

ECONOMIC GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

28 SEPTEMBER 2021

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool.

Present:

Councillor Paddy Brown (In the Chair)

Councillors: Ben Clayton, Rob Cook, Pamela Hargreaves, Jim Lindridge, and Mike Young.

Officers: Chris Little, Director of Resources and Development
Bev Bearne, Assistant Director, Development and Growth
Israr Hussain, Economic Growth and Regeneration Manager
Steve Hilton, Communications and Marketing Team
David Cosgrove, Democratic Services Team

5. Apologies for Absence

Councillor Brian Cowie.

6. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Hargreaves and Brown declared personal interests as business operators in the town.

7. Minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2021

Received.

8. Economic Growth Strategy (2022-2025) *(Assistant Director (Development and Growth)*

Type of decision

Key Decision, test (ii) – General Exception Notice Applies.

Purpose of report

To inform the Committee on the progress made on the:

- current Economic Growth and Regeneration Strategy 2019-21
- the impacts of Covid-19 on the Hartlepool economy and
- the activities the Economic Growth Team are undertaking to support local businesses and grow the Hartlepool Economy.

Issue(s) for consideration by the Committee

The Assistant Director, Development and Growth reported that the Council approved the current Hartlepool Economic Growth and Regeneration Strategy in 2019. A copy was supplied as appendix 1 to the report. The report also highlighted some of the key achievements and outcomes of the strategy.

However, business decisions for investment have been impacted by the uncertain economic environment, including the impact of the time taken to reach an EU Exit agreement and the Covid-19 pandemic. Locally, the biggest impact has been by far on the leisure and tourism industries that have had to endure more than other sectors the financial consequences of not being able to trade in their usual manner.

With the easing of lockdown restrictions by the Government allowing businesses to start to trade again the focus for the Economic Growth Team was engaging with local businesses to help with investment and growth to help boost the local economy.

There is a need to develop a new 3 year Economic Growth Strategy that sets the vision and identifies the activities that need to be undertaken to improve the economy of the town. The Assistant Director proposed, therefore, that specialist economic consultants be appointed, through a competitive tendering process, to lead on the development of the strategy with oversight through the Hartlepool Economic Regeneration and Tourism Forum. As part of developing the forward vision for the economic priorities of the town there would also be a comprehensive consultation process.

Members welcomed the proposal and explored with officers the performance of the previous strategy and also those elements that had been undeliverable. The Chair and Members questioned how the support that had been provided through the Covid-19 pandemic had reached those businesses that needed it and how certain could the Council be that all appropriate businesses had been supported.

The Director stated that the Business rate Relief scheme had been relatively simple to administer and had robust procedures to support it set by government. There had been some element of discretion with the business grant support scheme and officers were quite assured that all

those businesses that could apply had and had received support. The business community was quite well connected in Hartlepool so the word had spread quickly around the support available.

The meeting moved to discussing the future strategy with Members keen to see and the identification of areas where support should be targeted and that it was delivered quickly. Work around reopening and reinvigorating the 'high street' was seen as a priority with Members keen to know what the impact of the pandemic had been in terms of businesses still viable to continue. The Assistant Director stated that gaining that baseline information would be a key element to the development of the strategy. The Director indicated that officers could provide the committee with some quarterly 'high level' information on business operation and growth if that would be beneficial. The Chair and Members welcomed the proposal.

Members continued in their expression of concerns for the retail business sector in the town following the pandemic and the Assistant Director indicated that while this was concerning, there were other cross-cutting issues. Gaining accurate intelligence on footfall in retail areas would be key to identifying the trends that the sector would need support through the strategy to adapt to.

Members welcomed the success of the BIS since opening and questioned the numbers of units let and if there were certain sectors being targeted for the letting of units. The Economic Growth and Regeneration Manager reported that 20 of the 28 units had been let which was ahead of the expected rate. There had been some turnover of businesses but there was a good spread of creative and IT businesses operating in the BIS at this time. In terms of future development, the Assistant Director stated that officers were working with the Northern School of Art on the future development of the TV and Film studio and what type of businesses could be developed alongside this exciting new facility for Hartlepool and the wider region.

A Member questioned if apprenticeship opportunities were also being promoted. Officers indicated that they would be but the wider landscape for apprenticeships had changed through the pandemic and with few new jobs being created at this time, new apprenticeships were few.

Members discussed the development of the new strategy questioning the consultancy support being proposed and their wish to be involved as much as possible throughout the consultation and development process. The Director stated that Members involvement had always been part of the process but a greater involvement may require some adjustment to the timescales for developing the new strategy, potential extending the date for the production of the final document until March 2022. Members supported the suggestion considering that the original January timescale had been quite ambitious.

A Member questioned if there had been any feedback from the business community on the government's recent announcement of a 1.25% increase

in national insurance contributions. The Director stated that there hadn't been any specific comments so far but he did anticipate the additional costs on businesses would translate to higher prices, the adult social care market being one area of concern to the Council.

In relation to the appointment of consultants, Members requested that the Director circulate details of the accepted tender and if it was within the budget anticipated.

Decision

That the development of a new three year Economic Growth Strategy for Hartlepool as outlined be approved. An interim report on the draft strategy to be submitted to the Committee in January 2022 with the aim of a finalised strategy being submitted for approval by the Committee and Council in March 2022.

9. Hartlepool Borough Council and Hartlepool United Football Club Memorandum of Understanding *(Director of Resources and Development)*

Type of decision

For information only.

Purpose of report

The report presented Members with an overview of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Hartlepool Borough Council (the Council) and Hartlepool United Football Club (the Club).

Issue(s) for consideration by the Committee

The Assistant Director, Development and Growth reported that the MOU had been signed in July 2021 and set out how the two organisations would work together to ensure the Club's long-term sustainable future as a key organisation in the town and to explore opportunities to develop the site to sit alongside the wider regeneration plans for the town.

The Vice-Chair commented that the investment by the owner and other backers of the HUFC needed to be better quantified to better understand the financial position of the club. The future of the Mill House Leisure Centre and the associated land nearby offered a significant development opportunity in that area and Members questioned if the club had put forward any suggestions. The Assistant Director stated there had been

previous discussions around training facilities but whatever was proposed for that wider area had to fit with the needs of the town.

Members also raised the future of existing sporting clubs based at the Mill House and the Bowls Club. The situation around the old Odeon Cinema building adjacent to the Mill House area was also highlighted by Members. The Assistant Director indicated the area would need a comprehensive strategy and much depended on the capacity of the existing team. There may not be a resolution to the Odeon site through this process.

Decision

The Committee noted the contents of the Memorandum of Understanding and the positive step forward it represents in establishing a robust working relationship between the Council and the Football Club to help realise the redevelopment opportunities that will benefit the town.

10. Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent

The Chairman informed Members that the date of the next meeting would be revised and Members would be informed of the new date at the earliest opportunity.

The meeting concluded at 11.05 am

H MARTIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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