

## **Herefordshire Business Board (HBB)**

### **Notes / Actions from the Meeting held on Monday 27 July 2020, 4-5.45 pm via Zoom**

**Chair:** Frank Myers (FM) **Present:** Abigail Appleton (AA), Cllr David Hitchiner, (DH), Debbie Gittoes (DG), Gareth Williams (GW), Helen Bowden (HB), John Reed (JR), Karen Usher (KU), Mark Pearce (MP), Nic Millington (NM), Paul Stevens (PS), Sharon Smith (SS), Stephen Eckley (SE)

**In attendance:** Gill Hamer (GH), James Newby (JN), Laura Hughes (LH), Roger Allonby (RA)

**Speaker:** Ben Godfrey, Network Strategy Manager, Western Power (BG)

**Apologies:** Christian Dangerfield, Christine Snell, David Williams, Doug Barrat, Cllr Ellie Chowns, Ian Peake

**Minutes:** Jan Bailey (JB)

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#### **1. Welcome**

FM welcomed everyone to the meeting. A special welcome was extended to today's speaker, Ben Godfrey. James Newby was also welcomed to the Board as the new representative from NMITE.

It was noted that Ian Peake will be retiring from his role at Hereford & Ludlow College and would be replaced at future meetings by David Williams, the new Principal.

Apologies were as noted above.

There were no Declarations of Interest.

#### **2. Minutes of the last meetings**

The minutes of the Herefordshire Business Board meeting held on 1 June 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

#### **3. Matters arising (not covered elsewhere on the agenda)**

None

## **4. Energy – Restrictions to the Hereford Grid**

**4.1** BG introduced himself and described his role at Western Power (WP). Essentially this is to look after the development of the network and to understand and plan for future energy needs across the region. This includes modelling and mitigating against potential constraints and ‘pinch-points’ in the system.

**4.2** BG explained that free capacity for Herefordshire currently stands at 10%. Future funding and investment in the network are determined by Ofgem, based on business plans submitted by WP. Ultimately, Ofgem will decide which projects will proceed and how much customers will be charged. This has historically worked on a ‘Just in Time’ basis, ie investment won’t be made until capacity is needed. WP will not make speculative investment.

**4.3** BG stressed that WP wants to work with groups such as the Business Board to understand local needs. However, there is a delicate balancing act between ensuring sufficient (rather than excess) capacity, costs to customers and the needs of decarbonisation initiatives.

**4.4** FM invited questions / comments from Board Members.

**4.4.1** KU asked about the capacity for WP to meet the additional energy demands of 2,000 students and new employers coming to the county, as anticipated in the University’s 5-year business plan.

**4.4.2** MP raised concerns about the needs (current and future) of the Hereford Enterprise Zone and his difficulties in finding the right contacts with whom to have a dialogue. He stressed how important it is for energy capacity not to be a barrier to future growth.

**4.4.3** JR and FM asked how individual needs for additional capacity (as opposed to commercial need) would be managed. Individuals could not be expected to ask for network upgrades, but capacity needs to be built in for future anticipated demand, for example greater use of electric cars and to meet the Council’s carbon neutral by 2030 goal.

**4.4.4** JR further commented that he was aware of situations where renewable energy had been generated but couldn’t be fed into the grid due to lack of capacity. He added that concern about grid capacity was affecting his business’ (Avara Foods) and other agricultural businesses’ ability to plan for future needs.

**4.4.5** GW commented that the historical national policy of no investment ahead of need would not work if we are to achieve decarbonisation targets. He argued that there must be investment ahead of need in order to accommodate the additional demands of renewables.

4.4.6 GH explained that the Marches LEP is looking closely at this subject and that significant energy capacity issues have been raised and continue to exist across the region. She stressed the importance of effective communications between WP and all interested parties (the LEP / Councils / BB) so that effective strategic planning could be undertaken to meet future energy needs.

4.4.7 RA commented that Herefordshire Council does have strategic growth plans in place and is committed to net zero by 2030. The LEP also has an energy strategy and dedicated postholder in place.

#### **4.5 BG's responses are summarised below:**

4.5.1 Triggering the requirement for additional energy capacity is the key factor. WP wants to work with businesses to understand what will be needed, but huge increases in capacity could not be arranged overnight.

4.5.2 There are stringent national targets around net zero / removal of internal combustion engines. WP are concentrating on what the future network will look like, however Government has devolved some short-term strategic planning to local authorities.

4.5.3 WP are trying to engage in discussions with LAs and other stakeholders to understand future demands as they work to a forward forecast based upon LA's predictions. WP need LAs' support in particular to understand local citizens' future needs. DH declined a request from FM to add any further comment on this point.

4.5.4 An ongoing national review is taking place to look at connection boundaries and charging arrangements. This is expected to be completed in November. BG is hoping that the local network operators will be given more responsibility for triggering additional capacity / developments.

**4.6 It was agreed that** a LEP-wide initiative, including a specific Herefordshire Group, should be established to work with WP to share information, future plans and likely energy requirements.

## **5. Hereford Transport Strategy Review**

FM advised that this review was ongoing. Cllr Harrington has recently written a letter (circulated) to interested parties advising that final decisions had been postponed until the end of September.

## **6. Marches Investment Fund (MIF)**

RA advised that tender submissions for two opportunities were being received (Marketing and PR campaigns in relation to growing Herefordshire's tourist industry) and would be assessed at the end of this week (commencing 27 July).

## **7. Marches LEP**

**7.1** GH updated the Board on the Government's 'Getting Building Fund' for which the LEP had submitted a number of bids. Notification of three successful projects (totalling £5.6 million) for Herefordshire had been received (although the money is not yet guaranteed). These were an extension to a Hereford city centre development project, an innovative wetlands project and some additional funding for NMITE.

**7.2** GH advised that a MLEP Board meeting had recently taken place at which there was a briefing from the Marches Skills Advisory Panel Chair. A number of significant issues had been identified, in particular in relation to challenges in the FE / HE sector and predicted high unemployment amongst young people. As a result, the LEP will be lobbying local MPs for more flexibility in terms of FE / HE budgets and how they could be utilised. In addition, a sub-group would be established to look at the many jobs-related initiatives announced by Government and how the region could maximise the benefits available from these.

**7.3** Members echoed their concerns in relation to the issues raised. Although there are some positives in the current situation – eg ongoing need and opportunities for IT / digital skills and agricultural workers – significant uncertainty exists around employees who are currently furloughed and the ongoing economic situation. FM asked all Board members to advise him if there are particular issues they require fed back to central Government as the Business Board / LEP is in a good position to do this and has a regular meeting to discuss matters for feedback..

## **8. NMITE**

**8.1** KU advised that there were no major updates since the last Board meeting. However, the University is now settling into an 'operational mode' whereby it has delivered 13,500 pieces of PPE into the local area.

**8.2** KU advised that the University is now delivering a number of online IT / technical skills programmes, which it is hoping to expand in the future.

**8.3** KU further advised that a virtual introduction to NMITE's senior leadership team is taking place on 19 August. If any Board member is interested in attending, please email Karen in order to be added to the guest list.

**8.4** JN advised that regulatory processes are ongoing and are expected to be completed by the autumn. It is still planned for students to join the university from January 2021.

**8.5** MP added that NMITE's development of the Advanced Timber Technology Centre in the Enterprise Zone is progressing well, with planning having been approved and contractors now being appointed.

**8.6** JN advised that the Blackfriars site is near completion. The University has also entered into a partnership whereby the accommodation near Hereford Station will be shared with the Arts College.

## **9. Horizon Scan**

**9.1 Discretionary Grant Scheme (DGS):** RA advised that applications are being sought for this scheme, which is intended to support business that 'slipped through the cracks' of other opportunities. The DGS is particularly aimed at bed and breakfast businesses, charities, market traders and those in shared business spaces. RA will share the weblink with Board members for ongoing circulation to any interested parties. The scheme closes at the end of August.

**Action 1: RA to forward link to JB for onward circulation to Board members**

**9.2 Stronger Towns Fund (STF):** RA advised that a Stronger Towns Board is now in place (FM and Jesse Norman are both members). Further guidance has been issued by Government and a Town Investment Plan is being developed. The submission date for the Plan is January 2021. There is the opportunity for funding of up to £25 million. Development of the Plan will involve on-going public engagement.

**9.3** RA advised that discussions were also on-going with Market Town Councils to gain a clear overview of their future ambitions. This exercise is useful so that a quick response can be made to future Government schemes, as they are announced.

**9.4** RA provided an update on Capital Projects:

9.4.1 The Shell Store (Rotherwas) business incubation centre is expected to be completed by the end of August.

9.4.2 The Midlands Centre for Cyber Security is expected to be completed by the end of this year.

9.4.3 Student accommodation near Hereford railway station – completion required by December 2020.

9.4.4 Maylord Orchards – as previously reported, the Council has purchased this and is considering how it will feature in city regeneration plans. It will not necessarily be utilised as retail premises.

9.4.5 FM added that work is ongoing at Hereford County Hospital to replace the hutted wards with permanent structures.

## **10. Herefordshire Vision – Herefordshire Investment Partnership**

Doug Barrat not being present at the meeting (apologies received), no update was received regarding Herefordshire Vision.

## **11. Any Other Business**

**11.1 Sheriff's Skills:** FM reported that good progress was being made and that a competition would be launched with schools in September.

**11.2 Herefordshire Business Board Terms of Reference:** FM advised that the Terms of Reference for all three MLEP Business Boards were being reviewed with the intention that one set of ToR would apply to all. This is ongoing and an update will be provided at a later date.

**11.3 HW Chamber Awards:** SS advised that the Chamber's awards this year would take place online (4 September). If Business Board members would like to get involved or sponsor an award, please email Sharon.

**11.4 Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF):** FM reminded Board members of the availability of National Emergency Trust funding available via HCF to struggling organisations. He asked all Board members to continue to raise awareness of the fund with their contacts.

**11.5 Tour of Britain (ToB):** FM advised that Christian Dangerfield is in discussion with ToB organisers, exploring the tourist opportunity that the Tour would bring if it came through Hereford. He is holding a further meeting in September.

## **12. Dates of Next Meetings**

5 October, 30 November – venue tbc.