

Open

Title:	Buckinghamshire Economic Recovery Plan
Purpose:	To provide board members with the framework and delivery process for the development of a Buckinghamshire Economic Recovery Plan and separate Digital Strategy building on the established foundations of the Buckinghamshire Local Industrial Strategy.
Recommendation:	That board members comment on content and approach and the process for developing and consulting on the Buckinghamshire Economic Recovery Plan and supporting Digital Strategy and to agree the steps outlined to prioritise the development of the plan.

1 Introduction

The emergency measures introduced by the Government at the beginning of March were in response to the immediate threat posed by the Covid 19 Crisis. The Lockdown measures were introduced to minimise the loss of life and to prevent the NHS becoming overwhelmed at the peak of the crisis. The impact on the global and national recovery is vast, and although it is still too soon to determine the final impact, recovery from the pandemic represents the single biggest economic challenge since WW2. However, it also presents a significant opportunity to reshape both the national and local economy to make it more inclusive, productive, sustainable, innovative, and resilient and take the best out of the crisis. With the UK in an extended period of lockdown, focus is now moving from the initial response into economic renewal and ahead to a rebound phase where the economy can be “built back better”.

If that recovery is to be effective, then it must take account of local circumstances and seize local opportunities. Sectors have been affected differently resulting in the impacts being experienced in different ways in different places. This must be acknowledged if recovery planning is to be successful. Plans will need to cover Local Authority transport/commuting plans to get people safely back to work, the start-up time required to restart supply chains and how to stimulate demand.

In Buckinghamshire a joint recovery group has been established including both the Chair and Vice Chair of this Board and are meeting on a fortnightly basis to help support the recovery process and to support liaison with the Buckinghamshire MP’s. This recovery board is being supported by a strong partnership approach so that the resources of the LEP are harnessed alongside BBF and the Buckinghamshire Council.

Across the country LEPs have been asked to reposition their Local Industrial Strategies as Economic Recovery Plans, for areas such as Buckinghamshire who already have strategies in place this should be seen as a progression of the original strategy to address both the impact of

the Covid 19 crisis as well as the growing significance of the Climate Change agenda which has emerged strongly over the past 12 months.

2 Revision of the Evidence Base

The Evidence Bases developed for LIS are a vital asset which when updated can form the critical platform for the wide range of decisions that exit and recovery plans will require, both to formulate them and then to use as the benchmark against which to measure progress and adjust accordingly. The evidence base on which our industrial strategy has been built will be updated to provide a full understanding of new factors, such as:

- Economic hardship which had not existed before.
- Weakened businesses potentially heading to failure.
- Ability of digital infrastructure to respond to new working practices.
- Broken supply chains, where suppliers may have gone out of business.
- Reduced demand/confidence nationally/globally.
- Vacant, retail, office commercial space.
- Changes to consumer behaviour.
- Changes to High Street and retail economy.
- Opportunities previously untapped accelerated during the crisis by enforced changes to ways of working.
- Other longer-term factors, such as onshoring, increased use of digitisation and reduced use of public transport.

Over the past 8 weeks a significant amount of data has been already collated on the impact of the Covid 19 crisis through a combination of BBF Member Surveys, liaison with business advisors and other Business Relationship Organisations (BRO's) together with media and social media monitoring. Weekly reports have been prepared by the Bucks Business First Growth Hub and a dashboard highlighting the latest impact has been produced on a weekly basis. A copy of the latest dashboard is attached as **Appendix 1** to this report.

Working together with colleagues from across the Arc, we would want to develop a consistent indicator base outlining the changing impact over the coming months, a copy of the indicators which could be collated as part of the Arc Data Observatory is attached as **Appendix 2** to this report. In addition, Richard Harrington is leading a national LEP Network Economic Recovery insight group, so that the valuable insight gathered by Growth Hubs and strong alignment from across the Arc can be amplified at a national level, where there currently is a paucity of local detailed insight.

3 Framework for the Recovery Plan

The recovery plan will need to reflect the changed circumstances for the “new normal” that businesses are operating and should provide through analysis revised ambitions for Buckinghamshire, while developing practical plans, amongst other things, to:

- Restore jobs and supply chains as quickly as possible.
- Support businesses to adapt, evolve and innovate to the 'new norm', including operating with social distancing across a range of businesses.
- Identify opportunities for growth, due to enhanced demand, changing consumer behaviour, digitisation of business models or specific regional opportunities.
- Develop skills interventions, working with FE, HE, skills and apprenticeship providers through existing Skills Forums to tackle labour market impacts.
- Support High Street/Town centre recovery and development.
- Identify a strategy to encourage businesses to (re)-hire staff/make investment.
- Identify working approaches to increase productivity.

This will be a significant piece of work and will need to reflect emerging and evolving government policy, as well as bringing together the short (**Respond Phase 0-6months**), medium (**React Phase 6-18months**) and longer-term (**Rebound Phase 18-36months**) priorities and plans.

4 Approach

We are currently utilising the sector advisory groups to provide the real-time insight into the impact and opportunities within their sector area, this is to be complemented by re-establishment of a cross sector business led advisory board in much the same way that the Local Industrial Strategy was developed.

The sector groups will also continue to develop investment propositions that can be fed into the Comprehensive Spending process which is now expected to take place later in 2020.

The joint "Team Bucks" strategic recovery board will then complement this insight and offer a sounding board and an opportunity to elevate and emerging messages to the Buckinghamshire MP's and other Government sources. A copy of the Organogram highlighting the roles and responsibilities of the partners in the recovery programme is attached as **Appendix 3**

The recovery steering group is supported by an aligned business unit with separate cells looking at different aspects of the recovery including immediate business support and the allocation of local and national funding, the safe use and future impact on public services and transport hubs, the changing digital infrastructure requirements and the impact on the skills landscape.

5 Focus

Our immediate focus was to review the existing action plan from the Buckinghamshire Local Industrial Strategy to see which of the actions were still relevant within the "new normal", to identify areas where the need for action was most immediate and to support opportunities for the resetting of our ambitions.

As a result of this initial assessment we are looking to immediately focus our recovery plan on 3 elements, two taken from the strategic drivers within the Buckinghamshire Industrial Strategy and the third because of the significant impact on town centre hubs: -

Digital Strategy

A first working draft of the Buckinghamshire Digital Strategy is attached as **Appendix 4** to this report covering the areas of digital connectivity, digital businesses and the wider economy including digital skills and a reflection of Buckinghamshire as a place and the impact of digital on the environment and the use of data to map onto the national digital strategy to support future investment bids. We are also working with key stakeholders to understand the local role of Buckinghamshire LEP in supporting cyber security and the use of data, policies which are at the heart of the UK government agenda. The following months will also be used to create a “vision” for a digital Buckinghamshire to ensure that key partners are working towards a single goal. To this end, case studies of best practices seen throughout the county and highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic will be used to bring the strategy to life and show some of the innovation which digital connectivity has enabled locally.

Commercialising Innovation through Advanced Business Support

The second of the economic drivers within the Local Industrial Strategy, it is our ambition to ensure that the Buckinghamshire ecosystem was supportive of the rapid commercialism of ideas helping bring new products and services rapidly to market. Over this period as businesses have seen existing markets disappear and new opportunities emerge many have looked to re-purpose their skills and resources to supply new markets and we have some excellent examples of where this has already been supported in Buckinghamshire including in the supply of ventilator technologies and PPE for the Health and Social Care System.

A focus of the Buckinghamshire Recovery Fund was to support this rapid repurposing of services to meet the national recovery or to enable businesses to serve new markets, in addition the long-held ambition of developing a sharing platform for Buckinghamshire businesses is being developed. As part of the recovery programme, entrepreneurs will be developing new business ideas, we would like to continue to use the recovery fund to stimulate these new ideas, inward investments and provide the framework for wider support to enable to the new products and services developed to find new markets both within the Buckinghamshire economy and beyond. The role of the Growth Hub in supporting this innovation will be critical.

Town Centre and Place Based Interventions

The impact of the Covid 19 Crisis will perhaps be seen most readily on the high street and within town centres. Already evolving before the crisis, the pandemic may change the outlook for town centres forever. Town centre businesses, shops and public spaces will need to offer new and safe and stimulating environments for customers and will need to consider how alternative access can be provided alongside traditional public transport. There is a great opportunity particularly within Aylesbury as a Garden Town and High Wycombe as a pilot for the Future High Street Fund to look to be a testbed for new transport methodologies and retail services and to advance sustainable environmental and climate change initiatives.

6 Plan Format

It is intended that the recovery plan will be an action led document but will need to evolve over the coming months as we begin to emerge from lockdown and learn more about Covid 19.

As highlighted above it will be considered in 3 phases, the timescales are indicative as this will largely be driven by national policy, the medical response and crucially the development and availability of any vaccine.

Response (0-6months) – Continue to support businesses to manage the immediate impact of closure or new working, provide access to emergency financial support and repurposing funding and gather intelligence on the changing impact on businesses. Continue the business case development for the Comprehensive Spending Review in late 2020.

Recover (6-18 months) Support businesses as they emerge from lockdown and develop their operations and services within the “new normal” and ensure that businesses and supply chains are better prepared for any future waves of the pandemic or other unforeseen economic disruptions.

Rebound (18months – 3 years) Help identify the investments and business sectors that can lead the rapid economic recovery and to establish new markets and services.

Review – Throughout this process will continue to review the impact of our support processes and planning to ensure that we can provide learning for future economic shocks.

7 Links to National & Regional Programmes

We are working very closely with the other Arc LEPs and the Arc Universities Group. The Chairs have collaborated on a paper to show how the economic innovation from across the Arc could help lead the national recovery.

An important part of the Arc recovery plan will be to support the economic and social modelling alongside the Arc Universities Group. This will help identify how the “new normal” within the Arc will look assessing areas such as digital capacity, transport and home working and learning trends, employment land use requirements and sector growth scenarios. This could form a pilot proposal for the Arc Policy Lab focussing on how temporary adaptations can be harnessed into permanent economic opportunities for the Arc and how this learning can be shared beyond the area.

We are being strongly supported in this process by the LEP Network which has ensured that the role and voice of LEPs is recognised within Government as part of two national recovery business roundtable meetings led at a ministerial level by Nadhim Zahawi and Simon Clarke and at director general level by Emran Mian.

8 Timescale

It is intended that the first draft of the recovery plan will be presented to this board at the July meeting and that the final plan will be in place by September 2020.

Business working group sessions are planned to be held in both May and June to help inform this first draft and also the digital strategy..

The plan will initially cover the period from 2020-2023, although there may be scope for extending this on a rolling basis if the national and international picture changes significantly. In the longer term the recovery plan will link into the wider ambitions of the Local Industrial Strategy.

Board members are asked to: Comment on content and approach and the process for developing and consulting on the Buckinghamshire Economic Recovery Plan and supporting a separate Digital Strategy and to agree the steps outlined to prioritise the development of the plan.