

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Overview Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 30 May 2024

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.09 pm

1 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 March 2024

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 March 2024 were signed as a true and accurate record.

2 Declarations of interest

Minute 6, An Economic Development Strategy for East Devon
Councillor Vicky Johns, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Director of Ottery Larder.

3 Public Speaking

No members of the public had registered to speak at the meeting.

4 Matters of urgency

There were no matters of urgency.

5 Confidential/exempt item(s)

There were no confidential/exempt items.

6 An Economic Development Strategy for East Devon

The Economic Development Manager presented this report and asked members to consider the new five-year Economic Development Strategy (EDS) for East Devon and make recommendations, before it is presented to Cabinet for approval.

The EDS had been developed following an Economic Development Review (LDR) presented to Cabinet in October 2023, the findings from which highlighted the core issues and challenges facing the district's economy. The Strategy had been widely consulted on, addressed the core challenges highlighted by the LDR, supported delivery of the new Council Plan and set a clear vision for East Devon's economy to 2029.

Discussion and clarification included the following points:

- Members commended the Economic Development team on carrying out the work in-house, remarking that Officers were therefore more likely to want to own it and deliver on it.
- The EDS is deliverable from within the current in-house resource and existing devolved funding (UKSPF/REPF). It does not propose delivery of any major new projects for which funding is not identified.
- The Service Plan for the Economic Development service will be based on the EDS, once adopted, and actions will align with the priorities set out.
- There are sites in the Enterprise Zone and Exeter Logistics Park which are suitable for large employers and particularly inward investors with good budgets, and this is beneficial

for business rate income. It was noted however that logistics and warehousing have low job density relative to the size of the footprint.

- Large employers struggle to recruit local staff, since the district has high levels of employment, and house prices mean that workers from elsewhere cannot afford to relocate to the area. The Economic Development team recognise the impact of the housing difficulties on recruitment and are committed to exploring what best practice exists in other local authorities and what this Council can seek to emulate, to ease the pressures.
- Average wages in the district have increased relative to the regional average and this might be related to the constrained local labour market, with employers having to pay more to attract workers in from greater distances who cannot afford to live locally.
- In regard to strategic planning, delivery of employment land followed by development of houses will help to reduce the requirement for people to commute across and out of the district and reduce the carbon impact of this travel.
- There are different types of demand for different areas of the district, with significant logistics demand in the west due to proximity to the transport infrastructure, but with rural centres in the east looking for smaller, more affordable B2 units to grow their businesses.
- The EDS reflects a holistic view of what good economic growth looks like, with a focus on environmental impact and how this is mitigated, and with consideration to the quality of jobs proposed and how valuable they are to the district's economy.
- There are factors within the report which are outside of the Council's remit including the cost of housing relative to wages, the cost and reliability of public transport, the road network and availability of WiFi, and Members expressed concern that these factors will restrict the capacity of the Council to deliver on the EDS.
- In regard to public transport and the availability of services to and from places of employment, the Council will work closely with the new Combined County Authority (CCA) to provide them with the appropriate data to inform their thinking around service provision.
- There is clear market failure in the delivery of employment land in East Devon and it was noted that to prevent the further loss of employment land to residential development, it is important that any proposed employment allocation site within the new Local Plan has been subject to robust viability testing prior to adoption. We will then have 1) the evidence we need to both protect those allocations from subsequent COU to more profitable residential development, and 2) an understanding of the infrastructure and investment requirement of those sites being delivered. This will form our pipeline of projects for which both centralised and devolved funding can be applied for.
- It has become apparent that the rail industry is unable to develop a freight terminal in the west end of the district and the Assistant Director – Growth, Development and Prosperity explained that due to the steep gradient, it is not possible for container traffic to use the stretch of line between Exeter St Davids and Exeter Central. There is ongoing work with Network Rail and others to look at the passing loop around getting a half-hourly service on the Great Western mainline out to Axminster, and this will boost reliability.
- It is understood that the Housing Task Force is considering the potential use of garages for housing. A Member suggested they could be used for small industrial units, in the alternative, and this potential use could be considered through a group of employment stakeholders and subjected to a feasibility assessment, if appropriate.

Following the discussion, the Committee endorsed the draft Economic Development Strategy (2024-2029) for East Devon.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet:

To adopt the Economic Development Strategy (2024-2029) for East Devon

7 E-petitions briefing note

The Committee received this briefing note and a full officer report is expected to a future meeting, outlining a business case for the introduction of an e-petition scheme for the

Council. The Overview Committee will then consider if the proposed scheme is cost-effective.

8 Work Programme 2024-2025

The Committee considered the Cabinet Forward Plan and noted the Work Programme for 2024-2025.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

B Bailey
T Dumper (Vice-Chair)
A Hall (Chair)
J Heath
V Johns
Y Levine
M Martin
H Riddell
D Haggerty
A Bailey

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

I Barlow
R Collins

Officers in attendance:

Simon Davey, Director of Finance
Robert Murray, Economic Development Manager
Sarah James, Democratic Services Officer
Anita Williams, Principal Solicitor (Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Andrew Wood, Director of Place (interim)

Councillor apologies:

P Fernley
O Davey

Chair:

Date: