

BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT - HUNTINGDON
(Report by the Overview & Scrutiny (Economic Well-Being))

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At its meeting held on 8th March 2012, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) considered a report by the Economic Development Manager on proposals to establish a Business Improvement District for Huntingdon. This report summarises the Panel's discussions.

2. THE PANEL'S DELIBERATIONS

- 2.1 The Economic Development Manager has provided the Panel with details of proposals for a Business Improvement District (BID) in Huntingdon and the process which will need to be followed for it to be established. The BID will focus on the town centre and is essentially the area circumscribed by the ring road. This covers 369 businesses across the retail and office sectors.
- 2.2 Huntingdon Town Partnership completed a feasibility study last year. Each of the businesses in the BID area was consulted. The study suggested a levy of 1.5% of Rateable Value on businesses will raise approximately £1M over the initial 5 year term of the BID.
- 2.2 In considering the contents of the report, the Panel has queried how the success of the BID will be measured. Members have been informed that if the Business Plan is not convincing, this will be reflected in the outcome of the BID ballot. In addition all projects will have their own critical success factors.
- 2.3 The Managing Director, Communities, Partnerships and Projects has stressed that BIDs are business led and it will be possible to dissolve the BID at any time if local businesses do not consider that it is delivering the anticipated outcomes. At this stage it is expected that the establishment of a BID for Huntingdon will operate in tandem with the development of the Chequers Court area.
- 2.4 The Panel has discussed the funding which has been provided by the District Council to assist with the development phase of the BID. The Council's total liability will amount to £56,000 over the 5 year BID period. A question then arises whether funding would be available to assist other towns within the District if they wished to adopt a similar approach. In response, the Economic Development Manager has stated that Huntingdon Town Partnership has evolved to such an extent that Council funding only amounts to 40% of its overall budget. It is, therefore, best placed to become a BID. It is unlikely that BIDs in St Ives and Ramsey would be viable and St Neots is bidding to become a Portas Pilot Town to regenerate the town centre.
- 2.5 With regard to the arrangements for the setting, collection and monitoring of the BID levy, following the closure of the ballot period, there will be a 12

month period to establish and implement the necessary arrangements. It will be possible to start collecting the levy partway through the financial year.

- 2.6 The Panel has commented on the changing face of high street shopping and the likelihood that town centres will become more leisure orientated and a focal point for the community in future years. A Member has reported on the positive feedback to the BID proposals which he has received from the business community.
- 2.7 On the question of car parking being identified as a key priority area for BID activities, the Economic Development Manager has explained that it will be possible for the BID to use its funding to reimburse the local authority to provide for free car parking. However, in other areas this had been considered but not pursued.

3. **RECOMMENDATION**

- 3.1 At the conclusion of its discussion on this item, the Panel has endorsed the recommendations that:-
- ❖ the Head of Customer Services be authorised to enter into the BID Levy Operating Agreement required in order to meet the Council's obligations under the Local Government Act 2003;
 - ❖ the Managing Director, Communities, Partnerships and Projects be authorised to cast any votes to which HDC is entitled in the ballot after consultation with the Executive Leader.
- 3.2 The Cabinet is invited to consider the discussions of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) as part of their deliberations on this item.

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