

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD

Wednesday, 22nd February, 2017

Present: Cllr B J Luker (Chairman), Cllr F G Tombolis (Vice-Chairman), Cllr M C Base, Cllr R P Betts, Cllr T Bishop, Cllr J L Botten, Cllr T I B Cannon, Cllr Mrs S L Luck, Cllr Miss J L Sergison, Cllr C P Smith, Cllr B W Walker and Cllr T C Walker

Councillors Mrs J A Anderson, O C Baldock, P F Bolt, D J Cure, N J Heslop, D Lettington and Mrs A S Oakley were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S M King, R D Lancaster and L J O'Toole

ERG 17/1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

However, with regard to the Skills and Work Readiness item and in the interests of transparency Councillor Heslop advised Members that he was employed by the Edge Foundation, which was an organisation dedicated to improving practical and vocational learning. This was not considered to represent either a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or an Other Significant Interest and Councillor Heslop remained in the meeting.

ERG 17/2 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the notes of the meeting of the Economic Regeneration Advisory Board held on 7 September 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

ERG 17/3 PRESENTATION FROM NIAB/EMR

The Operations Manager (Mr Ross Newham) of East Malling Research (EMR) and Dr Roger Carline of the National Institute of Agricultural Botany (NIAB) attended the meeting to provide an update on latest developments regarding the site

EMR was a horticultural and agricultural research institute specialising in fruit production. Following challenging financial pressures the facility was threatened with closure and administration in 2016 but became part of NIAB at that time, which was a plant science research company based in Cambridge primarily specialising in agriculture.

Since the integration with NIAB economies of scale and robust cuts had been introduced and although income continued to climb significant challenges remained. It was reported that the vast majority of contracts successfully won only attracted 80-100% of full economic recovery, which meant that the site potentially operated at a loss; glasshouse facilities were outdated and infrastructure equipment required to solve future technical challenges related to the industry were necessary. Alternative solutions and opportunities for use of the current site buildings would also be explored.

New initiatives such as Water Efficient Technologies (WET), a PhD Studentship Programme from October 2017 to September 2023 and industry training were being developed and promoted to support the next generation of scientists, productivity and new technologies.

In July 2016, EMR had submitted a Local Growth Fund Round 3 bid, supported by the Borough Council, which had been unsuccessful due to the lack of housing provision included in the submission. This had led to the conclusion that any future bid for investment on behalf of the East Malling estate would need to include housing. These proposals were now being considered. Members were reassured that any housing development would not adversely impact on EMR's current work as it was possible for this to continue on a much smaller area due to the intensive growing now adopted. In addition, a portion of the research work could be done offsite and in collaboration with other organisations.

Finally, Members were advised that there was huge potential for the site and EMR although the position remained challenging due to a number of external factors, such as the lack of Government support and the need to secure its own funding. The support from Tonbridge and Malling and Kent County Council were greatly appreciated.

Reference was made to engagement with the local community and although there were no current plans for the traditional Open Day (last held in 2013 to celebrate the site's centenary) EMR remained committed to effective communication with local residents. Members of the Advisory Board were offered an opportunity to tour the site during the summer and the invitation would be considered for either June or September.

The excellent work of NIAB EMR was recognised and Members were proud that such an asset was within the borough of Tonbridge and Malling.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET**ERG 17/4 ECONOMIC REGENERATION STRATEGY ACTION PLAN - REVIEW AND UPDATE**

Decision Notice D170017MEM

The report provided a detailed overview of the progress made in delivering the Economic Regeneration Strategy Action Plan during 2016. Overall, good progress was being made on a wide range of initiatives and these were set out in Annex 1 to the report.

It was indicated that 'business advice and support' would also offer guidance regarding the changes to business rates and the Borough Council would continue to lobby Government on behalf of local businesses. Business rates represented a significant impact to many businesses and this approach was supported.

In addition, it was confirmed that the business support workshops would be held in Kings Hill on 28 February 2017.

Reference was made to the three year survival rates, set out in Annex 2 to the report, and it was suggested that comparisons throughout Kent and the United Kingdom be included in future to provide context.

The award of £4.64m of Local Growth Fund Round 3 funding towards the Leigh Flood Storage Area, including Hildenborough, and East Peckham was reported and welcomed by Members.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the Borough Council Economic Regeneration Strategy Action Plan update, as set out in Annex 1 to the report, be endorsed;
- (2) the amendments to the targets relating to certain indicators reflecting 'previous performance', as set out in paragraph 1.2.7 of the report, be agreed; and
- (3) the priorities for 2017/18, as set out in paragraph 1.3.1 of the report, be agreed.

ERG 17/5 SKILLS AND WORK READINESS

Decision Notice D170018MEM

The report provided feedback on the findings of the Skills Panel held in November 2016. A series of actions intended to contribute towards improving skills attainment and careers guidance were also set out.

In addition, proposals for new initiatives were outlined and included the establishment of an Enterprise Adviser Network, taster days and Make It Work and Speed Networking events.

Members recognised the value in encouraging young people to learn and gain skills in order to increase their potential and opportunity in gaining employment and being ready for work.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the feedback from the Skills Panel be noted; and
- (2) the proposed next steps and initiatives set out in paragraphs 1.3.1 – 1.3.7 of the report, and summarised above, be supported and endorsed.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

ERG 17/6 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items considered in private.

The meeting ended at 8.45 pm