

CABINET - THURSDAY, 8 FEBRUARY 2024

Report of the Head of Economic Development and Regeneration Lead Member: Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Regeneration and Town Centres

Part A

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2024-27

Purpose of Report

To present an updated Economic Development Strategy for the Borough for the period 2024 – 2027.

Recommendation

That the final draft Economic Development Strategy 2024 – 2027 be adopted.

Reason

To set out objectives which help businesses and residents by facilitating a stronger economy for Charnwood and to enable the Council to undertake economic development activities which align with strategic priorities.

Policy Justification and Previous Decisions

This Council's Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024 includes the 'A thriving economy' theme. It states that regeneration and growth will support the borough's economic strength. It is likely that once approved the Council's new Corporate Strategy will also include a focus on economic growth in Charnwood. The Economic Development Strategy 2024-27 will enable and encourage effective implementation of actions across the Council and with key external stakeholders.

This Council's Climate Change Action Plan and Carbon Neutral Plan have informed development of the Economic Development Strategy and will provide a useful accompaniment to it in steering delivery over the coming years. Cabinet approved a Regeneration Prospectus in December 2023 and this updated Economic Development Strategy sits alongside it to give potential investors and funding organisations confidence that the Council has clarified priorities to create the conditions for economic and business success.

Implementation Timetable including Future Decisions

Should Cabinet approve the adoption of the draft Economic Development Strategy, implementation will commence immediately. The Economic Development and Regeneration Service Plan will reflect the priorities of the Strategy.

Monitoring of the delivery of the Strategy will occur through performance management mechanisms and scrutiny processes which are now in place consistently and as standard across the organisation.

Report Implications

Financial Implications

The strategy has no financial implications for the finance year 2024/2025.

Risk Management

The risks associated with the decision Cabinet is asked to make and proposed actions to mitigate those risks are set out in the table below.

Risk Identified	Likelihood	Impact	Overall Risk	Risk Management Actions Planned
A major event, such as further pandemic or civil emergency, that prevents officers from being able to deliver the strategy.	Unlikely (2)	Serious (3)	Moderate (6)	Officers have experience of working in a pandemic situation and agile working plans would support our ability to continue delivery of many, if not all actions.
Major recession in the national or international economy.	Unlikely (2)	Serious (3)	Moderate (6)	A review of the strategy would be undertaken and a revised Strategy and priorities would be put before Cabinet.

Equality and Diversity

EqlA info attached as Appendix

Climate Change and Carbon Impact

The economic development strategy links to aspects of the Climate Action Plan, proving information and support to businesses including promoting energy efficiency and supporting the delivery of Living Loughborough and Lanes and Links.

Crime and Disorder

None identified

Wards Affected

All Wards.

Publicity Arrangements

The Strategy will be published on the Council’s website and the inCharnwood website. The Communications Team will issue a press release and utilise social media. The Economic Development and Regeneration Team will notify partners and actively promote the strategy via social media and business networks.

Consultations

Consultation has been undertaken both internally and externally with stakeholders. A draft of the Economic Development Strategy and the background document (see Appendix 2) was shared with consultees, with an invitation for comments to be received by 12th January 2024. Consultees included: Sustainability Officer, Head of Strategic Housing, Director of Housing and Wellbeing, Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment, Director of Commercial and Economic Development Jane Hunt MP, Edward Argar MP, Loughborough University, Federation of Small Businesses, East Midlands Chamber of Commerce, and Loughborough BID. Cllr Tillotson and Cllr Miah were also involved in commenting on the content of the Strategy.

The consultation comments have been analysed and this final draft Economic Development Strategy has been amended to take into account comments received. A summary of the consultation responses is included at Appendix 3.

Links to the Corporate Strategy

Caring for the Environment	No
Healthy Communities	No
A Thriving Economy	Yes
Your Council	No

Key Decision: Yes

If yes

Date included on Forward Plan 10/01/2024

Background Papers: None.

Officer(s) to contact: Christopher Grace, Head of Economic Development and Regeneration,

Liz McCusker, Economic Development and Regeneration Manager
Tel: 01509 634534,
christopher.grace@charnwood.gov.uk,
Liz.McCusker@charnwood.gov.uk

Part B

Background

1. This Council's previous economic development strategy was adopted in 2018. Review of the strategy was scheduled for early in the new decade, but the Covid-19 pandemic meant that 'business as usual' was put on hold whilst the Council and its partners focused on supporting residents and businesses of Charnwood and through to recovery. During 2023 the Council recruited into posts within the Economic Development and Regeneration Service which were either vacant or newly created because of the Council's Leadership review. This has created a stable environment which, alongside removal of all pandemic related restrictions, has meant work could commence during the latter half of 2023 in reviewing economic strategy to make it relevant for the forthcoming years through to 2027.

2. The UK economy, similar to that of many others, shrank from the impact of restrictions imposed on individuals and businesses for reasons associated with the Covid-19 'pandemic'. There has been minimal recovery with economic growth being weak and following the pandemic economies have faced increased global energy prices, rising inflation and cost of living issues. The local economy of Charnwood is affected significantly by international, national and regional circumstances. The document attached to this report at Appendix 2 looks at some of these issues especially across the regional and local aspects. Footfall and retail vacancy rates in Loughborough, business trends information supplied by the LLEP, and information from East Midlands Chamber of Commerce and the Office for National Statistics will be reviewed annually to ensure that trends and impacts can be monitored.

3. The Economic Development Strategy 2024-27 and associated actions is intended to create a positive environment in which businesses can be successful and local people can find opportunities to be employed in those businesses or start up their own businesses. The Strategy will give potential investors confidence that Charnwood has plans to create conditions to encourage economic growth.

4. The strategy is concise to clearly show the Council's economic development priorities. There are four main strategic themes:

- I. Places and infrastructure
- II. Business environment
- III. People
- IV. Innovation

Each of these themes is underpinned by a series of key objectives which the Council and partners will look to achieve via the implementation of actions.

5. The final draft Economic Development Strategy 2024-27 strategy is attached to this report at Appendix 1.

Consultation and Consultation Responses

6. A consultation draft of the strategy was shared with both internal and external stakeholders (see Part A of this report). Consultees were encouraged to provide comments regarding the strategy and in doing so were invited to consider some specific questions:

- Are the four main strategic priority areas of Places and Infrastructure, Business Environment, People, and Innovation appropriate?
- Has the strategy omitted any significant objectives which in your view should be included? (If so, what are they and why are they important?)
- Does the strategy include too many objectives?
- Does the strategy provide a useful platform upon which collaborative working and delivery of actions can be developed?
- What would be your 'Top 3' areas of action from those which are included within the draft strategy?
- Is the strategy relevant to the needs of businesses in Charnwood?
- Will the strategy help facilitate an inclusive approach to economic development, for all parts of the borough and for people and businesses of diverse circumstances?

7. A summary of consultation responses is attached to this report at Appendix 3.

Conclusion

8. This final draft strategy reflects the national, regional and local economic situation, and is based on previous successful initiatives and views of internal and external stakeholders which help deliver economic development and regeneration initiatives. It provides a framework which if approved will enable the development and implementation of specific action plans. These action plans will highlight partnerships, collaborative working to help create an environment which encourages business success and facilitates opportunities for businesses and residents of Charnwood.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Draft Economic Development Strategy 2024 – 2027

Appendix 2 – Background Document (to be reviewed annually)

Appendix 3 – Summary of consultation responses

Appendix 4 – Equality Impact Assessment