

# Economy Portfolio Holder Report

Scrutiny Committee - December 7<sup>th</sup> 2023

## Introduction

From an Economy Portfolio Holder perspective, a lot has happened since May's elections. Though some work of the Economic Development team is commercially sensitive, there have been a broad range of achievements relating to our District economy and local employment which should be acknowledged. This report provides a summary of some of the main areas of progress made over the last 6 months.

## Cllr Matt Hall

Portfolio Holder for Economy

## Local Economic Review (LER, Oct 2023)

It has been some time since Local Authority Economy teams have felt confident enough to begin refreshing their baseline assessments from headline economic indicators which have been subject to regular and dramatic change over recent years. However, as local economies emerge from the turbulence of the UK's departure from the EU, pandemic lockdowns and recent sharp increases in supply chain and energy costs, EDDC's Economic Development team have taken the opportunity presented by a period of comparative calm to complete an incredibly important [Local Economic Review \(LER\)](#), capturing the core economic data for the district of East Devon.

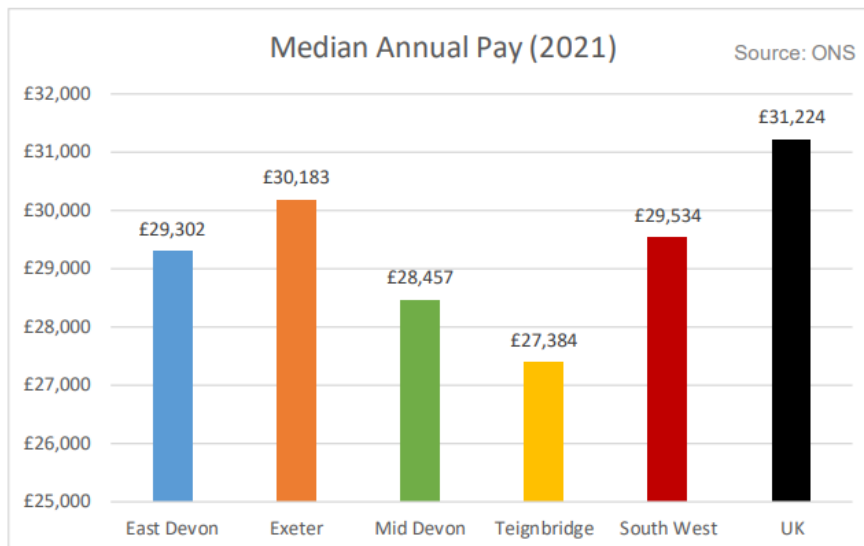
This substantial and detailed LER incorporates the most recent data available and is now being used to guide wider strategic planning and help to inform policy at a local level.

From this work, historical or longitudinal changes can be identified across a range of areas such as our demography, levels of economic activity, local employment, skills, wages, productivity, enterprise data, workspace supply/demand, wellbeing and district level carbon emissions. The comprehensive data provided within the LER ensures that the Council is informed, and so able to act upon, the most reliable, transparent and up to date local economic evidence. This is already being used to inform the emerging Council Plan in identifying local economic and employment priorities, as well as providing baseline evidence for the development of a robust new Economic Development Strategy designed to deliver on our new Council Plan aims.

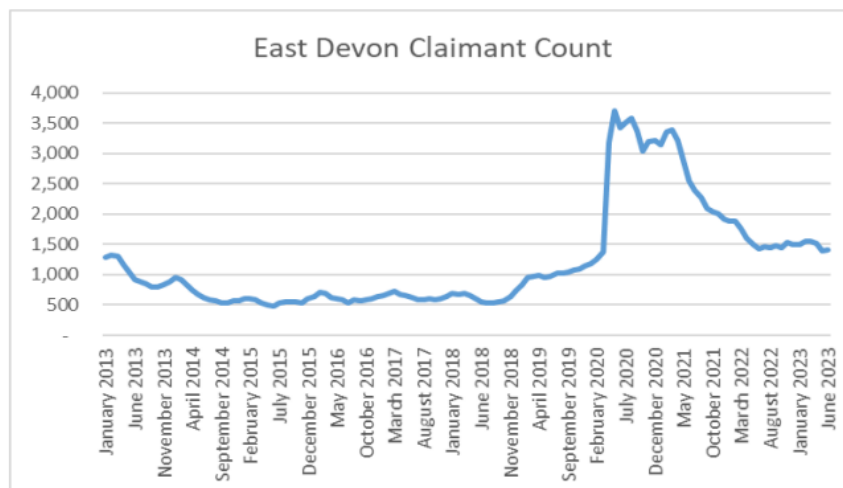
The LER's main findings show four particular clusters of economic change as being most noteworthy in illustrating improved performance, as well as highlighting key challenges to be acknowledged, understood and acted upon. The headline issues are presented as follows along with some key statistics for each theme:

## 1) Employment and Wages

Despite the loss of so many valuable highly skilled Flybe jobs, average wages in East Devon have increased over the last 10 years to match the regional average (still below nat. average).



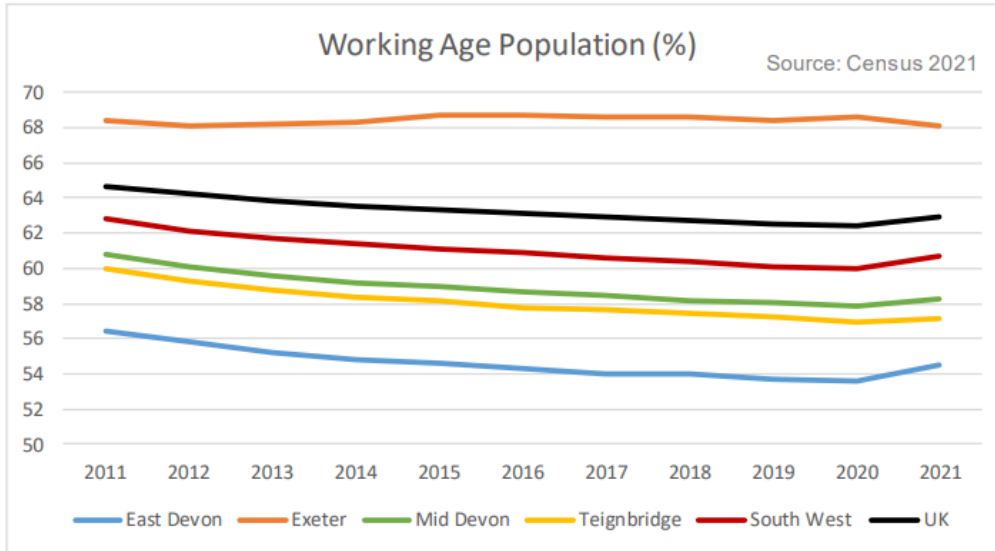
Average productivity rates in East Devon are catching Exeter's but remain below the national average. Despite a low proportion of economically active residents, the district has one of the lowest rates of unemployment, with claimant count figures slightly above pre-pandemic levels.



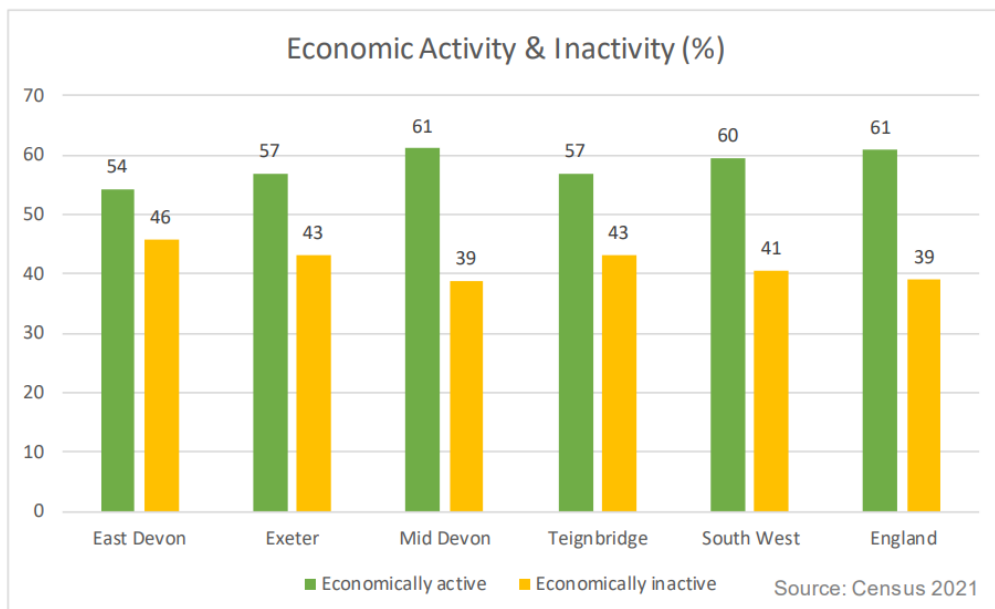
- Our unemployment claimant count is 1,410 residents (1.7% June 2023)
- Our claimant counts are consistently below regional and national averages
- In terms of unemployment, we're 18th lowest of 332 local authorities in England
- East Devon's job density figure is 0.74, lower than 2011 (0.78). Exeter's is 1.23
- We have significantly fewer jobs in district compared to our working age population
- East Devon compares poorly in terms of jobs provision with most surrounding LAs
- Wages in East Devon (resident/workplace) have both increased significantly
- Resident wages now compare well regionally but are below the national average
- Median salaries are higher than Mid Devon & Teignbridge, though lower than Exeter

## 2) Demographic Challenges

East Devon's working age population is just 54.5%, significantly below neighbouring authority, regional and national levels.

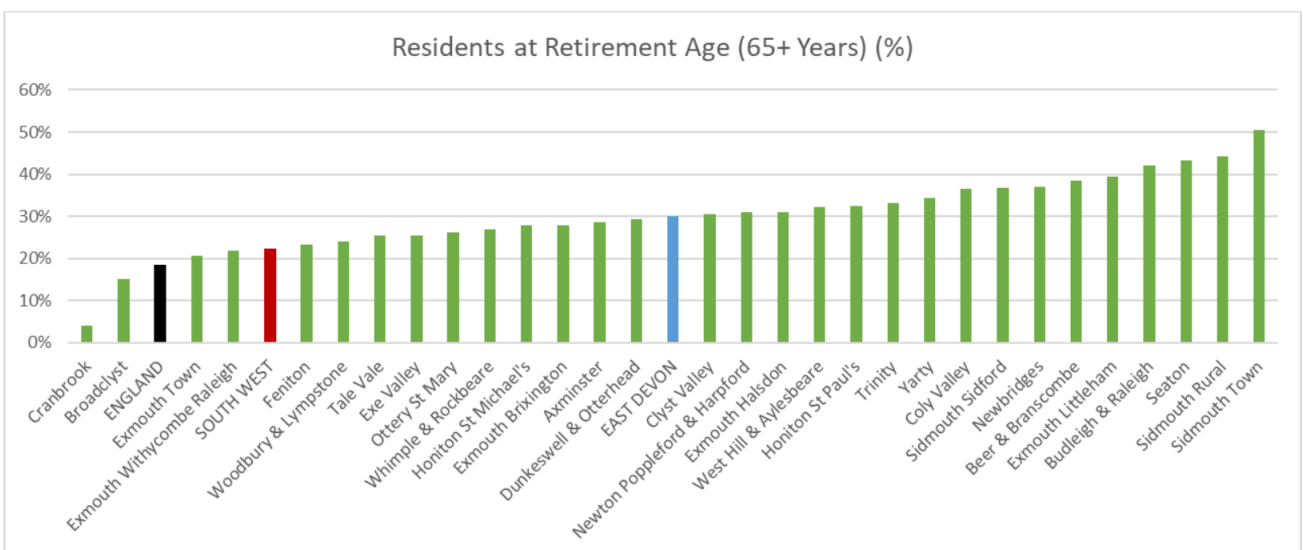
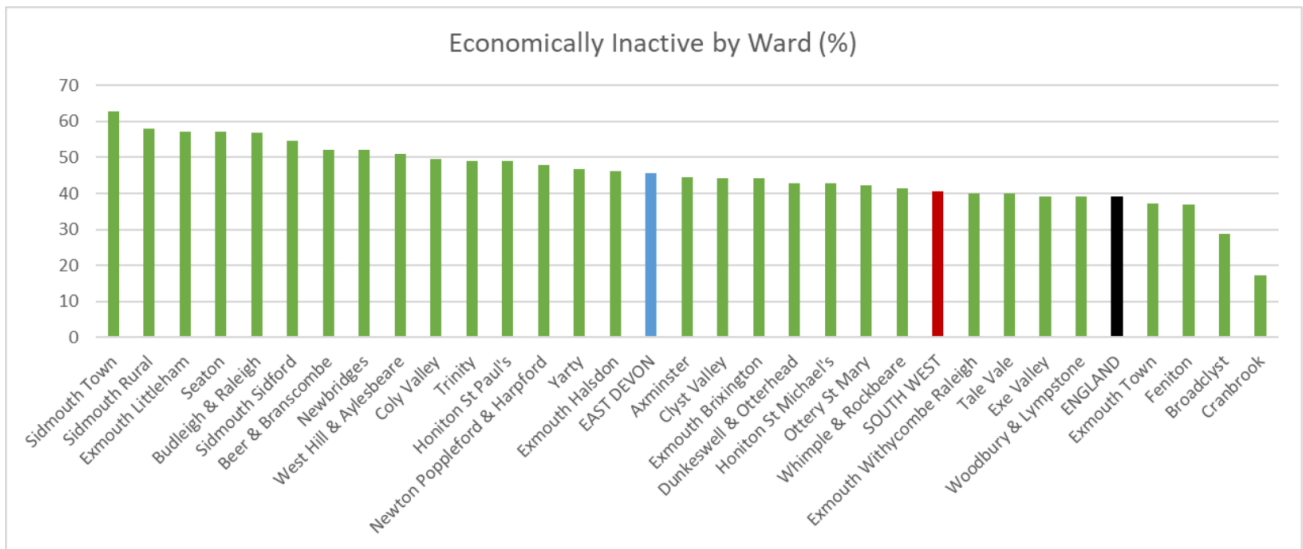


As a district, we have the fourth highest proportion of retirees and the third lowest proportion of working age residents with inevitable consequences in terms of reduced employment, constrained local business growth and reduced economic activity. East Devon also has the lowest proportion of economically active residents and highest number of economically inactive residents compared to the other EHOD geographies (Exeter, Teignbridge and Mid Devon) and the regional and national averages.



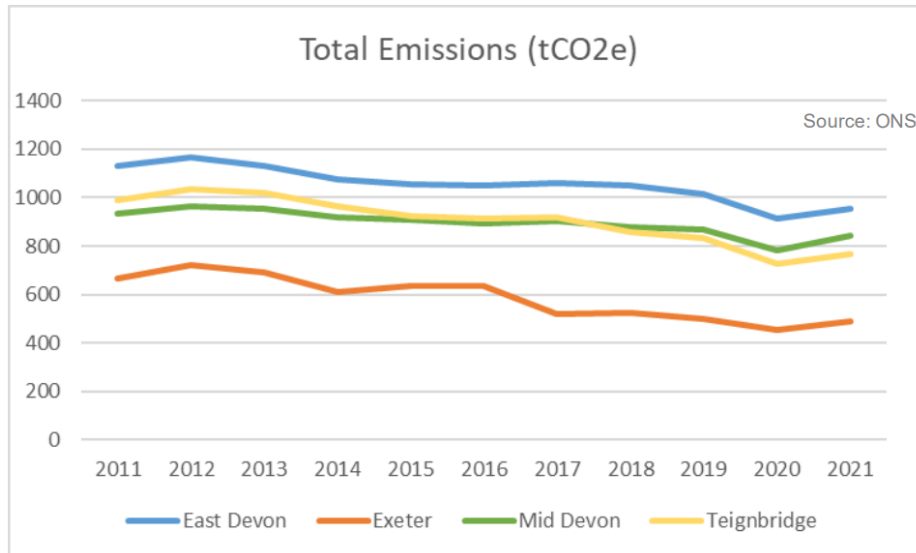
We've huge variance in the age profile of our settlements, with only two of our 30 wards having a retiree population below the national average. Nine of East Devon's wards have populations comprising an absolute majority (above 50%) of economically inactive residents with retirees in Sidmouth Town representing the majority of the population.

- Out of England's 332 local authorities, we've the fourth highest proportion of retirees and the third lowest proportion of working aged residents
- Reduced employment & economic activity, constrained local business growth
- Pronounced variance in population stats across wards
- Retirees in Sidmouth Town make up the majority of the population
- Only two wards (Cranbrook, Broadclyst) have retired % lower than national average
- Acknowledging and addressing our pronounced levels of economic inactivity across the majority of East Devon wards is a fundamental challenge for the Council
- Three quarters of those aged 16+ in East Devon are economically inactive due to retirement
- 9 of our 30 wards have populations comprising a majority of economically inactive residents
- Only 4 of our 30 wards record levels of economic activity higher than the England average



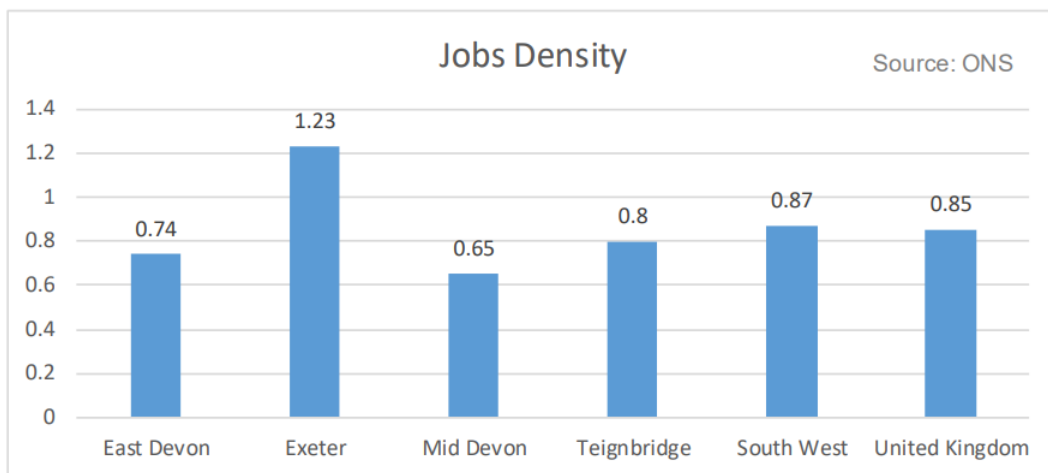
### 3) Sustainable Communities and Carbon Reduction

Our total carbon emissions have decreased, but remain higher than neighbouring districts, national and regional averages with transport (including commuting) accounting for 31% of our overall emissions.



Our lower local jobs provision undermines settlement sustainability, leads to higher levels of out commuting and higher associated emissions. The amount of carbon emitted in East Devon will need to rapidly decrease in order to reach net zero by 2040.

- East Devon compares poorly regionally and nationally in terms of providing local employment to reduce the need for out-commuting with clear consequences for our carbon emissions and the sustainability of our communities

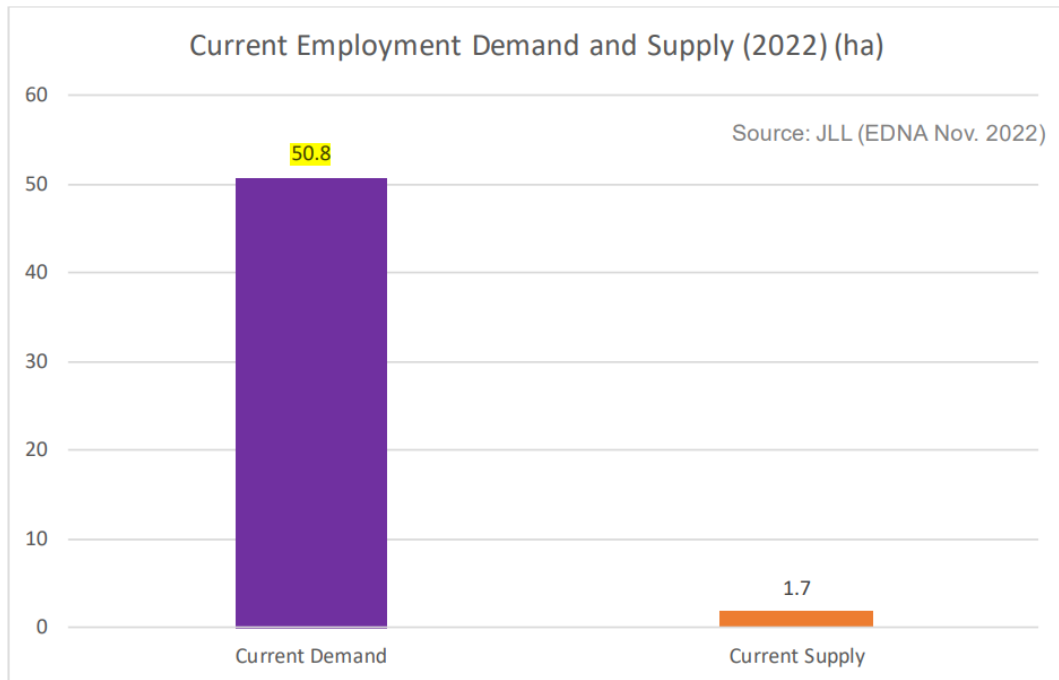


- Carbon per capita has decreased from 8.4 tonnes in 2011 to 6.2 tonnes in 2021
- It remains higher than Exeter, Teignbridge as well as the nat. and regional average
- 52% of East Devon residents are reliant on private vehicles to get to work. Car use is typically higher than the national and regional average for most East Devon wards
- Around a third of our population primarily work from home

#### 4) Workspace Supply and Demand

There is high demand from employers to provide local employment in East Devon, however, the available supply of employment land and premises is critically constrained. This undermines inward investment and means some local employers must relocate in order to grow, contributing to high levels of out commuting for employed residents.

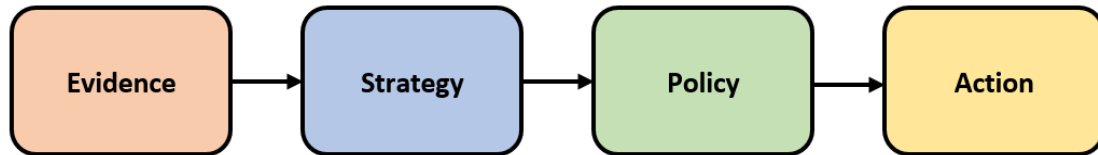
Current unmet employment land/premises demand for East Devon stands at 50.8ha (primarily industrial and logistics towards our West end) whilst available employment land supply currently stands at just 1.7ha.



- Local employers looking to grow and provide valuable additional local jobs can find it difficult to grow on their current site or have specific operational requirements that are difficult to meet on what little available land there is being marketed
- 2/3 of East Devon is AONB, limiting capacity for strategic rural employment
- Many of our communities have high out commuting with insufficient local jobs
- Some main employment allocations have not come forward despite policy support
- Exeter has insufficient employment land allocated to meet its own future demand. Proposals within the current draft of the Exeter Local Plan include mixed-use redevelopment of some major existing employment sites which are important to the wider economy. Significant levels of employment displacement are possible and there is a challenge as to how this can be accommodated, predominantly by East Devon, when we face an acute shortage of available employment to meet our own needs.

## Economic Development Strategy – Current Approach & Consultation

In order to directly engage the core challenges highlighted by the Local Economic Review, October [Cabinet](#) endorsed work to begin on the development of a new Economic Development Strategy (EDS) for East Devon. The Economic Development team has now put together a brief for this work, outlining the purpose, timeframe and process of developing a five-year Economic Development Strategy for the district.



The key objectives of our EDS can be simplified as follows:

- To clearly set out a shared economic vision for the district
- To produce a delivery plan with an achievable set of economic outcomes
- To outline how we will prioritise our resources consistent with annual service planning
- To provide a consistent message on our economic priorities, aligned with the Council Plan, to help strengthen future funding bids
- To directly inform the development and help realise the delivery of other key strategic plans such as the emerging Local Plan
- To help identify shared objectives with our regional partners and local stakeholders

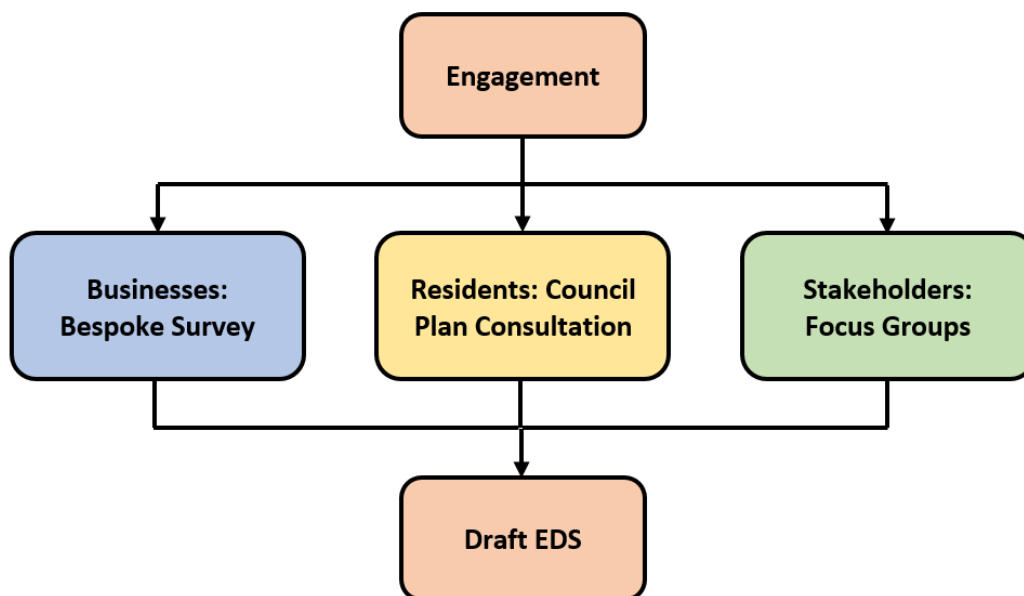
The purpose of the EDS will be to set out the types of economic development we want to catalyse and nurture in the district. This work will be developed in tandem with the emerging Council Plan and Local Plan, allowing for wider corporate alignment with the Council's core strategic priorities. The Strategy will also factor in other strategic documents, such as the Tourism Strategy, Poverty Strategy and Cultural Strategy for example.

The Strategy will detail how we aim to keep track of progress and define what 'success' looks like. We will adapt and refine our approach as we go, alongside an annual update of our Local Economic Review to track the progress of headline indicators against any relevant baselines.

Current thinking is that our EDS will be broken down into various themed policy areas relating to the evidence summarised earlier from the LER. These policies will link to specific actions to be undertaken by the Council. For example, we could introduce a Workspace Policy, the purpose of which would be to outline how the Council will try to address the market failure of employment land delivery. This policy would be focussed on increasing the supply of employment land and premises across the district and to support the retention of existing allocations determined to be deliverable within the next plan period. The Policy would need to be aligned with the relevant strategies and policies of the emerging Local Plan, any updated iterations of the NPPF and the findings of current officer examinations of both our own stalled employment sites and future supply on a sub-regional basis. This Policy approach is just one way in which our Strategy can direct team resource to tackle the local economic issues evidenced in our LER.

So, the aim is to develop a concise, accessible and well-structured Strategy document alongside a policy backed Action Plan for engaging our local challenges in the most effective way. However, having the most reliable and up to date local economic evidence to inform this work is only part of the process. What's equally important is to engage with the local employers, businesses and organisations comprising our district economy to understand their thoughts and experiences of the trends and issues described by the statistics.

To this end, the Economic Development team are undertaking a series of targeted key stakeholder focus groups including businesses (micro, SME and larger employers), representative groups (such as the FSB, NFU, etc) and community-based organisations (including the diverse membership of our UKSPF Local Partnership Group). A bespoke online survey will also be promoted through our business bulletin to capture the views of our wider business community. Furthermore, to ensure that local residents can have their say, we will factor in the results of the Council Plan consultation (resilient economy element) which is currently due to take place in December 2023.



As the development of both the Council Plan and EDS progresses, we will help to ensure that the economic priorities and actions proposed in both documents align with each other. This approach will help to strengthen the corporate 'golden thread' running from the Council Plan to the EDS, the team's Service Plan and finally to individual officer PERs.

A second round of targeted stakeholder consultation will conclude in Feb/Mar. The ambition is for a final draft of the EDS to be presented to Cabinet in May 2024.

## **Enterprise Zone**

In October, Cabinet also received a positive and well received report on the operation and performance of the Exeter and East Devon Enterprise Zone designation including a review of what has been delivered to date since 2017.



Key aspects of successful delivery and spend totalling almost £12m include:

- A new Park & Change facility at Exeter Science Park (£1.1m)
- The Ada Lovelace Building (£660k)
- An enhanced bus service ((£450k)
- Land acquisition at Cranbrook Town Centre (£5.117m)
- The enhancement at Long Lane (£4.52m)
- C.400,000 sq. ft of new floorspace has come forward since 2017
- Under development: Cranbrook Town Centre – Morrisons supermarket, parade of shops and nursery and Zeal Hotel at the Science Park
- The Enterprise Zone was also rebranded in September 2023. The vision is to deliver a world-class, low-carbon environment for business success. This recognises the emphasis being placed on achieving clean growth and supporting the transition to a low carbon economy

The Enterprise Zone remains a powerful, long-term designation and solid progress is being made across the four sites which is ultimately helping to bring forward a wide range of new employment opportunities.

The report highlighted that a prudent approach has been taken in relation to retained business rate income and that headroom exists to support further strategic investment.

### **UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) & Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF)**

The UKSPF is intended to support the wider commitment to level up all parts of the UK by delivering on each of the levelling up objectives:

- Boost productivity, pay, jobs and living standards by growing the private sector, especially in those places where they are lagging
- Spread opportunities and improve public services, especially in those places where they are weakest
- Restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they have been lost
- Empower local leaders and communities, especially in those places lacking local agency

Following DLUHC's approval of [East Devon's UKSPF Investment Plan](#), the Council's allocation of £1,796,363 was confirmed and both Y1, and subsequently Y2 funds released to enable project delivery to commence (albeit after some delay).

In addition to the UKSPF, the Rural England Prosperity Fund was announced by DEFRA, building upon and complimenting the SPF prospectus. The Economic Development team successfully developed and submitted the required [addendum](#) to our SPF Investment Plan, securing a further £854,298 of additional capital funding for the benefit of rural areas over the next two years to March 2025. We have aligned this REPF capital grant provision to strengthen and complement SPF project delivery in order to;

- support new and existing rural businesses to develop new products and facilities that will be of wider benefit to the local economy. This includes farm businesses looking to diversify income streams
- support new and improved community infrastructure, providing essential community services and assets for local people and businesses to benefit the local economy

The following active projects are now being actively delivered under the two relevant SPF themes for Years 1 and 2 (A further 3 x People & Skills theme projects will come online from April 2024):

- **Communities and Place:**

Action on Poverty Fund - Grants to support community-led ideas and initiatives to help reduce poverty. UKSPF funding will allow us to extend this (currently council-funded) scheme into 2023/24 and 2024/25.

Active Travel Fund - Funding to develop additional cycleways to increase active travel take-up. This work will be funded in 2024/25.

East Devon Council for Voluntary Service - Funding to establish a new East Devon CVS to provide support for our voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector. This provision will be funded for the duration of the three-year UKSPF funding period.

East Devon Culture Programme - Funding to deliver the [Cultural Strategy](#), including training for local cultural groups and creative workshops for all ages. This provision will be funded for the duration of the three-year UKSPF funding period.

East Devon Leisure Programme - Funding to deliver the Leisure Strategy, including funding to increase take-up of existing local leisure providers. This provision will be funded for the duration of the three-year UKSPF funding period.

Rural Culture and Leisure Fund - Grant funding for rural East Devon community organisations to decarbonise their buildings. This provision will be funded for the duration of the two year REPF funding period through the [Culture, Leisure and Tourism Fund](#).

- **Supporting Local Business:**

Business Support Programme - Funding to provide the [Prosper](#) programme of general business support services, with specialist support for start-ups, net zero and agri-tech. This provision will be funded for the duration of the three-year UKSPF funding period.

East Devon Towns Feasibility Work - Funding to identify regeneration and development opportunities within our towns. This work will be funded for the duration of the three-year UKSPF funding period.

Net Zero Innovation Fund - Grant funding for East Devon businesses with a strong Net Zero focus or looking to reduce the carbon footprint of their operation. This provision will be funded for the duration of the three year UKSPF funding period through the [Innovation and Resilience Fund](#).

Rural Innovation Fund - Grant funding for rural East Devon businesses to increase productivity and create jobs. This provision will be funded for the duration of the two year REPF funding period through the [Innovation and Resilience Fund](#).

Sustainable Tourism Fund - Funding to deliver the Tourism Strategy, including funding for the [East Devon Tourism Network](#). This provision will be funded for the duration of the three-year UKSPF funding period.

## **UKSPF Evaluation Strategy**

Through the appointment of a new Economy Projects Assistant (EPA) role in May, the Economic Development team are now far better placed to effectively monitor UKSPF project delivery progress against our Investment Plan outputs and outcomes. This is essential since we submit separate monitoring and evaluation reports to the Department of Levelling up, Housing and Communities every four and six months.

Our EPA has recently developed an [Evaluation Strategy](#) for our UKSPF and REPF projects which was subsequently endorsed by our SPF member Panel. This confirms that each project will have a detailed evaluation conducted yearly to ensure delivery is efficient, effective, and delivering value for money. Thorough evaluation of our projects reflects our commitment to accountability, responsible use of public money and continual improvement of the services we provide.

Key achievements to date through our successful UKSPF delivery in 2023:

- Development of a [Council for Voluntary Service for East Devon](#) which will provide support and strengthen the voluntary and community sector.
- Development of the Arts and Culture East Devon (ACED) network and [ACED website](#) which provides a central platform to engage, promote, and talk about arts and culture in the region.
- Delivery of training courses to the [ACED Network](#), including carbon literacy, funding, and marketing training.
- Establishment of the [East Devon Tourism Network](#) to enable tourism businesses get closer to net zero, improve their accessibility, raise the quality of their product and service and work collaboratively with other tourism businesses and partners.
- The [Creative Cabin](#) has been on the road visiting schools and community groups to engage young people in arts projects with environmental themes. Three workshops out of fifteen have already been delivered with over 100 attendees.
- The [Innovation and Resilience Fund](#) Round 2 has awarded over £150,000 to local businesses to decarbonise, improve productivity, and create high value employment. The full list of recipients and their projects can be found on [our IRF webpages](#).
- The launch of the [Prosper](#) programme of free business support to East Devon businesses, with specialist support for start-ups and businesses seeking to decarbonise. To complement this work, our EPA has also compiled and [published](#) a list of freely available resources to help Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) on their journey to Net Zero alongside an [online survey](#) to gauge the support need.
- [The Culture, Leisure, and Tourism Fund has awarded over £180,000](#) to community organisations looking to decarbonise and to tourism businesses either seeking funding

to reduce their carbon footprint or improve their accessibility above statutory requirements.

As of the end of September 2023, EDDC has spent 100% of its Year 1 (2022/23) allocation and 56% of its Year 2 (2023/24) allocation. For REPF, East Devon has now spent 100% of its Year 2 allocation via the [Innovation and Resilience Fund](#) (Round 2) and [Culture, Leisure and Tourism Fund](#). We expect to receive our Year 3 (2024/25) allocation in Spring 2024.

### **Axminster's Inaugural Gate to Plate Event**

On the 7<sup>th</sup> October Axminster hosted over 65 food and drink producers alongside a varied entertainment programme at the inaugural Axminster Gate to Plate festival. Initiated and funded by our Economic Development team and delivered by award-winning organisers, eat:Festivals, the festival aimed to bring footfall back into the town centre, showcase the local businesses and introduce visitors to micro and small food and drink producers from the surrounding area. Over 7,000 people attended over the course of the day and plans are firming up for the event to return to Axminster on Monday 27 May 2024.

Having established Honiton Gate to Plate in 2018, our Economic Development team supported Honiton Town Council in taking the festival on with eat:Festivals as part of its annual programme of events. This has now become a hugely popular annual celebration in the town with thousands of visitors flocking to the event again earlier this year on the 19<sup>th</sup> August. The team will be working with Axminster Town Council to support similarly successful outcomes.

Our team are also now approaching other East Devon towns with a view to rolling the brand out further such that East Devon town centre retail is supported, and the district continues to be heralded by visitors as host to the highest quality local food and drink produce.

### **Innovation and Resilience Fund (IRF1) Case Studies:**

In dedicating just over £1m of Additional Restriction Grant (ARG) capital along with £1m of its own funds, EDDC ensured delivery of the [Innovation and Resilience Fund](#) to support post-pandemic local economic recovery.

51 successful applicants received £2,082,918 of grants with a further £2.1m in volunteered match-funding being unlocked.

We can now proudly report that an important milestone has been reached. As of November 2023, more than half of the 51 projects in receipt of IRF1 grants have now been successfully completed, with more crossing that all-important finish line each week.

The success of this IRF scheme in providing a major boost to the East Devon economy has helped to set the standard in how to future-proof the economy at a local level. Here are just a few examples of these successfully delivered projects:

## 1) Cosmic Studio 15



**Business name and size:** Cosmic, a social enterprise delivering digital skills and services, employing 48 staff

**Funding awarded:** £ 42,475 to develop a dedicated studio-style space at East Devon Business Centre, equipped to produce high quality online video content and virtual learning experiences.

### **Project outline:**

Cosmic utilised the funding from the IRF programme to set-up and mobilise its own multi-media studio space at the East Devon Business Centre in Honiton. The new equipment purchased from the funding included a range of video, audio and high-end processing devices as well as state-of-the-art VR headsets. Alongside the equipment the fund also provided essential upskilling for staff being deployed in the new studio with video-editing, podcasting and VR content development. The outcome of the project is a new set of digital services being delivered to benefit SMEs, charities and organizations across the local area.

### **The challenge:**

In the aftermath of the pandemic it was evident to us that local businesses and organisations rapidly needed to develop new and innovative ways to promote services and products and to compete online in an increasingly global marketplace. The ability to offer multi-media services and support with the latest digital technologies and the support needed meant that SMEs and organisations can access these services locally and affordably. Cosmic has an ongoing commitment as part of our social impact to ensure that digital transformation and digital inclusion is achieved at all levels of the local community and economy – for individuals that means enhancing their employment opportunities through digital skills, and for local businesses this means improving their services, products and market position through digital transformation. Our new Studio 15 set-up has brought a new era and capability in our digital services and support.



**The solution:**

Cosmic Studio 15 is now available to support organisations, either by them coming along to East Devon Business Centre and working with us on their digital content development and training needs, or by us taking equipment out to their business premises and providing them the enhanced capabilities this way. Newly skilled staff members are able to assist businesses and individuals to navigate newer digital technologies in order to maximise the impact and success which can be achieved.

**The impact (key achievements):**

Cosmic Studio 15 provides a set of resources which will boost our own income in the coming years as part of our own business development, as well as continuing to support the local organisations in their own digital developments. The legacy of this set-up will be a host of businesses, charities and organisations (as well as the individuals) with new digital capabilities, skills, content and systems – all of which adding up to a major boost to the economic and social impact achieved.

**How is the new approach being sustained:**

We intend to keep the technologies in Studio 15 updated as far as possible within our own future budgeting processes, and at the same time bid for further enhancement and replacement as time goes by. We can also envisage a time in the years ahead where being able to replicate this model in other business hubs and resource centres will prove highly beneficial across a wider geographic area, and so we are exploring ways in which we might support other social enterprises and organization to maximise their own plans. This potentially could be achieved on a consultancy basis adding to Cosmic's own sustainable business model.

**Quote:**

Julie Hawker, MBE, Joint CEO at Cosmic, said: "The EDDC IRF Fund proved fundamental in enhancing the ways in which Cosmic has been able to develop its own digital technologies and resources in a way which is directly benefiting other local businesses, charities and individuals. The ability to bring the latest digital technologies to support and motivate people in our local economy sits at the very heart of Cosmic's work and the IRF Fund came at a golden moment to boost that opportunity"

**Website:** [www.cosmic.org.uk](http://www.cosmic.org.uk)

**2) Waffle Live**



**Business name and size:** The Community Waffle House CIC (Waffle) 35 staff, two sites, 40 volunteers.

**Funding awarded:** £2,683 to create a community-centred, alcohol free music hub in the centre of Axminster.

**Project outline:**

The Waffle Live project has an aim to make quality music available to the whole community. This sits within our wider mission as an organisation to gather the hardest to reach in our community with opportunities and skills to socialise. Waffle Live is a weekly program of free music events that take place within a safe, alcohol-free, community setting.

**The challenge:** To many, alcohol consumption is widely synonymous with live music consumption. Our challenge was to create a high-quality, grown-up venue for music which was also a 'dry' venue.

**The solution:** To achieve this we firstly focused on the music; making sure that our equipment and sound tech was of the highest quality and then bringing in some brilliant and eclectic bands and performers. We also brought in some really good Alcohol Free drinks and concentrated our efforts on creating a community within the space by maximising the opportunities for people to engage with others.

**The impact (key achievements):** the ongoing legacy of this project is that it has enabled us to diversify our business model. By extending our 'family feel' atmosphere into the evenings, we have developed a model for evening entertainment which has brought in a whole new revenue stream. We have then been able to take this learning and infrastructure and apply it to other evenings in the week to enhance our games and book events.

**How is the new approach being sustained:** This grant gave us the springboard to apply for an Arts Council England grant for which we have re-applied this year. Many of the core and capital elements of the funding have now been integrated into the business plan for Waffle which means that they can be sustained as part of the business. We are exploring how to continue to offer free music whilst also paying quality artists fairly.

**Quote:**

Matt Smith, Director of Waffle House, said: "As a project Waffle Live has paved the way for us to operate in the evenings, meaning that we can reach a whole new section of our community. It has shown us just what music can achieve in tackling loneliness when it is driven by community and resourced properly."

**Video:** [Waffle Live | Waffle](#)

**Website:** [www.waffle.org.uk](http://www.waffle.org.uk)

### **3) Project Impact: A Project Specific Carbon Calculator**

**Business name:** Blue Marble Environmental Partnerships Ltd.

**Funding awarded:** £50K to automate the collection and processing of carbon accounting data through the development of the Blue Marble platform.

**Project outline:**

Project Impact is a platform that enables companies to measure the carbon footprint of a project. The platform is based on a 'bottom up' approach ensuring accuracy and giving a very valuable insight as to where the impact within a project lies and how this can be reduced. The platform can be modified to almost any kind of project, from the laying of a road surface to the hosting of a music event. Blue Marble qualify the results and ensure compliance for the client's Net Zero strategy.

**The challenge:**

Currently, calculating the scope and indirect impacts of a business tends to be a lengthy exercise involving a lot of manual calculation. This results in cost and time, commodities not necessarily reserved for compliance type activities. At Blue Marble we have been engaged on many project carbon calculations from an advisory perspective, so saw the need to digitalise our service and make it more accessible. The main challenge was to make this user friendly and accurate.

**The solution:**

The solution was the development of a platform, developed on our (Blue Marble) own operating system utilising the relevant global standards for Net Zero reporting. As all projects are different, the platform has the ability to read a large range of CSV files specific to the details of that project. The platform is modified to each client in order for the platform to extract the detail from their own project records.

**The impact (key achievements):**

The platform is in use with a number of high profile clients and we are extremely pleased to see that it is providing meaningful data, which is enabling very impressive results when it comes to Carbon Reduction.

**How is the new approach being sustained:**



We plan to keep investing in the platform to develop its capability and make it accessible to a wider range of businesses.

**Quote:**

Henry Waite, MD of Blue Marble, said: 'We are very pleased to see meaningful carbon reduction initiatives and actions being taken off the back of using this platform. We are helping with substantial reductions of carbon impacts within the 'harder to reach' parts of a business activities. We are motivated to keep driving the capabilities and widening the application, ultimately helping with the urgent global Net Zero agenda'.

**Website** [www.blue-marble.co.uk](http://www.blue-marble.co.uk)

#### **4) Factory growth and expansion of technical advancement for sewing**

**Business name and size:** Fortis Clothing Ltd, £800k turnover

**Funding awarded:** £12,462 to purchase new machinery for the factory to enable us to increase our manufacturing output.

**Project outline:**

The project was aimed at giving existing staff members and new staff members training on new advanced machines to help our sewing output become better, faster and of better quality. We wanted to employ more locals to help us grow but needed the machinery to do this.

**The challenge:** The idea was perfect, but to remove such cash flow from the business can be very challenging and so this project came up, it ticked every box for us and what we wanted to achieve. So this challenge could be overcome with machinery and training but the funds were our main obstacle as we grow each year support like this is needed.

**The solution:** The machines, we needed the advanced machines to take the next step to the factory becoming more efficient, larger and have more skilled workers operating them.

**The impact (key achievements):** The impact was immense, just to afford the machines without disturbing cash flow made a huge difference to the factory we are now nearly 20% more efficient and larger in output, which allows us to take more orders. This has opened the next door to future growth and we are very grateful for this project as I believe we are 2 years ahead of plans and growing with a more advanced factory and team.

**How is the new approach being sustained:** We have more machine space to be used, we have more skilled staff trained through the project funds to help and train the next working staff members. It has been a great success for the future of our company and we are very grateful.

**Quote:**

Oliver Massy-Birch, Fortis® Clothing Director, said: 'Investment in companies like us is the key to the future of employment, thriving economy and growth of economic success. Our plan is to become one of the best factories in Europe, for skill, quality and working conditions. We will not stop until this is achieved'.

## **5) Castlewood Vineyards: creating a fully in-house winery**



**Business name and size:** Castlewood Vineyards Ltd., turnover £200K

**Funding awarded:** £40K to purchase the equipment needed to press own grapes and provide a service for neighbouring smaller scale vineyards.

### **Project outline:**

Installing a grape press allowed our winery to be fully in house. The equipment featured gyro pallet, neck freezer and disgorging line for sparkling wines.

**The challenge:** As a small scale vineyard a few tasks during the winemaking process were outsourced as the business couldn't support the capital investment required to purchase industrial scale equipment. Through IRF support, the relevant equipment could be purchased not only to facilitate our own production but also offer services for neighbouring drinks producers.

The challenge of a running a small business and working with a natural product is the ability to balance the correct labour units throughout the year. Certain periods are busier than others so by offering contract disgorging facilities and grape pressing it keeps labour units more uniform throughout the different seasons. Furthermore when your production is outsourced, not only is it costly but you also lose control of your production and deadlines.

### **The solution:**

The challenge was addressed by purchasing the correct equipment for the size of the existing business plus further expansion and contract services. There had already been some investment in a building, this was planned so that the new equipment had a home immediately and could commence with contract services ready for Christmas sales.

### **The impact (key achievements):**

The impact of the project thus far has generated approx. 20% more turnover to the business. Increased our wage bill by approximately 20% and provided more flexibility for employees in terms of regular work as opposed to more seasonal. We are now contract disgorging more of our customers' wine than our own. Last year we purchased grapes from neighbouring smaller vineyards as they usually have to send their grapes away to be processed. This is the first time we could offer this as previously we outsourced our pressing.

### **How is the new approach being sustained:**

The investment is self-sustaining as it thrives on the success of our English wines and the sales of our neighbouring vineyards too. I was always concerned after the pandemic that the sales luxury products like our sparkling wine may decrease. Therefore becoming a contracting business would add another revenue stream. So far sales aren't decreasing and our service industry is growing too.

### **Quote:**

Rob Corbett, Castlewood Vineyards owner, said: 'IRF funding gave our small scale winery the support we needed at a crucial period in our development. Our growth was being hindered by outsourcing certain aspects of production. Now everything is fully in-house we can not only respond quickly to our own demand but also offer services to other small scale drinks wineries experiencing the same challenges'.

AND

'I'd like to say a huge thank you to the amazing team that delivered the IRF funding. The turnaround and execution of this funding was so helpful enabling us to make use of our equipment in order to deliver contract customers their products in time for Christmas. The flexibility and transparency of the whole process made the application process very comprehensive to navigate. The ability to purchase second hand equipment also made this project viable for us - brand new would have not been affordable. Help from the IRF East Devon team was readily available leading to no delays and frustration which you often find with grant funding. Thank you!'

**Website link** [www.castlewoodvineyard.co.uk](http://www.castlewoodvineyard.co.uk)

## **Conclusion**

This report has highlighted the value of the work being delivered by EDDC in support of our district economy and in facilitating higher value local employment.

The value of our continued engagement with the local businesses and employers comprising our economy is clear. On the afternoon of Thursday 23rd November, I was part of the first two stakeholder consultation meetings to inform our new EDDC Economic Development Strategy (EDS). We heard from local businesses large and small and were able to consider the views of a diverse group of representative organisations from a broad cross section of our economy as to what they saw as our key challenges, opportunities and priority issues.

As EDDC moves forward with its new Local Plan it is important for the economic sustainability of our district that these views, needs and experiences are listened to and acknowledged, both in the development of our new Local Plan and Economic Development Strategy, but also in our ongoing work programmes.

The Growth, Development & Prosperity team perform a valued and much needed service which benefits not just the Council but also the businesses, residents and tourists of East Devon.

This is just a snapshot of the work that we do and we thank the Chairman of Scrutiny for allowing us to bring this update to you all.

07<sup>th</sup> December 2023