

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

21 February 2024

COUNCILLOR PAUL HEINRICH - CABINET MEMBER FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

For the period January to February 2024

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.

Economic Strategy & Action Plan

'Investing in Our Local Economy & Infrastructure' is an important strand of NNDC's Corporate Plan. A draft Economic Strategy and Action Plan (2023-2027), which sets out the approach and actions the Council will undertake to achieve this objective and support the growth of the local economy over the next four years, is due to be considered by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in February.

Business Breakfast Event

On 30 January a business breakfast event was hosted at the Council offices by NNDC in collaboration with Norfolk County Council. This well-attended event provided the opportunity to meet with businesses and local representative groups to discuss the Council's emerging Economic Strategy, to engage and feed into NCC's forthcoming Norfolk-wide Economic Strategy and to elicit views from businesses on the Council's Budget.

During the event a series of questions were posed to test the local sentiment of businesses. These included:

Question	Response
From the perspective of your business in North Norfolk, how optimistic are you about the next few years?	83% Very/Quite optimistic
Do you currently have plans to grow or expand your business?	65% Yes, definitely/Hopefully
Please prioritise the following as challenges for your business now or in the near future?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Recruitment and retaining staff2. Financial stability3. Training/Workforce Development4. Transportation5. Availability of sites and premises
From your perspective, please prioritise the impact of the following on North Norfolk's	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Cost of living2. Energy prices

economy?

3. Availability of finance (grants, loans, investment)
4. Climate change/flooding/coastal erosion
5. Availability of suitable/affordable housing

The event proved a very useful means for the Council to better understand some of the current issues facing local businesses and the responses to the questions posed will help to shape and inform how the Council engages businesses.

Funding and Programmes

Rural England Prosperity Fund

On 3 July 2023, NNDC launched the Rural Business and Communities Grant. This capital-only grant, funded by the Rural England Prosperity Fund, is intended to support the following activities:

Businesses

- Small scale investment in micro and small enterprises in rural areas. Including capital funding for net zero infrastructure for rural businesses, and diversification of farm businesses outside of agriculture to encourage start up, expansion or scale up of these businesses where this involves converting farm buildings into other commercial or business uses.

Community groups

- Funding (capital grants) for investment in capacity building and infrastructure support for local civil society and community groups.
- Funding (capital grants) for existing cultural, historic and heritage institutions that make up the local cultural heritage offer.
- Funding (capital grants) for impactful volunteering and social action projects to develop social and human capital in local places.

To-date, grants amounting to £377,321 have been offered, with a total project value of £710,148 (£335,826 of private investment generated in match funding). A strong pipeline of investments has been developed through to the next financial year.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund

The intention of the fund is to invest in local priorities, targeted towards a number of areas: building pride in place, supporting high quality skills

training, supporting pay, employment and productivity growth and increasing life chances.

The following activities have now commenced:

- Support funding for new, or improvements to existing, community and neighbourhood infrastructure projects (administered by the North Norfolk Sustainable Communities Fund);
- Work with Visit North Norfolk to develop a programme of support for local visitor economy businesses (including an additional staff resource to support this);
- Deliver the 'Go Digital' programme to support business digitalisation (working with Norfolk County Council); and
- deliver a business support and advice programme (working with New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership).

There has been a high take-up from beneficiaries across the programmes and the budget for this financial year (£310,867) is fully committed.

Progress is also being made towards developing programmes for the next financial year, including:

- A package to support business decarbonisation, through audits, advice and funding (in partnership with Groundworks East);
- The Future Skills Now Employment Skills programme which will support businesses seeking to address recruitment and training issues (in partnership with Norfolk County Council Skill's team); and
- A programme to support energy efficiency retrofit works for households experiencing fuel poverty in North Norfolk (with Norfolk Warm Homes).

The geographical spread of the interventions under the above programmes was shared with Members following the question asked at the last Full Council meeting.

North Walsham High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ)

Key updates:

Cedars

- The refurbishment of the Cedars is complete and lets have been provisionally agreed, and the leases are in the process of being signed.

Black Swan Loke (amenity garden)

- The transformation of the space that will form the link between Bank Loke Car Park and the Market Place is on track and due to complete by the end of March, within the allocated budget. Many of the materials are re-used or repurposed/surplus from other projects (e.g. the wood cladding on the western wall is old wooden decking from Cromer Pier).

- Led by a local artist and created by the local community, a mosaic has recently been installed at the site, which celebrates the heritage and history of the town.

Bank Loke

- Improvements to the appearance and amenity of Bank Loke are being planned for completion by the end of March 2024.

Evaluation & Monitoring

- The HSHAZ initiative is now approaching the end of its four-year holistic programme. A number of evaluation and monitoring reports are required by Historic England as part of the finalisation of this programme and the process of producing this has begun. As well as reporting to the funding bodies, the evaluation report will be reviewed and reported internally, in order to understand the extent to which the objectives were met and to ensure any lessons learned can be shared.

2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.

- Continued implementation of the UKSPF and REPF funded initiatives
- Finalisation of the Economic Strategy & Action Plan
- Taking forward the recommendations of Stalham High Street Task Force team
- Final stages of the North Walsham HAZ place making, and settling the final account
- UKSPF business decarbonisation programme: a webinar will be held on Thursday 25th April with Groundwork East – the link for any businesses to register is here - [Visit North Norfolk's Net Zero Webinar Tickets, Thu 25 Apr 2024 at 10:00 | Eventbrite](#)

3 Meetings attended

Cabinet
 Cabinet Business Planning
 PFH meetings (Economic Growth)
 PFH meetings (Planning)
 UKSPF/REPF Board meetings
 HAZ Board
 Development Ctte
 O&S Ctte
 LGA Economic Growth Workshop (online)
 Seaweed in East Anglia Project
 NNDC Business Forum
 Stalham HSTF strategy meeting

Holt BID presentation
Bittern Line Community Rail Partnership