

**Herefordshire Business Board (HBB)**  
**Notes/Actions from the meeting held on**  
**Monday 27 March 2023, 4.00 – 6.00 pm**  
**At NMITE, Skylon Park, Hereford HR2 6JT**

**Attendees**

**Chair:** Frank Myers MBE (FM) **Present:** Christian Dangerfield (CD); David Hitchiner (DH); David Williams (DW), Gareth Williams (GW), James Newby (JN), Mark Pearce (MP); Nic Millington (NM), Stephen Eckley (SE)

**In attendance:** Mark Schneider (MS), Marches Local Enterprise Partnership; Nadine Kinsey (NK), Herefordshire Council

**Apologies:** Abigail Appleton; Christine Snell; Doug Barrat (DB); Helen Bowden; John Reed; Paul Stevens; Rachel Laver (RL); Roger Allonby (RA); Sharon Smith

**Minutes:** Jan Bailey (JB)

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**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 new Declarations of Interest.

**3. Minutes of Previous Meeting (30 January 2023)**

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 January were agreed as a correct record.

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

There were no matters arising.

**5. Arctic Circle**

5.1 The Chair advised members that Arctic Circle had ceased trading. In light of this, Debbie Gittoes has tendered her resignation from the Board.

5.2 Board members expressed their sadness at this news. NK advised that Herefordshire Council has been providing support to those affected by the loss of their jobs at the company.

5.3 NK advised that HC had been working with DWP who are in contact with the administrators. Details of support (eg start up courses) were passed to DWP who were putting on a workshop and jobs fair for ex-employees on 29 March. NK had provided details of job opportunities to DWP to share and had been informed that a number of staff had already found alternative employment locally.

**6. Herefordshire Economy and Place Board (HEPB)**

6.1 The Chair shared a summary of comments received from Board members prior to today's meeting in response to proposals for the composition and selection

process for the new Herefordshire Economy and Place Board. These are attached at Annexe 1.

6.2 NK described the selection process that will be in place for the recruitment of new business members to this Board. This will include posting on the council's website and circulation of the opportunity widely, including to specific membership groups, such as the Chamber, Federation for Small Businesses and rural partners, including the Rural Hub and National Farmers' Union.

6.3 Board members stressed the importance of the HEPB including representatives from key sectors within the county, with the agricultural and environmental sectors in particular being named. Questions were asked about the make up of the selection panel particularly regarding the justification for inclusion of people who don't live in the county and have only been in post for a relatively short time. NK reiterated the point in Roger's email that all are encouraged to apply to the new Economy and Place Board and use their networks to promote widely.

6.4 NK explained that Terms of Reference had been drafted for the new Board and would be subject to discussion and adoption by the new HEPB at the first HEPB meeting..

6.5 In response to a query from the Chair regarding the remit of the HEPB, NK explained that the HEPB would have a wider remit than Herefordshire Business Board and will be looking at broader issues including, for example, infrastructure, housing and ecology. She said that one of their first tasks will be to finalise and agree the first BEP five year delivery plan and Terms of Reference. However, Board members felt that the relationship between the two Boards needs to be more clearly defined.

6.6 Board members requested that the selection panel for the appointment of new members to the HEPB be broadened to include more business representatives.

6.7 The Chair will write to RA/NK to highlight these additional comments from HBB members.

**Action: FM**

6.8 NK to provide a pdf copy of the 2050 Economic Plan for circulation to Board members.

**Action: NK/JB**

## **7. Stronger Towns Fund**

7.1 CD provided an update on this project, which he said is progressing very well. He advised that most projects now have a Funding Agreement in place, with actions being taken to resolve any issues related to those outstanding. A visit by BEIS last week had he said been very encouraging.

## **8. Horizon Scan**

8.1 RA had sent his apologies for today's meeting, but NK advised that the local transport plan would be going out to consultation shortly. DH added that the city master plan had gone to Cabinet recently with discussions ongoing.

## **9. Marches LEP**

9.1 MS referred to the recent budget announcement that the Government is 'minded to' close LEPs. In the meantime, all LEPs had been asked to complete and return a questionnaire to Government regarding their activities.

9.2 MS stated that the Growth Hubs were earmarked for continuation, with the funding level for next year expected to be similar to this year's.

9.3 The Board discussed what would happen to the work currently undertaken by the LEP and whether this could be successfully undertaken by another body, for example the Local Authority. DW highlighted one particular strength of the LEP - that it covers a wider defined economic area (Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin) rather than just a single county boundary.

9.4 The Chair requested that members consider in more depth what value they believe the LEP adds to the local economy and what will be lost if the LEP is disbanded. Any ideas to be sent to the Chair/JB for compilation and forwarding to MS/RL

**Action: All**

## **10. NMITE Update**

10.1 JN provided an overview of current developments at the University:

- Strategy has been refreshed and relaunched.
- The CAT Centre is doing well, including receipt of a number of research grants.
- The Centre for Automated Engineering is launching next month (April).
- Degree awarding powers are expected very shortly.
- The University is currently recruiting students for the September programmes. A broadened portfolio is on offer and 50-60 students are expected.

10.2 The Chair commented that these were great achievements for a new university and stressed the importance of Board members continuing to publicly support the university.

## **11. Herefordshire Investment Partnership**

11.1 In DB's absence, JB read out an update from him

11.1.1 In relation to the HIP, there was nothing to report.

11.1.2 In relation to the Marches Business Investment Grant, DB stated that a wrap up meeting had been held recently. After a number of very successful years supporting grant applications for SME, the programme has now come to an end and there is no news of any new scheme to replace it. He reminded HBB members that this was a Marches LEP funded programme.

11.2 NK advised that a council team were looking at the possibility of a new small equipment fund.

## **12. Sector Updates**

Please see attached at Annexe 2.

## **13. Any Other Business**

None

## **14. Dates of Next Meetings**

- **Monday 5 June, Caplor Energy, Fownhope, Hereford**  
**Meeting 4.00 pm – 6.00 pm**  
**Tour and celebration of Caplor's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday – times 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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**Action Log**

<b>Minute</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
6.6	Chair to write to RA/NK to provide HBB members' feedback on composition and recruitment process for HEPB	FM
6.7	Nadine to provide pdf copy of Herefordshire 2050 Economic Plan for circulation to members	NK/JB
9.4	Feedback on LEP activities to FM/JB	All
Annexe 2	Find out Public Art Strategy contact and feedback to NM	NK
Annexe 2	Discuss HBB representation on LSIP Board	DW

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**Annexe 1  
Economy and Place Board Recruitment Process  
Comments from HBB members (as at 23 March 2023)**

With local elections imminent and with the real possibility of change within the Unitary Authority, and possibly change of direction, the portfolio holder should not be taking part in such an important decision. Why does there need to be so much haste when this new arrangement will be in place alongside a new administration? The whole process and this urgency to involve the portfolio holder before May 4<sup>th</sup> suggests political bias

It seems that there are no direct private businesses or business representative organisations on this Board, other than the voluntary sector. That feels very public sector heavy and with no private sector business representation other than via the HBB chair, this seems a little light considering it's an Economy board.

But then again, if we add the Chamber and a few private sector businesses in, it is the same as the HBB really, isn't it? Although perhaps the 2 boards then have different agenda/scopes/TOR – but it's still always the same people therefore for efficiency is one collective meeting better? The Business Board is already structured in this way, why create something new when it is possible to build upon a tried and tested structure.

My other comment would be about the longevity of the Marches LEP, but I think this will work itself out over time.

Education important agreed - but all three colleges and yet there are no school representative for steering carers etc – seems too many for the small board and missing a trick.

There needs to be a representative there clearly and uniquely representing climate change and energy – key to success of the plan. And in a country legislated to net zero and a county with a declaration..... Plus, energy is a key to development and is already a limiting factor.

It reads like only one person representing business – way too little.  
Given a rural county – would agriculture not be represented the rural community generally.

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**Annexe 2  
Sector Updates**

**1. Manufacturing**

- SE:**
- A focus on recruitment and retention during the period as we continue to see challenging recruitment market conditions and the structural early retirement theme continues. Recruitment generally positive outside very specialised science.
  - Mixed market conditions in the sector with a number of significant supply chain issues; shortages, delayed delivery and significant price increases.
  - A range of input cost pressures will impact margins in the short to medium term and potentially impact the speed of investment as there will only be partial recovery through selling prices.
  - National increase in general protest activity against many businesses, life science sector and universities for the sector.

**2. Energy**

- GW**
- Business/domestic market still generating lots of interest. Very busy and there continues to be a massive interest in renewables.
  - Skills: Not just technical skills but finding people with all types of skills is challenging.
  - Energy pricing is calmer, helped by mild winter, but danger of becoming complacent when the problem hasn't gone away.
  - Grid capacity is a constant issue.

**3. Creative Industries**

- NM**
- Welcomes commitment to two strands of funding for cultural/arts projects within the Shared Prosperity Fund.
  - Cultural Partnership Strategy review – proactive with Herefordshire Council in connection with their Cultural Strategy. Conversations are on-going.
  - Need to connect the various interest groups, ie Public Art Strategy commissioned by Herefordshire Council.
- Action: NK will find out contact at the Council and feedback to NM.**
- Possibility of new funding from Arts Council regarding place based (ie Herefordshire) activity.
  - Visitor economy needs much more attention
  - Issues to do with Courtyard building are challenging and need resolution.

#### **4. Tourism**

**CD** - Hotel rooms rates holding up well with good demand  
- Destination BID – invoices being dispatched imminently  
- Recognised impact that the original Marches LEP investment had on tourism market.

#### **5. Education**

**DW** - Update on LSIP (Local Skills Investment Plan) – interim report being developed with H&W Chamber. Only a small number of Herefordshire businesses responded to invitation to contribute and difficult to isolate specific recommendations due to the questions that were asked.

- First LSIF Expression of Interest expected in next two weeks. However, the interim report isn't due until June.

- Following Debbie Gittoe's resignation, David will discuss HBB representation on the LSIP Board at tomorrow's meeting.

**Action: DW to discuss HBB representation on LSIP Board**