

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP (BLEP) EXTRAORDINARY BOARD MEETING

Held Monday 7 September 2020 from 12pm, via Teams

Present: Andrew M Smith, Pinewood Studios (Chair)
Richard Harrington, BLEP Chief Executive
Philippa Batting, Buckinghamshire Business First
Adrian Brown, Berkeley Strategic Land Limited (Part meeting)
Michael Garvey, Chandler Garvey
Eman Martin-Vignerte, Bosch
Cllr Steve Bowles, Buckinghamshire Council
Cllr Steve Broadbent, Buckinghamshire Council
Cllr Nick Naylor, Buckinghamshire Council
Cllr Martin Tett, Buckinghamshire Council

Apologies: Lucy Edge, Satellite Applications Catapult
Hiren Gandhi, Blaser Mills
Alistair Lomax, Arc Universities Group
Clare Pelham, Epilepsy Society
Cllr Isobel Darby, Buckinghamshire Council

In attendance: Kevin Hoctor, BEIS South Central & West
Richard Ambrose, Buckinghamshire Council
Rachael Shimmin, Buckinghamshire Council
Ian Thompson, Buckinghamshire Council
Ian Barham, BLEP Partnerships Manager
Sarah Fraser

SUMMARY MINUTES

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- It was reported Alistair Lomax would not be joining the meeting due to a declared conflict of interest with the single item agenda in terms of his role within the Arc Universities Group.
- There were no other newly declared conflicts.

2 BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL DEVOLUTION PLANS

- Further to the papers previously circulated, the Board noted the context around Buckinghamshire Council's devolution proposition to Government, discussion arising as a result of the anticipated Government White Paper on Recovery and Devolution due for publication during Autumn 2020.
- The proposition under development is an ask for Buckinghamshire as a whole, building on the strong record of partnership in Buckinghamshire and produced as a partnership of equals including BLEP, BBF etc, rather than being an ask solely from the Local Authority.
- The outline proposition has support from a range of stakeholders and the Council will continue to work with partners inside and outside of Buckinghamshire to ensure energy is focussed on maintaining momentum in terms of economic recovery and productivity.
- Noting Buckinghamshire Council has withdrawn from membership of the Arc, it was confirmed the Local Authority will continue to work on a bilateral and functional basis with partners in the constituent parts of the Arc, where this benefits Buckinghamshire.

- With regards to the possibility of a devolution deal for the Arc geography, it was suggested that, should such a deal be reached, Buckinghamshire would not be a significant beneficiary due to current governance structures and the likely draw on funding by other areas of the Arc geography. It was suggested the withdrawal from the Arc will allow for a greater focus on Buckinghamshire's priorities.
- Having completed the move to unitary status (a requirement for a devolution deal) and being so closely aligned with all partners in Buckinghamshire; BLEP, Buckinghamshire Business First, the Third Sector, the Healthcare Trust, etc, it was confirmed Buckinghamshire Council is able to progress devolution deal discussions at pace.
- The Board noted the asks made in the draft devolution proposition around freedoms, powers and flexibilities related to Places, Transport, High-tech Sectors, and Skills; the development of a Buckinghamshire proposition providing the opportunity to focus on those areas important in helping Buckinghamshire meet its priorities and continue performing for the benefit of UK PLC.
- It was agreed more work is to be done on developing the proposition to ensure this is reflective of the detail within the Local Industrial Strategy, Economic Recovery Plan etc, for example around economic assets/strategic drivers and supporting the existing business community as well as creating the circumstances for future growth.
- The Board recognised the requirement to continue to work with key partners in all neighbouring geographies in order to advance Buckinghamshire's prospects, acknowledging that businesses will follow opportunities wherever they arise, unconstrained by geography, but will need strong, open communication channels in place to be able to do this.
- It was confirmed the next iteration of the devolution proposition will come to the BLEP Board at its meeting on 18 September 2020.

In the meantime, the Board:

- **Endorsed the Local Authority's decision to progress development of a Buckinghamshire devolution proposition to Government and the general direction of travel outlined, pending a further iteration coming to the BLEP Board at its meeting on 18 September 2020.**
- **Requested the devolution proposition be more ambitious (but still achievable) in terms of the financial asks of Government.**
- **Requested the ask for powers, freedoms and flexibilities in the proposition is wide-ranging enough to enable Buckinghamshire to deliver on its ambitions, particularly around the digital agenda, recognising this will be a negotiation with Government.**
- **Requested the voice of Business is properly represented at Growth Board discussions and the views of Business properly reflected in the final devolution proposition to go to Government.**
- **Noted there may be a call from Central Government to meet prescribed local governance structures such as Elected Mayors or Combined Authority arrangements in order to benefit fully from funding and, if so, this would be a matter for the Buckinghamshire Conservative Group to consider.**
- **Noted the need for a significant lobbying campaign by all Buckinghamshire partners to support any devolution proposition put to Government.**
- **Agreed to withdraw from membership of the Oxford to Cambridge Arc in order to fully support the Buckinghamshire devolution proposition, removing any possible confusion on where Buckinghamshire's focus is or how its priorities will be met. At the same time, it was agreed work will be progressed to co-operate with important partners both within Buckinghamshire and beyond to continue to bring economic benefit to Buckinghamshire.**
- **Asked AS to inform Cllr Barry Wood of BLEP's decision to withdraw from Arc membership.**

3 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Friday 18 September 2020, 2-4.30pm via Teams