

**Herefordshire Business Board (HBB)**  
**Notes / Actions from the Meeting held on**  
**Monday 4 April 2022, 4.00-6.15 pm**  
**at Arctic Circle Ltd, Rotherwas, Hereford HR2 6JL**

**Chair:** Frank Myers MBE (FM) **Present:** Abigail Appleton (AA); Christian Dangerfield (CD); Christine Snell (CS); Cllr David Hitchiner (DH); David Williams (DW); Debbie Gittoes (DG); Gareth Williams (GW); Helen Bowden (HB); James Newby (JN); John Reed (JR); Nic Millington (NM); Paul Stevens (PS)

**In attendance:** Roger Allonby, Herefordshire Council (RA); Ross Cook (RC), Herefordshire Council

**Apologies:** David Ubaka; Doug Barrett; Mark Pearce; Rachel Laver; Sharon Smith; Stephen Eckley; Paul Walker

**Minutes:** Jan Bailey (JB)

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## **1. Welcome**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. A particular welcome was extended to Ross Cook, the new Director for Economy and the Environment at Herefordshire Council.

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

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

## **3. Minutes of the Last Meeting (31 January 2022)**

The Minutes of the Herefordshire Business Board meeting held on 31 January 2022 were approved as a correct record.

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

None

## **5. Herefordshire Council Update**

5.1 RC and RA presented slides on the Hereford City Centre masterplan. The slides will be circulated to Board members.

**Action: RA/JB – Circulate slides to members**

5.2 The Chair invited questions and comments from Board members. The following were noted:

5.2.1 The Chair queried whether the Council would be able to achieve all the outlined objectives by the February 2023 deadline. RC replied that although deadlines were tight, measures had been put in place to achieve the deadlines.

5.2.2 The Chair asked for further explanation regarding the objectives of the plan, in particular what would 'success' look like. RA replied that this would come out of engagement activities, for example with the Business Board and others. From these activities the vision would be extracted and a plan put in place for its achievement.

5.2.3 JN asked for an update on strategy regarding Hereford's road network, for example the progress on providing an additional bridge over the Wye in the city. RA replied that active travel measures were being put in place to address intra-city movement. He acknowledged that there was an on-going issue to do with resilience of the A49 into the city and the effect this could have on inward investment. He stated that the Cabinet was actively engaged in looking at an alternative to the western by-pass. RC added that the pandemic had changed people's travelling patterns, perhaps for good, and that a critical piece of work was to look at these patterns and understand how people were now travelling into and out of the city.

5.2.4 DG asked about the split between private and commercial transport coming into the city. RC reiterated that old data was available but new mapping and analysis was needed. Further comments were received from the Chair regarding the lack of capacity on Hereford's roads to provide dedicated bus lanes and also from DH with regard to school transport.

5.2.5 HB asked for further information regarding plans for electric buses that were being funded by the Stronger Towns Fund. PS said that initial provision was for three buses travelling from St Martin's to the Hereford Medical Centre every 15 minutes. HB stressed the importance for all such travel initiatives to be part of a joined-up cross-city approach.

5.2.6 RC expressed the Council's keenness to engage with businesses regarding their views on the city masterplan. JR acknowledged this but expressed his frustration with delays in getting the plan developed and actioned.

5.2.7 The Chair asked for clarification regarding energy strategy – where does this fit within the city masterplan, particularly bearing in mind previously reported concerns on grid capacity? RA replied that energy was a major strategic consideration and regular consultations were already taking place between the Council and Western Power.

5.3 RC presented slides on the Big Economic Plan. The slides will be circulated to Board members.

**Action: RA/JB – Circulate slides to members**

5.4 The Chair invited questions and comments from Board members. The following were noted:

5.4.1 CD asked about budget requirement/availability to achieve the plan. RA stated that funds could be leveraged from a variety of different sources, eg Levelling Up Fund, Shared Prosperity Fund, depending on objectives identified in each five year plan.

5.4.2 HB referred to the next round of Big Economic Plan engagement events and asked how these would move discussions on from last year's meetings. RA replied that the focus was now on forming a stakeholder group, ensuring cross-sector representation. He said that this group would become the focal point for liaison with other interest groups, ensuring integration of ideas and joined up thinking. The Chair emphasised the importance of business being represented on the stakeholder group. RA agreed to come to the next meeting of the Board with details of the structure and Terms of Reference of this stakeholder group.

5.4.3 DG asked for reassurances regarding continuity of plans should there be changes to leadership following local elections. RA replied that the Big Economic Plan should be a county owned strategy rather than a council strategy and therefore he hoped it would be less influenced by changes to political leadership.

## **6. Herefordshire Apprenticeship Scheme**

Due to apologies being received from Sharon Smith, this item was deferred until the next meeting.

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

7.1 AA, as Chair of the STF Board, provided an update regarding the Stronger Towns Fund:

- The scheme is facing a critical phase as projects aim to complete their Full Business Cases (FBC) by the end of June deadline.
- There are significant challenges with regard to cost increases, particularly construction costs.
- There are two phases to the scheme: Current phase is focusing on helping projects to compile FBCs; the next phase will be project delivery. With regard to the latter, a tender document is being developed to recruit specialists to help deliver the STF vision.

7.2 The Chair invited questions and comments from Board members. The following were noted:

7.2.1 HB asked whether all projects were continuing as initially planned. AA replied that there had been some minor adjustments to projects and some projects were more 'at risk' than others. However, at the current time all are progressing to FBC development.

7.2.2 NM commented on the importance of public communications regarding the STF and particularly regarding the benefits that individual projects will bring to the city. AA agreed stating that one of the specialisms that would be commissioned for the Project Delivery Phase of the STF would be communications and engagement. She also advised the Board that a STF communications and engagement sub-group had now been established to look at cross-cutting themes and supporting individual projects. However, she advised that some projects were very complex and sensitive and so communications needed to be handled appropriately and at the most suitable time.

7.2.3 The Chair reminded members of the Town Investment Plan document, which provides details of all the projects funded by the STF (see: <https://strongerhereford.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/S20098D-Hereford-TIP-Document-NEW-FINAL-1.pdf>).

7.2.4 In response to comments from CS and others, AA offered to present more information about the STF at the next HBB Board meeting.

7.2.5 HB suggested that the STF website would benefit from updates, for example latest news, case studies and other information.

## **8. LoRAWAN (Long Range Wide Area Network)**

8.1 CD provided an update on this initiative, which had been submitted for funding from the Stronger Towns Fund, but had not been chosen for the short list. In essence it would allow for data to be collected via a number of 'gateways' that could then be used to advise a whole range of decisions. For example, this could include information on visitor spend and footfall but also wider applications for healthcare and traffic management.

8.2 RA to provide further information for circulation to Board members.

**Action: RA to send information to JB for circulation to Board members**

## **9. Marches LEP**

9.1 No representative from the LEP was present at today's Board meeting. However, the Chair shared details of letters recently received that outlined the future

funding of both the LEP and Growth Hub. These will be circulated to Board members after today's meeting.

**Action: JB to circulate LEP letters to the Board**

## **10. NMiTE**

10.1 JN provided an update on progress at NMiTE, in particular:

- Additional funding secured from Government
- Updates on student numbers
- Progress on achieving degree awarding status
- New partnerships being developed with other universities
- Working on a project funded by the Stronger Towns Fund
- The University having been mentioned as an exemplar in the recent Government Levelling Up white paper
- New facilities being developed at Skylon Park – completion of the Centre for Advanced Timber Technology due in July

10.2 CS asked for further information regarding student numbers and NMiTE's future sustainability. JN responded that progress so far had compared favourably with other new university start-ups and was a good springboard for achieving its goals. The Chair reminded the Board that NMiTE was being closely monitored by government and that it had recently shown its commitment to the university by releasing more funds. Elena Rodriguez-Falcon, Chief Executive Officer at NMiTE, has been invited to speak at the next HBB meeting and will provide further details.

## **11. Horizon Scan**

11.1 RA provided an update on progress with the Destination Improvement District (DID). He said the focus was now on the practicalities of getting this established. Further details will be provided to the Board as available.

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

Due to apologies being received from Doug Barrat, this item was not discussed.

## **13. Sector Updates**

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

## **14. Any Other Business**

14.1 The Chair advised that Tricia Thomas, previous High Sheriff of Hereford and now a Deputy Lieutenant, was encouraging local businesses to submit applications

for the Queen's Award for Enterprise. The Chair encouraged all present to consider their own businesses for this accolade.

14.2 The Chair also updated the Board on the pressures currently being faced by the local NHS Trust (Hereford County Hospital).

14.3 DW advised that the 2<sup>nd</sup> round of bids for the Strategic Development Fund were now open. He advised a bid was being prepared, focusing on supporting training for business, particularly engineering. Further information to be circulated to Board members.

**Action: DW to send information to JB for circulation to Board members**

## **15. Date of Next Meeting**

Monday 6 June 2022, 4.00 – 6.00 pm, venue: tbc

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

**Meeting held on  
Monday 4 April 2022, 4.00-6.15 pm**

### **Annexe 1 – Sector Updates**

#### **1. Manufacturing**

##### **DG:**

- Little change from last meeting: buoyant demand but challenges to do with deliveries, exports and staffing

##### **JR:**

- Inflationary pressures, including cost of living increases
- Difficult to pass on to consumers
- Struggling to grow in an inflationary environment
- Pessimistic outlook
- Plus usual issues to do with staffing, supply chain

##### **FM:**

- Issues re supply chain, costs of materials and difficulties with export documentation

#### **2. Energy (GW)**

- Issues to do with energy security causing unprecedented level of interest in green energy
- Skills and people issue – not enough people with the right training
- Possibility of global supply issues in the future
- Government boiler upgrade scheme but limitations on funding available
- Member of Herefordshire Council Climate Emergency Group Board, but need to find out more about its Terms of Reference and objectives.
- HC ambition good, but needs significant funding and capacity to reach net zero by 2030

### 3. Creative Industries

#### AA:

- Great to see return of face to face, large scale events
- Schools Bill published by Government last week. Good to see encouragement of careers in cultural and creative industries

#### NM:

- Cultural Partnership Document (see: <https://www.the-shire.co.uk/stories/new-report-looks-boost-herefordshires-creative-economy>)
- Get Creative Debrief Session held 31 March. New Cultural Strategy mentioned, hope to know more by next HBB meeting.

#### PS:

- Ferrous Festival brought 32K unique visitors to the county, including lots of foreigners
- Apple Festival coming up in October

### 3. Agriculture (CS)

- Pessimistic outlook
- 13% increase in wages
- Dependence on visa-based labour, but will labour be available? – eg usually employ c 200 people from Ukraine
- Retailers aren't interested in reflecting inflationary pressures in consumer prices.