

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

### **Notes / Actions from the Meeting held on Monday 31 January 2022, 4.00-6.00 pm at Arctic Circle Ltd, Rotherwas, Hereford HR2 6JL**

**Chair:** Frank Myers MBE (FM) **Present:** Abigail Appleton (AA); Cllr David Hitchiner (DH); Debbie Gittoes (DG); Doug Barrat (DB); James Newby (JN); Mark Pearce (MP); Nic Millington (NM); Paul Stevens (PS); Stephen Eckley (SE)

**In attendance:** Rachel Laver, Marches LEP (RL); Roger Allonby, Herefordshire Council (RA)

**Speakers:** Cllr Ellie Chowns (EC) (Cabinet Member, Environment & Economy); Jo Ricketts (JR), Deputy Principal, Herefordshire, Ludlow & Shropshire College

**Apologies:** Christine Snell; Christian Dangerfield; David Williams; Gareth Williams; Helen Bowden; John Reed; Paul Walker; Sharon Smith;

**Minutes:** Jan Bailey (JB)

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#### **1. Welcome**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. A particular welcome was extended to today's speakers (JR and EC) and to RL, CEO of the Marches LEP.

#### **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 (6 December 2021)**

The Minutes of the Herefordshire Business Board meeting held on 6 December 2021 were approved as a correct record, subject to the following changes requested by Sharon Smith:

##### **Minute 5.3.2 – amended as follows (changes highlighted):**

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**

**Minute 5.4 - deleted**

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

4.1 The Chair confirmed that Elena Rodriguez-Falcon (Chief Executive Officer at NMiTE) had been approached with a view to attending the next meeting of the Herefordshire Business Board).

#### **5. Herefordshire Council Climate Action**

#### **5. Herefordshire Council Climate Action**

5.1 The Chair welcomed EC to the meeting.

5.2 EC made an oral presentation to the Board on Herefordshire Council Climate Action, focusing on two main areas:

- An update on the Council's actions under this heading to date
- An invitation to HBB to share thoughts on how the Herefordshire business community could engage with this agenda and work with the Council towards achieving the goal of a zero carbon, nature rich Herefordshire by 2030.

5.3 EC provided an overview of actions and achievements made by the Council to date, including:

- An overview of the history of the Council's commitment to climate action, including a unanimous motion passed in March 2019 that recognised the climate emergency and another unanimous motion passed in July 2019 that had resulted in the establishment of a Citizens' Climate Assembly.
- Recognition that the Council had committed to climate action for many years, but that there had been a step change in recent years.
- Confirmation that the Council is currently on track to achieve its zero carbon target by 2030, although there is still much to do. HC had achieved a reduction of 59.6% on 2008/09 levels by 2021. See <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/climate-2/climate-change/2> for more info.
- An overview of specific actions being taken, for example: The council switched to 100% renewable electricity in 2019; it is gradually replacing its vehicle fleet with green vehicles; the estates review is assessing energy efficiency of council properties; the new waste strategy incorporates a major increase in recycling (from ~40% to expected ~60%) and an immediate reduction in waste to landfill, down from 20% to 1%; and

investment in sustainable transport, including several new planned cycle paths in Hereford, expansion of Beryl Bikes and introduction of ebikes; business ebike grants, three new car clubs and more in the pipeline, feasibility studies for three Greenways, a new public transport hub, and a £17million bid for central government funding for an ambitious Bus Strategic Investment Plan.

- A recognition that much of the county’s housing stock is poorly insulated (some of the worst in the country – eg North Herefordshire is in the worst 20 constituencies in the country for housing EPC rating) and that a retrofit strategy is currently being developed.
- An overview of the Herefordshire Climate and Nature Partnership Board, formed in November 2021 after an open selection process. The Board has 16 members representing emitters, experts, enablers and communities. Gareth Williams sits on the HCNP Board, providing a link with HBB. The role of the Partnership Board (<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/climate-2/climate-change/6>) is to catalyse and coordinate new action to help achieve the vision of a zero carbon, nature-rich Herefordshire by 2030, through steering and overseeing the implementation of Herefordshire’s Climate and Nature Action Plan. Information about the Board and the Action Plan is here: <https://zerocarbon.herefordshire.gov.uk/>
- The council has recently run a community climate and nature grant scheme which is giving £200k of grants to dozens of community groups this FY: <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/climate-2/climate-change/7>
- Information on two recent benchmarking exercises: Sustainability West Midlands, which had ranked Herefordshire as 1<sup>st</sup> of 21 authorities in the West Midlands; Climate Emergency UK which had given us 58%.
- The climate footprint of the county as a whole has recently been reviewed in order to recognise a) the role of methane, not just CO<sub>2</sub>, and b) the difference between territorial and consumption-based footprints. EC advised that this data is available on the zero carbon Herefordshire website (<https://zerocarbon.herefordshire.gov.uk/getting-the-county-to-net-zero/>) and is a very useful starting point for efforts to understand and reduce the county’s climate footprint.

5.4 A Citizens’ Climate Assembly had been established and had met over six days in January. Forty-eight people had been selected to join out of hundreds that responded to a letter sent to 14,400 residents. Participants were chosen by an independent specialist organisation to represent the Herefordshire population. The assembly heard presentations from a wide range of expert witnesses, and engaged in in-depth deliberation on the question ‘How can Herefordshire meet the challenge of climate change?’ All presentations and Q&A sessions from the Assembly are available online (see <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/council/citizens-assembly>) and the recommendations will also be published shortly on the same link.

5.5 EC wanted to understand the situation with regard to green initiatives in the business community, in particular she is interested in the following issues:

- What is the business community doing to respond to the climate and ecological crisis, in terms of a) making a commitment to address climate change, b) taking action to reduce their climate footprint, and c) monitoring the impact of their actions?
- How can business and the local authority work together to support and respond to the climate crisis?
- How can business and the local authority communicate better on climate crisis/actions being taken?
- What have businesses already done to commit to the 2030 target?

5.6 The Chair invited comments/questions from Board members. The following were received:

5.6.1 DB commented on EC's dual brief – environment and economy – and stated that EC's presentation today focused only on the environment rather than the economy. He asked whether data was available on carbon reduction achievements for the city rather than for the county of Herefordshire as a whole.

5.6.2 EC replied that her presentation had focused on the environment as that was the brief she had been asked to speak to today. However, she would welcome the opportunity to return and speak on the economy. She explained that she was not aware of data specifically on the city, but would willingly ask officers whether it could be generated. She also stated her view that it was a real strength to have the dual portfolio of economy and environment. DH supported this view.

5.6.3 AA and JN asked whether there were any standardised assessment and/or accreditation resources that could be used across businesses, as at the current time businesses seem to use a variety of different tools. EC agreed that there are a lot of alternatives available, but that the first things businesses could do is to make a commitment to working in a greener way, identifying their carbon footprint and taking steps to change. She mentioned specifically the Greener Footprints Pledge <https://greenerfootprints.co.uk/>, through which people/organisations can take these first steps and make a commitment to change.

5.6.4 DG shared her experiences of obtaining green accreditation at Arctic Circle. After research, a particular standard had been chosen (B Corp: <https://www.bcorporation.net/en-us/>) but the biggest challenge for her business was dedicating the time to focus on this task.

5.6.5 RL reminded Board members that the Energy Environment Improvement Programme is still running through the Growth Hub and that grants are available to support businesses. She referred members to the Growth Hub website where further information can be found: <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/>.

5.6.6 The Chair commented he was keen that the Business Board and Herefordshire Council engage closely on this issue in the future, for example via the 'Horizon Scan' standing item on the Agenda. He said early notification regarding critical issues for business, such as the climate emergency, should be brought to the board so that members can discuss how to get local businesses engaged and involved.

5.6.7 RA reminded the Board of an earlier presentation from Ben Godfrey in July 2020. Also, that the absence of Gareth Williams from recent Board meetings may have reduced the focus on green issues. He also advised that future Government funding is certain to ask bidders to demonstrate their commitment to the green agenda.

5.7 EC welcomed the Board's comments. She said that resources are already available to support businesses, but noted the Board's suggestion that more one-to-one support for businesses might be helpful to support action and signpost resources. She requested Business Board help in identifying what support, encouragement or inspiration businesses need to engage in climate action, and stated that she would welcome the opportunity to be invited back to discuss this issue or any other aspect of her council portfolio. She also suggested that action on the climate and ecological emergency could be a standing item on the Business Board agenda.

## **6. Three Marches Colleges' Strategic Development Fund**

6.1 JR spoke to her presentation on the Three Marches Colleges' Strategic Development Fund pilot, for which the specific focus was Health and Social Care.

6.2 The Chair invited comments from Board members.

6.2.1 The Chair noted the emphasis on digital skills in the pilot programme and highlighted the potential for further connection with NM. NM welcomed this.

6.2.2 The Chair mentioned the possible synergy between the pilot and the work that NMiTE is currently undertaking for the Stronger Towns Fund. JN confirmed that he and David Williams were regularly in contact and that he would include this item in future discussions.

## **7. Updates and Progress Report – Stronger Towns Fund**

7.1 Board members provided an overview of the current situation with regard to various projects funded under the Stronger Towns Fund, notably:

- RA – Council led projects (museum and art gallery)
- Chair – South Wye (Growing Local/Belmont Wanderers/NMiTE), Wyese, skatepark and cycle track.
- NM – Skills Foundry, Digital Cultural Hub

7.2 As the newly appointed Chair of the Stronger Towns Board, AA provided an overview of the current challenges for the STF Board:

- Connectivity and delivery of more than the sum of the projects' parts
- Getting projects to a position of being able to submit Full Business Cases (FBC) – deadline June 2022
- Beyond FBC – programme management options and attracting future investment opportunities

## 8. Marches LEP

8.1 RL advised that Marches LEP was still waiting to hear the results of the LEP review and the outcome of the Levelling up White Paper (expected 8 February).

8.2 RL advised that despite this uncertainty, the LEP was continuing with 'Business as Usual', for example by the delivery of Local Growth Fund projects.

8.3 RL advised that the Growth Hub is still continuing to run, and asked Board members to let her know if there was specific information/advice that they would like included there.

8.4 The Chair advised that RA would shortly be moving to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The Chair and Board members thanked RA for his input to the Board over the years and wished him good luck for the future.

**Post meeting note.** The publication of the white paper clarified that LEPs will continue and resulted in a statement from the LEP Network which can be seen here <https://www.lepnetwork.net/news-and-events/2022/february-2022/future-value-of-leps-embedded-in-levelling-up-policy/>.

## 9. NMiTE

9.1 JN acknowledged the concerns that were expressed at the last Board meeting regarding NMiTE's future strategy. He provided an update of latest activity at the University, including details of the further intake of students in January.

9.2 JN advised that NMiTE are currently running monthly open days and invited all to attend any future dates.

9.3 The Chair advised that he hoped that Elena Rodriguez-Falcon (COO at NMiTE) would be able to attend the next Board meeting (Tuesday 29 March) to take further questions from Board members.

## 10. Horizon Scan

10.1 RA spoke to his presentation, which included updates on Omicron grant funding, COVID Recovery Plans, free buses, Hereford City Centre improvements and the Midlands Centre for Cyber Security.



10.2 RA stressed that the Council is keen to improve its engagement with business and to that end further virtual business briefings had been arranged. The dates of these will be circulated.

**Action: RA**

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

11.1 DB expressed regret that the expertise available via the Herefordshire Investment Partnership was currently not being utilised. The Chair acknowledged the huge resource available. He suggested that this expertise may be requested as part of the project delivery phase for projects supported by the Stronger Towns Fund.

11.2 DB advised that the Marches Building Investment Grant Scheme (MBIG) programme remained buoyant, particularly in terms of requests from Herefordshire SMEs.

## **12. Sector Updates**

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

## **13. Any Other Business**

13.1 MP provided an update on the Enterprise Zone/Shell Store. The Shell Store is being well utilised and he said that there had been an unprecedented level of interest in land in the last three weeks.

13.2 RA provided an update on the Destination Improvement District (DID). The next steps are to create a Company Limited by Guarantee and to seek board members. A further update will be provided at the next Business Board meeting

**Action: JB/FM – add to 29 March Agenda**

13.3 The Chair advised that he had been asked to endorse, on behalf of the Business Board, the Get Creative report which is being prepared and will be published shortly. It seeks to highlight the contribution creative businesses make to community economic success and wellbeing. As this was required before the date of the next meeting, this will be circulated to Board members as soon as available so that they could indicate whether or not they would be happy for the Chair to provide that endorsement..

**Action: FM**

## **14. Date of Next Meeting**

Tuesday 29 March 2022, 4.00 – 6.00 pm, venue: tbc

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

**Meeting held on  
Monday 31 January 2022, 4.00-6.00 pm**

### **Annexe 1 – Sector Updates**

#### **1. Manufacturing (SE/DG)**

##### **SE:**

- Buoyant demand
- Lead time management is challenging
- Recruitment challenging – decline in number of applicants for vacancies. Lots of vacancies available.
- This will impact on growth
- Supply chain issues regarding medical supplies and technical equipment
- Price pressures – on average an increase of 10%

##### **DG:**

- People – haven't been fully staffed for 3-4 years, but has become tighter in the past 18 months – 2 years
- People – essential life skills missing
- Lead times inhibiting growth (due to COVID in country of origin – knock on effects)

##### **FM:**

- Exporting issues – paper filling and bureaucracy
- Materials costs

#### **2. Creative Industries (AA/NM)**

- Update on Herefordshire Cultural Partnership Board.
- Research on the scale of creative businesses in Herefordshire.
- Inclusion of Herefordshire Council has changed the relationship with the local authority (positive).
- Would like more involvement with the LEP
- Lack of relationship with West Midlands urban centre (ie West Midlands Combined Authority)

#### **3. Agriculture – no representatives present**