

Economy and Business Development Scrutiny Committee

20 JANUARY 2016

PRESENT: Councillor P Strachan (Chairman); Councillors A Southam (Vice-Chairman), B Adams, A Christensen, M Hawkett, T Hunter-Watts, P Irwin, C Poll and W Whyte

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors C Adams, C Branston and H Mordue.

1. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 October 2016 were agreed as a correct record.

2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. AYLESBURY TOWN CENTRE PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

The Economy and Business Development Scrutiny Committee received a presentation from the Aylesbury Town Centre Manager. The presentation, which is attached to these minutes, provided an update on the work of the Aylesbury Town Centre Partnership. After the presentation, members raised concerns about illegal car parking in Kingsbury, and asked whether this was caused by car parks in the area being at capacity. It was noted that planters had been placed in the area, which had stopped some parking. A Public Space Protection Order had been applied for and would hopefully be in place by the Summer. This would enable on the stop fines for cars parked illegally. Members were also informed that, while some of the car parks located in the centre of Aylesbury reached capacity, there was plenty of parking available within a short walk of the town centre.

The Council had previously received criticism of the level of subsidy provided to Waterside Theatre. It was asked what impact the theatre had had on the town centre. The Town Centre Manager stated that the theatre was a major pull for new tenants, especially restaurants. Updates were sent to restaurants weekly outlining the schedule for the theatre, and this impacted on the staffing arrangements for the restaurants, as there was a noticeable difference in the footfall in the town centre when performances were on.

There had been a small increase in parking charges in the town centre recently, but it was noted that there had been no negative impact on the use of the town centre, and that footfall had increased. Members were also advised that the town centre partnership did not advertise on railway hoardings as they were very expensive. They would work with them for advertising for events, such as the Roald Dahl festival.

It had been noticed that there was an increase of homeless people in the town centre. The Town Centre Partnership was working proactively with the police, and such individuals would be moved on.

Businesses could make financial contributions to the partnership. The contributions range from £30 to £3000 per year depending on the size of the business. Many businesses also provided in kind support to the partnership. Discussions had taken place with Buckinghamshire County Council regarding planning consent and a change of use for the Travel Information Centre by the bus station, but these talks had stalled. It was suggested that the partnership work with the County Council on their review of signage in the area.

Members of the Committee extended their thanks to the Aylesbury Town Centre Manager for her attendance, and

RESOLVED

That the Aylesbury Town Centre Partnership Update be noted.

4. QUARTERLY ECONOMIC UPDATE

The Business Relationship Officer provided the Economy and Business Development Scrutiny Committee with a quarterly economic update. Members were informed that, as part of the Nov 2015 Autumn Statement and Spending Review, three areas in Aylesbury Vale had been designated as Enterprise Zones. These were Westcott, Woodlands and Silverstone. Only 18 Enterprise Zones had been designated nationally. The Chancellor's Autumn Statement and Spending Review also confirmed that the Local Growth Fund would remain at £12bn between 2015-16 and 2020-21, which meant that indicative Growth Deal allocations and core funding by Government for Local Enterprise Partnerships were confirmed, subject to being matched locally.

Members were advised that the last quarter had been generally strong for the Vale. Deprivation was low across Buckinghamshire, and Aylesbury was ranked 44th least deprived of the 326 local authorities in England. Gross median full-time earnings in Aylesbury Vale were below the national level for a second consecutive year. Total employment in Aylesbury Vale rose to 79,400 in 2014, which was an increase of 5.2% over the year, and it was noted that this was the fastest rate of growth in Buckinghamshire. 1,060 homes were completed in the year to Q3 2015, representing 1.4% of existing stock, which was the 9th highest rate among England's 326 local authority districts. The unemployment rate in Aylesbury vale stood at 3.8% for the year ending June 2015, and the claimant count fell to 0.6% of working age residents. Councillors were also informed that business 'births' rose and business 'deaths' fell, which led to Aylesbury Vale reaching its highest ever business population.

It was noted that work was being undertaken into the implications of the three Enterprise Zones, and this would be reported at a future meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the Quarterly Economic Update be noted.

5. RESPONDING TO BUSINESS NEEDS

The Economic Growth Manager gave a presentation outlining how the Council would respond to business needs. It was noted that the work included attracting and supporting increased levels of business investment and growth, improving business productivity and supporting the development of a more attractive commercial business environment. This was achieved by working through and with a range of national, regional and local stakeholders and business intermediaries and across the Council to provide insight into business needs and how to effectively support them. Responding to business needs would help to increase business confidence in Aylesbury Vale.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be noted.

6. INWARD INVESTMENT STRATEGY

Councillors received a report outlining the Council's proposed future approach to Inward Investment. It was noted that Aylesbury Vale District Council would with one 'joined up' strategy and action plan with other strategic stakeholders across Buckinghamshire, and would maximise the resources available through UKTI and SEMLEP, BTVLEP, BBF and other commercial intermediaries. Following a meeting with economic development stakeholders in December 2015, it was agreed that the strategies should be aligned and a joint action plan across all areas of economic development related activity around the issues of business survival and growth, skills 'fit for purpose' and infrastructure.

In the Autumn Statement 2015, the Chancellor announced the approval of BTVLEP and the three sites in Aylesbury Vale which made up Buckinghamshire's Enterprise Zone bid. Enterprise Zones were noted to be an important part of the Government's programme to devolve responsibility for leadership of local growth and would provide a powerful tool for Local Enterprise Partnerships to develop their local economy. The three designated Enterprise Zones were at Silverstone Park, Westcott Venture Park and at the Woodlands site. Work had been undertaken with MEPC and the Westcott site regarding attracting businesses to the site. There was also growth in existing companies at the site, and it was noted that there was business confidence both in the area and in the Council.

It was questioned what work was taking place to ensure that business needs were met in terms of education and the provision of desirable skill sets. It was, in particular, suggested that Officers engage with the University of Buckingham. Arla was known to bring staff from other Arla locations, and Members were advised that the skills provider for Arla globally was in talks with University College Aylesbury Vale. UCAV may be able to provide support in specialist training, such as for food technologists. It was also suggested that UCAV and local careers advisors engage with BTVLEP and SEMLEPs Skills Hub regarding local needs.

It was important to ensure that the correct types of property for employment use were available, and Members were advised that the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan would look at types of employment sites. Developers would also be made aware of what type of property or site had a higher level of demand.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.