

Business Consultation 2015

The 2015 consultation was conducted by the Economic Development Manager in partnership with the Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of Small Business. Working with organisations representative of business has the advantage of identifying business opinion from a wide range of members through a reliable methodology e.g. business surveys conducted by the organisations and regular ongoing direct consultation that the Council is not resourced to deliver. The disadvantage is that some of the local flavour can be lost. However, direct local consultation can sometimes result in an over emphasis on specific issues with car parking as a common example.

Consultation took place with business representatives from Bishop's Stortford, Hertford and Ware. The consultation took place in the context of informing the development of the Economic Development Strategy through the identification of current priorities of local businesses.

The Federation of Small Business has approximately 240 members from East Herts. The Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce has a strong East Herts membership as a proportion of 1,000 members across the county. The headline summary of responses from each organisation is included below. It is worth stating that businesses are not always fully aware of the budget responsibilities of local authorities; however the results do provide a snapshot of the views of local businesses.

Emerging issues

The following issues were discussed and suggestions made by local businesses:

Bishop's Stortford

- A need for greater working between East Herts Council, Hertfordshire County Council, Uttlesford Council and Essex County Council to deliver economic objectives.
- East Herts Council should lobby for improvements in infrastructure vital for business growth, e.g. A120 improvements, broadband coverage, employment land.
- Work with local colleges to deliver employment skills.
- Parking; residents CPZ is not business friendly.
- Investigate partnerships with the Universities of Cambridge and Hertfordshire to bring in new businesses.

- Collaborate with partners to take a joined-up approach to market Hertfordshire.
- Support local businesses through appropriate marketing of growth hub, provide more incubation space for business start-ups, support growth of manufacturing and investigate Business Improvement Districts.

Hertford

- More promotion of local businesses by East Herts Council, particularly businesses located away from the town centre.
- Set up business groups to represent different areas of the town. These groups could facilitate business-to-business trading and networking within East Herts.
- Focus on boosting the daytime economy in the town centre. East Herts Council can facilitate this by running and/or supporting events, e.g. additional markets, boating activities on the river, tourism activity. Could East Herts Council fund activity to boost the economy?
- Explore how the retail offer could be improved.
- Communicate in a simple way the responsibilities of each council, i.e. East Herts, Hertfordshire County Council and Hertford Town Council.
- Measures to address skills shortages and business recruitment needs especially the development of technical skills including through apprenticeship and graduate schemes.

Ware

- The need for the right blend of workforce skills and qualities was raised, including support for apprenticeships.
- Access to business advice and support including signposting to available grants and finance. Improved communication on support available from the Local Enterprise Partnership and Growth Hub.
- Improved broadband in specific locations.
- Recognition of the importance of the visitor economy and destination management. Explore the potential to promote Hertfordshire as a whole rather than East Herts as a destination in its own right.
- The need for the Council to engage directly with local businesses on a regular basis and in a variety of ways, e.g. networking meetings, email updates and social media.