

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

MINUTES of Meeting of the EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE held in Council Chamber,
Council Headquarters, Newtown St Boswells,
TD6 0SA on Tuesday, 17th September, 2019
at 10.00 am

Present:- Councillors S. Haslam (Chairman), C. Hamilton, M Rowley (Chairman –
Economic Development), E. Jardine, S. Mountford, R. Tatler, G. Turnbull and
T. Weatherston

Also present:- Councillors S. Bell, H. Laing, S. Marshall, N. Richards, H. Scott.

Apologies:- Councillors S Aitchison, G. Edgar, T. Miers; Mr J Clark (Borders Chamber of
Commerce), Mr G Clark (Federation of Small Businesses).

In Attendance:- Executive Director (R. Dickson), Chief Officer Economic Development, Chief
Financial Officer, Clerk to the Council, Democratic Services Officer (F
Henderson)

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BUSINESS

1. **CHAIRMAN**

Councillor Rowley chaired the meeting for consideration of the Economic Development business.

2. **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE**

- 2.1 With reference to paragraph 2 of the Minute of 16 April 2019, there had been circulated copies of a briefing note providing an update on recent Economic Development activities. The Chief Officer Economic Development, Mr McGrath, summarised the main points. With regard to business activity during the quarter, Business Gateway had assisted 83 business start-ups, of which 7 met the new classification of “Early Stage” growth. The Advisers had delivered 22 Start-up workshops and 5 Growth workshops to 165 attendees. Growth Advisers continued to work with companies which had potential to achieve growth targets and had put 12 businesses through segmentation. Business Gateway continued to work across the whole of the Scottish Borders, meeting with a number of intermediaries promoting the services available through Business Gateway and the Council. In total 46 intermediary visits had been held during the period. Business Gateway Advisers had facilitated 13 Digital Boost workshops with 106 attendees. The Scottish Borders Business Fund had received 6 applications and approved 6 grants valued at £19,666, supporting projects with a value of £45,469 between 21 March - 5 July 2019. These projects were forecast to create 13.5 jobs with a forecast economic impact of £651,000 GVA.
- 2.2 Regeneration updates were set out as part of the Town Centre Regeneration Action Plan 2018/19. Jedburgh was progressing well and the formal offer (legal contract) from Historic Environment Scotland had been completed and it was hoped that the Scheme in Hawick would be launched early October 2019. In terms of Business Growth Projects, the Council had previously acquired the former Armstrong’s department store building in Hawick for redevelopment and would potentially demolish elements which were beyond repair and redevelop it as a business incubator hub providing small office units. The development was anticipated to provide up to 17 business incubator units, 613 m² net business space and potentially up to 25 FTE additional jobs, with the overall project due to be completed in April 2021. Galalaw Business Park now consisted of 4 industrial units, with 3 of the units occupied.

- 2.3 The first cohort of unemployed trainees at the Hawick Textiles Training Centre for Excellence was completed in July 2019. Six trainees completed the training and four had been offered a job in textiles businesses. The second cohort of 6 started in August 2019. Employers had now guaranteed an interview for anyone completing the 16-week course. In addition, a number of mills were sending their existing employees on day-release to upskill and retrain. Five shopfront and property improvement grant schemes had been launched in Jedburgh, Hawick, Galashiels, Eyemouth and Selkirk as part of the allocation of funding to key town centre projects by Scottish Borders Council. The Schemes had been developed in partnership with business/community groups and were being funded through the Council's allocation from the Scottish Government Town Centre Fund.
- 2.4 European funding continued to be available to projects through the European Maritime Fisheries Fund 2014 – 2020 programme. The Scottish Borders LEADER Programme 2014-2020 was fully committed. The UK and Scottish Governments had confirmed that applicants whose grant funding was agreed and contracted by end of June 2019 would be able to complete their projects, even if the work was scheduled to take place after leaving the EU. Property enquiries received to date were 67 and had resulted in 11 new leases which would generate £44.3k in annual rental income for the Council. Occupancy levels for the last quarter (April to June 2019) were 88%. An update was also given on the five projects which had received grant funding from SOSEP totalling £1.045m to develop rural skills, community enterprises and local businesses.
- 2.5 Mr Dickson and Mr McGrath answered Members' questions on a number of matters. Staff were currently working on the Community Enterprise Support project with progress expected in weeks/months. With regard to the re-development of Armstrong's Department store into a business incubator hub, Mr McGrath advised that this would be a support building, not simply office space, and it would be operated by Business Gateway and SBC. The aim was to have much more of a licensed approach rather than through leases, which would allow Business start-ups to come in and then, after a time, move on to their own premises. In response to a question about the timescale for demolishing Armstrong's building, Mr Dickson advised that it was subject to a number of conditions attached to the planning approval as it was a listed building, so this could take up to 2 months before demolition could begin. With regard to maintenance of the of the planters recently provided as part of the Selkirk BID company project, Mr McGrath confirmed that the very driver behind this was that businesses in the town would support the planters through BID on an ongoing revenue basis. Members also made reference to the advertising on the cladding round the Tapestry building in Galashiels; the lack of business premises out-with the central Borders which was being worked on as part of the Local Development Plan; the lack of hotel accommodation in the central and eastern Borders which limited the number of visitors; and if community projects funding bids failed then officers worked with the communities to try to identify other sources of funding. Officers confirmed that the Council did work with other Public Sector partners e.g. NHS Borders where practicable with regard to available properties and marketing surplus properties.

DECISION

NOTED the update.

3.0 SCOTTISH BORDERS STRATEGIC EVENTS PLAN REVIEW

- 3.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by the Executive Director which explained that the Scottish Borders Events Plan 2014- 2020 outlined the vision that 'by 2020 the Scottish Borders was seen as a stage for significant events that raise the profile of the area and create sustainable economic benefits'. The current plan outlined the Council's approach for the support, development, delivery and measurement of the impact of events in the Scottish Borders. The report explained that over the past 5 years, the Council had been successful in securing and hosting the popular Tour of Britain as well as encouraging the development of a range of sporting and cultural events including the Borders Book Festival, Melrose 7's, Tweedlove/Transcend, Enduro World Series and the Borders Art Fair, which generated on average over £7million per annum to the local

economy in the Scottish Borders. In addition to the current event calendar, there were a range of key event opportunities from 2020 onwards, including themed event years, infrastructure development opportunities, cultural landmark celebrations as well as new and developing events. Development of a new strategic events plan would involve a collaborative approach with stakeholder consultation to develop a strategic events plan fit for purpose. Key stakeholders, ambitious event organisers, national events, sporting/ cultural agencies and local businesses organisations would be included within the consultation process. A new strategic events plan would ensure the Scottish Borders maximises the potential visitor opportunities and economic impact for the area. In response to a request that Scottish Borders Council support the Vintage Classic Car Event, the Chief Officer Economic Development advised that the Council had a variety of advice and guidance for any event organisers on how they could help themselves. Members commented on the variety of events in the Borders.

DECISION

- (a) **NOTED the progress made in relation to the Scottish Borders Council Events Plan 2014- 2020 and the economic impact of events for the Scottish Borders.**
- (b) **AGREED that:-**
 - (i) **Council Officers lead the development of a new Strategic Events Plan for the Scottish Borders over the next four months, engaging with key partners and stakeholders;**
 - (ii) **A draft Scottish Borders Strategic Events Plan would be presented for approval in early 2020.**

4.0 SOUTH OF SCOTLAND TOURISM ACTION PLAN

4.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by the Executive Director which updated Members on the tourism development activity of the Scottish Borders Tourism Partnership and sought approval for support for a South of Scotland tourism action plan to deliver a 12 -18 month programme of activity that paved the way for a transformational 5-year Destination Development Programme. Mr Dickson advised Members that there had been a typo in the recommendations in the report at paragraph 2.1 (c), which referred to the allocation of £60k and should have read £65k. The report explained that one of the key tourism initiatives which was underway was the strengthening of the local industry body, the Scottish Borders Tourism Partnership (SBTP). It had grown over time and was currently made up of over 550 private sector companies and was wholly operated on a voluntary basis, by the industry, for the industry. SBTP had led a review of the Scottish Borders tourism proposition during 2018 and the resulting report identified the low profile of the Scottish Borders as a tourism destination and a lack of innovation in tourism product development. Following further joint work with partners in Dumfries and Galloway, an agreement had been reached to progress with a joint tourism action plan covering the South of Scotland. The tourism action plan took the outputs from a recent workshop, and the ambitions of the local industry bodies and merged these with action already identified by SOSEP and VisitScotland.

4.2 The draft action plan was being tested with the industry bodies and other local partners so the actions and estimated budgets could be subject to change prior to a funding application being made to SOSEP. The report went on to detail the background, the sustainability of the Industry Body, the tourism action plan. In terms of financial implications, the Economic Development Service had an annual budget of approximately £120k to support tourism development in the Scottish Borders. Part of this budget included payment to VisitScotland for marketing campaigns specific to the Scottish Borders as part of the annual Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). In 2019, the VisitScotland MOA was used to secure the delivery of the Tour of Britain Stage 2 start and

finish. In 2020, the Council would have flexibility to use the MOA budget differently again; it was therefore recommended that £40k be allocated to delivery of the action plan. It was proposed that the tourism action plan be a priority for support in 2020/21.

- 4.3 A budget of £100k was allocated for the delivery of a new Boundary signage project, as the tourism action plan budget included a branding element. In the immediate short term, it was recommended that £25k of the boundary signage budget be used as match funding to help progress the branding element of the wider South of Scotland tourism action plan. In total it was therefore recommended that across 2019/20 and 2020/21 SBC allocate £65k to support delivery of the action plan. Whilst supporting the proposal in principle, the Leader was reluctant to commit budget until she had viewed the action plan.

DECISION

(a) **NOTED the positive progress being made by the industry-led Scottish Borders Tourism Partnership.**

(b) **AGREED:-**

(i) **to support the development of a pan-South of Scotland tourism action plan to deliver short-term tourism development activity in the Scottish Borders and South of Scotland; and**

(ii) **to delegate authority to the Chief Executive, Executive Director and Chief Financial Officer, in consultation with the Leader and Executive Member for Economic Development, to allocate £65k from existing Economic Development Service budgets to support the proposed South of Scotland tourism action plan and, in particular, the brand development work at SBT.**

5.0 EYEMOUTH HARBOUR TRUST – EXTENSION OF FUNDING SUPPORT

- 5.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by the Executive Director which sought approval from Members to continue the current arrangement whereby the Council underwrites a development loan provided in the 1990s from the Public Works Loans Board (PWLB) to Eyemouth Harbour Trust, which was a voluntary body. The report explained that the Harbour Trust was very proactive in seeking to control its operating costs and in identifying new opportunities to increase income from the harbour. The support from the Council had enabled the Trust to bring forward a range of harbour improvements and development projects that had helped bring a new income and diversify the activity of the harbour. The Trust acknowledged that the development and improvements they had made in the first five years would not have been possible without the Council support. However, the operating environment facing the Trust continued to present significant challenges, and should the Trust fail there was the potential to compromise the Council's financial interest as well as causing a major economic issue within Eyemouth. The Council was being asked to continue to alleviate a significant financial burden on the Trust in providing long term stability into the future. In response to a question regarding re-negotiating the Loan, the Chief Financial Officer explained that this had been considered but it was too costly to change.

DECISION

(a) **NOTED the progress made by Eyemouth Harbour Trust in developing new sources of income, controlling operating costs and recovering debts.**

(b) **AGREED that:**

(i) **the Council would continue its support of Eyemouth Harbour Trust by continuing to fund the Public Works Loan Board annual loan repayments of £62k for a further 10-year period; and**

- (ii) **the Chief Financial Officer would continue to receive regular financial and operating reports from the Harbour Trust.**

6.0 **MINUTE**

There had been circulated copies of the Minute of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 16 October 2018.

**DECISION
NOTED.**

7.0 **STREET NAMING AND NUMBERING – OXTON**

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Service Director Customer and Communities which proposed that the Executive Committee agree the naming of a new street in Oxton as the Developer, Local Members and Community Council could not reach agreement on the preferred name. The report explained that in terms of section 97 of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 the Council had responsibility for the naming and numbering of streets. The process was undertaken by staff in the Democratic Services Section and involved consulting with the local members, Community Council and Developers. Names of streets were usually agreed by consensus so the involvement of the Executive Committee was not required. In this case agreement could not be reached so in terms of the Scheme of Administration the Executive Committee was being asked to make the final decision. The developer had proposed 'The Larches' as his preferred street name as this best reflected the type of dwellinghouses being constructed. The Committee noted that Oxton and Channelkirk Community Council had been in abeyance since May 2019 and was in the process of re-establishment, therefore it had not been possible to consult with them directly. However, the Local Members and some former members of the Community Council had been consulted to ascertain public opinion in the Village and they had preferred 'The Sidings' given the proximity of the development to the former railway line. The Committee were of the opinion that the matter be deferred until the re-establishment of the Community Council, so that they could be consulted.

DECISION

AGREED that the decision be deferred until Oxton and Channelkirk Community Council had been re-established, in order that they be consulted regarding a name for the development.

The meeting concluded at 11.00 am