

RURAL, ECONOMIC & ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

9 MARCH 2016

REPORT OF HEAD OF COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

MELTON - RURAL CAPITAL OF FOOD

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To report to the Committee about the strategy the Council is taking regarding the Food Enterprise Zone (FEZ), Tourism and wider Economic Development Programme and its effect on the borough's identity as the 'Rural Capital of Food'.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members:

- 2.1 **Note the progress and effort being done in the FEZ project and its connection to the Rural Capital of Food brand.**
- 2.2 **Recognise the comprehensiveness of the FEZ and the critical importance of cross-departmental input and cooperation for the project's success.**
- 2.3 **Actively support, endorse and champion the next steps outlined in section 3.11 and 3.12 as initiatives of the FEZ project and wider Tourism Blueprint and Economic Development programme.**

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In February 2015, Melton Borough Council was successful in being selected as a pathfinder for the Food Enterprise Zone (FEZ), a flagship Government initiative for **economic growth** to boost food and farming businesses through benefits like business support, productivity optimisation and simplified planning. With only 17 FEZs in England, and being the only one in Leicestershire, the project has a huge potential for bringing benefits to furthering the **Rural Capital of Food brand, local tourism** and the **food and rural economy** of the sub-region.
- 3.2 From the best butchers, bakers and pork pie makers to some of the most celebrated farmers, micro-brewers and cheese-makers in the world, Melton should be recognized for high-quality and sustainable food as well as its spectacular beauty, tranquil spaces and working landscapes, which have been shaped by farmers and food production for thousands of years. The FEZ is designed to improve people's connection with local food, from field to fork, as well as strengthening local supply chains - supporting farms and businesses to add value to their products and by helping people find and appreciate this wonderful produce.

- 3.3 The response from the stakeholder engagement phase undertaken as part of configuring the Food Enterprise Zone programme has been outstanding, and as a result we have secured strong partnerships in support of our work, including Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP), National Farmers Union (NFU), Leicestershire Rural Partnership (LRP), Country Land and Business Association (CLA), Loughborough University and Brooksby Melton College (BMC).
- 3.4 The **FEZ** is therefore considered to be a **great opportunity to boost the rural capital of food brand**, local **tourism** and the **food and farming industry** that plays an essential part in the borough's **rural economy**. It is a project that aims to incentivise the creation of start-ups and allow existing businesses to grow, contributing to the creation of jobs and economic development. Furthermore, the **key elements of the FEZ aim to reinforce all four themes of Melton's Blueprint for Tourism 2015-2018**, as mentioned in the draft the **Melton Rural Economy Paper (2016)**.
- Destination (place): offer a wide range of quality attractions and experiences with growing local distinctiveness.
 - Positioning: developing and promoting the county's assets in a way that offers a unique and quality product.
 - People: investing in skills and creating a workforce capable of delivering high standards of services ensuring a world class experience for visitors.
 - Intelligence and support: strengthening the business-council relationship to allow for better coordinated and informed investment decisions.
- 3.5 With the wide variety of large and small players that Melton has in the food industry, the FEZ will **positively impact the borough's 'Rural Capital of Food' brand (RCF)**, building on Melton's flagship products like the Melton Mowbray Pork Pie and Stilton® Cheese. This will support the rest of the top quality food that the borough has to offer and reinforce the legacy of Melton as a food producing region.
- 3.6 Additionally, we aim to **join the elements of the food industry** in the borough like businesses and tourist attractions, offering a comprehensive, integrated and truly appealing set of locations and activities. The objective is to make the RCF live up to its name and create a complete destination for food tourism enthusiasts, whilst celebrating the Borough's food heritage.
- 3.7 In order to include the important aspect of nutrition into the RCF, we are collaborating with Fit for Work (Leicestershire County Council) and this Councils Sports and Leisure programme where good food and healthy diets drive innovation and productivity. A number of businesses have expressed strong interest in the initiative, keeping food diaries that will be reviewed by nutritionist Rosemary Connelly. We hope that this can be a strong promotional campaign that generates press interest. We have created a landing page on our MBC website where people will be able to download information for "diets

that help innovation”, tailored to their occupation and linked to Melton’s own quality products as well as our MBC’s Business and Inward Investment guides.

3.8 We consider up-skilling and improving income levels associated with the food and farming industry a fundamental part for the success of the FEZ and ultimately the RCF brand. Thus the **partnerships with academic and educational institutions** will prove to be invaluable. Loughborough University has shown great interest in placing their graduates from the School of Business and Economics, providing an affordable resource for SMEs, strengthening the skills of the businesses and giving graduates and post graduates professional experience. In addition, BMC have indicated that they would like to be part of the FEZ and we are scoping out potential opportunities to create programmes around entrepreneurship whilst making the most of their outstanding facilities available to SMEs for commercial, production and training purposes. They have mentioned that their qualified staff could also act as advisors for skills like marketing, finances and human resources.

3.9 The FEZ has attracted a lot of interest from farmers, producers and retailers. Through the consultation activities that have been carried out with them we have found that the main element that makes the FEZ so appealing is its **focus on business support and productivity opportunities**. This indicates the importance of considering the FEZ a **comprehensive project for sustainable economic development** where cross-departmental input is crucial, taking strength in multiple tools ranging from the LDO to business forums and grant schemes.

3.10 **Next Steps**

3.11 Further develop the FEZ web portal as a platform to showcase the wonderful food and drink people can enjoy in the Melton Borough area. Working directly with Melton Promotions and Melton BID to link the Town Centre App to a new digital local food finder to locate and promote the best places to buy, eat and drink, stay and explore our stunning local area, local fare and local events as well as being regularly updated on seasonal features. Our goal is to create something quite unique, which benefits the local food and drink industry and that also helps local people and visitors to Melton enjoy the incredible offer we have.

3.12 In delivering our Economic Development Strategy, focusing on key growth sectors such as food and drink and tourism, we aim to tailor our existing business support services and promote their access online through a business hub that interfaces with the LLEP business gateway. The hub will make the most of the “Better Business for All” tools, promotion of incubator and business accommodation facilities in the Borough as well as accessing resources using our burgeoning as well as longstanding relationships with national and local partners such as UK Trade and Industry (UKTI) and Pera. By collaborating with our academic and industry partners (e.g. NFU, Melton Brooksby College and Loughborough University) we will be able to provide bespoke training, leadership and business support functions targeted to SMEs

and in particular family based businesses, farms and enterprise, sole traders, microenterprise and fledgling start-ups.

4.0 POLICY AND CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are clear links with the Corporate Plan including:

- Promoting a vibrant and sustainable economy, focused on growth and prosperity.
- Developing a thriving Melton Mowbray town centre that is at the heart of the Borough.
- Helping to provide homes and environments that meet local needs.
- Creating a well-connected Borough.

5.0 FINANCIAL & OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The FEZ is being carried out with the £50,000 grant from DEFRA, as specified in the Food and Farming Local Development Order report to this Committee on the 4th of March 2015.

5.2 Projects that are developed in support of the Economic Development Strategy will be subject to their own assessment in regards to costs and the potential for income generation, and if applicable project mandates and business cases will be developed.

6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS/POWERS

6.1 At this stage no major legal implications have been identified. However, legal advice will be sought where necessary in relation to the Local Development Order that forms part of the FEZ and any specific legal matters brought to members attention as required.

7.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY

7.1 There are no direct links to community safety arising from this report.

8.0 EQUALITIES

8.1 No equalities issues have been identified at this stage, as proposals advance then detailed EIAs will be completed.

9.0 RISKS

Very High A				
High B				
Significant C				
Low D		1		
Very Low E		2		
Almost Impossible F				
	IV Neg- ligible	III Marg- inal	II Critical	I Catast- rophic

Risk No.	Description
1	Any targeted PR associated with the Rural Capital of Food brand and the FEZ campaign is not successful resulting in no direct or indirect benefits to local businesses.
2	The FEZ does not have the desired impact.

10.0 CLIMATE CHANGE

10.1 There are no climate change issues directly arising from this report.

11.0 CONSULTATION

11.1 As part of the FEZ project a series of consultation and engagement events have taken place with national as well as local stakeholders where participants have provided their opinion on the three key elements of the project. Additionally, a farmer focus group and producers, retailers focus group was created to explore these issues in more detail.

12.0 WARDS AFFECTED

12.1 All wards are affected.

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Background Documents: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs>

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