

# **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 2014/15 by the SSDC Economic Development Team and gives a focus to Area South. The report covers the various components of the service - Economic Development (ED); 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)**

2014/15 marked another successful year of operation for YIC with the centre generating a net profit of approximately £78k over the financial year

As of July 2015 the Innovation Centre had 36 out of 38 suites occupied. This represents a current occupancy level of 83% (based on total floor space at YIC) with approx. 155 people now based at the centre. Since 2008 some 46 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. There is a 'churn' of businesses as they move into the Innovation Centre, establish, grow and then move on

Within the last month, a lease has been agreed on the large upper floor space. A Yeovil-based graphics business will relocate and accommodate some ten staff. This will take the YIC occupancy level to 98% with a subsequent increase in net profit in future years. The phase two expansion of the Innovation Centre is prioritised within the Investing in Infrastructure programme and is likely to be progressed in 2016

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

With the increased occupancy levels, conference facilities have contracted due to a reduction in available space.

## **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 over 100 South Somerset businesses in 2014/15.

We provided detailed economic input to 73 planning applications relating to the use of workspace and employment opportunity. 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 250 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 625 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.

The local food event in September 2014 attracted approx.140 attendees and brought together local food producers and businesses who are interested in purchasing produce from local suppliers.

### **1.3 Business start-up workshops.**

A series of business start-up workshops were organised across the district in the summer months 2015. The workshops were run in conjunction with the Somerset Business Agency and were held in all four SSDC areas with events in Chard, Martock, Wincanton and Yeovil. 32 prospective entrepreneurs attended the one-day workshops and covered some of the essential steps towards starting up your own business. Advice included getting the basics right, establishing a customer base, sales and marketing.

Business advice, particularly for those seeking to start their own business is always available from Mike Bartlett, SSDC Business Support Officer. By email in the first instance [mike.bartlett@southsomerset.gov.uk](mailto:mike.bartlett@southsomerset.gov.uk)

### **1.4 Inward Investment**

South Somerset District Council remains committed to the principle of creating Inward Investment through the renewed 'Into Somerset' partnership – a collaboration between the five district councils and Somerset County Council. This is a new phase for the Into Somerset project with enquiries generated by a new website due to be launched in October. All enquiries will be handled directly by the district partners. The project is supported by the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership Inward Investment Group.

### **1.5 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.

As of June 2015, 118 businesses had applied to SSDC for grant assistance with 114 of these applications being approved. A total of £297,228.11 was awarded in grants with the average grant awarded being approximately £2,500.

A further £48,000 of the money awarded to SSDC by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills is being used to bolster the marketing of the local tourism industry through 2015 and 2016. This package has included new adverts in key tourism publications, new leaflets (with wide distribution) for Muchelney and the Levels and Moors, extended print runs and distribution for Discover South Somerset (from 60,000 to 95,000 copies), new pages on the tourism website dedicated to visiting the flood affected areas and better search-engine optimisation for the websites. The enhanced marketing campaign will particularly

target the 2015 and 2016 seasons, but the impact of the new leaflets and enhanced website presence will extend beyond that timeframe.

## **1.6 Superfast Broadband Extension programme**

On the 26<sup>th</sup> June 2015 Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) announced that the contract to roll out the second stage of the BDUK superfast broadband programme had not been awarded. The 'superfast extension programme' had aimed to take connectivity of premises in the two counties from the expected 90% (by December 2016) to 95% of premises by 2018, but the BT offer had not met a number of criteria and expectations.

The decision not to award the contract in June will result in a new open procurement process and this is likely to take place in the autumn.

The extent of the current programme can be viewed on the CDS website at [www.connectingdevonandsomerset.co.uk/where-when](http://www.connectingdevonandsomerset.co.uk/where-when)

## **1.7 Local Food Event**

The Economic Development team organised and ran a Local Food Event in September 2014 at Haynes Motor Museum. The event showcased local food and brought together local producers and businesses interested in purchasing produce from local suppliers. The event attracted 37 stall holders from various locations across Somerset including businesses from the Yeovil area. Over 100 businesses registered their attendance, but there were many others present on the day including students from Yeovil College who were on food preparation and business courses.

Due to the success of the event the economic development team will run another, similar event in 2016. Members will be cordially invited to attend the event and more details will follow.

## **1.8 Employment in South Somerset**

Since May 2014 the number of JSA claimants both nationally and locally has declined, with recent figures showing the lowest levels of claimants since 2008. June saw the South Somerset figures reach an eight year low of 0.7%. JSA figures are circulated to SSDC members by the ED team on a monthly basis.

## **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.

Visitors to our TICs for the year ending March 2015 were Yeovil 20135 and Cartgate TIC 61422 representing a 22% overall increase on the previous year

Major events such as the Yeovilton Air Day, the Tour of Wessex and the Yeovil Half Marathon also draw many staying visitors to the area and ticket sales to local events have greatly increased. It has been noticeable that many new visitors were attracted by the BBC production Wolf Hall with Montacute House and Barrington Court both noticing an upturn in visitors in the early 2015 season.

Additionally:

- Each year the TICs typically sell around £60k of tickets to local events and this contributes directly to the local economy. There was a 25% increase in orders from TICs between February and May of 2015 compared with 2014 so there has been a significant increase in exposure to the TIC market.
- 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. There was a 14% increase in overall 'pick up' between February and May of 2015 compared to 2014.
- SSSC TICs also co-ordinate the distribution of SSSC 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 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.

Type of assistance	Number of assists
Direct assists/ Visits to Businesses	Approx 250
Training	35
Support through planning system	14
Mail outs and Communication (per month)	625
Events	247
<b>Total businesses supports</b>	<b>1,171</b>

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.

## 2.3 Literature Exchange

The tourism team organise and run the annual Tourism Literature Exchange event. This year it was held in March at Haynes Motor Museum and attracted 110 tourism businesses comprising approximately 40 local tourist attractions and 70+ 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
- Advice on Heritage projects to consultants

#### **3.1 An Overview of 2014/15**

There are now eight volunteers at CHAC with one being based at Brympton Way 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 continuing to be very successful

In 2014 CHAC doubled the number of visitors compared to the previous year; there were 503 visitors to the building. Staff have put the increase down to having a better volunteer team. These tended to be organised group visits or visits made by arrangement with the staff. The

service also dealt with around 500 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. CHAC also took part in a Digitisation project funded by the South West Museum Development and now have a blog and are on Facebook and Twitter.

Continuing noteworthy success for 2014/15 was the production and sale of the third Yeovil In Living Memory calendar. This followed the format of using old photographs of Yeovil and publishing them in calendar form. One thousand calendars were printed and nearly all sold. The project will run again in the winter of 2015. Postcards and greetings cards have also been produced and will be for sale in the Tourist Information Centre and other local outlets. CHAC has joined the South West Heritage Trust and other museums in a project applying for funding from the Arts Council's Museum Resilience Fund to provide loan boxes to the local community. If the project is successful CHAC will have four loan boxes containing historic artefacts and activities to be loaned out to the schools and local communities. The boxes will be collected from CHAC and a charge of approximately £20 per half term will be made for each box. CHAC will receive the full amount of money charged.

The Arts Council had also awarded a grant of £500 in April 2015 for the purchase of three dehumidifiers as some areas of CHAC were struggling with high humidity. Advice was sought from Helena Jaeschke the Conservation Development Officer based at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter on which dehumidifiers to buy and Helena has visited CHAC recently to view these and advise on other collections issues. The new dehumidifiers are keeping humidity to the optimum levels at CHAC.

2015 marks the centenary of the outbreak of the founding of the Westland Aircraft Works in Yeovil. CHAC has produced a booklet on the event and a small display in the Town House, with a panel produced professionally.

Important local historical donations continue to be received from the public; the original plans and drawings for the Westland Wizard aircraft have been donated recently along several photographs of VE Day in Yeovil and ARP wardens during World War II.

Staff continue to attend museum training sessions provided by the South West Federation of Museums and Art Galleries. This enables staff to receive the latest thinking on museum topics, network with people from other museums and also to ask about any concerns on the collection. Recent training events attended (including one held at CHAC) were Care of Costume, Basic Collections Management, Care of Photographic Collections and Rationalisation and Disposal of Museum Collections. A member of staff provided a case study for a training session for 20 museum professionals and is also on the advisory panel for the Museums and Heritage Show held annually at Olympia in London. Staff are active in the Museums in Somerset group.

### **3.2 The Museum Development Officer**

Through a project partnership with South West Heritage Trust, we have secured the continued services of a Museum Development 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 2016. Our Museum Development Officer can be contacted on 01935 462886 (ideally on Fridays).

### **4. Financial Implications**

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

### **5. 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

### **6. Carbon Emissions & Adapting to Climate Change Implications (NI188)**

None.

### **7. Equality and Diversity Implications**

None.

### **8. 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