

# POLICY REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL

## 10 SEPTEMBER 2012

*Present :-* Councillor Julie Young (Chairman)  
Councillors Mark Cable, Nigel Chapman, Barrie Cook,  
Mark Cory, Margaret Fairley-Crowe and Jo Hayes

### 8. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 August 2012 were confirmed as a correct record.

### 9. Economic Development Strategy 2010 - 2015

Mr Brian Morgan, a Town Planner and Architect addressed the Panel, pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1). He explained that he was attending the meeting as he was very interested to hear the presentations for the various guests attending the meeting. As the economic outlook had changed considerably since the Council's strategy had been first introduced. He was of the view that detailed planning, and particularly that making the best use of the university, would play a key part in the economic development of Colchester. He referred to the opportunities to be gained from the creation of a 'Norwich style' retail park opposite the Knowledge Gateway, together with an extension to the A120, to the front of the university.

Nigel Myers, Enterprise and Tourism Manager and Karen Turnbull, Enterprise and Tourism Development Officer presented a report inviting the Panel to review the Council's Economic Development Strategy 2010 to 2015 and the corresponding Delivery Plan. The primary role of the Strategy was to set out a framework to steer the activities of the Council and partner organisations to achieve a sustainable and strong local economy, foster the conditions for economic resilience and growth and to capture the economic benefits for residents and businesses in the Borough.

It was explained that the Colchester economy was worth in the order of £17 billion, with key employment sectors being manufacturing, construction, retail, IT and business services, tourism and public administration, health and education. Emerging employment sectors were environmental industries, financial services and creative industries. One in six businesses in the Borough were creative industries. Businesses totaled over 20,000, the majority of which were micro businesses with less than 10 employees and small to medium size enterprises with less than 200 employees. Colchester Town Centre was in the top 50 (43rd) in the UK based on an annual retail expenditure of £540m alongside other cities such as Cheltenham and Bath and retail centres such as Brent Cross.

97,800 people in Colchester were economically active, representing 82.5% of the working age population. In contrast, 6,100 people were unemployed, representing 6.1% of those deemed to be economically active.

It was acknowledged that the borough faced some significant economic challenges in the period to 2015, including the level of unemployment, the effects of reduction in public sector spending, the relatively high level of young people aged 16 - 19 who are not in education, employment or training and the need to further increase the rate of new business start ups.

Engaging with the local business community was recognised as being fundamentally important for the development of local government services. The process of consulting with business owners and business representatives benefits both the Council and its constituents. In addition Colchester would continue to work in partnership with public and third sector partners at the appropriate geographic level to plan, co-ordinate and deliver economic development.

The following highlights were indicative of what the current Economic Development Strategy had achieved for the Borough:

- Directly assisted over 800 businesses to access a range of advice, support and funding
- Established 'Colchester Works' bringing together over 40 organisations such as Job Centre Plus and Essex County Council to address employability and skills issues in the borough – successes include securing funding for 'Finding Futures' an initiative which has help reduce the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training
- Increased the number of inward investment enquiries creating 50 jobs with 480 further jobs in the pipeline
- Digital Strategy which will commence deployment of wireless broadband in September 2012 – the Strategy has been instrumental in bringing forward £8m of investment in fibre infrastructure by 2.5 years
- Worked with the Colchester Christmas Group to deliver improved Christmas lights and promotional activities to drive footfall and expenditure
- Colchester Business Directory has helped local companies to secure contracts with a value of over £3.5m
- The award winning Visitor Information Centre and website 'Visit Colchester' helping to increase annual tourism expenditure to £224m and visitor numbers to 4.7m

Councillors Cope and Quince attended and, with the consent of the Chairman, addressed the Panel. Councillor Cope referred to the negative impact of the night time economy on the community in terms of crime and healthcare costs and Councillor Quince asked about the work undertaken on business start-ups, the use of VAT registered companies as a useful economic development indicator, the benefits of an application for purple flag status and the need for town centre management issues to be looked into again.

It was explained that work was going ahead on the night time economy impacts and the purple flag status was a very useful mechanism by which to manage this work. In terms of town centre management, the Council, this needed to be driven by businesses and retailers and the Council was willing to support any such initiatives moving forward.

Particular discussion from the Panel members was in relation to:

- The current definition of apprenticeships
- The welcome progress of the digital strategy, especially for rural areas
- Local area currency such as 'the Bristol pound'

Councillor Smith, Portfolio Holder for Business and Resources attended the meeting and, with the consent of the Chairman addressed the Panel. Councillor Smith referred to the continuing growth of the economy locally, albeit slower than in the past, reflected in the high levels of business incubation centre occupancies and the future investment in the town recently committed to by Fenwicks.

The Chairman welcomed guest speakers Eleanor Totman, Abigail Cheverst, Digby Chacksfield, Dr Janice Pittis and Steve Clarke to the meeting and thanked them for assisting the Panel members in their discussions. She invited each guest to make a presentation to the Panel and to respond to questions in turn.

Eleanor Totman, the Deputy Director of Commercial Services at the University of Essex provided the Panel with a presentation on the newly refurbished Wivenhoe House which had recently undergone a £10m refurbishment which had restored the building's hotel facilities as well as providing new conference and a choice of hospitality options. The hotel had built a relationship with the Edge Hotel School which enabled teams of young undergraduate managers to work with experienced professionals in a commercial hotel environment.

Abigail Cheverst, Manager of Slackspace explained the concept of this non-commercial organisation which put arts and performance into empty shops. Slackspace was beginning to receive national recognition through donations and the use of the Future Jobs Fund to pioneer its work with up and coming artists and musicians, helping to develop their self confidence and expertise. Slackspace employed two members of staff but 30 people regularly acted as volunteers, helping to support the creative economy.

Digby Chacksfield, Learning Manager of the Eastern Enterprise Hub in Ipswich explained that the Hub was a school for social entrepreneurs which worked in partnership with the University and local businesses to support young people and had contributed, since its inception in 2011, to the setting up of 41 enterprises and 740 jobs. The programme was built on an action learning basis using established entrepreneurs to teach skills such as accountancy but also self confidence and public speaking. Those accepted on the course are local BTEC students and the places are sponsored. The concept had begun in Ipswich, had now been delivered in the region generally and there were possibilities that similar opportunities might develop in Colchester.

Dr Janice Pittis, the Director of the Research and Enterprise Office at the University of Essex explained to the Panel the core business of the university to teach, undertake research and support innovation and enterprise. The university had 12, 000 students, 11,000 based in Colchester, 5,000 were international students from 130 countries. Beyond this, it was estimated that the university contributed £200m to the local

economy each year and was currently investing another £200m in new development. There were 2,000 members of staff whilst the quality of research was ranked 9<sup>th</sup> in the UK. The university was actively engaged in establishing a research links team with the Council which had contributed to work on the night time economy as well as other initiatives with the Chamber of Commerce, assisting with community consultation in North Colchester and hosting the broadband conference to launch Colchester's Digital Strategy. In terms of actual courses on offer being able to deliver the skills required currently, the university had established Employer Advisory Boards in each Department which gathered intelligence, provided feedback and suggested course content.

Steve Clarke, Knowledge Gateway Consultant for the University of Essex explained the competitive advantage that the university was able to offer to people willing to use its resources. The Knowledge Gateway was the same size as Colchester Business Park with potential for around 2000 jobs in the future. He acknowledged the potential location and access limitations compared to a direct A12 location but considered these should be balanced against the additional facilities on offer. To this end the university was working with Essex County Council's Investment Team to put in place a marketing strategy.

Particular additional discussion took place regarding:

- The bringing together of the Council's Enterprise and Tourism Teams and the good work this had delivered
- The anticipated growth in population forecast for Colchester to 2031 and the need to continue to respond with corresponding economic growth by means of resources and promotion

*RESOLVED* that:-

- (i) The contributions from each of the guest speakers be welcomed and they be thanked for their valuable assistance to the Panel;
- (ii) The discussion undertaken by the Panel be used to inform the review of the Council's proposed Economic Development Strategy 2010 to 2015, in particular in relation to the significant issues relating to:
  - Long term unemployed
  - Anticipated population growth
  - Nurturing of entrepreneurial skills
  - Unemployment 16 – 24 year olds

## **10. Work Programme 2012-13**

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Corporate Management giving details of the Panel's current work programme. The programme has been updated since the previous meeting of the Panel to reflect the decisions that were made and current circumstances.

The Chairman reported that following her enquiry to Councillor Derrick Louis, the Essex County Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation regarding the issue of 20 mph speed limits she had been informed that a press release was due to be issued explaining that a Comprehensive Review of Speed Limits was to be scheduled. She was hopeful that this might mean that progress would now be forthcoming on this issue.

*RESOLVED* that the contents of the report and the current situation regarding the work programme be noted.