

COUNCIL  
23rd April 2014



**REPORT TO COUNCIL – PORTFOLIO AREA OF PROSPERITY AND GROWTH**

**Agenda No: 11f**

**Business support**

An event for rural businesses was held on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2014 at the Essex Golf and Country Club on the Earls Colne Industrial Estate. Hosted by the Chairman, the event provided information and advice to rural businesses on Council services and support as well as support provided by other agencies such as Ignite Business Enterprise. The event also provided valuable feedback on how we can improve our services to meet the needs of rural businesses.

Witham Industrial Watch is proposing to renew their successful Business Improvement District initiative which provides CCTV on the Witham Industrial Estates and has reduced business crime and increased business confidence on the Witham Industrial Estates. I attended the launch event for this proposal at Village Glass on 14<sup>th</sup> March and was happy to confirm the Council's support. The ballot will be completed by 30<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

**Economic Development**

South East Local Enterprise Partnership has now submitted its Strategic Economic Plan to government. This should be approved by July this year with project funding available from April 2015. The District can play a key role in delivering the jobs and housing growth ambitions of the Plan, and we have submitted proposals for our strategic development sites at Skyline II and Panfield Lane to be included in the Plan delivery arrangements, as well as the further regeneration of Braintree town centre, and rolling out enterprise support for start up businesses across the District.

**Business engagement**

I chaired the first formal meeting of the District Business Leaders Board at Village Glass in Witham on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2014 where George Kieffer, Chairman of the Haven Gateway Partnership, briefed the Board on the campaign to improve the A120 as a strategic growth corridor. I am pleased that the A120 Corridor has been included in the South East LEP's Strategic Economic Plan. The Board also received an update on the programme to roll-out improved broadband from Superfast Essex and made strong representations that the programme needs to be targeted to the District's key employment areas to enable business growth and prosperity.

**Skills**

The District Leaders Board agreed to set up an Employment and Skills Board for the District. This will be a small, employer-led Board involving the college, schools and Jobcentre Plus, to help them equip young people with the skills and attributes that employers need. I attended Brooks Newmark MP's jobs fair in Braintree on 21<sup>st</sup> March and was encouraged to see the number of employers and young people attending.

## **Regeneration**

Highways works at the corner of South Street and Fairfield Road will be undertaken by County Highways and are programmed by the County Council to commence on the 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2014. We have been liaising with the County Council over the detailed design of the landscaping scheme for the site. This project should be finished by the Summer, improving traffic flow and providing a more attractive gateway to the town centre. Work to the St. Michael's Fountain site is substantially complete but with some further improvements to the fountain bowl to be undertaken. Exploratory dig works at Sandpit Lane were undertaken over a 3 day period in March to identify engineering solutions for this public realm scheme. We will now be progressing with detail design and further discussions with traders in the area.

The 'Love Where You Shop' Awards for 2014 were held at Prested Hall on 25th March 2014. Around 40 retailers and small businesses along with representatives from the Town Teams, Town Council and District Council were in attendance to celebrate the success of these small businesses. The awards were presented to businesses who were nominated by the general public in the following categories: Independent Business of the Year, Best Business for Marketing, Best Window Display and Town Champion. This year's deserved Town Champion was Lorne Campbell from Witham. The event was sponsored by the District Council, the Newsquest Group and New River Retail.

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