

**Herefordshire Business Board (HBB)**  
**Notes / Actions from the Meeting held on**  
**Monday 26 July 2021, 4.00-5.30 pm**  
**at The Shell Store, Skylon Park, Hereford HR2 6SR**

**Chair:** Frank Myers (FM) **Present:** Christian Dangerfield (CD); Cllr David Hitchiner (DH); Debbie Gittoes (DG); Gareth Williams (GW); Helen Bowden (HB); James Newby (JN); John Reed (JR); Nic Millington (NM); Paul Stevens (PS); Sharon Smith (SS); Stephen Eckley (SE)

**In attendance:** Roger Allonby, Herefordshire Council (RA)

**Speaker:** Mark Thomas, 99% Organisation (MT)

**Apologies:** Abigail Appleton (AA); Christine Snell (CS); David Williams (DW); Doug Barrat (DB); Karen Usher (KU); Mark Pearce (MR); Gill Hamer, Marches LEP (GH);

**Minutes:** Jan Bailey (JB)

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**1. Welcome**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked the Shell Store for their hospitality.

**2. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest**

Apologies are as noted above. There were no Declarations of Interest.

**3. Minutes of the last meeting**

The Minutes of the Herefordshire Business Board meeting held on 7 June 2021 were approved as a correct record.

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

**Item 4./Item 6.1 Herefordshire Business Board Terms of Reference:** The Chair advised that he had exchanged emails with DH on this subject. However, due to the fact that LEPs are currently under review, any future discussion on this item has been deferred. In the meantime, the Chair advised that Herefordshire Council's new CEO, Paul Williams, will be attending the next HBB meeting in October.

**Items 6.2.2 and 9.4 Skills Development / Widening Participation in Higher Education:** JN advised that these discussions had yet to take place between himself and DW.

**Item 6.2.3 Industry Meeting / Green Agenda:** DH suggested that this item is discussed with Paul Williams when he attends the October HBB meeting.

**Minute 4. Old Market Development:** DH stated that he had nothing further to report.

**Minute 6. Economic Strategy and Climate Emergency:** The Chair indicated that he would be very keen to receive a presentation from GW on this topic when he is able to present.

## **5. Updates and progress report**

### **5.1 Marches Investment Fund (MIF) – Update on Visitor Economy Marketing Project**

5.1.1 RA provided a verbal overview as a reminder to HBB members of the purpose and scale of this funding, which is coming to an end on 31 July. He stated that a final report was being prepared for the Marches LEP, but that all targets had been met or exceeded – for example, with regard to website hits, PR reach, etc. A survey of employers had indicated that 174 jobs had been saved as a result of the MIF and that the private and public sector had worked very well together.

5.1.2 RA advised that the MIF Steering Group had recently met to decide next steps. He stated that the council has given £350K to tourism from the COVID Recovery Fund, which would carry it through until March 2022 (tenders would be required by suppliers for Marketing/PR support as part of this). By March next year, RA said it is hoped that a DID (Destination Improvement District) is established, which would provide future funding via a levy from members.

5.1.3 The Chair commented that this was a great example of what could be achieved when parties work collaboratively. However, he cautioned that it is difficult to know how much of the increased tourism traffic is due to the MIF and how much to the increased popularity of staycations, due to COVID. Nevertheless, there is sufficient evidence to show what can be achieved by concerted spending on tourism, which will be useful for persuading parties to join the DID.

5.1.4 PS raised concerns that there was insufficient engagement in the city for the establishment of a DID, and he cited the example of some supermarkets in the city who couldn't see the benefits for their businesses. The Chair acknowledged these concerns but again pointed to the evidence from the MIF in terms of what could be achieved if sufficient funding was available. The Chair/HB stressed how important it is to ensure the messaging to potential DID members is pitched correctly.

## **5.2 Stronger Towns Fund**

5.2.1 The Chair thanked CD for his efforts on this project. He stated that there have been some tensions between the Council and the STF Board, but that he was confident that these will be worked through and resolved. He said the key message was that Hereford City would be benefiting from £22.4 million investment.

## **5.3 Knife Angel Project Hereford**

5.3.1 The Chair advised that the Knife Angel has now left Hereford City and that more than 100,000 people had visited during its stay. Associated events, eg seminars, schools workshops, had been very well attended. He also commended the Bishop of Hereford for his very positive engagement with the event.

5.3.2 The Chair advised that there was a KA Steering Group meeting being held on Wednesday (28 July) to consolidate information and share learning from the project.

5.3.3 NM commented on the power of these types of public exhibitions (the poppies at the cathedral were another example) which bring art to people rather than expecting people to go to the art. This should, he suggested, be borne in mind when planning future county cultural investment or activity.

## **5.4 COVID19 Recovery Plan**

5.4.1 RA advised that a sum of £6.14M had been approved to be spent this financial year to help the economy and people's wellbeing following the COVID pandemic. An example of expenditure was the £350K earmarked for tourism (see 5.1.2 above), but other ideas included free bus travel at the weekends, eating out schemes, Get Active strategies and reducing alcohol consumption. RA to circulate a link to the full Recovery Plan.

### **Action 1: RA to provide link to COVID Recovery Plan**

5.4.2 DH added that during COVID, more planning applications had been received, particularly for small scale projects. He indicated that the COVID recovery fund may be used to review Planning Department activity to speed up the processes involved. He added that for the first time, Herefordshire has shown that it has met the national requirement for five years housing supply.

5.4.3 The Chair raised an associated issue with regard to planning and projects included in the Stronger Towns Fund. He stated that he hoped that projects included in the STF would be treated sympathetically. DH suggested that the pre-planning process would help to provide an indication of their likely success.

5.4.4 HB asked whether Recovery Funding would be used to support retail businesses. RA indicated that a grant scheme will shortly be launched totalling £400K, for individual bids from £2-10,000.

## **6. The Herefordshire 2030 Project**

6.1 MT provided a presentation, with reference to the paper previously circulated to members, “What the hell happened?” Within his presentation MT identified sector ‘winners’ and ‘losers’, the obstacles to future growth and what could be done to remove these. The presentation will be circulated to members after today’s meeting.

### **Action 2: JB to circulate presentation to all members**

6.2 MT asked for the Board’s assistance to share the Herefordshire 2030 Business Growth Questionnaire with their contacts and encourage them to complete it. He suggested including a copy of the “What the hell happened?” report with the survey link as an extra encouragement for people to complete the survey. MT to send survey link to JB to circulate to members.

### **Action 3: JB to circulate shared link with members. Members to share with their contacts and encourage completion.**

6.3 MT said he would be happy to work with any Board member who is interested in the development of solutions for Herefordshire. He indicated that an event is being planned for September (at the Green Dragon) and a further report would be compiled in November. Further details to follow.

6.4 GW asked where climate change had been factored into the 2030 analysis. MT replied that there were three different streams to the project, including an environmental one. He stated that analysis had been conducted into which businesses were good for the environment, could be better for the environment and bad for the environment, and how to support businesses to make improvements. MT said that these ideas will be jointly developed between the three streams.

6.5 SS asked for clarification regarding any skills and general business support from the COVID recovery fund. She highlighted the challenges of encouraging business who don’t usually engage to get involved – probably around 80% of all county businesses.

6.6 JN asked for clarification regarding the number of individuals employed in each sector and whether this could have skewed the findings. MT replied that there were some small differences, but not material enough to have had an effect.

6.7 NM stressed the importance of including the younger demographic in future HBB and other discussions. Board members agreed that this was important. SS offered to link in with the Chamber’s Young Professionals group about this.

### **Action 4: SS to link Young Professionals Group with HBB**

## **7. Marches LEP**

7.1 The Chair referred to the circulated Marches LEP Board Meeting Paper regarding the review of LEPs and implications for the Marches LEP operational budget and staffing. He stated that this was placing the LEP in a very difficult and uncertain position, which was unfair particularly to its staff.

7.2 DH suggested that the LEPs will in future be asked to perform a different function, in particular that management of capital funding will not be part of its remit. This is expected to come to local authorities. He suggested that, that being the case, it was imperative that the relationship between businesses and their local authority is enhanced. FM agreed, stating that this will inform HBB's future discussions with Herefordshire Council's CEO, including at the October HBB meeting.

## **8. NMITE**

8.1 JN advised that a cohort of the minimum viable size of students (between 40-60) would be coming to NMITE in September and another in January (c 25). He reported that there is a good level of interest too from students in future intakes, which would be more easily managed through usual university admissions processes.

8.2 JN advised that student accommodation construction is progressing well in Hereford and that further construction works had started at Skylon Park. NMITE had additionally submitted and been successful in a bid from the Stronger Towns Fund.

8.3 JN advised that NMITE's academic staff had been running a range of 'Summer of Discovery' programmes. He encouraged Board members to review those available via the University's website.

## **9. Horizon Scan**

No additional updates provided.

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

No update provided as apologies received from DB.

## **11. Sector Updates**

11.1 Sector updates were provided by Business Board members as follows:

- DG/JR/SE/Chair – Manufacturing
- NM / HB – Creative Industries
- GW – Energy

See Annexe 1 attached.

## **12. Any Other Business**

12.1 The Chair referred to an email from DW in which he informed HBB members that a bid to the Three Marches Colleges' Strategic Development Fund had been successful. Over the next few months, the colleges will pilot ways of working together to serve the needs of employers. More details to be presented by DW at the next Board Meeting.

**Action 5: DW to present further details at October HBB meeting**

### **13. Date of Next Meeting**

Monday 4 October, 2021 – Venue to be confirmed

**Following meetings – all at 4.00 – 6.00 pm, venue tbc**

Monday 6 December

## **Annexe 1: Sector Updates**

### **Manufacturing:**

- DG** - Skills always top of their agenda  
 - Over the past three months, experiencing supply chain problems, caused partly by the pandemic, partly due to lorry driver shortages. Means they can't deliver to customers when promised.
- JR:** - Desperately short of people, which is holding the business back
- SE:** - Buoyant market and opportunities for development  
 - Helped by fact that don't generally recruit locally – staff come from Birmingham, Bristol, Worcester, etc, so makes it easier. See good aptitude and skills ability  
 - Shortages being experienced in supply chain, causing issues with production. Been affected with COVID related difficulties since last March.
- FM:** - Significant exporting problems with some countries, eg Spain, USA.

### **Creative**

- NM** - Lots of activities hit by COVID, particularly freelancers and venues. Some signs of recovery, eg Courtyard and National Trust properties reopening  
 - Towns Fund – portfolio of projects – digital hub, very exciting. Hereford's bid stands out in its commitment to cultural/green/social mobility projects  
 - Some signs that young entrepreneurs are moving into the county  
 - Consultancy project success around scale of creative and cultural industries in the county. Herefordshire seems to be ahead of the curve in this respect.
- HB:** - Very buoyant at moment, particularly IT and web development.

### **Energy**

- GW** - Busy nationally and also local installations increasing. Businesses increasingly thinking about doing the right thing.  
 - As an industry, looking at local and national backing to support what we are trying to do. We need policies to support us going forward.  
 - Some supply chain issues.  
 - 'The Great Collaboration' developed with Parish Councils – ideas to encourage Parish Councillors on how to get involved with green agenda – what practical things they can do. Further information to be circulated.

**Action 6: GW to provide further information on The Great Collaboration for circulation to members**