
REPORT TO:	ENVIRONMENTAL & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES	AGENDA ITEM: 11
DATE OF MEETING:	19th APRIL 2018	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER	
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SUBJECT:	FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR A BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT (BID) FOR THE NATIONAL FOREST	REF:
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	TERMS OF REFERENCE: EDS 10 & 11

1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 That Members consider a contribution of £2,000 to the National Forest Company towards a Feasibility Study into a Business Improvement District for The National Forest.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To seek Members' views on a request from the National Forest Company to participate in a Feasibility Study to explore the potential for a Business Improvement District (BID) for The National Forest.

3.0 Detail

Background

- 3.1 Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) are business-led partnerships representing a defined geographic area which are created through a ballot process to deliver additional services to local businesses. They can be a powerful tool for directly involving businesses in local activities and allow the business community and local authorities to work together to improve the local trading environment.
- 3.2 A BID is a defined area in which a levy is charged on all, or sector specific, business rate payers in addition to the business rates bill. There are exemptions based on a minimum rateable value and there are maximum contribution levels set. The levy is used to develop projects which will benefit businesses in the local area. These are defined in a business plan developed by a BID partnership representing businesses. There is no limit on what projects or services can be provided through a Business Improvement District. The only requirement is that it should be something that is in addition to services provided by local authorities.

The benefits of BIDs are wide-ranging and can include:

- Businesses decide and direct what they want for the area
- Businesses are represented and have a voice in issues affecting the area
- BID levy money is ring-fenced for use only in the BID area
- Increased footfall
- Improved staff retention
- Reduced business costs
- Enhanced marketing and promotion
- Facilitated networking opportunities with neighbouring businesses
- Assistance in dealing with the Council, Police and other public bodies

- 3.3 The National Forest Company secured charitable status in 2016 in order to help it develop more sustainable income sources alongside the grant support it receives from the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs. To maximise the economic benefits from the development of the Forest and to specifically help the Forest economy become more sustainable and develop at pace, the Forest Company aims to attract more support from businesses, the community and visitors.
- 3.4 BIDs exist in neighbouring towns such as Loughborough and Hinckley but there are none currently in the Forest. The Forest Company has followed the development of BIDs covering broader geographic areas, and in particular those having more of a place-marketing agenda.

Feasibility Study

- 3.5 A Draft Brief for the Feasibility Study has been prepared by the National Forest Company. The objective of the Study would be to explore the potential for a BID and to guide the future approach to business partnerships, whether they are a BID or other arrangement.
- 3.6 Key outputs of the Study would include: Consideration of the fact that the Forest covers multiple local authority areas; A preliminary analysis of business needs and desires; Levy revenue options; Whether the BID focuses on particular business sectors and the implications of this for revenues generated; Exemptions; and, Additional income generation potential. The Study would also include advice on BID development, including communications, the ballot process, governance and management options, resource requirements, and timescales for implementation or alternative actions if a BID is not feasible.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 A Brief for the Feasibility Study would be issued and the work overseen by the National Forest Company supported by a steering group of contributing District Councils. The National Forest Company has requested that the District Council contribute £2,000 towards the cost of the Feasibility Study. This cost could be met from existing budgets. It is anticipated that the total cost of the Study will be approximately £15,000, with contributions also being made by the National Forest Company and other District Councils within the Forest.

5.0 Corporate Implications

5.1 A BID for The National Forest could contribute to the Corporate Plan's vision to 'make South Derbyshire a better place to live, work and visit' and in particular to the themes of:

- Place – Creating vibrant communities to meet residents' needs
- Progress - Encouraging inward investment and tourism opportunities

5.2 The key aims include:

- Support provision of cultural facilities and activities throughout the District
- Work to attract further inward investment
- Unlock development potential and ensure the continuing growth of vibrant town centres
- Work to maximise the employment, training and leisure uses of The National Forest by residents and increase the visitor spend by tourists.

6.0 Community Implications

6.1 A BID for The National Forest could contribute directly to the South Derbyshire Partnership's Sustainable Community Strategy vision of '*a dynamic and caring South Derbyshire, able to seize opportunities to develop and empower successful communities, whilst respecting and enhancing the varied character and environment of our fast growing and diverse District*'.

6.2 Sustainable Development is highlighted as a key theme, with the aim of achieving 'A more prosperous, better connected, increasingly resilient and competitive economy' and 'A better place to live, work and visit at the heart of The National Forest', with measures including unemployment levels in the District and spend by visitors to The National Forest.

7.0 Conclusions

7.1 The District's Economic Development Strategy 2016-2020 highlights that maximising the potential of The National Forest is a key challenge for the District in order to realise the full benefit of this unique initiative. A Business Improvement District for the Forest could offer a new source of resources, in terms of both staff and finance, to support the economic development of the Forest.

8.0 Background Papers

8.1 None