

GROWING THE ECONOMY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, 10 FEBRUARY 2021

PRESENT:- Councillors Kevin Parry (Chair), Junab Ali, Abdul Amin, Nick Burns-Howell, Mark Dempsey, Jenny Jefferies, Roger Smith and Timothy Swinyard.

16. Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting.

Councillor Kevin Parry made a non prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of Agenda Item 7 as he was employed by Honda.

Councillor Roger Smith made a non prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of Agenda Item 5 as he was employed by Savilles.

Councillor Junab Ali made a non prejudicial declaration of interest as he was a Non-Executive Director for Business West.

17. Public Question Time

Mr Roy Worman asked a public question regarding using the principle “building what people want” for future developments. The Chair responded at the meeting.

18. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 4th November 2020, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

19. Town Centre Masterplanning

The Leader of the Council, Cabinet Member for Strategic Infrastructure, Transport & Planning, and Cabinet Member for the Town Centre, Culture and Heritage and the Director of Economy, Growth and Place and Director of Strategic Development submitted a joint report on work to date by Swindon Borough Council officers in engaging with property owners and business on planning and other interventions to support the regeneration of Swindon Town Centre.

The Cabinet Member for Strategic Infrastructure, Transport and Planning and the Council's Planning Manager highlighted the following issues as part of their presentation and members' scrutiny:

- The value of town centre workshops between Members, officers and businesses in understanding what businesses, landowners and developers require for the town centre and how the Council can add value.
- The positive reaction from developers and landowners in respect of schemes coming forward for the town centre and the need for the Council to engage with more positive messaging in respect of those schemes.
- The workshop attendees had shown interest in investing in the town centre.

- The focus on culture and how the public and private sectors could work together to develop this was welcomed.
- The repurposing of the retail core to increase the flexibility of usage. This would include providing a greater steer on development form and a push for quality.
- The need to invest in the evening economy and the food and beverage sector.
- Whilst there was a need for retail there was also an opportunity to create more residential opportunity in the traditional town centre area.
- The creation of a flagship office area, encompassing the cultural quarter, tri centre Zurich development Kimmerfields, Bus Boulevard and Sheppard Street underpass.
- This would utilise the Kimmerfields area attract businesses from the London and the south-east area to a clean and safe location.
- There was a need to work with private land owners to create a vision and co-ordinate development of the Fleet Street/Bridge Street area.
- When looking at residential properties in the town centre area it was important to consider a mix of quality homes for people who chose the town centre as a lifestyle choice.
- The showcasing of existing and forthcoming schemes within the town centre to show the viability of the town centre moving forward.
- Work with potential developers, including workshops, following the development of infrastructure to support future schemes.
- The use of feedback and information from workshops to help shape the future sustainable development of the town centre.
- Work to enable developers to liaise with landowners in the town centre area to enable potential developments.
- The potential for smaller businesses to establish themselves in the town centre.
- The increased promotion of Swindon on-line both as a Council and in liaison with partners.
- The re-purposing of the town centre to reflect the national downturn in retail outlets; this situation had been accelerated due to the pandemic and as shopping habits change.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

20. Business Retention and Expansion and Inward Investment Update

The Business and Economy Manager, Growth and Regeneration submitted a report updating the Committee in respect of the current status, recent progress and next steps for the Council's Business Retention and Expansion and Inward Investment services, with a particular focus on business grants, TechSwindon, the ESIF Inward Investment programme and Switch On To Swindon.

The Business and Economy Manager, Growth and Regeneration highlighted the following issues as part of their presentation and members' scrutiny:

- The majority of work in the past twelve months had been based around business retention and managing the Coronavirus business grant schemes since March 2020. This included interpreting the Government guidance and

rules; designing a scheme and working with Finance, Audit and Programme Management to create and application and checking process, then physically checking the applications and responding to several hundred email enquiries and complaints each week.

- Support work for Coronavirus business grant schemes had been progressing well with around 100 applications being processed daily with backdating grant payments to 2nd December following a change in tier level.
- The delivery of the inaugural Tech Swindon campaign in 2020 highlighting the technology sector in the town and those businesses relying on technology to operate which was a strong and growing sector.
- The Tech Swindon summit week in November 2020 which comprised of around 30 events with presenters from a range of organisations such as the British Computer Society BT; Intel; Catalent; Tech Nation and UK Research and Innovation. This was attended by many entrepreneurs and small businesses across Swindon.
- The events had excellent on-line coverage through social media creating over 900,000 social media impressions, approximately half of which were overseas, and had received excellent feedback from companies attending.
- These events promoted Swindon as an ideal tech location for businesses and to support existing micro-start-up companies grow, develop and innovate.
- Work on bids for European Structural Investment Funds in partnership with Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership and Wiltshire Council to fund inward investment activity which would continue for another 18 months.
- The £600,000 project aims to support and attract SMEs from outside Europe to invest and settle in Swindon and Wiltshire. This focused work was currently undertaken through Artificial Intelligence tools and on-line meetings.
- There were still inward investment enquiries, despite COVID and the team responded to these whilst building an understanding of the requirements of interested companies and to identify potential sites.
- The Switch On To Swindon network of Ambassadors and brand were created in 2017 to harness local energy and communication reach to promote the town and now had 800 ambassadors.
- The priorities of companies seeking to move to Swindon, including the available of a skilled workforce, which given the current situation with Honda could be provided.
- The development of the Institute of Technology was also proving to be beneficial.
- The ability to match companies with appropriate facilities, infrastructure and sites was also very important.
- Overseas investors were also looking for a business supportive Local Authority and Government and the United Kingdom has for a number of years been seen as an easy place to set up and operate a business.
- The tangible metrics showing the positive effect of the work being undertaken to support and attract business to the town and in creating employment and how this would be recorded moving forward.
- How the Council could be reactive to encourage and support local companies to expand production/products quickly to meet either local or national needs.
- The increased use of IT and virtual technology to promote Swindon.

Resolved - (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That it be noted that COVID-19 has required a heavy emphasis on the 'Business Retention' part of the service, and plans for future activity, assuming the team has

some time away from business grants also be noted.

21. Honda & Supply Chain Coordinating Steering Group Update

The Business and Economy Manager, Growth and Regeneration updating Members on the recent Honda the Supply Chain Coordinating Steering Group and Task Groups' activity and plans for the imminent future.

The Leader of the Council and Business and Economy Manager, Growth and Regeneration highlighted the following issues as part of their presentation and members' scrutiny:

- A forthcoming meeting of the main task group, chaired by the Secretary of State for business, scheduled to be held on 15th March 2021.
- Support currently being offered to Honda, its partners and workforce, including comprehensive re-training packages, alternative employment opportunities and educational opportunities as well as well-being support.
- On-going work of sub-groups supporting Honda, its suppliers and workforce.
- Advice being offered to Honda employees and supply chain employees affected by the closure either for transitioning to alternative work, self-employment or in preparing for retirement.
- Upcoming virtual events for those affected by the Honda closure, including employment opportunities in other sectors.
- The role of the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership in funding Transport and Energy Studies to help Honda to attract high-value operators of the main site.
- The use of virtual information and pre-recorded events to help as many employees as possible to access information regardless of shift patterns.
- The role of other organisations, including The Local Enterprise Partnership and the 3rd Sector, in providing support to employees and their families.
- Work on the future use of the Honda site, including the Leader of the Council's approach to Tesla, and consideration of infrastructure changes that might be required to support a change of use. It was noted that Honda owned the site and any negotiated would be private.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

22. Town Centre Assets

The Business and Economy Manager, Growth and Regeneration updating Members to update members on the use of Town Centre Assets for Development Schemes.

The Town Centre Management Team highlighted the following issues as part of their presentation and members' scrutiny:

- The Bus Boulevard scheme had been awarded £25m of funding from the Future High Street Fund, and would receive £3million from the Local Growth Fund as well as £5 million Council funding. This would help transform Fleming Way, improve the experience of people visiting the town centre by public transport and would support the wider Kimmerfields development.
- The Bus Boulevard scheme was complex with a number of utilities situated

beneath the public highway and pieces of privately owned land. Issues relating to this and the design were currently being finalised for tendering.

- The scheme was expected to commence in the spring of 2022 and would take approximately two years to complete.
- The Kimmerfields project would link the town's business centre with the retail space.
- Zurich had commenced their office project in July and was on programme with staff moving in in 2022.
- The Council had recently purchased the north part of the site to enable it to drive the project forward as a sole developer.
- A revised masterplan for Kimmerfields, Swindon's flagship regeneration scheme, was currently being produced. This mixed use development, including the cultural quarter in the north west of the plot, would deliver new opportunities to live, work and play in the town centre.
- The Council had applied for a £6million grant from the Town Investment Fund to support the Kimmerfields project infrastructure.
- The current bus station site would form part of the proposed cultural quarter.
- Work was on-going with a number of key partners, developers and stakeholders to produce a plan for the town's cultural assets which had identified five key projects which where a new 1,200 seat theatre, a renewed Swindon museum, a new art pavilion/gallery, a new media production centre and a new dance centre.
- These projects would bring economic, cultural and social benefits to the town and its residents and would widen the use of the town centre area. It would also make local and national organisations based within the town more visible and would be partly funded by the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership through a feasibility study and the production of an investment prospectus.
- A broad range of experts were involved in the planning and design of these projects.
- The finances of the project and future investment both through grant funding and Council investment.
- Work was on-going to find a future use for the Mechanics Institute and to be able to bring the building back into a usable state following an options appraisal in December 2019.
- A Hazardous Materials report is awaited on the Mechanics Institute on receipt of which a structural engineer will be appointed to undertake a structural survey, condition report and cost plan for the Mechanics Institute.
- Works to complete Phase 2 of The Carriage Works to deliver units 7&9 would be in contract in spring 2021 following a successful bid to the Getting Building Fund administered by the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Council providing an extra 15,000 sq foot of quality space.
- The Royal Agricultural University has taken occupation of unit 11 of the Carriage Work in September 2020.
- Phase 3 to upgrade the West Shed was being planned and grant funding sought from the Town Fund.
- The scheduling of phases 2, 3 and 4 of the Carriage Works and the type and mix of space available.
- The importance of the Bristol Street underpass to link the proposed cultural quarter and Outlet Centre.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

23. Visit Swindon update

The Business and Economy Manager, Growth and Regeneration submitted a report setting out pre-COVID-19 plans and activity to promote Swindon as a visitor destination.

The Business and Economy Manager, Growth and Regeneration highlighted the following issues as part of their presentation and members' scrutiny:

- Most recent work had been to support and protect businesses involved in the tourism and leisure sectors which had been hardest hit by COVID-19 restrictions.
- Prior to COVID-19 work had commenced on a tourism strategy and had met with local tourism, sport and hospitality businesses and organisations to discuss creating a small tourism strategy, which could be delivered in partnership.
- Following productive discussions partners had agreed to help to provide web and social media content to promote the town. Due to the effect of the COVID pandemic this work had to be put on hold as many businesses have been closed or severely restricted for almost a year.
- The Council continued to work with Jazzbones (local creative marketing and design company) to promote the town. Jazzbones provides, maintains, and updates the Visit Swindon website and media accounts in partnership with the Council.
- A video had also been produced about leisure and historical facilities within the town.

Resolved – (1) That progress to date on Visit Swindon be noted.

(2) That it be noted that plans put on hold due to COVID-19, will be resumed at the appropriate time.

24. Work Programme 2020/21

The Committee considered (a) an oral update on Apprenticeships, and (b) a report by the Chief Legal Officer setting out the Committee's proposed Work Programme for the Municipal Year 2020/21.

Resolved – (1) That the update on apprenticeships be noted.

(2) That the report be noted and Work Programme for the current Municipal Year be approved.