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**GREAT YARMOUTH ECONOMIC FORUM**

**11 December 2008 – 4.00 pm**

**PRESENT:**

Councillor Plant (in the Chair); K Duffy (NWES), M Gouldby (Port Users Association), D Martin (Business Link), P Paine (Great Yarmouth People), M Pearson (Environmental Forum), Councillor C Reynolds (Greater Yarmouth Tourist Authority), C Williams (Chamber of Commerce) and P Witcombe (EEDA).

R Perkins (Waveney Economic Partnership) also attended by invitation.

T Howard, P Wright, P Warner, J Butcher and S Davis (Borough Council Officials).

T Leonard (LSP Officer)

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from J Holt, L Brooks, P Barry, D Dukes, H Foale, J Steward, T Aydin, B Collins and R Parkinson.

**2. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meetings held on 11 September 2008 were confirmed.

**3. MATTERS ARISING**

It was noted that there were no matters arising from the above minutes.

**4. NORFOLK SKILLS ROAD MAP**

The Forum received a briefing paper on the Norfolk Skills Road Map which would be launched in March. It was suggested that the Forum needed to think of the issues now which included the links between skills, economic development and productivity, understanding the local economy, understanding one size did not fit all, raising awareness of businesses for training and skills, and increasing access to training and skills. The need for partnership arrangements and shared responsibility was stressed and that resources should be more focused towards the skills that were needed and be demand led. Members received details of existing skills providers, including Train to Gain, and the Skills Pledge, together with a number of challenges such as the level of skills and qualifications in Norfolk and the need to change perceptions that Norfolk was low skilled. The Forum was also reminded that they had previously identified skills as its top priority and had consequently created an Employment and Skills Working Group to deal with this issue. It was intended that there would be a link between the labour supply and demand through Working Neighbourhood's Funding and this sat well with the Economic Forum's objectives. There was also a need to start thinking on how this issue would link in with what was happening in the Borough such as employment boards, brokers, more Train to Gain, and being more proactive.

Caroline Williams reported that a skills conference would be held in Norwich on 21 April and requested details of a business case study for a project in Great Yarmouth. It was noted that funding had been secured from the Norfolk County Strategic Partnership for a website giving details of access to training and funding which would also signpost to other organisations. Members were therefore asked to provide contact details for inclusion on the website. The need for proactive action and for independent advice was stressed. A suggestion was made that a possible case study for the conference could be the way in which businesses were engaged in education using Flegg High School as an exemplar.

**RESOLVED:**

That the position be noted and any partners with details of examples of good practice and contacts for service providers be sent to Caroline Williams as soon as possible.

## 5. THE CREDIT CRUNCH – IMPACT ON LOCAL BUSINESSES

It was noted that there had not been a huge number of job losses in Great Yarmouth to date and it was possibly that the oil and gas industries, together with the Outer Harbour development might cushion any affects of the recession. Reference was made to the HMRC decision to close its offices at Haven Bridge House with a loss of 137 jobs in Great Yarmouth and this together with the recent closures of Roseby's, Woolworths and MFI seemed to indicate that the position might be even worse after Christmas. Partners were reminded that Business Link offered help and advice to businesses before they declared redundancies or bankruptcy and partners were asked to urge businesses to seek help at an early stage and to also ask for help in understanding their responsibilities to employees and to provide guidance on how to help people affected by redundancy. It was noted that the Chamber of Commerce was trying to pull together all the information on support available across Norfolk and to link this in with local websites. They also planned to meet banks early in the New Year. It was also reported that the Government had produced a website and flyer for businesses which picked up on the key interventions available. The need to understand what was happening at a local level and to obtain evidence in order to feed into policy making and measure how interventions were working was stressed. It was noted that the annual Business Ratepayers Meeting would be held on 6 January 2009. Several suggestions for the way in which the Government could help small businesses were made including a possible business supplementary rate and a percentage of business rates being used locally to spend on infrastructure, the payment of invoices sooner and to make grant forms more user friendly. Paul Witcombe reported that £1bn was available for small businesses as part of the Small Business Loan Scheme. It was also likely that the dualling of the A11 would be beneficial for some businesses.

Clarification was sought as to whether the Borough was helping to promote tourism in order to take advantage of a weak pound and thereby create more jobs. Concern was expressed that the recession was also hitting the global oil and gas industries which could mean that Great Yarmouth was not as sheltered as it perhaps once was.

A discussion ensued on the need for courses relating to the skills required for the tourism industry and also to support the oil and gas industry. Members noted that Norfolk Tourism hoped to provide a

summary of the skills courses available in Norfolk shortly. It was also noted that service industry courses were currently available at Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft Colleges so this issue would be picked up as part of the Post 16 Skills Review. It was suggested that the Enterprise and Competitiveness Sub-Group should discuss the credit crunch.

**RESOLVED:**

That the position be noted and partners be asked to emphasise to any local businesses that help was available and that should be accessed sooner rather than later.

**Michael Pearson declared a personal interest on the above item in relation to the discussion on business rates on the grounds that he owned a guesthouse.**

## **6. DRAFT PROSPECTUS**

The Regeneration Manager reported that the draft prospectus was a physical regeneration framework which co-ordinated and prioritised physical regeneration for the next seven years. It was intended that the framework would be used to address weaknesses and stimulate economic growth and private investment. The document focused on eight strategic sites which included the 1<sup>st</sup> East area, private sector developments and public sector areas. The document would also be used to advise EEDA on the Borough's key regeneration priorities and linked in policies with data and evidence to show why the Borough wanted to undertake the schemes. It was noted that an Executive Summary of the Prospectus would be available shortly and would be sent out to consultation to relevant partners such as EEDA, the County Council and 1<sup>st</sup> East and then out to a wider consultation. The document would also contribute towards a sub-regional regeneration plan and would inform the Integrated Development Programme.

## **7. WORKING NEIGHBOURHOODS FUND**

Members received the LSP Officer's report which gave details of the next steps for commissioning projects. Members were reminded that some funding had already been spent on transitional projects and their attention was drawn to how the remainder of the funding would be divided. It was likely that projects would commence in April 2009. In

light of the credit crunch, it was noted that there was a possibility some targets may be changed although it was perhaps more likely that the policy would change rather than the targets.

**RESOLVED:**

That the LSP Officer's report be noted and the next steps for commissioning the WNF be endorsed.

**8. THE WAY FORWARD FOR THE LSP**

Members were reminded that the recent LSP Stocktake had proposed changes to the LSP with Fora becoming Delivery Partnerships. A change Management Sub-Group had been formed and would consider the way forward and report back to future meetings.

**9. FEEDBACK FROM THEMED WORKING GROUPS**

It was noted that three of the four Themed Working Groups had met and the need to populate the meetings further was agreed. Members noted that the Enterprise Group had discussed targets and the Infrastructure Group had considered the efficiency of land use.

**10. enterpriseGY**

Members received an update in relation to the above and it was noted that the Catalyst Centre had recently been officially opened and was available to existing businesses who wanted to grow. It was intended that the enterpriseGY programme would be re-focused on business development and survival but, as a consequence, this meant that not all of the existing activities could be continued.

**11. INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

The Economic Development Officer reported that the above programme fitted into the Regional Economic Strategy, Regional Spatial Strategy and at a sub-regional level and was effectively a socio-economic and environmental programme for capital led investment. The prospectus would also feed into the programme. A copy of the draft IDP would be

circulated once available. The need to ensure that the programme was prioritised was stressed and that all the relevant Local Authorities should sign up to the Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft IDP.

## **12. UPDATES**

It was noted that the stand for Offshore Europe in September 2009 in Aberdeen had been launched and 11 spaces had been reserved already. Members were also informed that it was hoped the container terminal at the Outer Harbour would be open in July 2009.

## **13. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

RESOLVED:

It was agreed that Economic Forum meetings would be held on 12 March, 11 June, 17 September and 10 December.

## **14. LDF WORKING PARTY**

It was noted that the LSP representative on the LDF Working Party had recently resigned and anyone who might be interested in replacing him was asked to contact the LSP Officer.

## **15. SUB-NATIONAL REVIEW ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The Economic Development Officer reported that a sub-national review on economic development had taken place and recommendations published on 25 November on how this could be taken forward. Partners were asked if there were any observations they wished to make on the following suggestions:-

- Duty to carry out economic review of areas.
- Economic improvement bids.
- Integrated regional strategy.
- Implementation plan to deliver strategies.
- Annual monitoring.
- Joint investment plan.

**15. CLOSURE OF MEETING**

The meeting ended at 6.15 pm.