

# **Economy and Business Development Scrutiny Committee**

**31 OCTOBER 2016**

**PRESENT:** Councillor P Strachan (Chairman); Councillors B Adams, Branston, A Christensen, P Cooper (In place of T Hunter-Watts), M Hawkett and C Poll

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors P Irwin, J Ward and W Whyte

## **1. TEMPORARY CHANGES TO MEMBERSHIP**

Councillor P Cooper substituted for Councillor T Hunter-Watts

## **2. MINUTES**

RESOLVED –

That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2016 be approved as a correct record subject to the following amendments:-

That in paragraph 6 of the item relating to Waterside North the town of Oxford should replace Hemel Hempstead.

Also, the item relating to Aylesbury Vale Broadband (AVB) was in the opinion of one of the committee members not satisfactorily answered, therefore at the next update on AVB the Chairman will repeat the question to the presenter.

## **3. ENTERPRISE ZONES**

Members were provided with an update from representatives of the Buckinghamshire Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership (BTVLEP) in relation to the Aylesbury Vale Enterprise Zone (AVEZ).

In late 2015 BTVLEP made a submission with the support of AVDC for an Aylesbury Vale Enterprise Zone which was accepted by central Government. This reflected the partnership working between AVDC, BCC, BTVLEP, Silverstone Park, Westcott Venture Park and Arla. It was recognised that enterprise zones were an important part of the Government's programme for devolving responsibility for leadership of local growth to Local Enterprise Partnerships to develop the local economy.

Businesses that based themselves in enterprise zones could access up to 100% business rate discount worth up to £275,000 per annum over a five year period for qualifying occupiers. The benefit could only be offered up to March 2022, from which point it would taper off until March 2027. Enterprise zones could also benefit from 100% retention of business rate growth for the LEPs to reinvest in development in the zones. There were further benefits regarding business rates for the LEP, Local Authorities and landowners which were outlined in the report to the committee.

The Aylesbury Vale Enterprise Zone comprised:-

- Westcott Venture Park – only the Space Propulsion element of the site formed part of the enterprise zone. Westcott had both the recognition and support of the European and UK Space Agencies and BTVLEP had been working actively with the agencies regarding plans for investment on the site. It was also hoped that a major space engineering company would be locating to Westcott by March 2017.

- Silverstone – only the undeveloped site K formed part of the enterprise zone. It was hoped that with enterprise zone recognition, development of the site would be accelerated and be able to attract businesses earlier than normal.
- Woodlands – there were both areas on consented and unconsented land. The consented area of land covered the Arla development and the unconsented area was being led by Buckinghamshire Advantage. It was intended that this site would focus on food and drink, health and care related activities. A planning application was being prepared for the non Arla part of the site and would include both residential and employment uses.

LEPs were the governing body with responsibility for overseeing the development of enterprise zones but they were expected to work closely with the local authorities in which the zones were based. Each site would have a flexible Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that should last until 2020. The MoU needed to be signed off by BTVLEP, the landowners and the local authorities.

The Aylesbury Vale Enterprise Zone Strategic Board would manage the progress of the zone and would comprise local authorities in whose area the zone was based, landowners and a private sector LEP Board member.

The Board would be responsible for:-

- Ensuring that the Aylesbury Vale Enterprise Zone was able to maximise the potential of this location to benefit Buckinghamshire;
- Managing Delivery of the strategic vision;
- Overseeing marketing and co-ordination of development across the enterprise zone sites; and
- Monitoring the performance of the enterprise zones against key measures including the fiscal and employment outcomes to be secured across the zone.

Michael Dillon, a chartered surveyor with extensive property development, inward investment and enterprise zone experience had been appointed, on a temporary basis, to the role of enterprise zone manager.

Central Government were now asking that MoUs should be agreed for each enterprise zone. The Westcott MoU had been agreed in principle with Rockspring and it was hoped that it would be ready for signature at the next AVEZ Strategic Board meeting. The Silverstone MoU, once amended, would be forwarded to MEPC's legal team for review and sign off.

A Board paper was being prepared by the enterprise zone manager to identify the methods by which the first stage of development of Aylesbury Woodlands could be brought forward and in-house development appraisals of the site were being undertaken to establish appropriate phasing and the highest and best value uses for the site.

Members enquired if the Arla Woodlands site would include updating the main road around the area and were advised that the road would be built in the initial stages of the development to enable the infrastructure to be constructed.

Members asked how BTVLEP's reports would be presented to Councils and how they would measure success. Members were informed that BTVLEP had applied to the Government and had made a successful bid in order for the zone to be granted. Aylesbury Vale was one of twelve areas in the country that had applied. The reports were shared and kept-up-to-date regularly as AVDC was an accountable body.

Members were concerned about the roads around Westcott being used as a rat-run to Thame and surrounding areas. They asked if anything would be done to alleviate the problem when work started on the new Enterprise Zone. Members were informed that there were no details at that time and it was the responsibility of the landowner to specify what infrastructure they wished to put in place. However no major problems regarding traffic on the A41 had been foreseen.

Members questioned the representatives over what challenges they were worried about and how they were marketing the Enterprise Zones. Members were told that the Enterprise Zones had got off to a phenomenal start and it was a challenge to keep up that level of momentum. A growth hub had been developed to work together on a marketing strategy.

Members were concerned that the discounted business rate scheme linked to the Enterprise Zones would mean that AVDC would lose revenue. Members were informed that over the 25 year period they should be better off financially as a proportion of the rates would be redistributed back to the Councils.

Members asked what was attracting businesses to these areas. They were advised that there was a resilient business economy in these areas, particularly strong in high performance engineering at the Westcott site. Significant investment in businesses with financial incentives also helps to attract them.

RESOLVED –

That the latest position on progress as outlined in the report and the presentation given by Bucks Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership be noted.

#### **4. TOWN CENTRE PARTNERSHIP**

Members were given an update on the work of the Aylesbury Town Centre Partnership.

The partnership was a thriving organisation which supported the Aylesbury town centre business community and helped to improve and promote the town to encourage more footfall and investment.

The Town Centre team consisted of three part time members of staff, including the Markets Manager, who delivered the business plan on behalf of and worked with the Partnership members.

The Partnership was currently financed from a number of sources with AVDC being the majority funder.

The Town Centre Manager presented a summary of the Partnership achievements over the previous twelve months and highlighted key elements to be included in the business plan for the forthcoming year. These included:-

- Maintaining a dynamic partnership
- Supporting & enabling business development
- Environmental enhancements
- Managing & developing Markets
- Creating vibrant public spaces & managing/promoting their use
- Influencing the future development of the town and supporting the businesses involved

Members raised concerns about people parking on and around Kingsbury creating difficulty for public exhibitions and entertainment. Members were advised that the PSPO had taken a while to come through so strategically placed planters were currently deterring people from parking on the square but not working particularly well. It was also stated that the Town Centre team would need training before the PSPO was put into place. The closing off of the upper part of the High Street was successful and been used for various activities.

Members asked about the refurbishment of Sainsbury's, the use of the old cinema on Cambridge Street and who was taking over the former BHS retail space. They were informed that the refurbishment of Sainsbury's in the Town Centre was also tied in to their Gatehouse development. It was anticipated that they would be putting in an application before the end of December 2016. Churchill homes were responsible for the old cinema site and development was slow. There were some retailers interested in the former BHS retail unit but it was too early to say what was occurring and who had shown interest.

Members enquired about what facilities were available to Teenagers in Aylesbury. Members were informed that Aylesbury was above average for these types of facilities compared to other towns of a similar size. The current facilities consisted of cinema, swimming, tennis, skate parks, bowling, Rogue racing, youth groups and under 18 nights at various pubs in the town. It was stated that any operator who might come forward with other leisure facilities such as an ice rink or climbing wall would be welcomed. Currently under development was a youth market in conjunction with local Schools, Colleges and Universities along with Youth groups such as Young Enterprise. A new app was also being developed with and for young people to help promote the town for their age group.

Members asked about the retail food outlets along the canal underneath the University and the updating of the Aylesbury arm of the canal. The Members were advised that the restaurant space had not yet been taken up and that it was a challenge integrating the canal with the Town Centre. However this was something that they were working on and various possibilities were being explored in conjunction with the owners of that area.

Members suggested hosting a food festival in the Market Square. They were informed that this had been examined but the lack of power outlets, space and length on the Market Square posed a problem. This however was a possibility in the newly proposed public area in Waterside North.

Members also commented on how hard working and enthusiastic the Town Centre Manager and her team were and asked if they let other people know about their activities. Members were advised that Mix 96 and the Bucks Herald received regular updates about their progress and events in the town centre.

RESOLVED –

Members noted the work of the Aylesbury Town Centre Partnership and its plans for the next twelve months.