

Economy and Business Development Scrutiny Committee

1 JUNE 2016

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

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor S Bowles

APOLOGIES: Councillor T Hunter-Watts

1. TEMPORARY CHANGES TO MEMBERSHIP

There were none.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the minutes of 15 March 2016 be approved as a correct record.

3. STRATEGIC ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

Members were given an update on the proposed economic development priorities for AVDC, following a progress review and refresh of the AVDC Economic Development Strategy 2011-2014 and an ongoing review of the BTVLEP Strategic Economic Plan priorities from 2016 onwards.

The report circulated to Members summarised the key economic development priorities and focus for action.

In December 2015 an economic development stakeholder meeting had been held and chaired by Councillor Steve Bowles, where it was agreed to progress and align the joint economic development strategies of AVDC, BTVLEP and BBF, helping to create a common action plan. This had been intended to cover all areas of economic Development related activity including:

- Business investment, survival and growth
- Skills “fit for purpose” and
- Underpinning infrastructure

A diagram setting out the proposed focus for the Economic Development team in future subject to any change during the service reviews had been attached as an appendix to the officers report.

The immediate outcomes from that meeting were summarised in the officers report to committee as was the progress made since then.

Updates were also given on the following:-

Aylesbury Vale Enterprise Zone (Silverstone Park, Westcott, Arla Woodlands)

Paul Spooner, Government Advisor on Enterprise Zones had visited the above sites on 15 April. The outline Heads of Terms Agreement between AVDC, BTVLEP and other stakeholders had been agreed on 10 May 2016. It was proposed that the Council's Economic Development Team work closely with BTVLEP as an integral part of the

Buckinghamshire Enterprise Zone operational team focusing on marketing and business development. There would be a specific focus on Motorsports and High Performance Technologies, Space Propulsion/UAVs, Healthcare and the Food and Drink manufacturing sectors and working alongside Buckinghamshire Business First, Government bodies such as DCLG, BIS, Innovate UK, UK Space Agency and Space Catapult, the Automotive Investment Organisation, the MIA, UKTI, and the Universities and Research Councils.

Other Key Employment Sites

The Economic Development team had been engaged with major employment sites in the Vale in addition to those now granted Enterprise Zone Status. The key activity for the team was in attracting and retaining businesses in the Vale as it came under increasing competition from nearby locations. The team would be working closely with the Development Management team on major commercial applications. The team had recently met with Aylesbury Vale Estates (AVE) and would be working with them and their agents to review the status of lettings and available space, sharing market intelligence and enquiries.

The team were also working with Forward plans to help with key employment site information and the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan process. In summary the Economic Development team worked with agents, developers, Forward Planning and Development Management to:-

- Promote and market schemes
- Flexible planning approach
- Series of developer meetings, and
- Capturing up-to-date key site information

Inward Investment and Sector Information

Since January AVDC had agreed with BTVLEP/BBF that the process for supporting ongoing aftercare of companies relocating to the Vale would be agreed on an individual case basis in line with AVDC's business engagement strategy and the evolving top 100 companies that the Council wished to engage with. More information was attached as an appendix to the report.

As the Enterprise Zones incorporated key sectors, it would allow AVDC to continue to work with One Team Bucks on sector development initiatives. For example the Council were working on a food and drink sector event for 2017 and were an active participant and sponsor of the Grand Prix week business event.

There was to be a refreshed investment website to include a whole approach in the use of social media in targeting inward investors and promoting successes.

Business Engagement

A list of an initial 100 companies had been compiled based on employee size and growth potential. A review would be conducted monthly on the best method of engagement. This would be built into the work programme. An annual overview of the key issues and outcomes would also be produced and this would be used to help inform and influence future activity.

Presentations had been made to Lloyds Bank, Handelsbank and Metro Bank by the team which would be increasingly important when the equity/loan funds from the LEPs

come on stream. An appendix regarding this had been attached to the report as an appendix.

Skills and Motivation

It was acknowledged that although the team did not lead on skills, a great deal of intelligence could be gathered from engagement with businesses and the enterprise zones to inform future interventions.

Ongoing work would be in supporting the new and emerging centres of excellence and innovation centres, following the launch of the EU funded centres to collaborate with businesses, the research base and Government. This would assist with inward investment, higher level manufacturing and engineering apprenticeships in the core areas of healthcare, high performance technologies and space; for example:-

- Bucks New University is involved in a rehabilitation and healthcare innovation hub which will link with Woodlands;
- The National Space catapult is involved in a Space Innovation centre bid at Westcott; and
- Silverstone was looking to develop further innovation centre space, which would be further stimulated by the launch of the Silverstone Cluster report.

The team were also exploring ways around how a science, technology and engineering and maths facility could be developed in Bucks, in which RAF Halton may have a role.

Infrastructure

AVDC was represented on SEMLEP/BTVLEP groups that were involved in determining the priority infrastructure requirements in terms of transport, including the Aylesbury Town Centre transformation and other infrastructure which will help underpin the effective execution of the final adopted Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan. Working groups such as Connected Counties, the Strategic Alliance and the Economic Heartland, Bucks Advantage, Aylesbury Town Centre Partnership and Midlands Connect/Midlands Engine all supported the future infrastructure endeavour.

Members commented on and supported a number of issues, including:-

- Some Members had raised concerns that AVDC were pressing ahead with a number of Vale Commerce commercial activities which they felt had not been properly scrutinised. It was felt imperative that both the Scrutiny committee and the Audit committee were fully involved with any such activities.
- Clarification was needed on who had bought the estate at Silverstone previously owned by Eddie Jordan and how many units were now in use.
- It would be appreciated if Members of the committee could get regular updates on what was happening at Silverstone, Westcott, Woodlands and other enterprise zones etc.
- Item 4.5 in the officer's report related to Skills and Innovation. It was felt that there was a significant skills gap relating to the building trades, the NHS, agriculture for local food consumption and engineering. There had been some interest in creating a sports village within the Vale. However, an update on Skills was given in the next item to committee.
- It was noted that the Aylesbury Town Centre manager had been in discussions with the Kingsbury retailers with the aim of revamping the area and encouraging more independent shops to the area.

- Work had been started on a food and drink online community which could potentially be developed by IncGen, not dissimilar to Not on the High Street/Just Eat.
- It was hoped a food and drink festival would be held in 2017, similar to that already held in Towcester/Northampton and possibly complement a Garden/Homes event that Limecart had been considering.
- BT/Broadband – Members had raised concerns on where this was heading. It was explained that that the Council were still waiting for a response from BT on connected counties before a decision on how much the Council could invest was made.
- A bid had been made for a Healthcare Hub from EU funding. There was an opportunity through Bucks New University to start to invest in nurse training for use in new telehealth techniques such as remote assistance via the internet etc. Royal Bucks Hospital have clearly stated that they were in need of a number of specialist nurses. Members sought clarification on how much involvement there was from Stoke Mandeville Hospital or the local NHS trust.
- It was acknowledged that Aylesbury Vale had one of the biggest growths of small businesses anywhere in the UK.
- There was concern over the loss of employment space particularly in Aylesbury Town which was being turned into housing. The Enterprise Zones could be used for future employment space. However, there were a number of vacant offices which if filled could increase the footfall in the town.
- Keep linking up with the planning team over developments.
- A jobs and opportunities fair should be looked into to encourage people into the areas where there were skills shortages.
- It would also be useful to have a speaker at a future meeting of the committee, ideally someone who was local and had made a success at recruiting locally.

RESOLVED –

That Members noted the report.

4. SKILLS UPDATE REPORT

Mena Caldbeck provided the Committee with an update on skills and the progress made since the last update in October 2015.

At the previous update she reported that one in three businesses had reported a skills gap, which included specific skills relating to technical or practical skills or IT skills and that businesses across the Vale were reporting difficulties recruiting skilled people.

Members at the committee in October 2015 had received presentations from Ian Harper, Managing Director from University Campus Aylesbury Vale (UCAV), Ruth Farwell and Jackie Campbell from Bucks Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership (BTVLEP) Skills Board and had also received testimonial evidence from David Handley, a director of Thame Workholding.

Following the last meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, the Chairman had written to Jackie and Ruth at BTVLEP Skills Employability Programme highlighting the Council's support for the Board's ambitions and the intention to work more closely with them and other local partners to ensure there would be an improvement between businesses, local schools and colleges so that young people would be aware of the opportunities available to them. The Chairman had also written to Ian Harper at UCAV in support of the UCAV's aims, and David Handley with the offer of support to provide engagement with the Employability Skills Board. The Economic Development Team had since met with Ruth and Jackie at BTVLEP.

The Economic Development Team had drawn up a list of recommendations to take to the BTVLEP Employability Skills Board to ensure the Council supported employers and young people for the future economy and this has been attached as an appendix to the officers report. The Economic Development team were actively engaged in several of the developments already underway as listed in the appendix.

The Council would like to address the issue of Science Technology Engineering Maths (STEM) skills at Higher Apprenticeship level availability and also support those people in their 20s and 30s in the manufacturing sector.

A number of recommendations included in the appendix are being carried forward by BTVLEP Skills Hub and are supported by AVDC including:-

- Skills Hub – This included the promotion of the Hub and its activities with employers, in particular the OppsinBucks web portal www.oppsinbucks.org. Awareness of the Hub had been raised in number of ways including an article in Aylesbury Vale Times.
- Enterprise Advisors – Representatives of businesses were being encouraged to become Enterprise Advisors to engage with schools and colleges to work with the senior leadership so that young people had full awareness of all career choices and options locally.
- The Local Careers and Enterprise Company – This company was independent of Government and would focus on young people aged between 12 and 18. BTVLEP had invested in the company to address the poor “work readiness” skills of young people which it was felt the current careers advice system didn’t effectively achieve.
- The Bucks Skills Show, July 2016 – hosted by BTVLEP at University Centre Aylesbury Vale would provide an opportunity for employers to promote their companies and the diverse careers opportunities on offer to young people and their parents in Bucks. The event was being held on Saturday 2 July 2016. Members were encouraged to pass on information about this to any interested businesses they knew of and to others in their wards.
- University Centre Aylesbury Vale (UCAV) – the Economic Development team had met with Ian Harper at UCAV to ascertain how the team could work with and support the aims of UCAV and businesses in the area. It had been agreed that a joint group of stakeholders in support of UCAV; “Friends of UCAV”, would be set up.
- Unilever/ARLA University Technical College (UTC) Bid – The Economic Development team had recently supported Unilever’s bid for the creation of a University Technical College (UTC) at Colworth Park, in Bedfordshire. This would help to support the food and drink manufacturing and processing companies and SMEs in the Vale. Further information was given in the officers report to committee. More information on the bid should be known by October.
- Local Area Reviews – as part of the Government’s devolution plans, Area reviews were being undertaken to establish whether local institutions were financially resilient, were able to offer high quality education and training based on the needs of learners and employers within the local area and support the need to move towards fewer, larger, more resilient and efficient colleges. This would include the need for greater specialisation. Aylesbury College was

currently undergoing this process with the support of SEMLEP and BTVLEP to hopefully deliver some of the three million apprenticeships by 2020 as targeted by Government. There was a need to ensure that the colleges were offering the right courses for the workplace.

It was confirmed that success was measured against case studies. The age group that was being targeted was 14 to 21 possibly up to 24. Mentoring was part of the offer to young people. The main skills gap was in technical and marketing.

Members felt there was a need to possibly target some young people at an even younger age, i.e. 11, before they became disillusioned with school. The local Careers Enterprise was looking to address that problem. It was acknowledged that not all schools provide good careers advice. Work in secondary schools could perhaps include extended work experience

It would be useful to have an employer speak to the committee that uses apprenticeships effectively. A couple of suggested companies were given to the Economic Development team to contact.

Members also suggested perhaps holding careers evenings on a regular basis although it was acknowledged that this was mostly an area that Bucks County Council should cover. There was concern on how to get young people in the rural communities in touch with job centres etc.

The Chairman thanked the Economic Development team for their work in achieving all of the above.

RESOLVED –

That Members noted the report.