

TITLE: RURAL ENGLAND PROSPERITY FUNDING

Committee: Finance and Assets Committee

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1.0 ISSUE

1.1. To approve the allocation of £550,000 of the Councils Rural England Prosperity funding (REPF).

2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

2.1. Members are requested to:

2.2. Approve allocation of £550,000 of ECDC's Rural England Prosperity Funding as set out below.

2.3. Delegate authority to the Economic Development Manager, in consultation with the Chairman of Finance & Assets Committee, to finalise the detailed arrangements and utilise funding to commence development of ECDC's E-space North business centre in Littleport.

3.0 BACKGROUND/OPTIONS

3.1. The REPF is a top-up to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF). It succeeds EU funding from LEADER and the Growth Programme which were part of the Rural Development Programme for England. Like SPF the REPF is also part of the governments Levelling Up programme.

3.2. Importantly this is a capital only investment fund and targeted at supporting new and existing rural businesses to develop new products and facilities that will be of wider benefit to the local economy.

3.3. Applications to the Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) are administered for the region by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA).

3.4. ECDC Officers have worked with the CPCA to define how its allocation of funding can best meet the Governments objectives within our District.

3.5. Members may recall that in July 2022, the Council submitted a levelling up fund bid to DLUHC which included an extension to the E-space North business hub facility in Littleport. Nationally, that fund was significantly over subscribed and our bid was not successful.

- 3.6. However, this extensive body of work enabled a successful bid to the CPCA's market town programme for £925,000 of funding. Whilst not sufficient to complete the project, it was anticipated that the REPF could, in future, provide sufficient match funding to complete the £1.5M project.
- 3.7. ECDC officers are now preparing agreements with the CPCA to access the REPF in order to match fund the project.

4.0 ARGUMENTS/CONCLUSION(S)

- 4.1. At the 23 June 2022 committee, members approved the business case for the extension of its E-space North facility as part of its hybrid 'Levelling up Littleport' bid.
- 4.2. Officers subsequently adapted this proposal to meet CPCA Market town programme funding limits, to secure £925,000 of alternative funding. This was done with REPF match funding in mind to cover revised project costs estimated at circa £1.5m
- 4.3. Economic Development Officers remain of the view that the E-space North Extension project, which addressed issues around shortage of commercial office/incubator space for start-ups, rural area job creation and space for the local community remains the council's strongest investment potential for this type of funding.
- 4.4. With recent confirmation of CPCA/DEFRA agreements on funding, Officers are now able to bring this project back to committee with a view to utilising REPF funding to accelerate commencement and delivery of the E-space North expansion scheme during 2025.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS / EQUALITY IMPACT STATEMENT / CARBON IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 5.1. There are no additional financial implications
- 5.2. Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required.
- 5.3. Carbon Impact Assessment (CIA) not required

6.0 APPENDICES

None.

Background Documents:

None.