

## **Herefordshire Sustainable Food & Tourism Partnership, 13<sup>th</sup> March 2015**

**Present:** Jenny Beard, David Curtis (Chair), Nick Read, Clare Greener, Cathy Meredith, Alan Curless, Bobbie Heavens, Matt Smith

**In Attendance:** David Bland, Jesse Norman MP, Cllr Graham Powell

**Apologies:** David Bailey, Rachel Jones, Mel Prosser, Christine Hope

### **Broadband and mobile connectivity**

The main purpose of the meeting was to continue the dialogue on broadband communication in Herefordshire. Jesse Norman and Cllr Graham well were welcomed, as was Matt Smith who has recently joined the Partnership. It was acknowledged that everyone present was committed to trying to achieve the best possible outcome for Herefordshire.

David Bland had produced a discussion paper which he circulated and spoke to. There were seven substantive points:

1. The need for higher expectations nationally
2. Greater transparency
3. Better understanding and use of alternative technologies in addition to fibre-optics
4. The need for a community focus
5. More joined up approaches, broadband and mobile together
6. Value for money
7. Greater market competition.

A recent House of Commons Report indicated that Herefordshire was close to the bottom for English Counties and Broadband connectivity. Customers want to know when they will have access to better broadband or, if not, what they can do to remedy the situation.

Matt and Cllr Powell outlined the contractual situation with BT. The contract with Herefordshire Council does allow for the use of other technologies, but BT are pushing for fibre first. It is important that BT investigate alternatives.

The Council had obtained £1.2m of EAFRD funding to support funding for connectivity but Defra have indicated that State Aid rules are unlikely to allow this to take place. 4G is not yet a commercial market so it is impossible to prove market failure which would allow public funding to be applied.

Cllr Powell reported that there was movement on mobile phone connectivity. A number of masts had been decommissioned following the merger of EE and Orange, leaving some gaps; though not necessarily not-spots which were easier to tackle. However 4G micro-networks and Vodafone were active and although the minimum requirement contractually was 2G, since 3G were one of the companies that had to be included in new mast provision 3G or even 4G provision would be obtained. Mobile connectivity is measured by population and Herefordshire needs county-wide coverage because of its geography.

Broadband provision, however, is measured by premises, totalling 83k in Herefordshire. In the South Herefordshire Parliamentary Constituency there were 44k premises. To date, 34k can access broadband.

- Phase 1 enabled BT and other commercial providers to connect 26k premises; this was a purely commercial relationship and public funding could not support it. Although the number of premises connected is known, the speed of connection is not.

- Phase 2 will enable a further 8k premises to be connected under Fastershire, of which 7k will have 30Mbps or better.
- Phase 3 will enable 90% of premises in Herefordshire to be connected and entails a further £5.5m of funding from government which must be matched locally. The Council will need to decide by June how this is to be achieved. Under phase 3 Herefordshire and Gloucestershire are divided into 14 “milestone areas” and each will be tackled in turn. Note that government set a target of 95% of premises connected, but this is a national target and does not have to be replicated at a local level.
- Phase 4 will allow targeted funding to support connectivity and this contract does not have to be with BT. Three pilot areas are being investigated.

There is a bursary scheme which will allow businesses to connect but there has to be an economic argument. It was suggested that the Food and Tourism Partnership could help to identify a pilot area, though if it is a cluster of businesses it is likely to be included under phases 2 and 3 anyway.

Although wireless technology is eligible for public funding under State Aid rules it only applies if 90% of customers receive a service of >15Mbps during the “busy hour” which is impossible to achieve in a rural area.

Jesse commented on the need to renew State Aid provisions in 2015, though this applies to all State Aid not just Defra-inspired programmes.

It was agreed that a representative from BT should be invited to a future Partnership meeting.

Tele-health provision could help to generate economic opportunities. The UK was lagging behind countries such as Finland and this needed to be reflected in the Herefordshire Economic Masterplan.

After this item Jesse and Graham left the meeting. Both were thanked for their attendance and constructive responses and David Bland was also thanked for his continuing support of the group.

### **Food Enterprise Zones**

Clare reported on a conversation with David Llewellyn concerning the Marches LEP inability to bid for Food Enterprise Zone status, compared to Worcester LEP which achieved a successful bid using data that would have supported a Marches approach as well. There was a continuing breakdown in communication between the Marshes LEP and its constituency, at least in Herefordshire.

It was agreed:

- To invite Gill Hamer and David Llewellyn to a future meeting
- To formally write to the LEP to express our concern at the lack of communication with the business constituency. Nick will draft a letter, Partnership members are requested to forward case studies etc to him.

### **ACTION: ALL Members**

### **Buttermarket update**

Nick reported on the latest developments concerning a proposal to acquire the Buttermarket under a Community asset Transfer to support local food.

### **Visit Herefordshire**

- Alan indicated that the Herefordshire BID had been successful and VH was co-locating with the BID team.
- A new Tourist Information Point was to be developed in the city.

- He had conducted an appraisal of other tourism promotion organisations and Visit Herefordshire was virtually unique in receiving no Local Authority funding, having no membership scheme and relatively few large companies involved in commercial sponsorship.

**Bruton Knowles initiative**

Bruton Knowles have launched an initiative to link local producers with local retail outlets. It was agreed to invite them to a future meeting to give a presentation. [lan.cooke@brutonknowles.co.uk](mailto:lan.cooke@brutonknowles.co.uk)

David Curtis was also thanked for his support for the broadband initiative and his hospitality for the meeting.

**Date of Next Meeting**

Monday 20<sup>th</sup> April at 2pm at the Cider Museum.