

Herefordshire Business Board (HBB)

Notes / Actions from the Meeting

Monday 25th November 2019, 4-6.00 pm

held at The Business Solutions Centre, Rotherwas

Chair: Frank Myers (FM) **Present:** Christian Dangerfield (CD), Cllr David Hitchiner (DH), Debbie Gittoes (DG), Doug Barrat (DB), Gareth Williams (GW), Helen Bowden (HB), John Reed (JR), Mark Pearce (MP), Nic Millington (NM), Stephen Eckley (SE),

In attendance: Gill Hamer (GH), Cllr John Harrington (JH), Laura Hughes (LH), Nick Webster (NW), Richard Ball (RB), Roger Allonby (RA),

Speaker: Tim Yair (TY), MLEP Regional Senior Energy Projects Officer

Apologies: Abigail Appleton, Ian Peake, Karen Usher, Sharon Smith

Minutes: Jan Bailey (JB)

1. Welcome, apologies and declarations of interest

FM welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologies were noted. A particular welcome was extended to Tim Yair and Cllr John Harrington (Cabinet Member Infrastructure and Transport). FM also introduced and welcomed Laura Hughes who is director of Herefordshire business, Signs and Labels, and was present both for her own CPD and to bring a younger dimension to Herefordshire Business Board operations.

No declarations of interest were submitted.

2. Minutes of the last meetings

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 September and the Extraordinary meeting held on 21 October were both approved.

3. Actions Arising

Tricia Thomas - High Sheriff Skills Development: FM advised that the sub-group had met prior to today's Board meeting and good progress was being made. Plans were in place to engage with Herefordshire schools on this issue and a further meeting of the group is planned for January. The group is aiming to help Tricia 'hit the ground' running in terms of her skills initiative when she begins her period of office as High Sheriff in March 2020.

LIS Consultation: FM thanked DH for the Council's contribution to the LIS consultation. GH advised that the period of consultation has now closed, but if Board members had any more contributions to make, they should send them to her by the end of this month. She thanked all those who attended the LIS public event at the Hereford Racecourse in October.

4. **Marches LEP Energy Strategy**

TY gave a comprehensive presentation (to be circulated to Board members), including the background to the Midlands Energy Hub and its role in helping the LEPs, local authorities and businesses to develop projects that help to reduce energy usage. He advised that Herefordshire Council, in line with c250 other local authorities nationally, had declared a climate emergency and set a target of becoming carbon neutral by 2030. He agreed that this is a highly ambitious target that will require a proper worked through action plan and significant innovation.

TY advised that a Rural Community Energy fund of £2M was available for rural communities to develop feasibility studies (Phase 1) and then business development and planning of feasible schemes (Phase 2).

Key priorities for the county were outlined. TY highlighted a major priority was to develop a pilot grid to mitigate the fact that Hereford's grid has no further capacity.

MP expressed concern about this situation in relation to the Hereford Enterprise Zone (HEZ) and the planned installation of multiple solar panels. What would happen if they could not export to the grid? TY replied that we need to develop more sophisticated solutions for the storage of excess energy and would like to work with industrial estates to enable them to become energy independent.

HB queried why extra capacity could not simply be added to the grid. TY replied that this was due to cost, which could run into millions of pounds.

Other priorities outlined by TY were:

- Innovation in agricultural technologies
- Sufficient reliable energy supply
- Development of the supply chain in key areas of the low carbon economy
- Local renewable energy supply
- Addressing high levels of fuel poverty

FM asked whether any steps had been taken to harness the significant energy potential in the region's rivers, notably the Severn and the Wye. TY advised that some investigations had been undertaken in connection with the River Arrow, and he would welcome other initiatives. FM suggested that this could be something on which the Marches could take a lead.

DG suggested that investment was a key consideration and asked where funding would come from. TY agreed that investment was the key issue.

TY indicated that there was also significant potential in harnessing wasted heat. His vision was to be able to heat new homes with wasted heat from elsewhere.

FM thanked TY for his presentation and confirmed the Business Board's support for what the Hub is trying to achieve. He asked TY to let the Board know if there were particular ways in which he felt it could help.

Following a suggestion by JH, it was agreed that the Board would invite Western Power's Network Strategy Manager to attend a future Herefordshire Business Board meeting in order to question him on the capacity issues of the grid and future planning to mitigate this risk. TY agreed to suggest some questions that could be put by the Board.

Action 1: Circulate TY presentation to Board Members (JB)

Action 2: Invite Western Power's Network Strategy Manager to future meeting of the Board (JB/FM)

Action 3: Suggest questions to be posed by HBB to Western Power (TY)

Action 4; Consider how to start a project to harness energy from the rivers (JB/FM)

5. Hereford By-pass

JH outlined the current situation with regard to the two major road schemes: the South West Transport Package (SWTP) and Hereford Transport Package (HTP). He explained that as a consequence of the change of leadership following the May local elections, the new cabinet had decided it wanted to pause these two schemes and look at all options before progressing further. This was particularly in light of the fact that research has shown that more than 50% of travel by car into the city was for journeys of less than two miles.

GH outlined the current stance of the LEP Board with regard to the £27M funding allocated to the road schemes. She confirmed that although a contract is still in place between the Council and the LEP, this was in jeopardy because of the risk that outcomes upon which the funding was contingent would not be achieved within the specified timeframe.

GH confirmed that the LEP had not yet agreed to a proposal by the local authority to release an initial tranche of funding for active traffic measures in the South Wye package. This decision will be reviewed at a further LEP Board meeting tomorrow (27 November).

As a consequence of the above, GH advised that in anticipation of there not being agreement by the local authority to proceed with the SWTP by the end of January 2020 a call for Capital Investment Projects had been published by the LEP. The deadline for initial expressions of interest is 6th December.

DG asked JH when a decision by the Council would be forthcoming. JH advised that he hoped this would be by the end of January. Board members (DB, FM) asked why the process was taking so long and questioned whether the Council was attaching sufficient urgency and importance to this issue. RB advised that due processes needed to be followed in order that the Cabinet felt fully informed to make this significant decision on behalf of the county.

DB stressed that the SWTP was a vital component in a circle that links jobs, housing, infrastructure, the Enterprise Zone development and NMiTE. Without the road he argued that the county would struggle to attract inward investment.

FM thanked JH for attending the meeting and stated that the Board understood the position of the Council, although was disappointed that there did not seem to be the sense of urgency that was needed to make this critical decision and he urged that extra special effort be made to inject rapid progress.

GW stated his support for the Council's search for alternative measures to address the county's congestion issues, particularly in light of TY's earlier presentation. However, he agreed that the slow speed of decision making was regrettable.

FM/GH stressed their support for green initiatives but advised that the LEP's criteria for investment was currently based on other output measures and that we need to pursue growth *alongside* these initiatives not stop economic progress.

6. Herefordshire Vision - Herefordshire Investment Partnership

DB advised that because of the change of the Council's strategy (see item 5. above), opportunities for local investment had been missed. However, he was continuing to progress other investment opportunities and would keep the Board informed of all developments.

7. NMiTE

GH provided an update on the current situation. Following receipt of a detailed business plan from the University, the LEP had now released the additional allocated funding, subject to contract, which will enable three additional buildings on the Enterprise Zone to be developed.

A sub-group, comprising Frank Myers, Andrew Manning-Cox and Ruth Shepherd, has been set up to support the University and to keep progress on track. Time is of the essence to get everything done before the deadline of March 2021.

GH welcomed local MP, Jesse Norman's, efforts in trying to gain an extension of this deadline, but so far to no avail.

8. Horizon scan

NW advised that Leominster's expression of interest had been accepted for Historic England's Heritage Action Zone Funding. Funding of £2M would be granted, subject to satisfactory completion of a programme design document (deadline 6th December). The aim is to improve the economic prosperity of the town and ensure buildings of significant historic interest are brought into use. It is anticipated that with match funding, the programme will be worth c£4M.

NW also advised that several expressions of interest would be submitted to the LEP for Growth Deal funding as a result of the call for projects described in 6 above. The deadline for submissions is 6th December.

RA advised that Hereford has been selected for 'Towns Funding' and that the Government had now published its prospectus that sets out what can be supported and the required next steps.

The aim of the fund is to drive the economic regeneration of towns to deliver long term economic and productivity growth. Next steps are to establish a Town Deal Board (by end of January 2020) and then to Develop a Town Investment Plan (by summer 2020). Subject to agreement of the Investment Plan, a 'Town Deal' will be agreed based on a detailed business case.

9. Marches LEP

GH asked members to circulate a forthcoming advertisement for two LEP Board member positions. She is particularly keen to receive applications from Herefordshire based individuals who have experience in higher education/higher level apprenticeships and those who have a background in food/drink/farming. Applications from suitably qualified females would also be particularly welcomed as the Government has set targets for this..

10. Raising the profile of Herefordshire Business Board

FM advised that LH had made a number of suggestions to him regarding how to raise the profile of Herefordshire Business Board, particularly amongst the younger generation of Herefordshire business people. He then asked for the Board's thoughts on this matter.

A number of observations/suggestions were received:

- DH referred to his previous membership of Junior Chamber International which he had found good for management development. He suggested that an organisation such as this would be good for Herefordshire.

- NM referred to the Hereford Young Professionals group (currently facilitated by Harrison Clark Rickerby's Solicitors) and suggested that the Business Board could develop a formal link to that group.

- NM suggested incentivising young entrepreneurs might be a good way to encourage involvement.

FM asked LH to canvass the opinions of her professional contacts to find out what would encourage them to engage more with the Business Board.

Action 5: Canvass opinions of young(er) professionals and report back to HBB (LH)

11. AOB

- CD reported that he will shortly be attending meetings that include a mix of private and public sector stakeholders to look at how they can collaborate to increase and improve Herefordshire's performance in the tourist sector.

- NM advised that the Herefordshire's A Great Place project, working closely with Herefordshire Council, has commissioned the Burns Owen Partnership to undertake research into Herefordshire's publicly owned buildings to see where and how they could be put to greater use. An interim report is expected before Christmas with a final report due in February 2020.

- GW requested that the Board writes a note expressing its concerns regarding the local grid capacity that he can table at future BEIS (Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) meetings.

Action 6: Write a note expressing Board's concern with grid situation (FM)

- In view of the lack of representation on the Board from the agricultural sector, GW agreed to FM's request to sound out a number of his connections to see if they would be interested in becoming a Board member. FM advised that Matt Hayes (Chairman - Hereford BID) would also be formally invited to join the group.

Action 7: Suggest additional Board member(s) from the agricultural sector (GW and all)

Action 8: Invite Matt Hayes to join the Business Board (FM/JB)

- JB asked all Board members who hadn't already submitted their biographies/photographs to LH for the website to do so as soon as possible.

Action 9: Members to submit their biographies/photographs (all applicable)

12 Dates of Future Meetings

The venue for Herefordshire Business Board's 2020 meetings will move to Arctic Circle, Rotherwas, Hereford HR2 6JL. FM thanked DG for her kind offer to host the meetings.

The proposed dates are as follows (to be confirmed). All meetings will run from 4-6.00 pm.

- Monday 3rd February
- Monday 30th March
- Monday 1st June
- Monday 27th July
- Monday 5th October
- Monday 30th November

Links to Marches strategic boards (control and click to follow the links)

[Hereford Enterprise Zone / Skylon Park](#)

[Herefordshire Business Board](#)

[Marches LEP](#)

[Shropshire Business Board](#)

[Telford Business Board](#)