

Annual Report Outlining the Work of the Economic Development Team

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Purpose of the Report

To update Area South Members on the past year's work of the Economic Development Team.

Public Interest

The South Somerset economy is of crucial importance and is a key part of South Somerset District Council's (SSDC's) Council Plan. This report provides an update on the work undertaken during 2013/14 by the SSDC Economic Development Team as it affects Yeovil and Area South. The report covers the various components of the service - Economic Development; The Yeovil Innovation Centre (YIC); Heritage and the Community Heritage Access Centre (CHAC); Tourism and Tourist Information Centres.

Recommendation

That the contents of the report are noted.

Background

The Economic Development Service comprises the Economic Development, Heritage and Tourism teams.

In addition to the main service provision, the team is responsible for the operational running of Yeovil Innovation Centre, the Community Heritage Access Centre at Lufton, Cartgate Tourist Information Centre (TIC) and its satellite TIC operation at Petter's House in Yeovil.

Report Detail

1. Economic Development

1.1 Yeovil Innovation Centre (YIC)

2013/14 marked another successful year of operation for YIC with the centre generating a net profit of approximately £34k over the financial year.

As of July 2014 the Innovation Centre had 28 suites occupied. This represents a current occupancy level of 70% (based on total floor space at YIC) with approx. 140 people now based at the centre. Since 2008 some 38 businesses have either started up at the centre or relocated to it. Several businesses have now moved on from the centre. Tenant occupation has seen a continual upward trend since the opening of the centre in 2008 when all performance indicators started from a zero base. Occupation rate is expected to finally level

off at around 85%, but there will be a 'churn' of businesses as they move into the Innovation Centre, establish, grow and then move on.

YIC contributes significantly to the Council Plan 2012 -15, featuring as an exemplar project on Page 6, providing the mainstay for 'Providing targeted support for start-ups and small businesses and those with the aspiration to expand' and directly helping the council meet two other stated economic objectives.

YIC is also a mainstay of the Economic Development Strategy 2012-15 where business start-up and diversification, particularly in the high-tech sector, are identified as key components in the continued success of the Yeovil and South Somerset economies.

Additionally, the centre's conference facilities are extensively used by a range of local businesses who run courses and promote networking events. The facilities were used again as an assessment centre by Augusta Westland in 2013 as part of their graduate recruitment programme, with business graduates, engineering graduates and apprentices recruited.

1.2 Business Support

In addition to the direct support provided to the tenants at YIC, the economic development team have either responded to, or signposted requests for advice from approximately 70 South Somerset businesses in 2013/14.

We provided detailed economic input to 75 planning applications relating to the use workspace and employment opportunity. 20 of these applications were in Area South. These result from requests for assistance from the applicant or for specific input or local economic knowledge from development control officers.

Additionally the ED team handled over 200 enquires that were related to economic development matters from businesses, the public, other public bodies or agencies within Somerset

Our newsletter to the tourism trade is distributed monthly to over 600 businesses. This publication contains information on training courses, changes in legislation and provides regular informative updates for the trade. It is a publication that is well received and much valued by its readership.

1.3 Business Start-up Event.

The second Business Start-up event was held in September 2013 at the Guildhall in Chard. Working in conjunction with the Somerset Business Agency, the event brought together a variety of business support specialists that were able to provide advice to people who were considering starting their own business.

The event attracted 65 prospective new businesses and 20 specialists who were able to offer advice over a wide range of topics covering Business Planning, Legal Issues, Accountancy, Marketing and other areas of interest to new entrepreneurs. The event drew a number of prospective or new businesses from Area South.

1.4 Inward Investment

South Somerset District Council remains committed to the principle of creating Inward Investment through the 'Into Somerset' partnership. SSDC is a founding member of the project. The scheme will run until March 2015 and is hosted by the Somerset Chamber of Trade in Taunton.

The scheme promotes Somerset as an excellent county in which to locate, grow and develop businesses. The primary aim of the scheme is to raise awareness of Somerset to regional, national and international audiences whilst recognising that differing parts of the County have different specialist economic sectors and offer different skills sets.

Gerard Tucker, the Innovation Centre Manager, is currently seconded three days per week from the Economic Development Team to the position of Inward Investment Manager for the programme. 10 investments were supported for South Somerset during 2013/14 with four of these resulting in direct investments in Area South.

1.5 Investment in Infrastructure Programme.

The decision to undertake an Investment in Infrastructure programme was agreed by SSDC's District Executive Committee in December 2013. This followed work by officers and members in identifying a long-list of potential investment projects across the District.

Further consultation with Area Chairs and Area Development Managers has refined the project list and ensured that the priority Area projects remain for consideration in a revised short-list of 15 projects. For Area South, projects include Yeovil Eastern Corridor Highway improvements, Yeovil Western Corridor Highway improvements, Star's Lane/ Box Factory site, Yeovil Cattle Market, Innovation Centre phase 2, Retail Incubator (a District Wide project).

Some of the work undertaken has already resulted in funding applications being supported. Yeovil's Western Corridor is currently ear-marked for Local Transport Board Funding with a business case and an indicative programme of work already prepared by Somerset County Council (SCC). Member consultation in 2013 and 2014 has indicated that once the Major Scheme Business Case has been finalised and approved, delivery of the scheme would be likely between 2015 and 2019.

A report on the short list of projects will be presented to District Executive Committee in the Autumn where a resolution will be sought to commence negotiations and work on prioritised and deliverable projects.

1.6 Support to Businesses affected by Flooding

Following the extreme winter weather conditions of 2013/14, SSDC was able to apply for government grant assistance to help flood affected businesses. Businesses affected fell into two broad categories- those directly hit by the flood water and those whose businesses were affected by interruption to trade. Business interruption caused by flooding is likely to have prolonged impact on parts of the economy, especially for the tourism sector where the national perception of a 'county closed for business' has proved hard to counter and dispel.

At the time of writing, 98 businesses had applied to SSDC for grant assistance with 96 of these applications being approved. The average grant awarded has been approx. £2,600. SSDC also approved an award of £10,000 towards a Village Agent (this post hosted by Somerset Community Council) to provide direct support to flood affected businesses in rural locations.

1.7 Superfast Broadband Extension programme

The current Connecting Somerset and Devon (CDS) programme aims to deliver 90% superfast broadband coverage to the whole area by the end of 2016. The programme is currently on track to meet its target, but would leave a gap of 10% coverage beyond 2016.

In recognition of this shortfall in provision the Government has announced the Superfast Broadband Extension programme which would help to take the overall coverage figure to approximately 95% of all premises in the area.

A report was presented to District Executive by SCC officers in June 2014 where an in-principle decision was taken to allocate SSDC funding towards the extension programme pending receipt of a detailed breakdown of the extension programme. The detail of the extension programme is not likely to be ready until late in 2014 or in 2015. Members expressed a wish to see greater connectivity of superfast broadband to existing business parks as a priority in such a scheme, although connectivity to our rural areas was also regarded as critical to the South Somerset economy. A full report will be taken to District Executive when the full detail of the scheme is known.

1.8 Local Food Event

We are running a Local Food Event on Wednesday 17th September at Haynes Motor Museum (10.30 a.m to 13.30 p.m). This will be showcase event bringing together local food producers and businesses who are interested in purchasing produce from local suppliers. Invites have been sent to restaurants, pubs, cafes, canteens, hotels, bed and breakfast establishments and other quantity purchasers of local food. The aim of the event is to showcase local food and to introduce producers to a much wider potential market. The event is modelled on the successful event that we ran in Chard in 2011. Members are cordially invited to attend the event. Several Area South producers have already booked stands for the event.

2. Tourism

2.1 Tourist Information Centres (TICs)

The District Council runs two TICs as part of its service. Cartgate TIC is the main operating 'hub' and Petter's House hosts a 'satellite' service. We remain very grateful to Yeovil Town Council for their continuing generous grant that provides financial support to run Yeovil TIC. We also acknowledge the full support we receive from the Area South team in helping to make the TIC's location at Petter's House such a success.

The prolonged inclement weather of winter 2013/14 made the year one of the wettest on record. This impacted significantly of the winter footfall to the TICs but nevertheless the combined total of visitors to the TICs was upwards. In 2012/13 our TICs received a total of 53,000 visitors. In 2013/14 this had increased to 66,000 visitors.

Additionally:

- Each year the TICs typically sell around £50k of tickets to local events and this contributes directly to the local economy.
- The TICs will also distribute around 25,000 leaflets for attractions in South Somerset. This has a major positive effect on the local economy that would be lost if there were no TICs.
- SSDC TICs also co-ordinate the distribution of SSDC leaflets and brochures to other TICs in the region which will generate considerable further income.
- The TICs provide up to date information on the availability of accredited tourist accommodation in the district.

2.2 Website and Publications

The tourism team produce a number of publications for the tourism trade and visitors to South Somerset.

Discover South Somerset is our headline publication. This is primarily a 'what's on' in South Somerset guide and consistently proves to be the most popular and best used of the publications. It is used by tourists and the trade to keep up to date with events and activities across the District. 55,000 copies of this publication were printed and distributed in 2013. Our other publications include 'Classic Gardens' (60,000 copies), 'Market Towns' and 'The 80 mile Cycle Ride'. We also work closely with groups across Somerset to collate a range of local walks for easy printing via our website.

SSDCs tourism website was re-designed and refreshed in 2013. The Tourism website can be viewed at www.visitsouthsomerset.com

2.3 Business Supported by the Tourism Team

The tourism team also provides direct support to businesses seeking advice. Requests for advice from small businesses have increased significantly in recent years. The E.D. and tourism teams are consolidating their role in the provision of business advice. The team provided support to 1,058 businesses in 2013/14.

Type of assistance	Number of assists
Direct Calls/ Visits to Businesses	Approx. 200
Training	60
Support through planning system	25
Mail outs and Communication (per month)	625
Events	148
Total businesses supported	1,058

Additional support: The tourism service always operated a small grants system for the network of Local Information Centres (LICs) that operate in our Market Towns. From 2010 these grants were made available through the Area Grants process. The team still provide a full-range of back-up advice and support for the LICs.

2.4 Literature Exchange

The tourism team also organise and run the annual Tourism Literature Exchange event. This year it was held in April at the refurbished Haynes Motor Museum and attracted 148 tourism businesses comprising approximately 50 local tourist attractions and 90+ South Somerset accommodation providers. The event is held in high regard by South Somerset Businesses and offers them a low-cost leaflet distribution opportunity combined with an excellent networking event. This year's event proved to be particularly successful.

3. Heritage

The Heritage Service is now housed entirely at CHAC in the Lufton Depot, Yeovil. There are three members of staff (2.3 FTEs).

The Heritage Service Provides:

- A home for over 40,000 artefacts forming a collection of local & national significance.
- Storage & maintenance of collections of significant national importance such as the Stiby Firearms Collection or the local gloving industry archive.
- Bespoke storage facilities kept under environmentally controlled conditions.
- Accessioning and cataloguing on a Modes database system.
- Visits to CHAC by arrangement. The centre takes 'group bookings' and these can vary from a small number of people to in excess of 200 visitors on 'open days'
- Visits to CHAC from individuals with specific interests, expertise or specialisation.
- An enquiry service by email, letter or phone for items contained within the collection of specialist local knowledge.
- Specialist support to other local museums to help run their own service.
- Support to other local museums in providing artefacts for their exhibitions.
- Support to major community events that help to keep heritage and local history firmly in the mind of the community.
- Exhibitions in public areas such as libraries or through public events such as country fairs and cultural events.
- A major opportunity for the local community to get involved and donate time through an organised volunteer system.

3.1 An Overview of 2013

There is a new core of six volunteers at CHAC who help undertake key tasks for the service. This follows a major review and restructure of the Volunteer Service undertaken in partnership with South Somerset Association of Voluntary and Community Action. The Volunteer Service at CHAC was re-launched April 2014 and is proving very successful.

In 2013 CHAC received around 200 visitors to the building. These tended to be organised group visits or visits made by arrangement with the staff. The service also deals with large numbers of enquiries relating to the collection by letter, email and telephone. The nature of these queries vary and range from basic enquiries relating to collection items right to through to enquiries from students or specific and specialised research for academic studies and television productions.

The new heritage website is now well used by the public and its redesign was made possible by SSDCs GIS team working in conjunction with CHAC.

2013/14 also saw a second intern – Robyn Raxworthy working with the CHAC team. Robyn took up her post in September 2013 and has proved invaluable in helping set up and run the new volunteering arrangements.

Continuing noteworthy success for 2013/14 was the production and sale of the second Yeovil In Living Memory calendar. This followed the format of using old photographs of Yeovil and publishing them in calendar form. Once again this resulted in a complete sell out of the 500 printed calendars. The project will run again in the winter of 2014 and we will once again increase the calendar print run to accommodate the unmet demand of 2013. In early 2014, an application was made for £2,000 to the Arts Council's Small Grant, Big Improvement Fund to pay for the 2015 calendar and this was successful. The award was one of only two applications in the South West that received the full grant.

The Arts Council had also awarded a grant of £1,000 in October 2013 for the purchase of boxes to store the handling collection properly; this project was completed in March 2014. An application was made to the Jonathan Ruffer Curatorial Fund via the Art Fund for £200 which enabled the purchase of a book on local artist E R Sturgeon and several other publications on art.

2014 also marks the centenary of the outbreak of World War One. The centenary is being marked across the country, with CHAC making its own contribution with a strong local flavour. CHAC has successfully applied for a number of grants to help promote activities, with focus being on the production of a commemorative booklet for schools. The booklet focusses on the impact of the war on the local area using photographs of people and home life in wartime. A programme of talks, activities, exhibitions and lectures has also been prepared and is proving successful.

Important local historical donations continue to be received from the public; an important donation was a series of unique medals and tokens that had been given to a Mayor of Yeovil to commemorate national events in the twentieth century for example the coronation of King George V.

3.2 The Community Museums Officer

Through a project partnership with Somerset County Council, we have secured the continued services of a Community Museums Officer one day per week. This officer works closely with Community Museums across the District offering advice on collections management, displays, visitor management and business planning. This programme will continue until at least March 2015. Our Community Museums Officer can be contacted on 01935 462886 (ideally on Fridays).

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications as a direct result of this report.

Corporate Priority Implications

The work of the Economic Development, Heritage and Tourism Service supports the Districts Council's corporate priorities (2012-15):

- Focus 1: Jobs
- Focus 2: Environment
- Focus 4: Health and Communities

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

None.

Equality and Diversity Implications

None

Background Papers: *SSDC Economic Development Strategy 2012-15*
SSDC Heritage Service- the Way Forward, District Executive Report August 2012
Future Operation of Yeovil Innovation Centre 2013-16, District Executive Report June 2013