

GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECONOMIC GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday 21 September 2023 commencing at 10.00 am at the Tewkesbury Borough Council
Report by Cllr Angus Jenkinson for the CDC Oversight and Scrutiny Committee, Oct 31, 2023

The meeting took place in Tewkesbury and focused on matters related. It is the second meeting I have attended. At the first one I had to suggest that we introduce ourselves. There is a learning curve involved in contributing, of course, even when you happen to be competent in the field in a general way.

1. Tewkesbury's High Street Heritage Action Zone

Tewkesbury is getting a makeover costing £2 million, half from Historic England, £600,000 from an S106, and the balance from the borough council. Within the budget, the plan looks sensible and will support tourism and local life. It's due to end on 31st of March 2024. The plan aims to balance heritage and climate priorities.

2. Tewkesbury Garden Town

There is a major development to implement the Tewkesbury Garden Town, a completely new centre close to the motorway adjacent to the historic town. It would amplify the Tewkesbury – Gloucester – Cheltenham hub. At this stage, it is still going through intensive planning. A garden town, and its little sister the garden village, are a means of designing a contemporary urban area with well-planned and considerable inclusion of connected green (plant, trees) and blue (water courses) along with cycle paths, community centres, traffic organisation, work spaces, and so on. There are nine guiding principles. There is considerable budget to support this including the design phase.

We might take account of this possibility as a smarter way of dealing with growth that may be necessary. Colin Chicks, lead GCC planner, considers that there is a prime opportunity in the North Cotswolds, if we were minded. His forecast is that a further 6 to 7 garden towns will be needed in the county in the following decades to 2050. This is a significant picture of the future. We discussed the ecological, governance, design, transport, and other matters.

3. UK Shared Prosperity Fund / Rural Fund Update

This was a presentation on the use of this fund (UKSPF). Its focus is on boosting productivity, spreading opportunities and public services and restoring a sense of community. The total is &1,400,000, £1 million from the UK and the balance from the rural fund.

It has four streams:

1. Supporting businesses
2. Community and places
3. People and skills
4. Rural prosperity

There is an aim to reduce the "economically inactive". The advice for other councils obtaining this fund is "to listen to what the people wanted and need".

5. Growth Hub Update

The meeting took place alongside the Hub, and the report demonstrated that it is having multiple benefits. A report is going to be circulated. In addition to the staff, it works with a number of different partners and learns also from talking to businesses.

6. Executive Directors Report/ Performance Data Q1

Colin Chick with David Owen took the reports as read and answered questions on each. The reports contain an extensive set of data that is available if you wish to read it.

7. Work Plan

We discussed the future working plan. This seems to be a good practice, to consider what needs to be addressed rather than simply responding to Cabinet matters.

Naturally, I suggested we should consider farming as prior Committee scrutiny activities are focused on agritech while current practice is looking at more ecological methods such as organic and regenerative farming.

Comment

The focus is on giving information and receiving questions, which occasionally lead to thought.