

REPORT TO: Cabinet
LEAD OFFICER: Mike Hill

7 February 2017

Recommendations from the Member Task and Finish Group on supporting rural businesses

Purpose

1. To outline the draft findings of the Task and Finish Group on supporting rural businesses.
2. To consider and agree the recommendations to take forward.
3. This is a key decision because it is significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards or electoral divisions in the area of the relevant local authority and it was first published in the January 2018 Forward Plan.

Recommendations

4. It is recommended that Cabinet:
 - Agrees, with or without amendments, recommendations 1, 3, 4, 5 b and c, 6 a and b, 7 and 8 (to be implemented within existing resources)
 - Agrees, with or without amendments, recommendations 2, 5 a and d and 6 c in principle, subject to further work to develop more detailed proposals and resource requirements.
 - Reviews progress against any agreed recommendations in 12 months.

Reason for Recommendations

5. To allow officers to continue to support South Cambridgeshire's rural businesses by developing a range of tools that will help to reduce barriers and support growth across the district.

Background

6. The purpose of the Member Task and Finish Group on Supporting Rural Businesses has been to identify what South Cambridgeshire District Council can do to assist in the encouragement, development and support of rural businesses in South Cambridgeshire.
7. Through gathering evidence, consultation and deliberation, the Group has sought 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.

8. Whilst the group has considered the needs of all businesses within the district, they have taken particular care in ensuring that small and medium sized enterprises are supported.
9. The group has been 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 was supported by officers from the Health and Environmental Services Directorate.
10. 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 should consider several separate workstreams: planning; business support; and housing.
11. 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. The Group also attended a meeting of the Melbourn Business Association in order to hear directly from (around 40) businesses. A summary of the discussion at each of these sessions is provided at Appendix 1.
12. 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

The membership of the Melbourn Business Association can be found on their website at <http://www.melbournbusinessassociation.com/members/>.

13. The feedback from each Task and Finish Group session has been worked up into a series of potential recommendations outlined below.

Recommendations

14. Each recommendation includes an explanation as to why it is considered necessary. Appendix 2 provides estimates of the timescales and resources required to implement those recommendations that can be implemented within existing resources.
15. **Recommendation 1:** Improve South Cambridgeshire District Council's engagement with local businesses through:
 - (a) The development and implementation of a South Cambridgeshire business engagement plan;
 - (b) Revamping and relaunching the council's business webpages; and
 - (c) Developing a South Cambridgeshire District Council 'business visit' offer.
16. During the Task and Finish Group's visit to the Melbourn Business Association there was a general consensus that the district council needs to improve its communication with businesses on the information and support that is available to help their businesses to grow.
17. The business representatives at the Task and Finish Group session on supporting rural business highlighted the importance of using a range of methods to engage with businesses. They recommended a number of potential options including developing a strong website offer, roadshows, breakfast meetings, attendance at external networking meetings and engaging with private sector providers of business support including banks, accountants, and surveyors.
18. Given the range of methods available, it is important that the council engages with businesses via those channels where its messages will have the most impact and where the council's resources can be targeted most effectively. The preparation of a business engagement plan will enable officers to undertake a fully considered analysis of engagement opportunities over the short, medium and long term. It will also enable them to identify where the council can work with partners and where additional resources or training are required in order to help to implement the plan.
19. There will be a need to capture the business data gained from business engagement activities. A simple business database/CRM system capturing ongoing data on local businesses and feedback from engagement with them will be developed and maintained as part of this work.
20. Ensuring that comprehensive information on the support available to businesses within and beyond South Cambridgeshire is available online will provide a key initial cost-effective way of disseminating information to a wide audience. For many companies, the council's website will also be the first point of contact when searching for business support. It is important therefore that the business webpages are quickly reviewed and updated to provide a complete picture of the support that is available.
21. The 'business visit' offer will offer local businesses the opportunity to meet with council officers at the business's own premises. These discussions would allow council officers to hear about, and potentially to help to solve, local business's issues and concerns and to pass on information on the support that is available to the business. In the longer term, directly meeting with companies will help to build relationships between the council and local businesses.

22. **Recommendation 2:** (a) The provision of a resource pack, seed funding and research to support the development of business networks within and across South Cambridgeshire's villages (b) facilitating the development of local business apps.
23. Business networking can provide businesses with the opportunity to share expertise and knowledge, develop their local supply chain, collaborate, market their business offer and build new skills. For businesses in rural areas or areas where there are a large number of sole traders working from home, business networks can also reduce business's feelings of isolation by providing them with an opportunity to become part of a local business community.
24. Currently there are around 3-4 visible local business networks within South Cambridgeshire with the most prominent networks in Melbourn and Gamlingay. Other networks are active within the Greater Cambridge area, particularly ones with a specific sector focus, however these tend to meet within or on the edge of Cambridge. There is therefore significant potential for the development of new business networks to bring local businesses together across or within their communities.
25. It is important that the business networks are locally driven in order to ensure that they meet local need and they are sustainable in the longer term. South Cambridgeshire District Council would not wish to impose a network on an area but rather to work with interested local businesses and parish councils and other organisations as may be identified to facilitate their development.
26. Council officers would work with partners and existing business networks to develop a resource pack which would include advice on setting up and maintaining a network, for example on how to find and engage businesses, contacts and case studies. Some officer time would be available to support the network in the first 6 months as well as funding (to be agreed) to support initial marketing and venue costs. Individuals or businesses interested in establishing a local network would be identified through promotion of the business networking pack to councillors, parish councils and businesses along with existing communication links such as the business newsletter
27. At their first meeting, the Task and Finish Group heard about the innovative new initiative, Gamlingay Solution, an app developed by Gamlingay Parish Council which seeks to support the local labour market by facilitating the exchange of information between local workers and local businesses. The Gamlingay app will be launched around the middle of 2018 and a framework will be made available to other local communities by the parish council to help them to develop their own apps. South Cambridgeshire District Council would develop a toolkit (with match funding) for parishes and groups of parishes to support them in developing a local business app.
28. 16,000 residents of South Cambridgeshire are self-employed¹. Many of them will work from home. They are an important and little understood business constituency that are likely to be key potential members of business networking groups. The council will initiate a home-based business focus group in order to understand their distinct business needs and potential demand for networking, move-on accommodation, local business hubs etc.

¹ ONS annual population survey (July 2016-June 2017)

29. **Recommendation 3:** Support local business through the provision of business support workshops.
30. South Cambridgeshire District Council's potential role in relation to supporting businesses could be as a signposter, facilitator and/or provider. The development of an Economic Development Strategy during 2018 will help to clarify the council's preferred role going forward. However, there is an immediate opportunity to address issues that were raised at the Task and Finish Group sessions that could be taken forward by officers over the coming year.
31. Feedback from representatives at the business support session suggested that businesses prefer targeted workshops, concentrating on single issues that are of interest and importance to them. Organising a series of workshops (minimum three per year) will help local businesses to address of the key issues and legislative changes, such as GDPR (Data Protection).
32. **Recommendation 4:** Support and encourage Connecting Cambridgeshire in their work to improve broadband and mobile phone coverage in South Cambridgeshire
33. The importance of broadband and mobile phone coverage to businesses was raised across a number of the Task and Finish Groups sessions. At the Melbourn Business Association it was highlighted as a key issue for businesses in the area and at the business support session its importance was underscored as a key factor in relocation decisions made by business owners.
34. The National Farmer's Union highlighted the reasons why better digital access is vital to South Cambridgeshire's farm businesses: precise farm technology, a new approach to farming practices which is increasingly used by farmers, is reliant on GPS; the forms that farmers need to complete, for example to receive payments from Government, are increasingly only available online; and if farms wish to convert their farm buildings to either housing or office premises they have to have digital access in order to attract occupiers.
35. During 2017, the Government made £30 million of competitive funding available for capital investments in the creation of Next Generation Access (NGA) broadband infrastructure in rural areas across England. Connecting Cambridgeshire submitted a bid for the Cambridgeshire area and they expect to hear whether they are successful during the first half of 2018. Connecting Cambridgeshire has also been asked to develop a full application for European Regional Development Funding (ERDF) to extend broadband coverage within the county.
36. South Cambridgeshire District Council supported Connecting Cambridgeshire in their collection of evidence to support the recent Rural Broadband bid and going forward the council will have representation on the Connecting Cambridgeshire Programme Board. The council would look to support Connecting Cambridgeshire in their activities to roll out broadband across Cambridgeshire and to be an effective advocate for the provision of broadband to South Cambridgeshire's businesses and residents.
37. There appear to be very few examples of interventions by councils to improve mobile phone coverage across the country and, whilst there are initiatives such as #CambsNotspotter helping to understand the gaps in coverage in the Cambridge area, there are no current initiatives taking place to address these gaps where the private sector do not plan to provide coverage.

38. Devon County Council has recently commissioned consultants to work with them to develop a business case for public investment to improve mobile phone coverage. The outputs from this work may provide the council and its partners with some potential options to be considered for South Cambridgeshire.
39. **Recommendation 5:** Ensure that officers, councillors, communities and businesses have the sufficient information available to them to make informed decisions on employment sites and premises through:
- (a) Ensuring that the evidence collected to underpin the Economic Development Strategy and the Local Plan includes analysis of the demand and supply of business premises within individual areas and across the district and addresses the availability and potential of agricultural premises.
 - (b) The development of Neighbourhood Planning guidance on employment land and premises.
 - (c) The provision of a workshop and guidance for councillors and officers on the need/scope for employment land in and on the edge of villages and the use of the flexibility allowed for in planning policy.
 - (d) The development of a South Cambridgeshire property information/inward investment offer.
40. The first Task and Finish Group session on Planning considered how to create sustainable communities where residents are able to live and work and are not as reliant on cars and public transport in order to access employment opportunities. Evidence heard at the group suggested that officers, councillors, local communities, agents and developers all have a role to play in enabling sufficient supply of employment land and premises to meet demand from businesses.
41. The collection and analysis of evidence of the demand for and supply of business premises will be an important tool to enable South Cambridgeshire District Council to meet the needs of local businesses. The two key documents that this evidence will inform will be the council's Economic Development Strategy and its new Local Plan. It is therefore vital that evidence gathering on business premises demand and supply is initiated as part of the development of the evidence base for the two documents.
42. Communities via their neighbourhood plans have an important role to play in ensuring that there is sufficient employment land available within villages to meet demand from local businesses. The provision of a document providing guidance on developing neighbourhood planning employment land and premises policies within the Neighbourhood Planning Toolkit published by South Cambridgeshire District Council should encourage and enable parishes to engage with businesses and consider their needs within their plans.
43. Evidence taken at the Task and Finish Group session on planning demonstrated that the emerging South Cambridgeshire District Council planning policy allows for flexibility in considering planning applications for business premises in villages. It is proposed that there be a workshop and guidance for councillors and officers on the need/scope for employment land in and on the edge of villages and the use of the flexibility allowed for in planning policy.

44. South Cambridgeshire District Council has an important role to play in promoting the district's land and premises to local businesses and business from outside the area. In order to carry out this activity effectively, the areas that the council will need to consider will include:
- The development of baseline knowledge of business premises in the district
 - The creation of a 'South Cambridgeshire' inward investment brand
 - The development of a method of collecting and promoting vacant premises
 - The creation of a procedure for dealing with business premises enquiries
45. **Recommendation 6:** Ask the Housing and Planning portfolio holders to implement the following actions:
- (a) Ensure that the affordable housing needs of rural business employees (and potential employees) and the resulting risks to business growth are recognised and addressed in the development of South Cambridgeshire District Council housing and planning policies. To include:
- (i) The Greater Cambridge Housing Strategy
 - (ii) The Greater Cambridge Local Plan including Rural Exception Sites
 - (iii) Planning SPDs
- (b) Consider how the council's affordable housing initiatives and joint ventures with partners could potentially help to deliver homes for key employees, for example, through community-led development, modular housing, build to rent schemes and the review of older people's housing accommodation
- (c) Review the current processes for developing and varying s106 and s278 agreements for housing development with the aim of speeding up the implementation of planning permissions.
46. Concerns over the availability of affordable housing for people working in South Cambridgeshire were raised by participants at all three of the Task and Finish Group sessions. Examples were given where the cost of accommodation had impacted on recruitment by businesses alongside instances where larger businesses have addressed the problem directly, for example, the planned 'landing accommodation' at Cambridge Biomedical Campus.
47. Meeting demand for affordable housing in South Cambridgeshire requires a flexible approach, open to a range of different solutions tailored to address the differing needs of the district's communities taking into account current and potential future demand from South Cambridgeshire's businesses, both large and small. Housing and Planning policies and current initiatives from the Affordable Housing Team would have the potential to directly address local business needs.
48. Holding comprehensive, up-to-date information on housing demand and supply in parishes helps to ensure that the Affordable Homes team can tailor its work to meet community need. A whole community response to housing need with help to ensure that older people are able to access the accommodation that they require and, at the same time, expand the affordable housing available for people working in South Cambridgeshire.
49. The representatives at the housing session (see paragraph 12) informed the Task and Finish Group that the key cause of delays in commencing housing developments is the process of negotiating legal agreements. The existing work taking place to develop standardised S. 106 agreements for housing developments should help to speed up the development process. Reviewing the change process once agreements are signed as well as partner agency legal agreement processes should also assist in creating a more effective and responsive system.

50. The housing session highlighted the fact that, in general, builders do not incorporate energy efficiency measures which have the potential to significantly reduce household bills when constructing houses. These are almost always fitted retrospectively. A Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Sustainability Design Guide, proposed within the emerging Greater Cambridge Housing Strategy, will help to promote the delivery of housing that has a positive impact on the financial wellbeing of residents over the longer term.
51. **Recommendation 7:** Request that the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership consider rural business crime as part of their Strategic Assessment process
52. The Task and Finish Group business support session highlighted the significant costs that rural businesses, and particularly farmers, incur as a result of a range of rural crimes such as burglary, hare coursing, fly-grazing and fly-tipping. It was agreed that the CDRP be asked to review as part of the development of the 2018-19 Partnership priorities what extra actions could be taken to support local businesses in tackling rural crime with a focus on improved intelligence and data sharing.
53. **Recommendation 8:** Monitor progress on Brexit and engage with and influence Government directly and through the Combined Authority and LEP on the opportunities for and impacts of Brexit on South Cambridgeshire businesses. Review work at end of 2018 with a view to preparing for outcomes of Brexit.
54. Brexit, in whichever form it takes, has the potential to impact on businesses in South Cambridgeshire in a range of different areas. These include in particular:
 - a. Agriculture
 - b. Research and Development
 - c. Employment regulations
 - d. Exporting/Importing

Implications

- (b) 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

- (c) An estimate of the financial implications of each of the recommendations that can be implemented within existing resources is included in Appendix 2.

Legal

- (d) The Legal implications of each of the recommendations will be considered once the Task and Finish group recommendations are worked up into individual projects.

Staffing

- (e) The staffing implications of each of the recommendations that can be implemented within existing resources are included in Appendix 2.

Risk Management

- (f) The Risk Management implications of the recommendations will be considered once the Task and Finish group recommendations are worked up into individual projects.

Equality and Diversity

- (g) The Equality and Diversity implications of each of the options will be considered once the Task and Finish group recommendations are worked up into individual projects.

Climate Change

- (h) The Climate Change implications of each of the options will be considered once the Task and Finish group recommendations are worked up into projects.

Consultation responses

- (i) Summaries from each of the Task and Finish Group sessions are included at Appendix 1.

Effect on Strategic Aims

Aim 1 – Connected Community

- (j) The recommendations support the connected community objective of working with partners to ensure new transport and digital infrastructure supports and strengthens communities and that our approach to growth sustains prosperity. In particular the 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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Appendix 1: Summaries of Task and Finish Group session

Planning

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

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

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.

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

- (k) 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.
- (l) 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.

Updated: 4 December 2017

<p>District Council housing and planning policies. To include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) The Greater Cambridge Housing Strategy (ii) The Greater Cambridge Local Plan including Rural Exception Sites (iii) Planning SPDs <p>(b) Consider how the council's housing initiatives and joint ventures with partners could potentially help to deliver homes for key employees, for example, through community-led development, modular housing, build to rent schemes and the review of older people's housing accommodation.</p>	<p>February 2018</p> <p>TBC</p> <p>April 2018</p> <p>February 2018</p>	<p>July 2018</p> <p>TBC</p> <p>March 2019</p> <p>Review February 2019</p>	<p>Affordable Homes team</p>	<p>Julie Fletcher, Affordable Homes (or portfolio holder)</p>
<p>7. Request that the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership consider rural business crime as part of their Strategic Assessment process</p>	<p>January 2018</p>	<p>March 2018</p>	<p>Health and Environmental Services staff time</p>	<p>Kathryn Hawkes, Community Safety Officer</p>