

SCRUTINY ECONOMY COMMITTEE

11 November 2010

Key Elements of the Programme for the Economy Portfolio for 2010/11

Developments

Bus & Coach Station Site

We continue to work with the Planning team to deliver a Master Plan for the site and with Land Securities with a view to them reporting on scheme viability by Christmas 2010. A two year Exclusivity Agreement has been agreed in principle with Land Securities/Crown Estate to provide comfort to all parties during this process.

1-11 Sidwell Street (former Debenhams)

An Agreement for Lease has been entered into with Land Securities under which they will refurbish the lower floors of these premises for John Lewis. A new lease will be granted once agreed pre-conditions have been discharged by the developer. It is hoped that the new retailer will be open for trade in October 2011.

Canal Basin

The developer for the Old Electricity Building has agreed a package of works to seek to protect the fabric of the building whilst we await favourable conditions for a redevelopment commencement. Negotiations with Sutton Harbour for a start on the second new build site at the head of the Basin are well advanced and a Development Agreement may be drawn down shortly. Although provisional terms have been agreed between DCC and ECQT for a site for the new Haven Banks Outdoor Education Centre, the County Council is reviewing the position. We should know shortly whether they intend to proceed. In the light of that eventual decision, an update on the overall Delivery Strategy will be submitted to Executive.

Livestock Centre

We are in the process of reviewing the future of the Livestock Centre and a report on this review will be presented to Executive in due course.

Economic Development Strategy

This year the priorities of the Economic Development Strategy continue to focus on promoting and securing the growth of businesses, a better-trained workforce, helping people into work, bringing forward the availability of employment land and lobbying for investment in transportation and the communications infrastructure.

Supporting new businesses

Through the Exeter Business Support initiative, secure the starting up of 50 small businesses in the city and support existing businesses particularly through working with Business Link and the Innovation Centre.

City Centre Promotion

Work is continuing with the business community to prepare a business plan and gain support for the establishment of a Business Improvement District for the city centre seeking to further improve the attractiveness of the city centre to visitors and investment.

A package of activities has been pulled together to attract the very important Christmas trade into the city; some 40% of annual retail turnover.

Science Park

Working as an active partner with the Exeter Science Park Company we will continue to progress and market the project to encourage the development and growth of science, technology, and research based sectors in the local economy. We are pleased to have played our part in lobbying for confirmation of the funding for the improvements to Junction 29.

City of Science

Launched the first stage of the initiative with a new website to promote the scientific assets of the city as a basis for working with partners to attract investment and increase interest amongst younger people in studying STEMM related subjects (science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine)

Inward Investment

Have established a public private partnership to promote a positive and progressive image of the City's economy including the New Growth Point projects and to encourage inward investment.

Skills and workforce development

Work with the Employment and Skills Board to promote investment in relevant training provision for employers and identify skills issues relating to potential job opportunities arising from the Exeter and East Devon New Growth Point projects.

Work is continuing to assist a minimum of 300 people from the most deprived neighbourhoods in the city to take up training and/or employment by continuing the successful activities of the Exeter Positive Steps Fund. Projects in hand are helping 235 people.

Tourism

We have continued to grow and develop the Exeter and Essential Devon Tourism Partnership increasing its membership base to 300 businesses and thereby its resources to undertake a marked increase in promotional activity.

We shall also continue to manage and promote the range of City Council attractions and collaborate with other organisations in the city to attract and raise visitor expenditure which is vital to the retention of many jobs and the quality and variety of retail and restaurants which can be enjoyed by residents.

A new Tourism Strategy will be developed for spring 2011.

Strategic Priorities

We will explore options to enable the City to get to grips with the critical infrastructure improvements needed against the changed financial background. It is important not to lose sight of:-

- necessary improvements to the wider urban area;
- securing funding for the proposed high quality public transport system linking the growth point developments with the city centre;
- achieving park and ride improvements particularly to the south west of the city;
- stimulating/supporting diversification and growth of the city's economy.

There are four key factors which relate to how and with whom the Council works to be proactive in supporting economic sustainability and medium to longer term recovery and growth:-

- maintaining strong partnerships with public, private and third sector organisations, working to build upon the city's distinctive assets – its university, business make up, and quality of place – and that of the economic role of the city in the wider geography;
- working across administrative boundaries to secure investment in economic development and regeneration to maximise the sub-region's competitiveness
- securing investment in workforce skills;
- responding to changes in the economy – it is important to attract and grow private sector knowledge-intensive services, firms, jobs and individuals as well as developing retail, leisure and tourism sectors to provide better quality employment opportunities for those with lower skills, and those entering or returning to the labour market.

Regional Growth Fund

One key area of funding is the Government's recently announced Regional Growth Fund, with an emphasis on support for those areas with a high dependency on the public sector. Local authorities per se cannot lead bids, but we must work with partners to try and secure funding for progressing the Science Park and support for business creation, development and growth.

“Re-localising the business rate”

The main source of local tax revenue for local government is Council tax, which is only 17% of its income. With localism and radical changes taking place at the centre of Government, we should be lobbying for the proposed greater local control over business rates. This could provide a major local opportunity to support the right local conditions for economic jobs and growth.

Local Enterprise Partnership

To date we, like other district councils, have been excluded from discussions on the development of the new LEPs. These are meant to replace the RDA and to provide the opportunity for partnership working, on the basis of real functional economic areas, to take an integrated approach to growth and infrastructure delivery though transport, housing and planning.

We will continue to proactively pursue our involvement in the potential LEP for a grouping of functional economic areas, broadly covering the geographical areas of Devon and Somerset, in order to seek recognition and a collective strategic commitment to building upon Exeter's wider economy in collaboration with other parts of the South West. The aim is to establish a sound basis for promoting private sector based employment growth and secure the resources to achieve the priorities to support it.