

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP (BLEP) BOARD MEETING

Held Friday 4 December 2020 from 9.30am, via Teams

Present: Andrew M Smith, Pinewood Studios (Chair)
Philippa Batting, Buckinghamshire Business First
Lucy Edge, Satellite Applications Catapult
Hiren Gandhi, Blaser Mills (Part meeting)
Michael Garvey, Chandler Garvey
Richard Harrington, BLEP Chief Executive
Eman Martin-Vignerte, Bosch (Part meeting)
Clare Pelham, Epilepsy Society
Martina Porter, Allspring Media
Cllr Steve Bowles, Buckinghamshire Council
Cllr Steven Broadbent, Buckinghamshire Council
Cllr Nick Naylor, Buckinghamshire Council

Apologies: Adrian Brown, Berkeley Strategic Land Limited
Cllr Martin Tett, Buckinghamshire Council
Cllr Isobel Darby, Buckinghamshire Council

In attendance: Kevin Hoctor, BEIS/MHCLG Cities and Local Growth Unit
Gavin Brooks, Buckinghamshire New University (Skills Advisory Panel Chair)
Ian Thompson, Buckinghamshire Council
Claire Hunter, Buckinghamshire Council (Section 151 Officer)
Ian Barham, BLEP, Partnerships Director
Heather Dean, BBF, Head of Skills and Business Support
Caroline Perkins, BLEP, Research Manager
Anthony Sowden, Aylesbury Vale Enterprise Zone Director
Sarah Fraser

SUMMARY MINUTES

1 WELCOME AND BOARD APPOINTMENTS

- The recommendation from the Remuneration and Nomination Sub Group to appoint Martina Porter as a member of the Buckinghamshire LEP Board was endorsed.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- Andrew Smith and Gavin Brooks declared interests under item 8 of the agenda (Capital Programme Sub Group update) relating to the “Bucks Creates @ Pinewood” project.
- Steven Broadbent declared an interest in discussions around the Woodlands project as a member of the Strategic Planning Committee.
- Steve Bowles and Nick Naylor declared interests under item 8 of the agenda (Capital Programme Sub Group update) relating to discussions around Eastern Link Road South Scheme).

3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING – 18 SEPTEMBER 2020

- The Minutes of the above meeting were agreed as an accurate record.

3.1 Matters arising:

- **Lessons learned – carried forward** – The executive team is collating a note around ‘lessons learned’ following work on the latest funding round/Local Authority discretionary funding and will share this with the Board once complete.

- **Economic Recovery Plan** – Changes discussed at the last meeting had been incorporated in the Economic Recovery Plan and this had been submitted to Government.
- **Devolution Deal** (now the “Buckinghamshire Recovery and Growth Deal”) - The latest iteration will shortly be forwarded to Government and local MPs.
- **Spending Review** – Proposals submitted to Government under the Spending Review contributing to economic recovery and to the levelling up agenda are to be followed up with Government.
- **Growth Board** – Business representation has been widened on the Bucks Growth Board to include LEP representatives, the Chair of Buckinghamshire Business First and sector specialists.
- **England’s Economic Heartland (EEH)** – Issues arising from the recent EEH Transport Forum:
 - **Transport Strategy** – Following consultation on the draft strategy, EEH is proposing to change how projects are assessed to include a significant weighting on carbon impact. This may impact some projects already submitted.
 - **Connectivity Studies** – It is proposed delaying North/South connectivity study to 2021/22; the focus prior to this being alternatives to the Expressway. The LEP would wish the North/South work to be undertaken sooner, appropriate infrastructure required to support the LEP’s focus of economic growth.
 - **Transport Forum** – The bid for the Transport Forum to become a statutory body has not come to pass and it is now proposed there will be a concordat in place with Government to achieve the same level of consultation. Further information is awaited.

4 THE SPENDING REVIEW – IMPLICATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Further to the presentation given, the Board noted:
 - Small pots of individual Department funding are available eg DWP funding for a programme similar to the Kickstart Scheme, which the LEP might wish to consider bidding for.
 - No response has been received to the LEP Network’s request of Government to increase capacity funding for LEPs.
 - Government is still to share specific criteria around the levelling up agenda; information expected in 2021. Decisions on this agenda will be made centrally, and “local harmony” will be very important.
- It was suggested the LEP should look to better access funding available to support town centre regeneration, R&D, and the digital agenda, recognising there is a bias away from London/South East, and more work for BLEP to do to agree strategy/priorities when bidding.

5 SKILLS STRATEGY AND FUTURE SKILLS INVESTMENT

- The Skills team were congratulated on work undertaken to date and phenomenal results in terms of leveraging funding (similar to the Growth Hub). It was noted the updated Bucks Skills Strategy, once complete, must reflect skills needs outlined in the Local Industrial Strategy.
- The Board noted the growing skills gap when young people enter the workplace, from whichever education setting, which has been exacerbated by COVID-19. There is an increasing need for closer engagement with employers, not only to provide critical placements/work-based learning opportunities, but also to look at skill sets in most demand and develop appropriate curricula.
- The pandemic has seen a shift in social values with people taking the opportunity offered by furloughing etc to look at volunteering in new roles/careers, providing greater value to their community. Anecdotally, many of these people have taken the decision to pursue these new careers; something supported by increased numbers taking up short courses at Buckinghamshire New University. It was suggested the LEP might capitalise upon this shift.
- The Board agreed the need to ensure sustainability of funding to the Skills Hub, recognising the importance of the team’s work to the local area; acknowledging there may be challenges encouraging other partners to support this investment. There is an ask of Government within the Buckinghamshire Recovery and Growth Deal around devolving responsibility for Skills funding and it was suggested the Skills Advisory Panel might give this some thought.

The Board:

- **Supported the principle of continued funding for the Skills Hub for April 2021-March 2026.**
- **Requested the Audit and Finance Sub Group review the skills operational budget for 2021/22 as part of the MoU development process with the BBF Growth Hub. The MoU and agreed budget to be brought to a future Board meeting prior to any release of LEP reserve funding.**

6 GROWTH BOARD AND BUCKS GROWTH DEAL

- The work of the Growth Board continues, progressing local priorities and with development of a prospectus, recognising the delay in progressing a Bucks Growth Deal.
- Business representation on the Growth Board has been increased and it has been accepted the LEP Board generates thought leadership around economy, economic strategy and delivery of programme; this is then aligned with the strategy around place, community and health.
- A Vision for Bucks is being developed which will be circulated to stakeholders for comment.

7 COVID-19 ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLAN – PROGRESS AND NEXT STEPS

- Board members noted the paper and the progress made on recovery plan actions, recognising the impact of the second lockdown on recovery. The excellent relationships and liaison between the LEP, BBF, Buckinghamshire Council, Buckinghamshire Healthcare Trust, etc, have ensured a co-ordinated place-based approach to supporting the Buckinghamshire business community during the pandemic, and this will continue going forward to ensure longer term recovery.
- Key to recovery will be the efficient and effective roll out of vaccines and the LEP is working with partners to look at the quickest way to facilitate this, including the use, confirmed recently, of the Aylesbury Campus as the Aylesbury Hub facility.
- Businesses in the county are working to support each other in recovery and, where other areas have struggled, Buckinghamshire has filled its allocation in terms of Peer Networks.
- Key educational institutions have been flexible in the courses provided to support those looking to change careers, and in meeting changed timescales due to disruption caused by the pandemic eg courses starting in January with a condensed first year.
- The Board noted the need, in Spending Review discussions, to put support fully behind strong proposals that play to central Government's agenda.
- Whilst predictions of a long slow recovery are worrying, anecdotally there are encouraging signs being seen on the ground as businesses push forward with investment plans.
- Government policy decisions must reflect what is needed on the ground for programmes to be successful.

8 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

- Further to the information provided, the Board noted the national priority around the green economy and discussed how Buckinghamshire might contribute to this picture.

8.1 Enterprise Zones

- An update was provided on progress with development of the Enterprise Zones at the end of 5 years of operation.
- Approximately £3.2m has been retained in business rates for investment in the Enterprise Zone sites, with the likelihood of this increasing significantly once sites have been fully developed.
- Enterprise Zones have overachieved on delivering floor space and, although slightly delayed, it was anticipated job creation will follow. It was suggested there are further discussions to be held in 2021 about the possibility of extending existing sites and looking at scope for development of a site in the south of the county.
- In the short term, focus will be on business case development to hone the ask of Government in an attempt to secure further investment.
- Adrian Brown has now taken over as Chairman of the Enterprise Zone Board, which will be renegotiating the MoU with Buckinghamshire Council. It is hoped to widen private sector

representation on this Board and to discuss the LEP Board using a proportion of revenue from retained business rates against identified priorities.

8.2 Annual Performance Review (APR)

- The APR process is to be confirmed but it is anticipated it will be lighter touch than previously.

8.3 Growth Hub

- An enormous volume of activity has been undertaken by the Growth Hub in support of Buckinghamshire businesses through the pandemic and the changes needed to be COVID-safe, and in preparation for Brexit, the transition bringing its own challenges in terms of a lack of clarity around some real practicalities for businesses. The pandemic and Brexit have resulted in it now being more expensive than ever to be in business.
- The Growth Hub has seen the fast adoption of technology/businesses adapting to new ways of working and it was suggested this will become evident in productivity statistics to come.
- Continued investment at the level of the firm as well as at the level of place is needed. Core funding vital if the Growth Hub (and Skills Hub) are to continue to leverage resources, delivering massive benefits financially and in terms of activity for a relatively small investment.

9 **SUB GROUP UPDATES**

9.1 Audit and Finance Sub Group

- **The Board noted the update from the Audit and Finance Sub Group and approved the updated MoU with Buckinghamshire Council around financial and procedural aspects; and the revised risk register updated in line with discussion at the last Board meeting.**

(Andrew Smith and Gavin Brooks left the meeting; Michael Garvey took the Chair)

9.2 Capital Programme Sub Group

- At its most recent meeting the Sub Group had reviewed progress on the LGF programme and noted challenges emerging with this, acknowledging the continued need for a healthy pipeline of robust future projects to, in part, offset issues suffered previously with slow on projects.
- The Board noted issues with both the University of Buckingham and the National Film & Television School projects and were clear on the need for order and transparency in the decision making/allocation process, whilst recognising the requirement to be agile in terms of reallocating funding to appropriate schemes should this become necessary.

It was agreed:

- **The Capital Sub Group will meet prior to the next full Board meeting to:**
 - **Discuss whether funding allocations currently with the University of Buckingham for its Centre of Computing and AI, and with the National Film & Television School to extend its existing site, should remain in place or be considered for reallocation.**
 - **Consider the process by which any reallocation of funds should take place should they become available.**
 - **Develop a recommendation re the above to put to the full LEP Board for endorsement at its next meeting.**
- **To approve Buckinghamshire Council's request to amend in year eligible expenditure items for the Eastern Link Road South scheme as per document previously circulated.**
- **To approve an additional £30k LGF capital grant for building works as part of the Bucks Creates @ Pinewood LGF project as per document previously circulated.**

(Andrew Smith and Gavin Brooks rejoined the meeting; Andrew Smith resumed the Chair)

9.3 Remuneration & Nominations (RemNom) Sub Group

- The Board noted the update from the RemNom Sub Group and, her position having been endorsed at the start of the meeting, welcomed Martina Porter as a new LEP Board member.
- It was reported a further candidate from the HE sector has been interviewed, with conversations due to continue around time availability in the New Year.
- It was confirmed the recruitment process has commenced for a BLEP Finance and Governance Officer; and that recruitment for a new BLEP Chair and additional private sector Board members will be progressed utilising the assistance of a headhunter/recruitment agency if required.

10 **MICHAEL GARVEY RETIREMENT**

- The Board and individual Board members offered their sincere thanks to Michael Garvey who was stepping down from the BLEP Board after 9 years of service. The Board recognised the tremendous contribution Michael has made to the LEP, and to Buckinghamshire as a whole, both financially and in terms of the enormous time commitment given, commenting that he will genuinely be a very hard act to follow.

11 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- The Board thanked the LEP and BBF teams for everything achieved during a challenging year.

12 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

- Friday 29 January 2021, 9.30am, venue tbc or via Teams