Purpose of Review (Responsible Officer / Member)	Expected Outcome	Relevant Cabinet Member
3/9/2014 Lead Officer Tracey Aldworth	No items at present	19/8/2014				

Date of meeting	Item	Reports due	Requested by	Purpose of Review (Responsible Officer / Member)	Expected Outcome	Relevant Cabinet Member
21/10/2014 Lead Officer Tracey Aldworth	No items at present	7/10/2014				

Date of meeting	Item	Reports due	Requested by	Purpose of Review (Responsible Officer / Member)	Expected Outcome	Relevant Cabinet Member
8/12/2014 Lead Officer Tracey Aldworth	Budget review	25/11/2014	Committee	To look at 2015/16 budget proposals within the Committee's remit (Andrew Small)	To make recommendations to Cabinet	Cabinet Member for Resources

Date of meeting	Item	Reports due	Requested by	Purpose of Review (Responsible Officer / Member)	Expected Outcome	Relevant Cabinet Member
21/1/2015 Lead Officer Tracey Aldworth	No items at present	6/1/2015				

Date of meeting	Item	Reports due	Requested by	Purpose of Review (Responsible Officer / Member)	Expected Outcome	Relevant Cabinet Member
17/3/2015 Lead Officer Tracey Aldworth	No items at present	3/3/2015				

Items pending –

Future of LEPs

Skills/Business Development Seminar

The Development of East – West Rail (to include BCC)

Utilisation of redundant airfields

Growth of Westcott Business Park

Businesses that have been lost from the Vale and reasons why.

Inward Investment in the Vale – Steps Being Taken To Deliver Employment on Sites Already Planned

Aylesbury Vale Visitor Economy Action Plan