

Economic Development – Chippenham

October 2020 update for Area Board

1) Covid-19 impact – Business support and Market Towns Recovery

Wiltshire Council has been providing support to businesses of all sizes since March to help them cope with the impact of Covid-19.

This support has been provided to smaller businesses mainly in the form of the Small Business Rates Relief and Retail Hospitality and Leisure grants in the first instance, and latterly by the Discretionary Grant scheme.

Around £95m has been disbursed throughout Wiltshire, and to early August £4.04m had been distributed to 427 Chippenham based businesses. An updated figure will be provided to the next Area Board.

Wiltshire Council continues to work closely with central government and the relevant local business representative organisations in communicating messages around support schemes as well as vital public health information. We are identifying particular businesses and sectors at risk, as well as opportunities for growth.

Wiltshire Council provides a strong Employment and Skills offer which is extremely active in offering redundancy support, job matching service as well as facilitating in partnership key recovery schemes such as Kickstart and Apprenticeships.

Further support is being provided through the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership Growth Hub which is acting as a central portal for business support and advice. www.growthhub.swlep.co.uk

Analysis

- Many businesses still have a proportion of staff working from home (especially office functions) which obviously impacts town centre footfall.
- Some sectors have been more exposed than others e.g. pharmaceutical and IT sectors are comparatively buoyant, whereas some businesses are recovering from a strong downturn/impacts of temporary closures e.g. clearly retail, hospitality, some manufacturers.
- In common with other areas, many businesses have already or will be looking at efficiencies, where income remains out of step with costs; trading has been curtailed, support schemes coming to an end, uncertainty around second/local lockdowns etc; one planned major office development has not come forward.
- There remains very strong demand for industrial space in the Chippenham area. High demand for logistics facilities driven by growth in online sales. Chippenham's location in relation to transport is a positive. Across the county, there is demand for smaller commercial units to buy and good quality smaller office space.
- In common with other areas, a technical step forward for many companies; increased home working and new ways of working, increased online sales etc; demand for flexible office space may increase rather than demand and lease on large footplates

- With more people potentially shopping locally, opportunities for some High Street businesses to win customers back
- Local redeployment opportunities for skilled staff entering the jobs market following recent announcements and e.g. from the closure of the Honda plant in Swindon planned for 2021

2) Chippenham Station Hub update

Station Square

- An additional £1.6m funding has been secured by GWR through the Station Improvement Fund. This funding combined with the existing Local Growth Fund monies will enable the high specification scheme to come forward as planned.
- Works for the station square are being put out to tender and are currently scheduled to start on site in March 2021.

Northern access Lift

- The tenders for the construction of the lift have been returned and are currently being analysed by Network Rail.
- Works are scheduled to start in February 2021.

Sustainable transport

- A range of improvements to cycle, pedestrian, bus and network capacity which will improve the train's station accessibility and linkages with the town centre are currently underway and due to be completed by the end of March 2021.

Sadlers Mead

- The impact of Covid-19 resulted in Good Energy's decision to pull out of the Sadlers Mead development. The site remains an extremely attractive site at a prime location within the town. Wiltshire Council is working closely with SWLEP to bring forward a suitable and sustainable development at the site.