

**REPORT TO:** Business and Customer Services  
Portfolio Holder's Meeting

**LEAD OFFICER:** Mike Hill

9 November 2017

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## **Rural Task and Finish Group on Supporting Rural Businesses**

### **Purpose**

1. To provide an update on the work of South Cambridgeshire District Council's Member Task and Finish Group on Supporting Rural Businesses.
2. This is not a key decision. It is an update requested by the Portfolio Holder to capture progress and to confirm next steps.

### **Recommendations**

3. It is recommended that Portfolio Holder note the progress of the Task and Finish Group.

### **Reasons for Recommendations**

4. The Member Task and Finish Group on Supporting Rural Businesses has completed its initial evidence gathering phase.

### **Background**

5. The purpose of the Member Task and Finish Group on Supporting Rural Businesses is to identify what South Cambridgeshire District Council can do to assist in the encouragement, development and support of rural businesses in South Cambridgeshire.
6. Through gathering evidence, consultation and deliberation, the Group seeks to identify a range of potential actions to introduce, adapt or modify South Cambridgeshire District Council's policies in order to:
  - Address barriers to business growth
  - Help to support business growth
  - Build relationships between businesses and the District Council.
7. The group is chaired by Councillor Grenville Chamberlain. Its other members are Councillor Brian Burling, Councillor Nigel Cathcart, Councillor Tim Scott, Councillor Bridget Smith and Councillor Nick Wright. The group is supported by officers from the Health and Environmental Services Directorate.

### **Progress**

8. The first meeting of the Task and Finish Group took place on 5 July 2017. At this meeting it was agreed that the initial evidence gathering stage of the Group's work consider several separate workstreams. They were planning; business support; and housing.

9. During September and October 2017 meetings were arranged for each workstream. Alongside Task and Finish Group members, external speakers and South Cambridgeshire District Council officers were invited to attend to input their experience and ideas (see paragraph 22 for attendees). A brief summary of each meeting is provided below.

#### Planning

10. The Planning meeting on 5 September considered issues and potential solutions around differing land values for employment and housing uses; the flexibility of the planning process in identifying and approving employment land in villages including the potential of neighbourhood planning and the role of councillors; and the part that agricultural land and premises could play in addressing shortages.

#### Business support

11. The issues raised at the Business Support meeting on 5 October were wide ranging from the need to address business security and broadband/mobile phone coverage to potential initial areas of focus for South Cambridgeshire District Council such as building a knowledge of the district's business base, developing a business advice and support offer and the delivery of place based economic development. The importance of the planning process and the provision of affordable housing for workers were also confirmed by attendees.

#### Housing

12. The Housing meeting on 12 October took an in-depth look at opportunities and potential barriers to the provision of affordable housing in South Cambridgeshire. Topics discussed ranged from how the planning process, and in particular the preparation of legal agreements, could be improved, to the need to understand and work with local communities to develop local housing solutions. The importance of flexibility in the provision and range of accommodation was also highlighted.
13. Alternative types of affordable housing were considered at the meeting including key worker housing, landing strip accommodation, modular housing and private sector rented housing. Attendees raised the importance of engaging with Government and with partners from across the public, private and voluntary sectors in order to create viable, funded developments. Addressing the funding gap was identified as a key major barrier that all agencies have to overcome.

#### Melbourn Business Association

14. Members of the Task and Finish Group visited the Melbourn Business Association on 3 October 2017. Attended by approximately 40 businesses, the meeting provided the opportunity for the Group to hear directly from businesses.
15. Issues raised by the businesses included infrastructure provision, particularly land and premises, broadband and mobile phone coverage and roads and cycleways. Concerns were raised around the level of business rates and delays in the planning process. The group were particularly keen for the Council to improve its communication with businesses.

#### **Next steps**

16. A draft report will be prepared during November 2017. This will report back on the conclusions from the Task and Finish Group meetings and will include a series of recommendations.

17. The report will be taken to the final meeting of the Task and Finish Group which will take place on 14 December 2017. The Leader and Portfolio Holder will also be consulted on the report content during this period. Having taken on board the feedback received, the final report will go to Cabinet on 8 February 2018.

### **Implications**

18. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk management, equality and diversity, climate change, community safety and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered: -

#### ***Financial***

19. There are no financial implications at this stage.

#### ***Staffing***

20. Officers from the Health and Environmental Services team will be preparing the draft and final Task and Finish Group report.

#### ***Equality and Diversity***

21. Equality and diversity implications will be considered as the recommendations from the work are developed.

### **Consultation responses**

22. The additional attendees at each workstream meeting are outlined below.

#### Planning:

Cath Anthony, Bidwells  
Philip Halmshaw, Barfords  
Caron Kendall, Federation of Small Businesses  
Rick Parisi, Paragon Land and Estates  
Stephen Kelly, South Cambridgeshire District Council

#### Business Support:

Martin Lutman, Greater Cambridge, Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership (GCGP LEP)  
John Bridge, Cambridgeshire Chambers of Commerce  
Hannah Padfield, National Farmers' Union (NFU)

#### Housing:

Tim Holmes, Endurance Estates  
Nigel Howlett, Cambridge Housing Society  
Alan Lewin, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Housing Association Group  
Dr. Martin Clark, Allia  
Simon King, Cambridge Biomedical Campus  
Stephen Hills and Julie Fletcher, South Cambridgeshire District Council

23. The Melbourn Business Association was attended by approximately 40 business representatives. The membership of the group can be found on their website at <http://www.melbournbusinessassociation.com/members/>.

### **Effect on Strategic Aims**

#### **Aim 1 – Connected Communities**

24. The work of the Task and Finish Group will support the Connected Communities objectives to work with partners to ensure new transport and digital infrastructure supports and strengthens communities and that our approach to growth sustains prosperity.
25. In particular it helps take forward the Connected Communities action to ‘support our villages to strengthen their communities and social networks, reducing isolation by improving access, delivering effective community-led services and targeted support for the rural economy’.

### **Background Papers**

Where [the Local Authorities \(Executive Arrangements\) \(Meetings and Access to Information\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#) require documents to be open to inspection by members of the public, they must be available for inspection: -

- (a) at all reasonable hours at the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council;
- (b) on the Council's website; and
- (c) in the case of documents to be available for inspection pursuant to regulation 15, on payment of a reasonable fee required by the Council by the person seeking to inspect the documents at the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council.

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