

MINUTES

STRATEGIC PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

7 JULY 2015

Present:

Members:

Councillors: Adshead
Ashbourn
Hearn
Hicks
Howard
Matthews
Ransley
Riddick
Wyatt-Lowe (Vice-
Chairman)

Officers:

Cabinet Support Members

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

9 **MINUTES**

10 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor Anderson.

11 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

12 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

13 **CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE
COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO CALL-IN**

There were none.

14 **ECONOMIC WELLBEING REPORT INCLUDING DACORUM'S DEN**

Lesley Crisp introduced the report, highlighting that during the first 3 dens (between 2012 – 2014). 26 businesses have benefitted from a total of £30,700 in grants. Most have received a £1000, with a small number receiving £2000 in special circumstances. Of these winners, 92% are still trading. She went on to add that between the winning businesses a further 25 additional jobs have been created which is a 52% increase in employment. Dacorum's Den 2015 took place on Friday 12th June and there were 7 winners taking a total of £10k in grants (sponsored by Symbio Energy and Maylands Partnership). These came from a pool of 38 initial applications. She then went on to introduce 2014 winners Kim Hurrell and Meena Wells, from the Cinnamon Travelling Café, who gave a presentation on their business and how winning Dacorum's Den 2014 has impacted on their business.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe thanked them for their presentation and noted that every business started in a small way and is integral for ensuring a vibrant economic community.

Councillor S Hearn congratulated the winners on their success and noted the support they had received since winning the den, he went on to enquire as to whether they were confident that the support would still be useful and relevant as they expand their business and it continues to grow.

Meena Wells advised that they were confident as they take responsibility for themselves and willing to learn and educate themselves, with regards to things such as accounting and promotion of the business. She went on to advise that they have signed up to the Great British Start Up.

Rebecca Oblein advised that Lesley and the Maylands Business Centre, take businesses to a certain level of expansion and advised that the LEP has recently introduced a growth hub for businesses over 2 years old and they would then refer them to this.

Councillor S Hearn then enquired as to if this then meant that the businesses move away from Dacorum's umbrella.

Rebecca Oblein advised that this was not the case and that hopefully they would still be working out of the Business Centre, but the Growth Hub has a bit more experience and a few more connections, wider than Dacorum, that they can move the businesses into. She went on to advise that they are currently working with the LEP to try and put in place a standard level of small start up business support in place across Hertfordshire. The LEP are actually looking at what is being done in Dacorum as a model as we actually do far more than other areas do. She added that they are looking to put a bid in for some European funding to try and get a standard level of start up business support that will then be the step below the Growth Hub.

Councillor Birnie requested clarification on what WENTA represented.

Lesley Crisp advised this was the Watford Enterprise Agency, which has now spread right across Hertfordshire and that it works with start up businesses across Hertfordshire, apart from Dacorum. However she went on to advise that we work together with WENTA to build a consistent offer to all businesses.

Councillor Birnie went on to ask that when we say we have “brought into” it, is that meant in a literal way .

Lesley Crisp advised that this that WENTA had recently launched an online support service, where you can get online business support via live chat which was ideal for home based start ups and compliments what we are already doing in Dacorum, so we have bought into this service which is now available to all Dacorum residents..

Councillor Birnie enquired after the financial cost of this.

Rebecca Oblein advised it was £1200 for the year and that a deal had been struck through the LEP, where all the Boroughs in Hertfordshire could make this available on their websites. She went on to advise that the first set of statistics from it were not available as yet, with regards to the number of people accessing it, but advised that this would be monitored.

Councillor Ashbourne thanked the ladies from the Cinnamon Travelling Café for their presentation and wished them all the best for the future.

Councillor Matthews referred to Page 5 of the report – 1.9 and that ‘most have received £1000 with a small number receiving up to £2000 in special circumstances’ and went on to enquire of those receiving the higher amount, how many of those businesses were still trading.

Lesley Crisp went on to advise that all of them were.

Councillor Matthews went on to ask how much liaison had been done with the local Chambers of Commerce.

Rebecca Oblein advised that through the Dacorum Look No Further campaign they had part funded a member at Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce to be based in the Dacorum area, as there had been a bit of a drought of interest from the Chamber in the area. She went on to advise that this hadn’t been overly successful, however she went on to say that they do work with the Berkhamsted Chamber of Commerce and the Berkhamsted Business Leaders Group and also with the Tring Together Partnership.

Councillor Wyatt-Lowe advised that it was true to say that Chambers of Commerce have by and large been languishing for quite some time, which is a shame as they are a repository of local knowledge that could be used and exploited to support and encourage local business, and urged members and officers that anything they can do to encourage a renaissance of that ethic, would be helpful.

Councillor Hicks commented that the assistance of the officer appeared to be of more value than the grant.

Kim Hurrell advised that both were of equal value. She advised that Lesley’s support had been invaluable but the grant had allowed them to purchase equipment that allowed them to expand and progress the business quicker than may otherwise have been possible.

Councillor Hicks then enquired of the Officers as to the cost of running the Den and subsequent support service.

Rebecca Oblein advised that it was mainly officer time as it is based at the Business Centre. She went on to say that it was part of a suite of support that is offered out of the MBC. In addition to the job creation that the project brings, it is also really good publicity for Dacorum Borough Council, that we support our small businesses in this way as it is not done in many other Boroughs. She went on to advise that they ensure they have articles in magazines about it, within trade press, that Dacorum business is personal, and that this attracts good press for us.

Councillor Ashbourn enquired if it was the intention to keep this scheme going indefinitely or if it was thought that we may reach a critical mass.

Lesley Crisp advised that in regards to the Den itself, they are currently working on a sponsorship package, looking for sponsors for next year and advised that this year Corona Properties had sponsored £5000 towards the Den and that Maylands Partnership had provided the balance.

Councillor Ashbourn enquired as to whether they would be looking to develop it further.

Lesley Crisp advised that it had been a big learning curve and that they hoped it would get better each year.

Councillor Wyatt-Lowe sought clarification on the point of European funding through the LEP.

Rebecca Oblein advised that this was for business development and support rather than the Den.

Councillor G Sutton congratulated this years winners and hoped they would be as successful as previous years winners. He went on to say that he had started his own business in 2007 and felt sure that had this support been available to him at that time his journey would have been easier. He concluded by advising that he would always continue to support this initiative as our future lies with small businesses and especially in a town like Hemel Hempstead.

Outcome

The Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

15 TOURISM STRATEGY

Sue Lea introduced the report and advised that further to the decision to extend her role as Tourism Officer for a further additional 2 years, the strategy would build on the work that has previously been carried out and to set the structure for the next 2 years, and that it had been drafted in consultation with stakeholders. She went on to say that in March of this year a Tourism workshop took place where tourism businesses attended and offered their input and expertise in how to develop the strategy. She advised that the draft strategy included in the report sets out the visions, objectives and targets for the next 2 years. There will also be destination

plans devised specifically for Berkhamsted and Tring. Following on from the workshop it became clear that partners and tourism businesses wanted to continue with the tourism partnership, however to make this possible a membership scheme needs to be devised to fund the future work.

Councillor Matthews noted that a lot of work had obviously gone into the strategy and referred to Page 44 of the report and the 'Importance of Tourism' and noted that the visitor economy is worth £218 million. He went on to enquire as to what a visitors economy was.

Rebecca Oblein advised that the department invests in an annual report called the 'Value of Volume' survey which is an industry standard measure of the tourism economy countrywide and is then broken down into separate towns and Borough level, and that is where this figure has come from. It breaks down everything that is included in a visitor economy and includes all of the supporting businesses that include, hotels, food suppliers to those hotels and the jobs that are included in that, as well as attractions and shops in market towns. Anything that a visitor might come in and spend money on is included in visitor economy and the supply chain that goes around that. She further added that visitors also includes business travellers and that business tourism is a big part of Dacorum's tourism.

Councillor Matthews then went on to enquire as to what the 'key hallmark attractions' were.

Rebecca Oblein advised that the hallmark attractions were things such as the Snow Centre, XC, Natural History Museum in Tring, Berkhamsted Castle and advised that Harry Potter World is also included as many visitors there stay in hotels in Kings Langley.

Councillor Hearn enquired that the strategy was available for public consumption, however noted that it is quite difficult to read and whether it would be possible to make it more reader friendly.

Rebecca Oblein advised that the strategy was not really devised as a document for visitors and that the plan is to take relevant information from the strategy and create a summary that would be more public friendly. She went on to advise that the strategy had been more devised for tourism businesses that are becoming our partners so that they can understand what they are investing in and the work that we are going to be doing, and where their membership money will be spent.

Councillor Hearn also mentioned the Destination Plan for Tring and suggested that if you have linked promotions it can be more cost effective as you are sharing costs. He went on to enquire as to the possibility of a combined leaflet that suggests a days package of visits that could be made.

Sue Lea acknowledged the linked trips idea and advised that since this began 2 years ago, there have been businesses linking up together and cited Shendish and Snow Centre as a point in case as they offer linked trips and Shendish Manor reporting 45 snow bookings for snow weekends. She went on to say that that would not have happened if there was not someone to help facilitate this. She also went on to advise that when Scarenation (an external company) were looking for premises to hold their annual Halloween events she managed to secure the event at Frogmore

Papermill, and that it has now been held there for the last 2 years, again proving the benefit of linking up that the Tourism Officer is able to help facilitate.

Furthermore with the new membership scheme that is taking place, which has only been going for the last 2 weeks, we already have a good amount of businesses really keen to sign up straight away as they have seen the value that the Tourism Officer can provide. Also as part of the sign up they receive a certificate to say that they are part of the Tourism Partnership, so when a visitor comes into the area and sees at reception a certificate, they can see that they are part of the 'Enjoy Dacorum' partnership and see the links between accommodation and attractions.

Sue Lea went on to advise that she has been overwhelmed by the businesses wanting to link up with one another as they feel that this increases footfall which in turn increases income. She further advised that businesses can also see the value of linking up as it not only brings people in but generally they stay longer.

Lesley Crisp went on to add that there are plans in place to educate front of house staff at some of these attractions on some of the other local attractions, as well as taxi companies and accommodation receptionists, so that they can promote other businesses in the Borough.

Councillor Hearn asked if they were proposing a day ticket type scheme to gain entry to multiple venues.

Sue Lea advised that there are suggested itineraries on the website that promote Dacorum as a whole. She further added that they are looking at the idea of a passport type scheme. She went on to say that the Tourism Partnership has a marketing subgroup who look at ways to increase the profile of the area as a tourist destination and that this group is where ideas for developing the business further develop.

Councillor Wyatt-Lowe enquired as to whether there is close liaison with both Tring and Berkhamsted Councils.

Sue Lea advised that the town clerks are part of the sub groups looking at these areas individual destination plans.

Councillor Birnie advised that he has spent some time looking at the website and noted that he was impressed with what he had seen, however he did comment that the search engine needed some attention as he had tried searching for various things that are referred to in the report but with no success.

Sue Lea advised that they had employed a consultant back in February to audit the website and that this was something that had been raised and that he provided us with the tools to work on the search engine. Also at the tourism workshop some businesses had been concerned about the 'Enjoy' section of the website and the information it provided. She further added that those comments had been taken on board and she had been notified that day that the changes have now been made and they are just awaiting my authority to make those changes 'live'. She also stated that they have purchased their own URL (Enjoy Dacorum), so that it takes you straight there. There is a new menu bar that gives you options such as where to go; where to stay; food & drink and events, so it is now much more a visitor information website.

Sue Lea also advised that next Thursday (16 July) they are holding their tourism launch, with 57 tourism businesses attending and the website and new branding will be launched at that event.

Councillor Ransley suggested that it would be useful to have a tie up with London Midland and train operators, as Tring has an out of town train station and there is nothing there to tell you where to go and what is available.

Sue Lea advised that this had also become apparent from the audit that took place earlier in the year and that would involve working with the local town and parish councils.

Councillor Ransley also went on to mention that as some of the local attractions such as the Natural history museum in Tring are run by volunteers, a summary of the strategy would be helpful for them.

Sue Lea agreed that this is something that can be worked on.

Councillor Hicks referred to the itineraries and noted that a lot of people visit the area from London and can be hampered by public transport and suggested therefore if it may be useful to include transport link information on those itineraries.

Councillor Matthews advised that as a member of Berkhamsted Town Council, he would be happy to engage with the Destination Plan.

Councillor Ashbourn congratulated the officers on the amount of work that has gone into the Strategy. He went on to say that he was aware that Shendish had facilitated the Smartex Annual Forum that day and that perhaps as we move forward we need to distinguish between business tourism and private tourism, and that within the business area there is further distinction that can be made between businesses interested in promoting their businesses through this medium. He finally commented that the promotional card that had been handed out was far more valuable than the strategy report itself.

Sue Lea advised that the card had originally been devised for events that she was attending and where people were not too sure where Dacorum actually was and who also didn't realise how much there is in the area, and that includes local people as well.

Councillor Riddick noted that Apsley Paper Mill was mentioned quite regularly within the report and given that he has heard that this attraction may be closing down, would this have a detrimental effect on the strategy.

Rebecca Oblein stated that she was aware of the situation, and that they are currently not in a position to join the membership scheme, but that she couldn't comment on how any possible closure may affect them.

Councillor Riddick went on to refer to 1.9 on Page 14 of the report that was Annex 1 of the previous agenda items, and its reference to sending out newsletters to over 50,000 addresses, purchased from a database and enquired as to what the cost of that was and what the potential return was likely to be.

Rebecca Oblein advised that it had cost under £1000 to purchase the data to target individuals to attract to the area, targeted individuals and young families who live within an hours drive of Hemel Hempstead.

Councillor Riddick enquired again as to the cost of mailing out to 50,000 people.

Rebecca Oblein advised it was all done by e-mail and therefore there were no printing or postage costs involved.

Councillor Riddick then referred to item 2.3 on page 15 which referred to the Tourism consultant and enquired as to the terms of his remit.

Rebecca Oblein advised that the consultant had performed a one off piece of work to help with the writing of the tourism strategy and that he was now no longer employed.

Councillor Riddick went on to point 3.3 on Page 16 and the three radio adverts that had been commissioned on Dacorum Leisure Radio and at what cost.

Rebecca Oblein advised that the adverts had cost £1300 for the entire year.

Lesley Crisp further added that as a direct result of someone hearing that advert, she had received a call that day from someone who is currently located in the Regis offices, who would like a virtual office from Maylands Business Centre, and that that call alone has basically paid for the advert.

Councillor Adshead referred to the website and enquired as to who was responsible for updating it as the 'Womens Tour' is still future tensed.

Sue Lea advised that she was responsible for that and that she had tried to remove it earlier that day but had been unable to, however she hoped to have it removed by the next day.

Rebecca Oblein accepted that they needed to be a bit sharper on dates, however as Sue was the only resource, that sometimes things slip through the net.

Councillor Ransley enquired that should any Councillors have any unplanned events coming up, could these be advertised on the website.

Sue Lea advised that definitely they could as she will happily advertise any event that is going on as she is not always aware of every event that is occurring.

Councillor Howard enquired as to whether Sue Lea was in contact with Radio Dacorum.

Sue Lea advised that she had been the voice of Radio Dacorum a couple of weeks previously and that she did have a contact.

Councillor Hicks enquired as to whether they had a contact at Pendley theatre as there are always things going on there.

Sue Lea advised that the contact she had had has now moved away, so she is trying to re-establish.

Councillor Sutton thanked the officers for their thorough and excellent report. He went on to say that the tourist economy is good as we are in a beautiful part of the Chilterns and need to continue promoting Dacorum as a whole. He finished by saying that as an ex-caravaner he had tried to find a touring caravan site in Dacorum to no avail. He went on to say that they could bring in a lot of economy, as we are ideally located, so would like to see if it is possible to encourage a caravan or caravan and camping club into the Borough.

Outcome

The Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report, with a recommendation that a summarised version of the Tourism Strategy content should be considered with accessible reports to be made available to Councillors as they have a duty to ensure that the content of these reports are in line with the strategy of the Council.

16 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

The Meeting ended at 9.06 pm