

Herefordshire Business Board (HBB)
Notes/Actions from the meeting held on
Monday 30 January 2023, 4.00 – 6.00 pm
At Arctic Circle, Rotherwas, Hereford HR2 6JL

Attendees

Chair: Frank Myers MBE (FM) **Present:** Christian Dangerfield (CD); Christine Snell (CS); David Hitchiner (DH); David Williams (DW), Debbie Gittoes (DG), Gareth Williams (GW), James Newby (JN), John Reed (JR); Mark Pearce (MP); Nic Millington (NM), Sharon Smith (SS); Stephen Eckley (SE)

In attendance: Mark Schneider (MS), Marches Local Enterprise Partnership

Apologies: Abigail Appleton; Doug Barrat; Paul Stevens; Rachel Laver; Roger Allonby

Minutes: Jan Bailey (JB)

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. A particular welcome was extended to Mark Schneider, attending from the Marches LEP on behalf of Rachel Laver.

2. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

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

3. Minutes of Previous Meetings (5 December, 14 November and 3 October)

The minutes of the meetings held on 5 December, 14 November and 3 October were all agreed as a correct record.

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

There were no outstanding matters arising.

5. Herefordshire's Big Economic Plan

5.1 The Chair provided an overview of the situation with regard to Herefordshire's Big Economic Plan. In essence:

- This was authorised by Cabinet last week and had been endorsed by the stakeholder group
- The Chair had held a further meeting with Patrick White (Consultant, Metro Dynamics) to discuss next steps
- A further meeting will be held on 6th February to discuss how to take forward the establishment of a Board to oversee its implementation

5.2 HBB members stressed the importance of the Big Economic Plan being seen to be a multi-partner initiative, and not just 'owned' by Herefordshire Council. The Chair acknowledged this, which he said had also been recognised by the council. He advised that Patrick White's recommendation for the constitution of the Board was that it should include representation from Higher and Further Education, Health, the local authority, the business and voluntary sectors.

5.3 Patrick had further advised that the Board should be chaired either by a Cabinet member or an independent appointed by Board members. Sub-groups could be established to drive specific initiatives, for example climate and nature, local skills investment.

5.4 DH advised that Metro Dynamics had been asked to look at best practice from other areas of the country which could be utilised in Herefordshire.

5.5 The Chair advised that Patrick White had been asked to summarise the above in a paper, which would be circulated to HBB members for comment as soon as possible (to be received in advance of the meeting on 6th February).

Action: FM/JB/All

5.6 The Board agreed that the Board should be legally constituted, eg as a CIC or charitable body. This would enable it to receive funding independently, to make grant applications in its own right and to ensure its longevity.

6. Local Skills Investment Partnership (LSIP)

6.1 DG provided an update on this project, which is a Department for Education initiative that aims to understand the skills needs of the locality (in this instance, the Marches area of Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin).

6.2 DG advised that a large number of organisations had already taken part in the survey, with others outstanding. SS outlined ways in which businesses can still get involved, stating that the number of responses from Herefordshire businesses is low

6.3 SS further advised that interviews are due for completion mid-March and a report submitted to the Department by mid-May. However, this initiative continues until 2025, so there is scope to look at how research can be refined to ensure that more voices are heard and also to think about how the work can align with the aims of Herefordshire's Big Economic Plan.

6.4 The Chair raised an issue to do with education and skills liaison across the Welsh borders. DW advised he has had ongoing conversations with Welsh associates, but difficulties have arisen due to delegated powers held by the Welsh Government. The Chair and DW agreed to discuss this issue further.

Action: FM/DW

7. Stronger Towns Fund

7.1 CD provided an update on progress with the Stronger Towns Fund Projects, advising that the majority now had Funding Agreements in place and some had commenced works. He said that one or two projects were causing some concerns, mainly due to inflationary pressures. However, he said overall the project was progressing well.

8. Marches LEP

8.1 MS referred to the document previously circulated to Board members, highlighting in particular the Marches Energy Grant, which had received a good level of applications. He said that further monies may be requested once this fund is exhausted.

8.2 MS advised that the Marches Careers Hub is searching for Enterprise Advisers to work with schools and colleges. Further information can be found here: <https://www.marchescareershubs.co.uk/enterprise-advisers-employers/the-role-of-an-enterprise-adviser/>

8.3 MS advised that consultants had been appointed to look at 'shovel ready' transportation projects across the Marches LEP region. Results are expected in March/April.

8.4 MS further advised that no information had yet been received regarding future funding of the LEPs. A decision is expected shortly, but the Marches LEP had sufficient funding to continue for the next 12 months.

9. NMITE

9.1 JN provided an update on current developments at the University, in particular with regard to recruitment activities for the September 2023 intake (going strongly with 60-80 students anticipated) and new programmes planned that will broaden the University's portfolio.

10. Sector Updates

Please see attached at Appendix 1.

11. Any Other Business

None

12. Dates of Next Meetings

- **Monday 27 March**, 3.30 pm (tour) 4.00 pm (meeting): NMITE, Skylon Park Enterprise Zone campus
- **Monday 5 June**, Caplor Energy, Fownhope, Hereford
Times and details to be confirmed
- **Monday 24 July**, Windmill Hill Farm, Hereford (provisional)
Times and details to be confirmed
- **Monday 2 October** (details tbc)
- **Monday 4 December** (details tbc)

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Meeting held on Monday 30 January 2023**

Action Log

Minute	Action	Responsibility
5.5	Circulate Big Economic Plan Economy and Place Board paper for discussion and feedback by 6 February.	FM/JB/All
6.4	Ongoing discussions re education opportunities English/Welsh borders	FM/DW
Appendix	Any issues with local grid capacity – please send to Gareth	All

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Sector Updates

1. Manufacturing

- DG:**
- Seeing cut-backs in retail customers' new store programmes
 - Heat pump business buoyant, lots of enquiries from customers keen to support green agenda
 - Still some issues to do with materials supplies, especially electrical/electronic components
- SE:**
- Recruitment: specialist roles difficult to recruit to
 - Mixed market conditions, some raw material shortages impacting capacity to grow
 - Significant price increases – energy prices challenging. Impacting margins and timings for significant investment
 - Increase in protest activity
- JR:**
- Cut-backs from retailers
 - Cost inflation, uncertainty re energy prices, challenging times

2. Energy

- GW**
- Extremely busy as customers are increasingly concerned about energy prices and climate change
 - Be aware that new-entrants to the green energy market may not provide a good service – customer complaints higher with new entrants
 - Referenced Cornwall Insight paper – energy price predictions
 - Joining renewable energy sector now one of most popular career choices
 - **Grid constraints: please send any individual issues (1/2 or full page summary to Gareth)**
 - Reminder re Green Advantage Programme (Aston University) – free to join

3. Creative Industries

- NM**
- Reminder re cultural strategy's priority areas: creative industries and visitor economy. Would like to know more about Destination BID and its place in UKSPF (UK Shared Prosperity Fund). The Chair provided an update on current status with the Destination Bid and suggested NM links with RA for more information.

- Arts Council recently confirmed funding for five core organisations (Courtyard, Ledbury Poetry Festival, Rural Media, rural touring company, Open Sky Theatre). Sadly, 2Faced Dance lost their core status.
- Welcomed Council appointment of new head of cultural services
- CEO of Arts Council visiting 30 March with Regional Director
- Money is available to appoint a Coordinator for the Cultural Partnership

4. Agriculture

- Some sectors are seeing massive inflationary pressures, eg poultry, grain based industries
- Labour market is 'unbelievably tight', paying significantly higher rates for semi-skilled workers
- Significant stress throughout the industry

5. Education

- ONS reclassified Further Education as public sector. No affect locally, but will have an effect on organisations nationally.
- Switching off level 3 provision in favour of T levels. This will have a significant impact on students with lower ability.