

Economic Development Update

The following note provides an update to the Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee on economic development activity in Warwickshire over the past couple of months, and includes work undertaken by County Council officers, the work of the Coventry & Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership (CWLEP), the Coventry & Warwickshire Growth Hub, and other key pieces of relevant news/information.

- **Warwickshire County Council's Small Capital Grants Programme** – a further five grants worth £142,611 were awarded to five small Warwickshire businesses at the August Grants Panel. These include PSW Paper - a digital print provider based in Studley, Threadmaster Gauges - a manufacturer based in Kenilworth, and ZenZero - an IT company based in Warwick. WCC's funding will unlock over £600,000 of private sector investment for projects that should create 26 jobs over the next few years.
- **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)** - in the latest internal figures produced by DIT (Dept for International Trade), Warwickshire continued to perform at the highest level, outperforming the rest of the Midlands per capita in new investments for FDI in 2018-9. There were 46 successful projects with 2965 jobs created and safeguarded, across Coventry & Warwickshire, a positive result against a background of national pressure on inward investment due to trade tensions, Brexit and 'dieseltgate'. A number of these investments were supported by DIT and the inward investment services of Warwickshire and Coventry.
- **Supportive Employers Forum** – Further to the launch of the Warwickshire's Supportive Employer forum earlier this year, The Economy & Skills and Education & Learning teams held their second event which was hosted by the Nuneaton Golf Club. The morning session was very well attended with over 40 businesses and education providers coming together to discuss accessible apprenticeships. This latest in a series of planned events aimed at creating opportunity for those attending to share ideas and demonstrate best practice when providing opportunities for accessible apprenticeships. These unique apprenticeship models are designed to offer additional support for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and act as a progression route to young people who would like to develop beyond a supported internship. The group received a very powerful presentation from Natasha Hope who as a pupil of Oakwood School in Nuneaton spoke of her relationship with the schools work coach and the tremendous guidance provided along her journey from supported intern to apprentice. Natasha is now enjoying her job at the British Forces Resettlement Service where she is a hugely valued employee.

The events “call to action” encouraged businesses to sign a further pledge of commitment which would enable them to contribute to the agenda and consider creating such opportunities in their own organisations, the project team were delighted to see over half of those attending sign pledges and continue their support now giving a total of over 50 organisations actively engaged. Furthermore, we have also been working with George Eliot Hospital in Nuneaton, who are committing to 12 placements.

- **Small Business Apprenticeship Support Programme** – In May, the Council launched a new strand of apprenticeship business support which would enable us to support small businesses in recruiting apprentices. This programme would allow the county to share some of its unspent Apprenticeship Levy funds and create a budget of £300,000 to share outwardly and cover the full training costs for businesses in need of support. Since launching in May there has been significant interest in the programme from the business community and a healthy pipeline of businesses wanting to access the funds. Geographically there is good representation across the county, and the team are really pleased to see high street businesses and online retailers taking part.

Whilst attracting a good level of interest from businesses, the team have also heard from other Apprenticeship paying organisations and council's wanting to learn from the County's programme and how their own might be developed to achieve similar objectives. Last month the programme also received recognition in the Annual FSB Local authority awards and won the award for “Best small business support campaign”.

- **Future High Streets Fund announcement** – the Government recently announced that they were extending the size of the Future High Streets Fund to incorporate an additional 50 proposals that they had received following the competitive bidding process that was held earlier in the year. This extension means that both Nuneaton Town Centre and Leamington Town Centre have been shortlisted to develop plans to reinvent their High Streets and are now able to progress to the second phase of the Future High Streets Fund and can receive up to £150,000 to support the development of detailed project proposals that can be submitted for capital funding. Warwickshire County Council provided help and support in the development of these bids, and will continue to do to help them both move forward through the second phase. In brief, the two bids were looking at the following:
 - **Leamington:** £75,000 to develop key proposals around public realm enhancements, physical connectivity improvements, digital connectivity and wayfinding improvements, and proposals to reveal Leamington's waterways and address environmental and social conditions in the Old Town area.
 - **Nuneaton:** £100,000 to explore opportunities to address the lack of diversity within the town centre, including the relatively low percentage

of independent businesses, leaving the town centre vulnerable to the shift away from national retail in town centres. The focus is on improving the leisure offer, enhancing the public realm and the opportunities around opening up the river Anker.

- In addition to the Future High Streets Fund, the government has just launched a **£3.6bn Towns Fund**, with 100 places invited to develop proposals for a new generation of multi-million-pound Town Deals. In an announcement made on 6th September, **Nuneaton has been chosen to develop proposals to take advantage of this new regeneration fund**. This is likely to be a significant additional investment to bolster the Transforming Nuneaton agenda.
- **Transforming Nuneaton (TN)**: The TN Programme is moving forward with some key steps achieved over the last few months:
 - Land assembly at Vicarage Street is progressing well with 2 buildings now purchased – Powell House and the old post office; negotiations have now started with tenants with regards to gaining vacant possession ahead of demolition. The aim is to create a larger development site which would be more attractive to the private sector. This is funded with LEP monies.
 - Work on attracting new tenants for some of the retained Co-op building has been taking place and lease arrangements are almost complete with an Escape Room operator and fashion retailer. WCC is making a £1.5m investment in the Co-op building in support of the work that NBBC are leading on.
 - MACE have been appointed to progress the design for a proposed new public sector building for the town centre. The design looks to create a new landmark building anchoring a key area of the town and stimulating a growth in new uses in the town centre. It would house the library, a new cafe and new business centre – focussing on growing the local office market and supporting local businesses,
 - The proposal for a new Business Improvement District in the town is progressing with the appointment of Heart Flood consultancy who are leading the work on behalf of the BID working group. An initial meeting for all town centre businesses was held in early August.
- **ERDF Funding Opportunity** – there is a final opportunity to take advantage of unallocated European Regional Development Funding to support projects designed to help business growth. There is a deadline of 30th September for organisations to submit Outline Applications for extensions to existing projects or any new projects, based around supporting businesses to undertake innovative activities, improve their environmental performance, help them pursue their growth ambitions, and to exploit opportunities from utilisation of ICT. Warwickshire County Council and Coventry City Council are both working on extensions to their existing ERDF Business Support Programmes to take advantage of this opportunity.
- **Creative scale-up programme** – the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) have been successful in obtaining £1.3m in funding from DCMS to

develop a Creative Industries Scale-up pilot programme across the region. Warwickshire County Council have been working with the CWLEP and WMCA to ensure the new business support programme has the maximum impact for local businesses and compliments the existing support programmes on offer. The West Midlands programme is 1 of 3 pilot areas, the others being Manchester and Bristol. Development of the programme is currently underway and a national launch of the programme is expected in October.

- The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) has launched its first **Automotive Skills Plan** alongside a £3m skills boost for the region's automotive supply chain businesses. The WMCA wants to ensure the region's automotive businesses remain competitive, are ready to adopt emerging new technologies, and have the chance to upskill and reskill staff to help attract investment. The West Midlands has been chosen as UK's first Future Mobility Area - The West Midlands will pioneer innovative new transport schemes to make journeys quicker, cheaper and cleaner following a £20 million funding announcement, and will see the money invested in new technology.

Business News:

- **Aldi has announced major further expansion at its Atherstone HQ**, creating 850 new jobs in Warwickshire. The extension will see Aldi expand its existing headquarters with 87,000sq ft of new office space and more than 120,000sq ft of new warehouse space. The premises will also see a new multi-storey carpark with 596 spaces. The first phase of the development will lead to the creation of two new office blocks and the new warehouse space. This is slated to create around 375 office jobs plus 50 jobs in the warehouse. Another two office buildings are scheduled for the second phase of the development, and this is set to create a further 440 jobs. The two phases of the development is expected to be complete within five years.
- Escape to Warwickshire – **Escape Rooms**, a relatively new phenomenon where players come together to solve clues to exit a room or series of rooms, are coming to **Hatton Country Park and Nuneaton Town Centre** (into the former Heart of England Co-op offices). These join similar investments in Stratford-upon-Avon town centre and Coventry city centre.
- **Loungers**, who landed in Rugby in 2015 with support from Invest in Warwickshire, are now looking to **open a new café bar in the former Maplin unit on Queen Street, Nuneaton**.
- **Coleshill is set to become home to the UK's most landlocked wave park** after plans for a new £25 million facility were revealed last month. The planning application lodged by Emerge Surf is for a 15-acre site, approximately seven miles to the east of Birmingham's city centre at Coleshill.

Features include a 5.4-acre surf lagoon, powered by Wavegarden's Cove technology, an outdoor heated swimming pool, a perimeter track for Onewheel self-balancing electric skateboards and a 1,600 sq metre hub building. The park will be named Emerge Surf Birmingham and will also be home to a surf school, surf shop, café and restaurant, multi-purpose fitness studio, physio and massage room and children's play area. With the closest surfable ocean waves more than 100 miles away, this new facility will be a haven for landlocked surfers and those keen to try the sport for the first time. It also follows on from the new Coventry Wave development on New Union Street in Coventry. Both schemes will serve both local and regional demand for water related leisure pursuits.

- **Fautlands, Nuneaton** - A total of 1,500 full-time jobs could be created in Warwickshire after plans for a new industrial and storage and distribution park were approved by the planning authority. The 64 acre site is owned by major Nuneaton landowner Arbury Estates, and is one of several that have come forward to create the 107ha of available employment land for development in Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough as part of the new Local Plan, providing a major boost to the potential for local economic growth. Across the road Goodman is in the process of completing a 230,000sqft spec build development on the former UPS site which has been vacant for a number of years.
- The Summer saw the **creation of two new private led business groups**, Business Buzz in Warwick (August) and Rugby (to follow in October), and Creative Mornings Leamington. Business Buzz is active in other UK locations such as Cambridgeshire and Oxfordshire, but this is the first time it has come to Warwickshire, with the first meeting on 15th August at Old Coffee Tavern in Warwick. Creative Mornings is a coup for Leamington, as it is usually only cities that host these events. There are Creative Mornings caucuses in cities around the world.
- There are **further future mobility investments at MIRA Technology Park**, on the border with North Warwickshire and Nuneaton. TIC-IT, for high speed autonomous testing, and Trusted Autonomous Parking are under development and will further bolster facilities on site. New light industrial spaces NW07 will be available shortly for new tenants to locate to.
- **Geely LEVC** (Ansty Technology Park), the former London Taxis International now based at Ansty, achieved a major milestone recently with the 2500th TXe taxi. It also confirmed that a new EV light van based on the taxi and ideal for last mile delivery, will debut next year.
- **Warwickshire rail manufacturer Vivarail** won the Environment Award at the Railway Innovation Awards for its battery charging technology, which it developed with funding from Innovate UK.