

Report to:	Cabinet	 East Devon District Council
Date of Meeting:	6 March 2019	
Public Document:	Yes	
Exemption:	None	
Review date for release	None	
Agenda item:	12	
Subject:	Future High Streets Fund – Expression of Interest	
Purpose of report:	To advise members of the detail regarding the government's Future High Streets (FHS) funding opportunity and agree an approach to submitting into the Expression of Interest stage the deadline for which is 22 Mar 2019.	
Recommendation:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cabinet considers the attached FHS Analysis document and comparison of East Devon towns (Annex 1) 2. Cabinet notes the advice from officers regarding Cranbrook and Axminster 3. Cabinet agrees which, if any, town or towns to submit to the FHS Expression of Interest (EoI) process 4. Cabinet delegates authority to the Deputy CEO in consultation with the Portfolio holder for Economy to prepare and submit into the EoI bidding process as specified according to Recommendation 2 above 	
Reason for recommendation:	See report.	
Officer:	Richard Cohen, Deputy Chief Executive rcohen@eastdevon.gov.uk	
Financial implications:	There appears to be no direct financial implications of making a bid and no requirements it seems for match funding. There will be officer resources required in preparing the bid and if successful in delivery but these can be considered and costed into the bid.	
Legal implications:	Legal Services have no specific comment to make at this time. Legal Services will be happy to assist further with any advice relating to state aid, land ownership, statutory and regulatory advice etc. as is needed as the project progresses.	
Equalities impact:	Low Impact	
Risk:	Low Risk	
	This is an expression of interest application seeking revenue funding and external support to develop and take forward an ambitious town centre development strategy	

Links to background information:

- [Future High Streets Fund: prospectus](#)
- [Future High Streets Fund: application form](#)
- [The High Street Report](#)
- [High Street 2030: Achieving Change](#)
- [High street crisis deepens: 1 in 12 shops closed in five years](#)

- See also links contained within Annex 1

Link to Council Plan: Developing an outstanding local economy
Encouraging communities to be outstanding

Report in full

The government has committed to helping more high streets adapt and meet changing consumer expectations. It launched its Plan for the High Street in autumn 2018 with a fund of £675m. This plan includes a cut in business rates by up to a third for a wide range of retail properties for two years, a consultation on planning reform to make it simpler to create more homes, jobs and choice in town centres, and the creation of a High Streets Task Force.

The Future High Streets Fund is part of this plan. It will provide co-funding towards capital projects that bring transformative change. The intention is to bring about the regeneration of town centres through innovative proposals around transport, housing delivery and our public services. The objective of the Fund is to renew and reshape town centres and high streets in a way that improves experience, drives growth and ensures future sustainability.

The Fund guidance states that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government '**will not accept bids covering town centre areas that are not facing significant challenges**'. They expect places to come forward with proposals that cover high streets or town centres as defined as areas that exhibit high levels of social and economic activity, that contain a variety of uses and functions and that act as important service centres for extensive catchment populations. Bidding local authorities are expected to '**put forward a single, transformative submission covering one high street or town centre in their area**'.

There is little doubt that this fund will be the subject of significant competition with bids from authorities across the country. There are areas elsewhere of significant high street decline and failure therefore if East Devon is to have a chance of competing, members need to consider what would constitute the most compelling case.

We are also required to liaise with Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (HoTSWLEP) as are all bidders with their respective LEPs. HoTSWLEP has invited interested local authorities to a workshop to discuss the FHS opportunity further and the LEPs involvement in the process.

The officer assessment is that there are two towns that represent an opportunity to submit an EoI to the fund, but either or both will need to be supported by strong engagement with MHCLG.

Cranbrook

Cranbrook represents a different kind of opportunity to the FHS fund in so far as it is not an established town centre and therefore FHS funding would be sought to enable the creation of a new kind of town centre that is both future proofed and could be a template for the development of town centres in new communities in delivery or planned elsewhere.

A Cranbrook bid brings with it a fast growing, young community and a local council for whom a town centre is the highest priority. Alongside this there is developer financial commitment through planning so any FHS bid carries with it substantial private sector match funding.

New towns are not precluded from bidding although MHCLG were not initially considering the opportunity presented by new communities such as Cranbrook. There are significant elements of the FHS criteria that make sense for a bid for a future town centre. A centre that is not retail

dependent and forms an economic, cultural and social core of a community in different and more diverse ways is very much a fit with the principles and some of the key criteria of FHS. A bid for Cranbrook could be an eye-catching challenge to government.

Axminster

Axminster is a long established town centre in a place designated by the council as a Regeneration Town. The town has and continues to be the focus of significant housing growth which is both a challenge and an opportunity for the future of the town centre. There is long term dereliction and underuse of the Webster's garage site at the heart of the town centre and significant opportunity to strengthen and diversify the town centre through the development of this site, adjacent land ownerships, council owned assets and nearby private land ownerships as well. The council also has One Public Estate funds that can be aligned with HFS to investigate public sector asset use principally to increase the residential element in the mix of uses in and around the town centre.

Axminster has the prospect of 800+ new homes development and associated infrastructure including employment, leisure and transport investment. That represents a 26% increase in the number of households in the town. This East of Axminster development also offer the potential to substantially reduce traffic flows through the town centre and opportunities for town centre investment, public realm enhancement and a more diverse range of attractions to secure increased footfall and economic activity.

There is a shared will in Axminster to embrace good growth and a desire, expressed through Neighbourhood Plan consultation, to bring vacant and derelict sites and buildings back into use that respects the historic core of the town and provides new facilities.

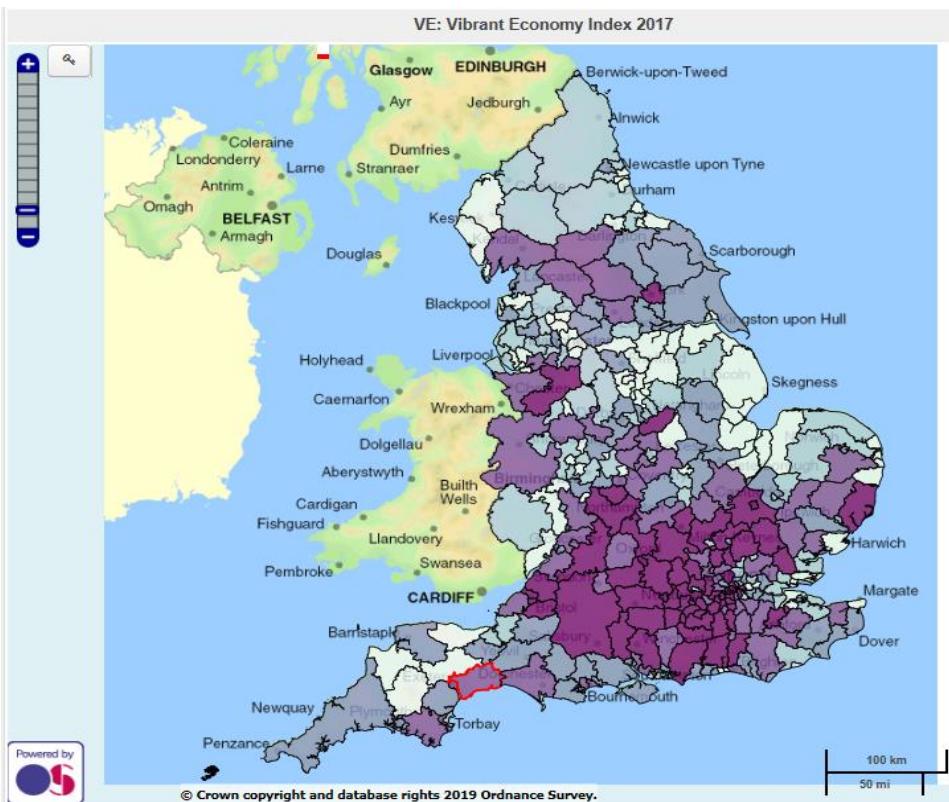
Comparing East Devon's town centres to Other Places

FHS is a national funding programme. It is attracting widespread interest so we can expect fierce competition from elsewhere. East Devon's established town centres perform better than or around the national average. The Fund criteria 'Supplementary guidance for bidding authorities' states that, where there is a high volume of Expressions of Interest, factors such as ensuring a geographical spread of impact and wider economic considerations may be taken into account.

Looking at how East Devon compares with other Local Authority areas in terms of wider considerations, the **Vibrant Economy Index** looks beyond traditional measures to encompass wider social and environmental indicators. Published by Grant Thornton in September 2018, the Vibrant Economy Index takes into account economic prosperity; health and happiness; inclusion and equality; environmental resilience; and community. It paints a unique national picture of vibrancy for England, Scotland and Wales respectively, as well as providing a framework by which to understand local strengths and challenges.

- East Devon is ranked at 102 out of 324 Local Authorities, which puts it in the top third of vibrant economies.
- East Devon is the top ranking Local Authority in Devon – above Exeter, South Hams, Teignbridge, North Devon, West Devon, Mid Devon and Torridge.
- East Devon ranks 6th out of 25 South West authorities. Cotswold is top followed by Tewkesbury, Stroud, Cheltenham and West Dorset. The bottom ranking authority is West Somerset.
- Nationally, the five top ranking Local Authorities are Cambridge, Camden, Westminster, Wokingham and Richmond upon Thames. The bottom five are Blackpool, Redcar and Cleveland, Barking and Dagenham, Boston, Hartlepool.

The map below shows how all 324 authorities perform on the overall index, with a darker shade of purple indicating stronger performance. More information on the Vibrant Economy Index can be found at <https://www.grantthornton.co.uk/insights/vibrant-economy-index/>



Deprivation

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is based upon seven domains of deprivation: income, employment, health and disability, education skills and training, barriers to housing and services, living environment and crime. These are weighted and combined to create the IMD.

East Devon's ranking in the Indices of Multiple Deprivation is 248 out of 326 and is the least deprived Local Authority District in Devon and in the 40% least deprived nationally.

The Index of Multiple Deprivation average Super Output Area score for East Devon is low, with a score of 12.7 in 2015. By comparison, the Devon and Cornwall figure was 23.32, the South West figure was 20.21, and the England figure was 25.78.

Across the district, there are two Lower Super Output Area (LSOA)* in the most deprived 30% of all areas across England which are contained within the wards of Exmouth Littleham and Exmouth Withycombe Raleigh. There are areas of Honiton St Michael's and Exmouth Town which are in the top 40% most deprived nationally.

*Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) were developed for the 2001 Census as small area geographical units. LSOAs have between 1,000 and 3,000 people living in them, with an average population of 1,500. There are 82 in East Devon and 32,482 nationally.

Crime

East Devon is one of the lowest crime rate areas in Britain with 19.1 offences per thousand residents in 2012. By comparison the Devon figure was 27.49 and the national figure was 37.63 offences per thousand residents.

Conclusion

Cabinet is asked to consider the above advice and recommendations and the attached analysis with a view to recommending officer action in time to submit to the first stage of the FHS bid process by the deadline of 22 March 2019.