

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

MINUTE of Meeting of the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Newtown St Boswells, TD6 0SA on Tuesday, 4 October 2016 at 10 a.m.

Present:- Councillors S. Bell (Chairman – Economic Development Business), D. Parker, (Chairman - Other Business), J. Brown, M. J. Cook, V. Davidson (during para 1.1), G. Edgar, J. Mitchell, D. Moffat, D. Paterson, F. Renton.

Also Present:- Councillors I. Gillespie, W. McAteer, A. Nicol, G. Turnbull.

Apologies:- Councillors S. Aitchison, C. Bhatia, R. Smith. Mr. J. Clark.

In Attendance:- Corporate Transformation and Services Director, Chief Officer Economic Development, Service Director Neighbourhood Services, Clerk to the Council, Democratic Services Officer (K. Mason).

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BUSINESS

Present: Mr B. Simpson, Mr G. Henderson

CHAIRMAN

Councillor Bell chaired the meeting for consideration of the Economic Development business. He advised that, in terms of the Scheme of Administration, Mr Simpson – who was attending instead of Mr Clark - could not contribute to the meeting but merely note the proceedings as substitutes were not allowed.

1. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- 1.1 With reference to paragraph 1 of the Minute of 10 May 2016, there had been circulated copies of a briefing note providing an update on recent Economic Development activities. The Chief Officer Economic Development, Mr Bryan McGrath, referred to the paper and highlighted the main points. Under the Business section of the update it was reported that for the period 1 April 2016 to 31 August 2016 the Business Gateway team assisted 83 business start-ups, of which 5 had the potential to be high growth. The advisers had delivered 31 start-up workshops and 21 Growth workshops with 299 attendees. Officers continued to work with partners on the actions contained in the Hawick Action Plan which included identifying buildings for future development, a workshop with Tourism Businesses on 26 September, survey work and a focus group to discuss the future of the High Street. This work had resulted in an announcement from the Scottish Government of significant capital investment.
- 1.2 In terms of Tourism and Events, the “runaway seat” campaign ran from the 2 – 8 August, involving a train seat being placed at secret locations around Edinburgh, Midlothian and the Borders. Using Social media and through the website, people were asked to help find it, and if they did so, upload a picture on Twitter using the #RunawaySeat which entered them into a prize draw. A partnership of Midlothian and Scottish Borders tourism groups had successfully secured funding to deliver a two year business to business project between both areas. The project would start on 1 November, would have a dedicated PM and Tourism business advisor and would deliver: (a) a travel trade development programme; (b) joint packaging and ticketing for the Railway; (c) World Host Training for businesses in both area; (d) digital tourism training; (e) digital apps; and (f) fam trips, market research and benchmarking. There had been a good response to the Scottish Borders Tourism Cycling Strategy consultation. A final version of this would be brought to the Executive Committee at the beginning of November.

- 1.3 In terms of funding, the LEADER Local Action Group met in July 2016 and approved grant funding of £74,739 to three projects, with total project values of £145,859. Two approvals were for community groups, the third was grant funding for a rural business and a fourth community group application was rejected by the panel. Applications for Round 2 closed on 31 August and five project applications for funding would be considered by the Local Action Group at its meeting in October. The first round of applications to the Forth Fisheries Local Action Group for grant finance from the European Maritime Fisheries Fund would be considered at the Group's meeting in October 2016. The Scottish Government had confirmed funding for the Scotland's Employer Recruitment Incentive (SERI) Scheme in 2016/17. The Scheme was relaunched on 1 April, targeting young people with multiple barriers to employment. Barnardo's Works had been contracted to deliver this scheme, eight places were allocated and five places had been filled to date.
- 1.4 During the discussions which took place it was noted that some of the directional cycling route signs were faded and Members were advised that signage improvement would be included in the cycling tourism strategy, which aimed to pull together all the different elements which cycling had to offer. It was confirmed that the Business Gateway workshops operated on a peripatetic basis which was why they were held in Galashiels and Eyemouth this time, with workshops due to take place in other towns in future. The local business loan fund was being replaced by the Business Loans Scotland fund, although there had been a slight delay in that coming on stream. The shopfront improvements scheme in Galashiels had now finished and the Galashiels Town Centre Co-ordinator was also coming to an end. It was confirmed that there was a commitment from Transport Scotland to run steam trains to the Borders and while the Council could try to influence further charter trains coming to the Borders, it could not control the routes used by the individual charter companies. It was reported that at a meeting of the Cultural Forum held the previous evening, the Forum was still asking for a meeting with railway operators regarding the promotion of arts and crafts in the area and the Corporate Transformation and Services Director advised he would instruct an Officer to take this forward.

DECISION

NOTED the update.

2. ST ABBS HARBOUR CAR PARK MANAGEMENT - UPDATE

With reference to paragraph 8 of the Minute of 16 August 2011, there had been circulated copies of a report by the Corporate Transformation and Services Director which presented information on the current car park management agreement with St Abbs Harbour Trust and proposed to extend the agreement beyond April 2017 for a period of 10 years. The successful integration of car park management arrangements at St Abbs had enabled the Harbour Trustees to develop a programme of maintenance work and infrastructure improvements at the Harbour, which benefitted Harbour users, visitors and the local community. Car park income, collected by the Trust, had been used to part-fund these works which had made the Harbour a safer and more attractive place for commercial and leisure users. Average annual expenditure on repairs and maintenance was now in the region of £22k, and the Trustees were developing an ongoing programme of Harbour improvements. The Trust had requested an extension to the car park management agreement to part-fund this programme. The current car park management agreement ended on 31 March 2017 so it was proposed to extend the agreement to 31 March 2027, subject to 3-yearly reviews. In response to a question raised, the Principal Officer (Rural Development), advised that he was not aware of any significant difficulties relating to the signage within the car park about charges for parking.

DECISION

- (a) NOTED the content of the St Abbs Harbour Trust car park management report for the period to 31 October 2015.**

- (b) **AGREED to extend the car park management agreement beyond 31 March 2017 for a period of 10 years to 31 March 2027, subject to 3-yearly reviews.**

3. **TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION**

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Corporate Transformation and Services Director about future actions in relation to town centres. The report updated members on recent activity and recommended a potential change to the Council's approach to town centre regeneration. The review of recent activity included the Galashiels Town Centre Manager Role. A new Town Centre Resilience Index was proposed measuring a range of regularly collected statistics in order to better understand each town and to provide an objective basis for prioritising public sector interventions. Finally it was proposed to establish a new three year rolling town centre action plan to be approved on annual basis following consultation with stakeholders. A suggestion was made that it might be helpful for members to have a copy of the Ryden LLP Report on Town Centres Retail Study and the Chief Officer Economic Development undertook to circulate this. Discussions took place in respect of Appendix 3 to the report – Town Index 31 August 2016 – Extract, with Members referencing towns within their own Wards. Some of the measures/criteria needed further refinement and Members unanimously agreed to an amendment to the recommendation at paragraph 2.1(a) in the report "...and agrees to use the Index to prioritise its town centre interventions and investments" in that this be amended to read "...and agrees that this be refined and updated on an ongoing basis for use in prioritising its town centre interventions and investments".

DECISION

- (a) **NOTED the development of a new Town Centre Resilience Index, detailed in Appendix 3 to the report, and agreed that this be refined and updated on an ongoing basis for use in prioritising its town centre interventions and investments.**
- (b) **AGREED to establish a rolling three year Town Centre Action Plan to be approved on an annual basis, no later than 31 March each year, and monitored by the Economic Development Executive on a quarterly basis. The first such Action Plan to be approved by 31 March 2017 following consultation as detailed in paragraph 5.8 of the report.**

4. **JEDBURGH CONSERVATION AREA REGENERATION SCHEME (CARS)**

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Corporate Transformation and Services Director updating the Committee on progress of the development of a potential Jedburgh Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS). The report sought formal approval for a funding bid to Historic Environment Scotland (HES), formerly Historic Scotland. Jedburgh town centre had declined since 2008 with reduced footfall, significant retail leakage and increasing vacancy rates. There had also been an increase in the number of buildings in the core of the town centre which had significantly deteriorated and were considered to have critical issues with external fabric and stonework. Following the model used for other successful heritage based town centre initiatives in Kelso and Selkirk, a heritage focused regeneration proposal had been developed for Jedburgh. The proposal would seek to begin to reverse the decline by conserving and enhancing key properties within the Jedburgh Conservation Area and act as a catalyst for wider regeneration in the town. The proposal included a five year programme of works from 2017/18 – 2021/22 with a total project budget of eligible costs of £1,327,000. Officers were thanked for the speed in which proposals for the Scheme had been progressed.

DECISION

AGREED:

- (a) **to approve the proposed bid for a Jedburgh Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme on the basis of match funding contributions from the Council of £150,000 from the Council's Revenue budget and £50,000 from within the Capital Programme; and**

- (b) **to formally approve the funding bid to Historic Environment Scotland CARS Programme.**

5. **HAWICK HIGH STREET – NON-DOMESTIC RATES REVIEW AND LOAN PROPOSAL**

There had been circulated copies of a joint report by the Corporate Transformation and Services Director and the Service Director Neighbourhood Services providing a review of Hawick Town Centre Non-Domestic Rates and proposing a Business Loan and Grant Scheme. Officers had undertaken a detailed review of Non Domestic Rates payable by businesses in Hawick High Street, and the Reliefs already in place. Officers had also reviewed a submission from Future Hawick on the matter. The review concluded that a pilot Non Domestic Rates Local Relief Scheme for Hawick High Street should not be pursued. The extensive reliefs from non-domestic rates already available such as Small Business Bonus Scheme, Empty Relief exemption for listed buildings and Fresh Start Relief would, it was considered, largely negate the effectiveness of the Scheme. Instead, a Scheme based on business loans and grants should be put in place. The High Street Loan Scheme proposed would be targeted at the subdivision of existing larger retail units, improving their attractiveness for letting, as well as a grant incentive for businesses to relocate to the newly formed premises. The Chief Officer Economic Development answered questions relating to the control of rental costs and the recently announced Scottish Government funding, which was targeted at a much wider area than the High Street. During the discussions it was noted that Dunfermline was a good example of changing premises into smaller units, and the closing date for comments being lodged to the Barclay Review about business rates in Scotland was 7 October 2016.

DECISION

AGREED that:-

- (a) **a new initiative as an initial pilot for 2017/18 should be put in place to support property owners in Hawick to appropriately divide key vacant units in order to make them more lettable in the new economic climate as proposed in section 7 of the report; and**
- (b) **the Corporate Transformation and Services Director present a report in due course on the success of the new initiative.**

OTHER BUSINESS

6. **CHAIRMAN**

Councillor Parker chaired the meeting.

7. **MINUTE**

The Minute of meeting of the Executive Committee of 20 September 2016 had been circulated.

DECISION

APPROVED for signature by the Chairman, subject to amending the sederunt as Councillor Gillespie's name appeared twice.

8. **PRIVATE BUSINESS**

DECISION

AGREED under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of the business detailed in the Appendix to this minute on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 6 and 9 of part 1 of schedule 7A to the Act.

9. **Minute**

The Committee approved the Private Minute of 20 September 2016.

The meeting concluded at 11.20 a.m.