

Herefordshire Business Board (HBB)

Notes / Actions from the Meeting held on Monday 6 December 2021, 4.00-6.00 pm at Arctic Circle Ltd, Rotherwas, Hereford HR2 6JL

Chair: Frank Myers MBE (FM) **Present:** Abigail Appleton (AA); Christine Snell (CS); Debbie Gittoes (DG); Doug Barrat (DB); Helen Bowden (HB); John Reed (JR); Mark Pearce (MP); Nic Millington (NM); Paul Stevens (PS); Sharon Smith (SS);

In attendance: Roger Allonby, Herefordshire Council (RA)

Speakers: Craig Watson (CW), Business Plan Project Manager, West Midlands Apprenticeship Ambassador Network

Apologies: Christian Dangerfield; Cllr David Hitchiner; David Williams; Gareth Williams; James Newby; Paul Walker; Rachel Laver; Stephen Eckley

Minutes: Jan Bailey (JB)

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

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 4 October 2021 were approved as a correct record.

4. Matters Arising (not covered elsewhere on the agenda)

The Chair confirmed that items included in the Summary of Actions from the last Board meeting (4 October) (circulated) had all been completed, with the exception of the information on the DID (Destination Improvement District), which will be covered at today's meeting.

5. West Midlands Apprenticeship Ambassador Network

5.1 The Chair welcomed CW to the meeting.

5.2 CW spoke to his presentation (circulated) on the West Midlands Apprenticeship Ambassador Network. He highlighted opportunities for Herefordshire businesses to become Apprenticeship Ambassadors. He confirmed that most current

Ambassadors in the Marches region are drawn from Telford and Wrekin, with a few from Shropshire and none from Herefordshire.

5.3 CW invited comments/questions from Board members:

5.3.1 DB supported any measures to improve understanding of apprenticeships within the education system.

5.3.2 SS expressed concerns regarding the coordination of current apprenticeship initiatives and measurable outputs achieved, and asked how the Apprenticeship Ambassador network fitted with existing provision. CW agreed that this can be confusing and that he was trying to develop relationships with local businesses to provide clarity. SS agreed to discuss further with CW after today's meeting so that current provision could be mapped out (with the support of Herefordshire Council/LEP/Growth Hubs). Once completed, it was agreed that this could come back to a future Business Board meeting for discussion on how businesses can get involved.

Action: SS /CW

5.3.3 AA asked about apprenticeships for the creative sector. CW advised that apprenticeship opportunities within this sector were limited, due to poor take-up and engagement from employers in developing creative apprenticeship standards.

5.3.4 JR endorsed SS's comments (5.3.2) in terms of understanding the structure and availability of apprenticeships in the area. He suggested provision needs to be pulled together so that employers could better understand what is available and how to engage with it.

5.3.5 FM agreed, stating that this was particularly the case with regard to engagement with SME and agricultural businesses.

5.3.6 Members agreed that there were more apprenticeship vacancies currently in the county than there were young people to fill them. They supported effective communication in schools as a key element and welcomed any work undertaken by the Ambassador Network to raise awareness and understanding of apprenticeships.

5.3.7 PS asked whether there was scope for apprenticeship training providers such as Hoople and HGTA (Herefordshire Group Training Association) to become Apprenticeship Ambassadors. CW replied that these organisations are part of the Marches Skills Provider Network, but as providers they were more involved with delivery of programmes than marketing.

6. Hereford Destination Improvement District (DID)

6.1 The Chair provided an overview of the current situation: that Herefordshire businesses had recently voted for the implementation of a DID. He thanked HB for her considerable involvement with this work.

6.2 RA outlined the next steps with regard to the establishment of the DID, including a statutory period for any appeals to be received on the vote for the DID, the formation of the DID company and governance structures plus business engagement activities. RA stated that Herefordshire was the first inland county in the country to establish a DID.

6.3 PS, based upon his experience as chair of the Hereford City BID, cautioned that although he was pleased that the DID had been approved, significant challenges remained, in particular with regard to engagement with retail businesses and councillors. He advised against any publicity campaign to publicise the vote for the DID until the Board was in place and Articles of Association had been agreed.

7. Updates and Progress Report – Stronger Towns Fund

7.1 The Chair advised on progress with regard to the Stronger Towns Fund:

- Confirmation has been received that Hereford would be receiving a substantial amount from the fund
- A 5% advance on this funding would be received shortly to meet initial project costs (particularly for professional fees, eg planning expertise).
- Projects are now working towards the development of Full Business Cases, and are proceeding at varying paces; all are currently on track to meet the June deadline
- The appointment of a new Chair of the Board is currently underway. There may be opportunity for further members to join the STF Board, if any Business Board members are interested, let FM know.

Action: All Board Members

8. Marches LEP Update

8.1 No representative from the Marches LEP was present at today's meeting. The Chair referred members to the update report from Rachel Laver that had been circulated to members prior to today's meeting.

8.2 The Chair advised that there was still no clarity regarding the future of the LEPs, which presented obvious difficulties and uncertainty for staff members. RA stated his understanding that a White Paper on LEPs is due on 17 December.

9. NMITE Update

9.1 No representative from NMITE was present at today's meeting. The Chair advised the Board of a recent meeting he had had with NMITE's CEO, Elena Rodriguez-Falcon, who was confident about future student intakes.

9.2 CS expressed her concerns about the future of the University, and the need for it to be able to compete with other institutions to attract sufficient numbers of students. FM/HB stated that NMITE's offer was different to other universities'. AA added that the period leading up to the first intake of students had been particularly difficult due to COVID and the restrictions it had imposed on visiting and open days. She stated her confidence in NMITE's distinctive offer, but agreed that there were difficult times ahead for all Higher Education Institutions.

9.3 JR stated his commitment to the university, but suggested they may need to look at adjusting their offer to include apprenticeships.

9.4 The Chair stressed the importance of the Business Board supporting NMITE as an integral and critical part of the city's future development strategy. He stated that he will invite NMITE's CEO to come to the next Business Board meeting to answer Board members' concerns.

Action: FM to invite Elena Rodriguez-Falcon to next HBB meeting

10. Horizon Scan

10.1 **Herefordshire Climate and Nature Partnership:** RA provided an overview of this partnership, whose vision is to achieve a 'thriving zero-carbon, nature-rich Herefordshire by 2030'. He advised that the first meeting of this partnership had now been held and included representatives from NMITE, the Marches LEP and the National Trust. Gareth Williams is also a member. RA suggested that if HBB wished, a speaker would be available to talk about the Partnership at a future HBB meeting. Members stated that they would welcome hearing about this initiative.

Action: FM/JB to invite partnership to attend a future HBB meeting

10.2 **Citizens' Assembly:** RA advised that a Herefordshire Citizens' Assembly had been set up and was due to meet for the first time in January 2022. Their focus would be on climate and climate change.

10.3 JR commented that business engagement was crucial to the success of these initiatives.

11. Herefordshire Vision – Herefordshire Investment Partnership

11.1 DB advised that HIP had offered their help with development of Stronger Towns Fund projects, but so far had not been approached to do so.

11.2 DB provided an update on grant applications to the Marches Business Investment Partnership, which had increased in number during the pandemic. He advised that a final meeting of the group was taking place week commencing 13 December, when all monies from the current grant scheme would be allocated. DB said he hoped that additional sources of funding would be found to replace the current scheme.

11.3 RA advised that the UK Shared Prosperity Fund is due to come out next year. He thanked DB for promoting the existing scheme in Herefordshire.

12. Sector Updates

Individual members present provided updates from their sector. Please see Annexe 1.

13. Any Other Business

13.1 The Chair referred to an email from Stephen Eckley regarding forthcoming seminars on cyber security taking place on Friday 10 December. Details will be circulated to all members.

Action: JB to circulate details to all members

13.2 MP provided an update on occupancy levels at the Shell Store. He also advised that demand for land on the Enterprise Zone was extremely buoyant and that he had received unprecedented numbers of enquiries.

13.3 MP advised that Andrew Manning-Cox would be stepping down as Chair of the Enterprise Zone from March 2022. A new Chair is being sought – further information to be circulated to Board members

Action: JB to circulate details to all member

13.4 FM advised that he had recently attended one of the Council's Market Town Roadshows in Ross-on-Wye.

14. Date of Next Meeting

Monday 31st January 2022, 4.00 – 6.00 pm, Arctic Circle, Rotherwas,
Hereford HR2 6JL

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Annexe 1 – Sector Updates

1. Manufacturing (DG/JR)

- Supply chain issues ongoing, no end in sight
- Struggling to recruit staff at all levels

2. Creative Industries (AA/NM)

- Very varied picture. Digital options – recruiting strongly
- Creative industries research (funded through Great Places) now being rolled out. Report to Board at a future meeting
- Arts Council investment – uncertain picture ahead
- Cultural Partnership recently met
- Emphasise need to make a greater 'noise' with regard to inward investment in our area of the West Midlands

3. Agriculture

- Labour is biggest issue and risk factor, impacting in all agricultural sectors
- Wage inflation
- Dependent on visa-based workforce