

AGENDA ITEM NO. 6

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

Date	25 OCTOBER 2012
Title	PROGRESS IN DELIVERING THE OPEN FOR BUSINESS CORPORATE PRIORITIES

1. PURPOSE/SUMMARY

- The purpose of this report is to provide members with a performance update on Open for Business corporate priorities.

2. KEY ISSUES

- Develop business and employment
- Promote the economic profile of Fenland
- Raising aspirations and improving learning opportunities
- Promote Fenland as a tourism and visitor destination

3. RECOMMENDATION(S)

- Overview and Scrutiny are requested to consider the progress made by the council in delivering the Open for Business corporate priorities

Wards Affected	All
Forward Plan Reference No. (if applicable)	
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr. Christopher Seaton, Portfolio holder for Economy
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Background Paper(s)	Corporate Plan 2012-15

1. BACKGROUND/INTRODUCTION

Open for Business portfolio within the corporate plan clearly sets out key priorities which will both encourage and facilitate sustainable investment and growth through development and support for business, employment, learning and tourism opportunities, with specific objectives that relate to inward investment:

The economic performance presentation will reflect on work that has been achieved within the first two quarters of financial year 2012/13 to maintain excellence and to contribute to work around the Open for Business priorities;

- Develop business and employment
- Promote the economic profile of Fenland
- Raising aspirations and improving learning opportunities
- Promote Fenland as a tourism and visitor destination

Helping people into work and encouraging innovation and enterprise is key to improving Fenland's economic vitality. It is an essential ingredient for improving the quality of people's lives across Fenland.

In delivering the Open for Business priority, we have worked our partners, business support organisations, business champions and other key stakeholders, including the Wisbech 2020 partnership that impact on the economic viability of our area.

2. EFFECT ON CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

The performance report reflects on progress made in meeting target indicators that contribute to the delivery of the Council's Open for Business objectives and help influence other corporate priorities.

The performance of economic development maintains excellence and contributes towards wider policies including the emerging Economic Development Strategy, Fenland Communities Development Plan: Draft Core Strategy 2012 – 2031 and the Fenland Neighbourhood Planning Vision.

3. COMMUNITY IMPACT

Economic growth and competitiveness of Fenlands economy is paramount to help raise the aspirations for the whole community.

Helping people into work and encouraging innovation and enterprise is key to improving Fenland's economic vitality. It is an essential ingredient for improving the quality of peoples' lives of all ages across the district.

The activities and performance of Economic Development during the first two quarters of 2012/13 financial year has and will help to deliver a competitive and sustainable economy; to support the development of innovation and enterprise; encourage, support and invest in economic growth and well-being and the promotion of the district as a location of choice.

Overview & Scrutiny Panel

22 October 2012

Progress of Open for Business Corporate Priority

April 2012 – July 2012

OB1 Develop business and employment in Fenland

Skylark Extension

Over the last year, the Council worked with Skylark Maize Maze and Garden Centre in Wimblington to develop a funding bid to Fens Adventurer Rural Development Agency under the tourism arm of the funding for expanding the tea room/restaurant. The aim of the project was to double the cafe area both in regard to indoor seating and improving the production and serving area of food and drink, with increased capacity the café is now able to meet the increased demand it was receiving from visitors to the venue. Over £50,000 of funding was eventually received and Skylark opened the extension in April. Councillor Cornwell and Councillor Jolley were in attendance for the opening.

Free Wireless Internet at the Boathouse, Fenland Hall and South Fens Business Centre

The Council have implemented new wireless internet (Wi-Fi) facilities at the above sites. It is easy to use for guests and visitors and offers a free service without any usage limits. The access password is available from reception staff at our Business Centres as well as Member Services and ICT teams at Fenland Hall.

The coverage is:

- The Boathouse (Planet Room, Pendennis Room, Richard Young Suite and the Lady Alice Lambton Suite)
- Fenland Hall (Council Chamber, Room 1 and Room 7)
- South Fens Business Centre (Oak Room, Apple Room and Beech Room)

The service is much faster than normal internet coverage using mobile phone networks and can be accessed on any device with a wireless internet connection such as laptops, tablet pc's and Smartphones.

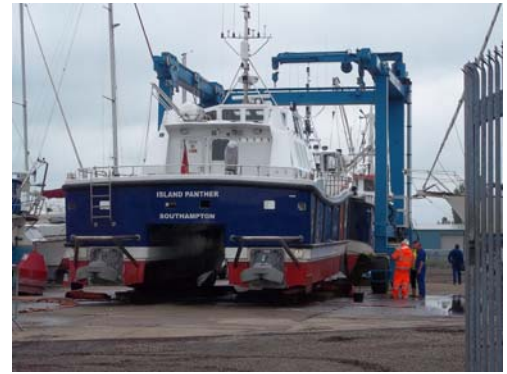
Yacht Harbour, Wisbech Dredging Works

De-silting works to Wisbech Yacht Harbour and ship berth have been successfully completed. Additional funding from the Environment Agency has been secured to contribute to these works.

Marine Services

Centrica Energy Lincs Wind Farm Ltd have commenced laying the second export cable in the inter-tidal area in Nene Ports Area of jurisdiction. A total of nine vessels have been working in this area along with various support vessels to and from Port Sutton Bridge and Wisbech Port, under the supervision of FDC as Harbour Authority.

Crab Marsh Boat Yard and travel Hoist continues its high customer base.



The 'Island Tiger' and 'Panther' are 16m Windfarm support catamarans which called into Crab Marsh Boat Yard for routine servicing. These are the first of a potential fleet of 18 vessels to use Crab Marsh Boat Yard which are currently working from Wells-next-Sea on the Sheringham Shoal Offshore Wind Farm Project. Marine Services provided a rapid turn round for the vessels and helped to bring economic spend into the local community.

Sutton Bridge Leisure and Commercial Moorings

Tenders for the installation of the new leisure mooring facility and refurbishment of the Council's commercial moorings at Sutton Bridge have been received. The project is being developed by Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) in partnership with FDC and will enable the replacement of ageing FDC infrastructure which supports the Fenland pilot boat and other commercial operations. The completed facility will also add to the local economy, create an attractive enhancement to the river on the important Nene gateway and compliment the Councils highly regarded facilities in Wisbech.

The award of the contract will enable the successful contractor to progress with the detailed design and programme construction works.

Official Opening of South Fens Enterprise Space

Members of the Cabinet and officers from Cambridgeshire County Council attended the official opening of Phase Three of South Fens Enterprise Space on 4 May. The opening was also attended by the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Cllr Chris Seaton, and from our co-funders, Cambridgeshire County Council. Over the last twelve months, the Council has now been successful in securing over £1.2 million worth of funding that supports the development of both business and employment growth in Fenland.

Business Centres

Occupancy at South Fens Business Centre remains at over 80%, whilst occupancy at The Boathouse is holding steady at 71%. Conference facilities at both business centres remain popular and are generating a healthy income for the Council.

Occupancy at the new South Fens Business Premises Phase III is 29%, which represents an encouraging start for the new facilities, and we currently have an 85% occupancy rate for our Light Industrial Units.

SmartLIFE Project update

FDC is working in partnership with the county council, Luminus and Anglia Ruskin University on the 'SmartLIFE Retro-fit for business' project. As part of the project, local businesses that are interested in moving into the retrofit market can attend a workshop with advice and support on installing these 'green energy' technologies. This event will take place at the end of September. There are also a range of other activities planned as part of this project, including 1-2-1 support sessions for businesses.

Supporting Local Businesses

Fenland District Council has entered into a fresh agreement with small businesses, representing a commitment to taking a proactive approach to engaging with and supporting these customers.

The Federation of Small Business (FSB) Accord is a voluntary code of practice that aims to encourage greater consultation and dialogue between councils and local businesses. The commitment of this Accord also is reflected in the emerging Economic Development Strategy 2012 -2031 where Fenland District Council has continued to adopt the view that consultation with the business community should not be limited to formal consultation exercises but should be ongoing dialogue.

A meeting has also been held with a business currently located in Kings Lynn and West Norfolk which is planning to relocate to Fenland. Officers ran through plans and arranged a meeting with an FDC Planning Officer to support the relocation process and help to address any issues that may arise with their relocation.

Members of the Fenland Economic Development Team are on the Board of the Fenland Chamber of Commerce and continue to ensure that local business issues and updates are considered at these meetings. The annual Skills Summit events are run in partnership with the Chamber as part of our close ongoing partnership arrangements.

OB2 Promote the economic profile of Fenland

Huntingdon Business Fair

The Council attended the Huntingdon Business Fair at Wood Green to promote Fenland's business support offer under the 'Fenland for Business' banner. The event also provided an opportunity to promote the Council's property portfolio including the new South Fens enterprise Park development. The event was attended by over 500 business and contacts were made regarding the South Fens Enterprise Park.

Promoting Fenland to Businesses

The Council attended a Business to Business Expo event held in Ely. This event provided the opportunity to promote Fenland's business support and accommodation offer and stimulate interest in relocation opportunities to Fenland.

Broadband

BT announced that it will be rolling out high-speed fibre broadband to another 25,000 homes and businesses in Fenland during 2013 with March, Whittlesey and Wisbech all included. Fenland District Council is part of the Connecting Cambridgeshire Broadband project and we are still actively promoting superfast broadband with market stalls and Leisure Centre events planned for later in the year.

OB3 Raising aspirations and improving learning opportunities

Fenland Horticultural and Land-based Skills Centre

The LEP has unveiled the projects that have been shortlisted to receive Growing Places Funding, and FDC has been successful in bidding for £230,000 to create the Fenland Horticulture and Land-based Skills Centre, one of only two grant funding bids has been endorsed by the LEP Investment Sub-group and Board for Phase 1 Growing Places Funding subject to due diligence.

Set within the existing boundaries of Delamore Ltd, the aim of the Skills Centre is to create a fully functional and self-contained technical environment in which student learners can develop or obtain the necessary skills and qualifications. The project will act as a catalyst to grow a sector skilled labour pool and lift supply in order to meet employer demand which would significantly improve employment and apprenticeship development opportunities for young people in Fenland, regionally and possibly nationally.

The training facility will also offer College of West Anglia Land-based study students access to realistic work environment to compliment studies at the college.

Fenland Enterprise in Education (FEE)

The FEE project manager was appointed in January 2012 and work is continuing to develop relationships between schools and businesses. The Skills Summit event in March 2012 focused heavily on the FEE project and discussions were held to gather information from businesses about how they would like the FEE project to work and how it could support their business.

The FEE team secured the 'Honda School of Dreams' team to deliver sessions in two Fenland schools, which encourage school children to learn how they can turn their dreams into reality. The team is planning a 'Fenland Opportunities Day' for 26 September in Wisbech to showcase the range of education and training opportunities on offer to school leavers in the area. The team has also started work with the Youth District Council to plan and deliver an employability skills day for secondary school children at the beginning of next year. This is in response to the consistent messages received from both young people and employers that there is currently not enough support for young people to prepare for work while they are in education.

Supporting partners with the development of initiatives for the improvement of skills among the Fenland workforce

FDC worked with CCC, Job Centre Plus and Caerus Care to deliver an event at the Boathouse for people looking to move into a career in social care. A total of 20 people attended to receive advice, support and information. Two further sessions were held in July to help people gain a basic grounding in two skills areas that they will need to secure employment in social care.

FDC supported an 'Industry Day' at Sir Harry Smith Community College in July. Officers ran four interactive sessions with groups of pupils based on key skills and knowledge they may need to consider in the workplace, such as team working and awareness of their energy use.

OB4 Promote Fenland as a Tourism and Visitor destination

Tourism Promotion

Following the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Review of tourism the Fenland Tourism Board (FTB) was formed, under the guidance of the FTB work is being developed to take forward the tourism offer in Fenland including:

- Ongoing developments to the FDC website, including linking all Fenland events through www.cambridgeshire.net to gain a greater website presence for events in Fenland.

- Production of an annual Welcome to Cambridgeshire Fens, Visitor and Accommodation Guide. 20,000 copies printed with 18,000 copies being distributed nationally through the national tourist information centre network.
- The Council will attend the Group Leisure Travel Trade Show at NEC Birmingham, on 19 and 20 September 2012, to showcase Fenland to around 200 exhibitors and over 2,000 visitors to a two day exhibition of group travel ideas, offers, holidays and services.
- Building on last year's success, the Council is working with partners to organise the Heritage Open Days (HOD) event 2012. Heritage Open Days celebrates fantastic architecture and culture by offering free access to properties that are usually closed to the public or normally charge for admission. Every year on four days in September. It is a once-a-year chance to discover hidden architectural treasures and enjoy a wide range of tours, events and activities which bring to life local history and culture. All events to date have been published on the national HOD website, and a local brochure is being collated to promote the event.
- All 'Fenland @ your service' tourist information hubs have been developed from a small leaflet area to a much larger area, offering the visitor more information.

Fenland Tourism Board

The Fenland Tourism Board (FTB) has held three meetings which have been focussing on:

- Tourism Branding - looking at developing a consistent brand that will be recognisable to tourism in Fenland
- Tourism Promotions – developing healthy press relationships and regular adverts, and showcasing of Fenland to promote Fenland
- Website Developments – developing the tourism website to be more tourism friendly and focussed
- Market Town Mini Guides – 4 new leaflets are being created combining 8 current leaflets into 4 new leaflets
- The annual Welcome to Cambridgeshire Fens, Visitor and Accommodation Guide.

The FTB has developed a delivery plan to record works carried out in developing the tourism offer for Fenland, the plan also offers a reporting mechanism for FTB.

The Council also met with a local cultural provider to offer advice on new business ideas, and potential funding streams.

As part of this work, the Council helped a number of local tourism businesses develop tourist information hubs within their businesses. These hubs are designed to add value for the promotion of local 'things to do' activities to increase visitor stay and return custom.

The local tourism offer was also promoted at the recent Friday Bridge Golden Age Fair and Middle Level Waterways Commissioners have been engaged to discuss a more joined up approach to promoting tourism and the waterways in Fenland.

Partners and the Council, led by Cllr Cornwell, are continuing to work towards improving the promotions outside Fenland, showcasing the tourism offer in Fenland. The FTB is also working with CCC on reviewing the Brown Sign Policy for Cambridgeshire, work is still ongoing but the FTB have fed back tourism provider comments to CCC on the process which will be taken into consideration.

The FTB are in the process of developing a logo for Tourism in Fenland that can be used as a consistent brand for Tourism.

The FTB formed two working groups to support officers in developing the tourism website and the Welcome to Cambridgeshire Fens, Visitor and Accommodation Guide 2013, work on the 2013 brochure due to start in August.

The FTB are in the early stages of organising an end of season stakeholder event, this event will provide a chance for the FTB to tell providers what they have been delivering and also encourage all tourism providers to tell the FTB how the tourism season has gone, what needs improving, what went well and if they require any help from the FTB.

Tourism Award at the Fenland Enterprise Business Awards

The marketing for this year's Fenland Enterprise Business Awards, supported by FDC, has begun. This year, to reflect the development of the new Fenland Tourism Board and in recognition of the importance of the tourism industry in Fenland, a Tourism Award has been included. This year's awards dinner will take place on 5 October at the March Braza Club.

Development of a more integrated Tourism focused marketing and promotional approach to raise national awareness

Under the guidance of the Fenland Tourism Board, work currently being undertaking to develop a more integrated Tourism focus includes:

- Purchasing advert space in 'East Life Magazine' for the July edition, promoting the Cambridgeshire Fens as a tourism destination. A total of 50,000

copies are distributed as a free pick up at as many high footfall outlets within East of England.

- Purchasing advert space in 'Discover Britain for Groups' for July and August. This advert will enable Fenland to gain an invaluable source of data and enquiries from the Group Travel Organisers who will monitor the success of the campaign.
- Developing a series of positive press releases to promote Fenland locally, regionally and nationally.