

CABINET MEMBER REPORT TO COUNCIL – 15TH FEBRUARY 2010

Agenda item 11(i)

CABINET MEMBER: Cllr Nigel Harley

CABINET PORTFOLIO: Enterprise & Culture

Portfolio covers:-

- District growth and infrastructure (inc. Transport Strategy)
- Economic Development Strategy
- Cultural Strategy
- Built Environment (planning policy)
- Business Support
- Tourism

REPORT COVERS ACTIVITY DURING PERIOD COMMENCING 2ND DECEMBER 2009 AND ENDING 1ST FEBRUARY 2010

LDF Annual Monitoring Report

- The report highlights the work done in preparing the LDF Document which is scheduled for adoption in June 2010. Reference is made to the extent of community involvement and input during the course of preparation.
- The report confirms the targets have been met in housing build and in fact were exceeded by 145%. However it should be noted that, due to the recession, only 54% of new houses were built when compared with the previous year. The build in the urban areas was 88% of the total while house construction in the six big villages was 9%.
- In order to comply with the quota of Gypsy and Travellers sites allocated to the Authority, four new pitches will need to be identified in the LDF Plan.
- In terms of affordable housing 100 new homes have been built, all of which conform with the requirement to be within 30 minutes of essential services.
- Sufficient employment land has been identified.

Planning Performance

- During the third quarter all planning applications were dealt with in accordance with the performance indicators.
- In December full local authority property searches exceeded private searches for the first time since the new law became effective in April 2009.

Town Centre Regeneration Projects

Braintree

- Three developers were selected in November to progress to the Detailed Solution stage of the OJEU process.
- Progress has been held up pending the Cabinet's decision about the future of Mayland House. Some re-scoping of the project may be required at that stage.
- The acquisition of 19/21 Bocking End, Braintree is due to be completed shortly.

Witham

- Cushman & Wakefield have established a value of £5.75m on Newland Shopping Centre.
- They have been instructed to approach the owners of the Centre to see if this price would be acceptable.
- There will be a number of issues concerning the site, including the liability exposure, before matters can progress.

Business Start Ups

- Several events have been hosted including a Braintree retailers meeting, a “meet the buyers” event and a conference on hotel futures.
- In the meantime 6 existing businesses have been supported through LDF funding and 42 start ups have been funded by the Business Link East voucher scheme.
- Considerable interest has been registered for the BIDS scheme in Witham with a number of businesses making the 50% deposit required to sign up.
- Talk continues with BEAU and BDS to see how a closer working relationship can be established.

Growth Area Funding

- The LDF Panel are to set the priorities for allocating these funds.

Tourism

- If approved by the Cabinet, the Braintree Tourist Information Office will close at the end of March. This will permit the office to be used for hire, thereby generating additional revenue.
- Visitor information will still be widely available through the work of the town councils, Freeport, Causeway House and a proposed information centre at George Yard, Braintree
- At the same time a new website is being developed that will be overseen by a new District Promotions Officer
- BDC will work in partnership with East of England Tourism as well as two web design and promotion bodies.
- Grants will be made to Halstead and Witham Town Councils for the promotion of tourism
- These changes, in addition to having financial advantages for the Council, reflect the change in the way that people seek information, with a far greater usage of the internet.

Museum

- Subject to approval by the Cabinet, the £40,000 already set aside be released in staged payments to the BMT and that a provision of £50,000 be made for the year 2010/11.
- This support will allow the BMT to carry on functioning while discussions continue with Colchester and Ipswich Museums to find a long term solution to the provision of museum services within the District.

FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE CONTENTS OF THIS REPORT CAN BE OBTAINED BY CONTACTING:
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