

Progress report for Improvement and Review Commission meeting on September 15 2014 from Councillor Tony Green, Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Regeneration

Executive Summary

My Portfolio covers two main areas of the Council's work:

- (1) Regeneration projects, which covers the use of the Council's land and property assets; and
- (2) Economic development, which includes the Council's contribution (not planning) to the wider economic development needs of the District.

The context to our work has changed over time in response to the changing economic operating conditions of the District and the Council. This includes an improving economic outlook for Wycombe District, as well as the development of two other organisations with a local focus on economic development and regeneration, namely:

- (1)** Bucks (Thames Valley) Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), which is the conduit through which Government now allocates various funds for infrastructure, economic development and, from 2015/16, skills. Support has been provided to the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive, who sit on the LEP Board and Bucks Advantage (its delivery arm). Work has been undertaken to assist with the production of the Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) for Buckinghamshire. This included a series of 'Asks' of Government. The plan was submitted to Government in March and funding has been secured for Buckinghamshire. The LEP will be giving a presentation on its work at the Members' Seminar on 7 October 2014.
- (2) Bucks Business First (BBF), which undertakes economic development activities on behalf of Buckinghamshire County Council. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed with Bucks Business First to ensure that complementary activities are undertaken.

The economic situation continues to improve and currently,

- Wycombe District is a £4bn economy
- 9,400 businesses are active in Wycombe District, employing 93,800 people, an increase of 155 businesses since 2012;
- Unemployment continues to fall, with the claimant count at June 2014 being 1,559 people (1.4%), down from 2,520(2.3%) in June 2012.
- Experian Local market forecasts estimate that there will be 103,400 people in employment in Wycombe by March 2021

The Council's approach has therefore evolved to have a greater focus on inward investment, town centres, business support (including business breakfast events) and profiling the benefits and success of the District's business community. We have sought to work with other organisations to complement, not duplicate, efforts on economic development and regeneration and prioritise our spending accordingly.

On regeneration, the Council has actively progressed a number of major projects, including Handy Cross Hub ('HXH'), a new sports and leisure centre; Hughenden Quarter ('HQ') and Cressex Island developments, amongst others. The strategy has been to:

- Maximise the use of the Council's land and property assets to stimulate economic growth;
- Ensure the Council has modern fit-for-purposes facilities; and
- Maximise financial return to the Council and seek to create revenue streams to assist with the Council's overall financial situation.

The Council's target of creating up to 2,000 new /retained jobs by 2016, is on course to be exceeded, with a potential 3,300 jobs being identified. (see Appendix to this report)

Detailed below are supporting details for both areas of my portfolio.

Economic Development and Regeneration

The Council's three year Economic Development Growth Strategy and Tactical Plan (EDGS and TP) was agreed by Cabinet in March 2012, following valuable input of the Improvement and Review Commission's report and recommendations.

The headline measure, as stated in the Council's Corporate Plan, is the creation of up to 2,000 new/retained jobs by 2016.

There are three objectives being delivered under the Economic Development Growth Strategy and Tactical Plan, which is funded from Local Authority Business Growth Incentive Scheme (LABGI) and a core annual revenue budget:

Objective 1 – Encourage inward investment

Objective 2 – Tackle the skills agenda

Objective 3 – Retain existing businesses and develop new businesses

Objective 1: Encourage Inward Investment

This objective is about promoting Wycombe District as a location for business. This includes the promotion of the key sectors in the district to attract other companies in these sectors. This is a targeted service to complement and support national programmes (e.g. United Kingdom Trade and Industry) and local activity (from Bucks Local Enterprise Partnership and Bucks Business First) rather than a general approach. It is also about

facilitating the creation of new jobs through planning permissions and development schemes.

Summary of activity

- **Growing Places Fund: allocation for HXH and HQ:** Wycombe was allocated £2m from the LEP administered Growing Places Fund for Handy Cross Hub and £1.3m for Hughenden Quarter.
- **HXH works:** Construction has commenced at Handy Cross Hub of the new Sports and Leisure Centre, Waitrose store, Coachway Park & Ride and on-site infrastructure / landscaping. Work to attract business occupiers to the consented offices started this year. A lease has been agreed with Waitrose supermarket, with the store programmed to open in 2015. The lease agreement represents a significant revenue source for the Council. Discussions have taken place with National Express and the two M40 coach operators regarding services to the new Coachway, with a favourable response being given. Ahead of open marketing, discussions are ongoing with an operator for the 150 bed hotel and with named business occupiers. Stakeholders are being kept up to date on the works via the website, dedicated newsletter, Twitter account and blog. A webcam allows the monitoring of live progress on site.
- **Cressex Island.** The Council facilitated and granted planning permission for new concept Next Home & Garden store. It is programmed to open in Spring 2015. The development is expected to create around 95 new jobs. Discussions continue regarding the use of the remainder of the Cressex island site.
- **John Lewis expansion:** the Council granted planning permission for expansion of John Lewis store to enable clothes retailing, which opened in autumn 2013. This created approximately 200 new jobs. As freeholders, the Council negotiated a substantial financial settlement for a lease variation and will benefit from increased turnover rent.
- **Hughenden Quarter re-development:** work has started on redevelopment of this former industrial site. This will include a new Spine Road, Continuing Care Retirement Community, further student accommodation and small business units. A report is being submitted to Cabinet for the release of funding for the Spine Road.
- **Relationship building - BIS / UKTI/ Ministerial visits:** The Council has hosted numerous visits to ensure Government and other agencies are aware of the inward investment opportunities locally. This has included a visit for representatives from BIS and UKTI in October 2013 and Greg Clark MP, the Minister for Universities, Sciences and Cities, visited Wycombe on 21 July 2014. This was a joint visit with LEP, for Mr Clark to see the major developments in the district, particularly those that we are seeking Government funding for through the LEP

Objective 2: Tackle the Skills Agenda

Following the decommissioning of the Skills Centre in February 2013, the Council took on a role of service commissioner, complementing and not duplicating provision from other providers.

Summary of Activity

- **WENTA key business skills training pilot:** Enterprise agency WENTA (identified by the Economy Task and Finish Group) have an established package of key business skills courses targeted at SME and start-ups. WENTA was commissioned to deliver 12 courses in locations across the district (Saunderton, High Wycombe and Marlow) from March to December 2013 covering: marketing x 4; finance and bookkeeping x 4 and website development x 4.

Courses were run at a subsidised rate and 17 people took up the training offer.

Feedback from attendees was very positive, but the number of delegates, despite wide marketing (with help of partners too), was not high enough to be sustainable.

The decision was made in September 2013 to cancel the remaining three courses (as they were not providing the council with value for money) and to consider investigating other options going forward.

To help us commission others to provide skills courses in the future we are seeking to understand current provision and how this applies to different customer journeys back into employment. A lot of work has – or is being carried out by others such as BBF and WENTA and the Council is linking with those bodies..

- **URBACT: Skills and Employment theme:** We are working with Bucks New University on the URBACT Wood Footprint Project and are linked into the skills and employment workstream that is being led by Yecla in Spain. The area that WDC is exploring through this learning exchange is how other municipalities re-skill workers who formerly worked in manufacturing.

Objective 3 – Retain existing businesses and develop new businesses

This objective has developed through the life of the Strategy and now has a focus on:

Business Support

This involves promoting the Council's role with business and signposting businesses to help available as well as facilitating growth, regeneration and job creation.

Promotion of, and networking with, businesses

This is about promoting the district and contributing to the Council's wider marketing work – as well as supporting partner activities that promote the District.

Summary of activity:

On business support, this includes

- **Globe Park and Marlow International BID:** Engagement was carried out on Globe Park and Marlow International Business Parks to determine the appetite to pursue a Business Improvement District management model to bring about improvements to the site. Survey feedback from Phase I was positive, but we got a lower than expected return rate. Groundwork South Limited was appointed in January 2013 to help with Phase II and started work by re-engaging the businesses.

Groundwork has helped to appoint a Steering Group and Chair and vice-chair. The group has been important in helping to shape the BID business cases and to engage with the businesses on the park. A BID proposal document which sets out the benefits of the BID and outlines what it would deliver has been developed and sent out to businesses within the BID area. Due to reluctance of some businesses on Marlow International, it has been decided to exclude this area from the BID.

A ballot of businesses on Globe Park will take place in October 2014. If a yes vote is secured then the BID will commence in January next year and will run for an initial period of five years. The operation of the BID will be overseen by Groundwork, with businesses in the area paying a 1.25% levy on their Business Rates.

- **Supporting the High Wycombe Business improvement District.** This has included having a service level agreement with the BID Company to manage certain functions on behalf of the Council in High Wycombe town centre, including the Frogmoor open space, hanging baskets and lamp column banners. Joint projects are also being undertaken.
- **Pre Planning Advice:** This funding enables Planning to offer free pre-application advice for applications that involve commercial use that have the potential to create new jobs. Following the first year of delivery, the criteria were reviewed and amended to be more specific (Class A and B) and further monies allocated. The relevant Planning budget is reimbursed on a quarterly basis upon receipt of details of qualifying advice provided in the period. Advice provided to 78 applicants to date. Provision of free pre-application advice using LABGI funding to continue with quarterly monitoring and payment of claims
- **URBACT Wood Footprint Project:** BBF contacted the Council in February 2012 with an approach from Paços de Ferreira Municipality in Portugal to be a partner in an EU URBACT (Urban Action) project aimed at addressing economic and urban issues in the wood sector, particularly in furniture. Wycombe was selected along with eight other "cities" from across Europe that have a shared interest/history based on the wood industry.

The key output from this project is the development of a Local Action Plan (LAP). The action plan will form the basis of a further submission for EU funding to support the implementation of the local action plan for the period 2015 -2020. In order to share learning and develop links going forward, the project also has a transnational study visit element. The EU have allocated up to up to €75,000 funding for Wycombe to enable this work – 70% will be met by URBACT (~£42.5) with the remaining 30% met locally (~£18k).

The project has five workstreams and Wycombe is leading on the 'Business Parks for Entrepreneurs and Growth' workstream. We are also involved in the workstreams for 'Abandoned Buildings' and 'Skills and Employment'.

Last year, we signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Bucks New University to help deliver this project and hosted the first of the transnational study visits in October. This was very well received and set the template for the remaining visits. To date, we have participated in visits to Roeselare (Belgium), Monaghan (Ireland) Viborg (Denmark) and Tartu (Estonia). Planning accompanied us on the Tartu visit to enable links to be made with town centre planning work being undertaken there

Further transnational study visits to be undertaken to Yecla (Spain), Sternatia and Lecce (Italy) and Paços de Ferreira (Portugal). The Local Action Plan (LAP) will be further developed, with engagement work on the draft LAP will take place with Local Support Group members and other interested parties. The finalised LAP will be submitted to URBACT for approval and a launch event held to promote the document to the local business community. The remaining expenditure claims will be submitted to URBACT to ensure re-imburement of 70% if eligible project costs;

On promotion of, and networking with, businesses, this includes

- **Business Breakfasts:** The Business Breakfast initiative that was started by Cllr Bendyshe-Brown in his year as Chairman (2010) was reintroduced this year – with the costs being met through direct sponsorship from businesses, rather than WDC funding. The launch event was held in the autumn in High Wycombe with the first 'breakfast' in Princes Risborough in February (63 attendees – with 49 people representing 40 different local businesses).

The next business breakfast was held in Marlow in June. Attendance increased significantly, thanks in part to support from the Marlow Chamber of Commerce. There were 88 attendees, with 74 individual businesses represented

A further Business Breakfast will be held in Bourne End on October 10 for 60 businesses and is being co-branded with Bucks Business First, in return for them supporting with event administration and promotion. This will complete the initial series of events. Following this, the events to date will be reviewed with a view to considering further events next year.

- **Wycombe for Business Website**

The Council launched the Wycombe for Business (WfB) website in November 2011. This was based on feedback received from business breakfasts and other ED events that businesses would value having a single website that they could visit for information on a wide range of business topics.

The offer for businesses already located in the area includes the provision of a business directory, business events calendar, local business news and lots of signposting on to agencies that provide specific business support services (starting a business; business support; business finance; networking; organisations for business; training and skills and news and events).

Information targeted more at businesses that are looking to move to Wycombe district includes a commercial property directory, an overview of the district, information about key business parks, development sites, links to planning information and business testimonials about what makes Wycombe district good for business.

In 2013/14 we focused on creating inward investment messages This included creating new series of visual banners that scroll – with images related to our offer:
EXCEPTIONAL business; connectivity; countryside; retail; transport and workforce:



We also raised the prominence of **‘Invest in Wycombe – why move to Wycombe district?’** on the home page and created a new inward investment section at www.wycombeforbusiness.co.uk/inwardinvestment. This provides an overview of the area and focuses on our four key sectors – Advanced Engineering, Software Development, BioPharma and Food & Drink. This information is supported by a number of additional business testimonials

Key website metrics for 2013/14:

Unique visitors = 2,326

Returning visitors = 31%

How people find the site (Top 3) = Google, direct traffic, link from WDC website

Where are visitors from? = Wycombe district and surrounding area (1,360) other UK (1,660 – half of these from London)) and international (215)

Most popular pages (Top 3) = business parks; business directory and property directory

Looking ahead, we will review of the website to identify aims and opportunities and to confirm whether there is still a need for the site. Hosting arrangements and contract for the website to be reviewed subsequently. Links with Evolutive system used by Bucks Business First will be explored with a view to integrating our businesses databases to present a consistent message to the business community and to make it easier to keep the directory up to date. A programme of work will be developed following these reviews

- **Talking Business:** We started sponsorship of the monthly Talking Business supplement in the Bucks Free Press in early 2013 and agreed to continue this until at least January next year. This gives us a page of copy to promote our activities and regeneration work – and helps reinforce our press releases. As we are paying for this space, we have the added benefit that the exact wording / design that we submit is published.

The sponsorship deal also includes a column on another page of the publication to promote Wycombe for Business, the council logo on the front page of the supplement and a 'supported by Wycombe District Council' banner at the top of each page.

For this year, the main focus of our Talking business is to promote the council's various regeneration projects. The space is also used to promote a range of other council and partner activities e.g. our programme of Business Breakfast, the Buckinghamshire Business Awards and the Wycombe Business Expo

We are the main sponsor of Talking Business until at least January next year, with our monthly copy continuing to focus on regeneration. The sponsorship arrangement will be reviewed shortly, with a view to continuing sponsorship for 2015.

- **2014 Buckinghamshire Business Awards:** The Council sponsored the Small Business of the Year category at the 2014 Buckinghamshire Business Awards, which were arranged by Bucks Business First. WDC has been a sponsor of the Awards (formerly Buckinghamshire Ambassadors' Awards) since their inception in 2006. I helped judge our category back in March, with the awards ceremony following in May.

The Business Awards had an additional element this year with the 'BBB Award for SME Excellence' – a special award for a Wycombe district based SME.

- **Wycombe Business Expo:** The Council was the main sponsor for the 2013 Wycombe Expo. Feedback from the 2012 Expo indicated that the timing in half term week excluded some exhibitors and made it difficult for others to attend. The Expo Team took this on board and the 2013 event was held outside of half term week at a new location. We used our stand at the Expo to promote Handy Cross, signpost businesses to help and advice and to sign them up for our business newsletter and business directory.

Following review of the 2013 event, we have decided to continue as lead sponsor of the Expo in 2014. We have reduced the value of our sponsorship slightly (from £6,000 to £4,000) to enable the event to become more business led. We are also now represented on the Expo Steering Group, which meets at least once a month. This will facilitate improved communication between all parties and ensure a more co-ordinated approach to promotion of the Expo.

Finalise arrangements for the 2014 event including design of the council stand and production of supporting material. As part of our sponsorship deal, we will have a second large display, promotional material and possibly a video screen. This will be used to promote Handy Cross and other local development plans.

Following the 2014 Expo, our sponsorship will be reviewed, based upon event feedback and submissions for the organisers in order to determine whether to continue sponsorship for 2015.

Appendix 1: Supporting economic data

Job Creation of new jobs

A key outcome set out in the Council's Corporate Plan to 2015 under the 'Sustainably regenerating the area' priority is 'facilitation of activities to help provide 2,000 new local jobs by 2016. The Planning Team keep a business tracker that logs when planning permission is sought and granted for plans that have a job creation element. Not all applications give specific number of jobs likely to be created, but the figures show that we are on course to achieve the aims of the Corporate Plan.

Date approved	Applicants	Predicted job gain		Delivery			
				2013	2014	2015	2016
2012	Compair Site	TBC	Hughenden Quarter development to include new spine road, assisted care community, further student accommodation and small business units. Also includes a County Council office and day care facility (planning permission granted) and a care home (awaited)				
Aug 12	John Lewis	200	Additional floor space created within the store to increase the sales floor space and expand the range of goods to be sold to include clothing and shoes	✓			
Oct 12	McDonalds	45	Erection of two storey building comprising restaurant with associated access, freestanding canopy, drive-thru and parking	✓			
Feb 13	Ercol	10	Creation of open storage area to the west of approx 1100sq m together with office portacabin and staff parking	✓			
Jul 13	Next	95	New concept Next store which is first of its type in country. Will include clothing, garden and homeware			✓	
July 2013	Wycliffe Centre, Horseley Green (assisted living facility)	41	Development of 169 unit supported living facility and clubhouse incorporating community facilities				

Aug 13	HXH: Hotel and Offices	2,500	Planning permission granted for a mixed use development comprising major office development and a 150 bed hotel				✓
Aug 13	HXH: Food Store	175	3,600sqm food store to be operated by Waitrose. Store to be leased from council, providing a significant revenue source				✓
Aug 13	HXH: Sports Centre	110	Sports and Leisure Centre with parking for 323 cars to be operated by Places for People Leisure Ltd, who took over running of three existing Sports Centres in July this year. New centre to feature 50m pool, learner/toddler pools, bowls rinks, squash courts, gym, steam room and sauna, meeting rooms and cafe				✓
Nov 13	Morrison Supermarkets	Not specified in application	New supermarket in Princes Risborough. To include demolition of existing Post Office building and erection of a two storey building to provide a ground floor retail units and 5 flats on the first floor.				
<i>Awaited</i>	Daws Hill mixed use	49	Mixed use development to include housing, retail unit, community centre, Air Training Corps building and 9 industrial units				
<i>Awaited</i>	Danesfield House	120	Construction of new spa and conference facilities				
	Total #	3,345					

Note: Other applications have been granted that will have created jobs locally but this has not been specified on the application and hence not included on this listing

Claimant Count

Percentage of resident population aged 16-64 claiming Job Seekers Allowance.

There has been a steady in the percentage and number of people claiming this benefit. In Wycombe District, the Claimant count has been gradually falling since a peak of 3,100 / 2.9% in September 2009.

	July 2012	July 2013		July 2014	
Wycombe	2.3% (2,500)	2.1% (2,297)	↓	1.4% (1,508)	↓
AVDC	1.9% (2,121)	1.6% (1,855)	↓	1.1% (1,183)	↓
CDC	1.7% (929)	1.5% (804)	↓	0.8% (440)	↓
SBDC	1.4% (562)	1.3% (530)	↓	0.8% (343)	↓
Bucks	1.9% (6,112)	1.7% (5,486)	↓	1.1% (3,474)	↓
South East	2.5%	2.1%	↓	1.4%	↓
Great Britain	3.8%	3.4%	↓	2.4%	↓

Source: DWP. Data is released on the third Wednesday of each month.

Young Claimants

Percentage of resident population aged 18-24 claiming Job Seekers Allowance.

There has been a steady in the percentage and number of young people claiming this benefit. In Wycombe District, the Claimant count has been gradually falling since a peak of 835 / 6.1% in August 2009.

	July 2012	July 2013		July 2014	
Wycombe	4.7% (695)	3.6% (540)	↓	2.2% (335)	↓
AVDC	4.1% (535)	3.3% (445)	↓	1.7% (230)	↓
CDC	4.6% (255)	3.6% (200)	↓	1.5% (85)	↓
SBDC	3.4% (150)	2.9% (125)	↓	1.7% (75)	↓
Bucks	4.3% (1,635)	3.4% (1,305)	↓	1.9% (715)	↓
South East	4.8%	3.8%	↓	2.3%	↓
Great Britain	7.5%	6.2%	↓	3.9%	↓

Source: DWP. Data is released on the third Wednesday of each month.

Employment

Estimated percentage of resident population aged 16-64 in employment

	Apr 11 – Mar 12	Apr 12 – Mar 13		Apr 13 – Mar 14	
Wycombe	77.2% (85,000)	75.6% (80,400)	↓	78.1% (84,500)	↑
AVDC	72.3% (80,400)	75.5 (84,500)	↑	77.7 (89,000)	↑
CDC	80.0% (45,600)	73.8% (42,500)	↓	79.7% (44,800)	↑
SBDC	77.7% (35,500)	81.6% (36,800)	↑	70.2% (33,200)	↓
Bucks	76.0% (246,500)	76.1% (244,200)	↔	77.1 (251,500)	↑
South East	74.6%	74.4%	↓	75.5%	↑
Great Britain	70.2%	70.9%	↑	71.7%	↑

Source: Annual Population Survey. Employment and unemployment figures are released quarterly in July, October, January and April. Figures for July 2013 to March 2014 will be released in October.

Unemployment

Estimated percentage of resident population aged 16-64 who are unemployed.

	Apr 11 – Mar 12	Apr 12 – Mar 13		Apr 13 – Mar 14	
Wycombe	5.3% (4,800)	6.6% (5,600)	↑	5.5% (4,900)	↓
AVDC	5.8% (5,000)	5.8% (5,200)	↔	4.4% (4,100)	↓
CDC	4.0% (1,900)	4.8% (2,100)	↑	4.1% (1,900)	↓
SBDC	4% (1,500)	3.8% (1,400)	↓	4.1% (1,400)	↑
Bucks	5.5% (14,300)	5.5% (14,100)	→	4.2% (11,200)	↓
South East	5.9%	6.1%	↑	5.4%	↓
Great Britain	8.1%	7.8%	↓	7.2%	↓

Source: Annual Population Survey. Employment and unemployment figures are released quarterly in July, October, January and April. Figures for July 2013 to March 2014 will be released in October.

Number of businesses in District

2012 **9,245**

2013 **9,400**

Source: Inter Departmental Business Register, via BBF. Figures for 2014 are expected to be published in October