

Herefordshire Business Board (HBB)
Notes/Actions from the meeting held on
Monday 29 January 2024, 4.00 – 6.15 pm
Held at NMITE, Skylon Campus, Skylon Park, Hereford HR2 6SR

Attendees:

Chair: Frank Myers MBE (FM) **Present:** Cllr Graham Biggs (GB); Helen Bowden (HB), James Newby (JN); John Reed (JR); Nic Millington (NM); Paul Stevens (PS); Sharon Smith (SS); Stephen Eckley (SE)

In attendance: David Wright (Herefordshire Council) (DWr); Rachel Laver (Marches LEP) (RL)

Apologies: Abigail Appleton; Christine Snell; Christian Dangerfield; David Williams; Mark Pearce; Roger Allonby

Absent: Gareth Williams

Minutes: Jan Bailey

Action Log

Minute	Action	Responsibility
4.1	Add JB and FM to circulation list for future Marches Growth Hub updates.	RL
5.12	Write document on what the local authority requires from a Business Board.	GB
5.12	Organise an extraordinary HBB meeting to discuss the above, if required.	FM/JB
8.1.2	Send details of all forthcoming County Plan business engagement events to JB.	DWr
8.1.3	Send link to latest edition of County Plan to JB.	DWr

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. A special welcome was extended to David Wright, recently appointed Head of Economic Development and Regeneration at Herefordshire Council.

Action

2. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest plus Membership Update

2.1 Apologies and absences are as noted above.

2.2 The Chair announced that he has been appointed Interim Chief Executive at Community First in Herefordshire and Worcestershire for a period of 6 months.

2.3 There were no other new Declarations of Interest.

2.4 The Chair advised Board that Caplor Energy Ltd has recently entered administration with the loss of 30+ jobs. HBB Member Gareth Williams is a director at this company. The Board expressed their sadness at hearing this news. DWr said that the Council had been in touch with Caplor to offer their support services, including help for employees to find alternative employment.

3. Minutes of the Last Meeting

3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

3.2 GB asked for clarification regarding membership of the Steering Group mentioned in point 5.1 of these minutes. The Chair explained that all Board members had been invited to attend this meeting and many had chosen to do so. The meeting had taken place immediately prior to the December HBB meeting and its recommendations were communicated to the Board meeting which followed.

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

4.1 Please see notes below.

Minute	Action	Resp.	Update
5.7	Develop a proposal for the future of HBB based on an inward investment partnership model.	FM	Outstanding pending further discussions – see below.
7.2.1	Details of portal for interested parties (SPF/RPF) to be shared with Jan for circulation to members.	NK	Completed

8.2	Provide promotional materials on Growth Hub for dissemination through Board members' networks.	RL	New case studies have been commissioned. Regular newsletters are sent to people who sign up. JB/FM to be added to circulation list.
8.4	Provide details of graduate trainee to RL	NK	Completed
9.2	Share information on local bursary opportunity with DW	JN	Completed
11.1	'Sustainable Business' to be included as a standing item on all future HBB meeting agendas.	FM/JB	Done and ongoing
Appendix	Send Public Arts Consultation Strategy document to JB for circulation to Board	NM	Completed

RL

- 4.2** GB confirmed that a Herefordshire Growth Hub is set to continue work in the county previously undertaken by the Marches Growth Hub. DWr advised that several business support events are already scheduled for the market towns and are booking well.
- 4.3** The Chair stressed how important the website had been in the progression of the Growth Hub and asked what plans are in place to develop a Herefordshire Growth Hub website. GB/DWr confirmed that this topic is currently under discussion and recognised its importance. DWr added that the economic development team is also considering how to better promote the council's economic development offer.
- 4.4** RL queried whether Herefordshire is currently spending the economic development monies currently allocated to it from the Marches Growth Hub. GB confirmed (after checking) that all monies allocated will be spent before the end of March.

Post meeting note: RL confirmed that Herefordshire Council can spend the full Growth Hub grant this year and have accepted an additional £1,500 of underspend that the LEP had.

5. The Future of Herefordshire Business Board

5.1 The Chair reminded HBB members of the current position regarding the Marches LEP. In essence, the Government had resolved that all LEPs (including the Marches) would be wound up and their functions transferred to local authorities from 1 April 2024.

5.2 The Chair also reminded members that the Marches LEP had agreed to fund HBB administrative costs for the next five years.

5.3 The Chair advised that a Transition Group of LEP Directors meets regularly to discuss what will happen to any unspent LEP monies after the LEP is wound up, stressing that the assets are the responsibility of the Directors.

5.4 RL advised that residual funds have to remain within the public domain and must be used for the original purposes for which they were intended (eg they cannot be reassigned to social services).

5.5 The Chair stated that the Directors of the LEP who represent the interests of business are very keen that business continues to have a voice in economic development decisions.

5.6 In Herefordshire's case, the Chair said that previous discussions at HBB and the Steering Group (held before the last HBB meeting) indicated a keenness to be funded to provide business leadership focused on inward investment attraction and development. However, the future role of HBB is yet to be confirmed and so he had not been able to develop a formal proposal as to the future of HBB.

5.7 RL stated that there will be a limited amount of money available for disbursement after the LEP is wound up and many competing priorities. She was clear that, in her opinion, any funding that came to HBB would have to be for work that is backed by Herefordshire Council and links in with their aspirations.

5.8 Board members asked for clarification regarding the status of the Economy and Place Board (EPB). They referred to a presentation made at the September HBB meeting that

indicated four sub-committees of the EPB. One of these sub-committees was given as HBB, but there has been no further information received on this or clarification of its role.

5.9 RL queried HBB's mandate from the business community and asked how it is representative. She said that when the LEP is gone, processes must be in place to ensure continued business engagement. It was her stated view that this is best done via the local authority.

5.10 DWr agreed that the local authority needs to have a means of engaging with the business community. He said he saw HBB as one of these ways, alongside business groups such as the Chamber of Commerce, Federation of Small Businesses, etc. How that engagement takes place in the future he said is being evolved and open for discussion.

5.11 SS again asked for clarification regarding the function of the EPB (in particular its proposed HBB sub-committee) and how that would affect the existing HBB. She felt that HBB needed to sit within the EPB structure and said she was not concerned if this is organised by Herefordshire Council so long as businesses make up the largest part of its membership. JN agreed that if the HBB wished to continue it must be aligned with Herefordshire Council's plans.

5.12 GB said he would write a document that outlines exactly what the council is looking for in a future business board, based on central government guidance on this subject. This will be available within the next two weeks. An additional extraordinary HBB meeting may then need to be organised to discuss this document.

GB

FM/JB

5.13 HB asked for clarification as to when the new EPB committee structure would commence. GB advised that meetings will be starting from February.

6. Stronger Towns Fund

6.1 In AA's and CD's absence, the Chair provided a brief update on the Stronger Towns Fund:

6.1.1 The Cycle Track and Skate Park are now open.

6.1.2 Castle Green project is progressing well, including the recent acquisition of the adjacent Bowling Green.

6.1.3 There is now very positive liaison between the STF Board and Herefordshire Council officers

6.1.4 Generally, the Board is satisfied with progress.

6.2 HB asked for clarification regarding the museum project finish date. PS confirmed that this is anticipated to be mid-2026.

6.3 There was a brief discussion on potential STF legacy projects with a number of ideas being mooted, including commissioning of artwork and possible festival activities.

7. Sustainable Business

No updates provided

8. County Plan 2024-2028 and Horizon Scan

8.1 County Plan

8.1.1 DWr said that an engagement process is currently under way with regard to the County Plan. Impact Consultants have been commissioned to engage with the public and a business consultation exercise is taking place (including 'piggy-backing' on business events organised by the Chamber of Commerce and Herefordshire Means Business).

8.1.2 DWr to send details of all forthcoming business engagement events to JB for circulation to the wider Board.

DWr

8.1.3 DWr also to send the latest County Plan to JB for circulation to the Board.

DWr

8.2 Horizon Scan

8.2.1 DWr advised that as there is a General Election due to take place later this year opportunities for future funding are difficult to ascertain.

8.2.2 DWr updated the Board on a number of forthcoming local skills events to coincide with National Apprenticeship Week (commencing 5 – 11 February).

9. Marches LEP

RL having left the meeting, no further updates were provided.

10. Sector Updates

Please see Appendix 1 below.

11. Any Other Business

11.1 The Chair shared details of the Rural Housing Enabling scheme, delivered by ACRE. Further details are available here: <https://acre.org.uk/press-release-acre-welcomes-government-boost-for-small-scale-rural-affordable-housing-schemes/>.

12. Date of Next Meeting

Next scheduled meeting: Monday 25 March 2024, 4.00–6.00 pm venue to be confirmed.

All 2024 Dates:

Monday 3 June

Monday 22 July

Monday 30 September

Monday 2 December

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Appendix 1 – Sector Updates

Manufacturing

JR

1. Same challenges as previously reported. Environment is not getting any easier.
2. Challenges and cost of getting non-UK workers highlighted(JR).
3. How can rural communities sustain large scale businesses? This question is key to Herefordshire's continued ability to attract and retain agricultural businesses.

SE (Written update)

1. Continuation of an issue in the biotech and small and medium sized companies sector raising finance. This results in projects either being delayed, cancelled, or partly run.
2. Despite some indications of improvement, input costs have remained high, with the average for the last calendar year still in double digits. While some of these costs may be reflected in pricing in 202f, it is unlikely that the entire increase will be covered
3. Recruitment continues to be challenging for some roles although manageable. There is a focus on staff retention.
4. The merger of the current research and development (R&D) tax relief regime for small and medium sized entities (SMEs) and R&D expenditure credit (RDEC) regime for large companies was confirmed in the chancellor's Autumn Statement 2023. Many SMEs that claim for subcontracted-in R&D activities under the existing RDEC regime will find they have no claim at all under the new subcontracting rules which will have a clearly negative impact.

Creative - NM

1. Public Art Strategy ongoing – publication expected soon. Six/eight major installations proposed – will be interesting to see public response.
2. Cultural Sector study commissioned and in progress, undertaken by Fifth Estate Consultants. Early findings indicate the importance of small businesses/sole traders for the sector.

3. Festivals – study will look at how we can be more strategic in approach. Funded via UK Shared Prosperity Fund and reporting at the end of March. This will help to inform the review and update of Herefordshire’s Cultural Strategy.
4. Digital Festival suggested as legacy project for Stronger Towns Fund.

Education – JN

1. Trying to get to grips with disconnect between Government policy and education delivery.
2. Good working relationship between colleges. Looking together at changes to funding arrangements for students and how these will affect course pathways.

Tourism – HB

1. County BID has now received funding for marketing activities. Orphans putting together a ‘Visit Herefordshire’ proposal.
2. PS: Reminder re not to forget importance of Hereford City as part of this. City Council would like greater involvement in the Apple Fest this year.