

**BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP (BLEP)  
BOARD MEETING**

Held Friday 29 January 2021 from 9.30am, via Teams

- Present:** Andrew M Smith, Pinewood Studios (Chair)  
Philippa Batting, Buckinghamshire Business First  
Adrian Brown, Berkeley Strategic Land Limited (part meeting)  
Richard Harrington, BLEP Chief Executive  
Eman Martin-Vignerte, Bosch  
Clare Pelham, Epilepsy Society  
Martina Porter, Allspring Media  
Cllr Steve Bowles, Buckinghamshire Council  
Cllr Steven Broadbent, Buckinghamshire Council  
Cllr Isobel Darby, Buckinghamshire Council  
Cllr Nick Naylor, Buckinghamshire Council  
Cllr Martin Tett, Buckinghamshire Council (Part meeting)
- Apologies:** Lucy Edge, Satellite Applications Catapult  
Hiren Gandhi, Blaser Mills
- In attendance:** Kevin Hctor, BEIS/MHCLG Cities and Local Growth Unit  
Prof Gavin Brooks, BNU (Skills Advisory Panel Chair) (Part meeting)  
Lisa Michelson, Buckinghamshire Council  
Richard Ambrose, Buckinghamshire Council (Section 151 Officer) (Part meeting)  
Ian Barham, BLEP, Partnerships Director  
John Rippon, BLEP, Programme Manager  
Jack Douglass, BLEP, Broadband Programme Manager  
Sarah Fraser

## **SUMMARY MINUTES**

- 1 **WELCOME AND BOARD APPOINTMENTS**
  - AS welcomed attendees, reporting that Professor James Tooley from the University of Buckingham had joined the Buckinghamshire LEP Board, his first meeting will be 26 March 2021.
  - Following appointment at the last meeting, Martina Porter shared her background, experience within the Creative Industries sector, and key area of interest around skills, particularly entry level, and particularly focussing on diversity within the industry.
- 2 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**
  - There were no new declarations of interest at this meeting.
- 3 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING – 4 December 2020**
  - The Minutes of the above meeting were agreed as an accurate record.
- 3.1 **Matters arising:**
  - **Lessons learned – carried forward** – A note around ‘lessons learned’ following work on the latest funding round/Local Authority discretionary funding will be shared with the Board once complete.
  - **England’s Economic Heartland (EEH) – Connectivity Studies** – EEH has confirmed North/South connectivity remains a high priority, following investigation into East/West connectivity.

#### 4 LOCAL GROWTH FUND REVIEW/GETTING BUILDING FUND OPEN CALL

- An update on progress on the capital programme was provided, the LEP approaching the end of the 5 year Local Growth Fund (LGF) programme, and anticipated to defray around 99% of total funds allocated.
- Work has been progressed on supporting deployment of the £7.7m Getting Building Fund (GBF) allocated to Buckinghamshire during 2020 for delivery by end March 2022.
- The Board noted the issues being experienced by project sponsors in deployment of LGF and GBF funds, as discussed at the last Board meeting, and the recommendation arising from discussion on this subject at the Capital Programme Sub Group.

##### **The Board:**

- **Noted the capital programme summary update provided.**
- **Agreed, re LGF funding:**
  - To withdraw £150k from National Film and Television School and £750k from The University of Buckingham as this funding will not be deployed by 31 March 2021.
  - To allocate £800k to the Satellite Applications Catapult for the Westcott DISC facility (withdrawing £800k Getting Building Fund previously allocated).
  - To utilise the remaining £100k LGF funding against building work on the Bucks Creates @ Pinewood project (£30k previously agreed on 4/12/20, noting this is not a Pinewood project but rather a Pinewood tenant/Buckinghamshire New University project, the extra funding delivering additional outputs), and £70k towards Bucks LEP operational/project capital costs incurred in 2020/21.
- **Agreed, re GBF funding:**
  - To withdraw £2m funding from The University of Buckingham, plans for development of the Centre for Computing and AI at Tingewick Road having changed significantly.
  - To utilise funding released by The University of Buckingham (£2m) and through the ‘flipping’ strategy at the Space Applications Catapult (£800k), to move to open call for new/expanded projects, encouraging applications from all sectors and from as diverse a pool as possible, particularly in light of the changed economic picture following Covid-19, whilst still supporting the aims of the Local Industrial Strategy and Economic Recovery Plan. The deadline for applications being 5 March 2021.
  - To explain clearly in open call publicity what is meant by “capital projects” ensuring criteria set are appropriate and attainable, and possibly looking at social value as one project measurement.
  - That the Capital Programme Sub Group, and thereafter the full Board on 26 March 2021, will consider applications received and, if necessary, discuss further the change request process to follow should interesting applications be received for new projects not previously agreed by Ministers (as with the initial GBF projects).

#### 4.1 Independent LGF Evaluation

- The Board noted the progress being made by Hatch Regeneris in assessing the impact of the current LGF programme, noting more work is needed in assessing tangible outputs/outcomes from the programme.
- The final report from Hatch will be shared in full with the Board once received, and Hatch are to be invited to the BLEP Board meeting on 26 March 2021 to present detailed findings.
- The Board asked that any recognition for successful projects is also credited to Government as the source of initial funding.

#### 5 BUCKINGHAMSHIRE GROWTH BOARD PROGRAMME

##### 5.1 Buckinghamshire Recovery & Growth Deal Proposition

- The Board noted the development of the Recovery & Growth Deal proposition by the Growth Board.

##### 5.2 Buckinghamshire Strategic Vision to 2050

- The Board noted progress on the Buckinghamshire Strategic Vision to 2050, offering initial suggestions for amendment/inclusion with any further comments to be received by the executive prior to end February, to enable a full response to the Growth Board consultation.

### 5.3 Digital Strategy

- The Board noted the Digital Strategy document circulated previously and the further update in the presentation provided.
- The Board commented that the strategy might benefit from more work to make it “locationally relevant” to Buckinghamshire and to highlight what is unique in the county, noting that take up of Broadband is higher in Buckinghamshire than in any other area in the country.
- It was suggested more needs to be done to encourage innovative projects, particularly machine to machine communications/advance manufacturing, and that funding is available to run pilots in this area.
- The Board noted the links between the digital agenda and the recent publication of the Skills White Paper, particularly the digital poverty that is being seen across the country generally and specifically in pockets in Buckinghamshire in the wake of Covid-19, even in families with apparently moderate income levels. A significant amount of work is being undertaken to address digital poverty within the county but more needs to be done; this is also being considered through the Skills Action Plan which is very much aligned to the Digital Strategy.
- The Board asked that cellular coverage be given higher profile within the document.
- The finalised draft Digital Strategy will go to the Growth Board in March 2021, before coming to the BLEP Board for final ratification on 26 March 2021.

## 6 **DRAFT BUSINESS PLAN 2021/22**

- The Board noted the covering report/draft business plan framework previously circulated, suggesting the inclusion of metrics for measuring success, applying resource accordingly to priority areas.
- Work will be undertaken with the BBF Growth Hub/Buckinghamshire Council to create complementary business plans in order to maximise benefit to Buckinghamshire from the resources available.

## 7 **CHIEF EXECUTIVE’S REPORT**

### 7.1 BLEP Operational Revenue Budget 2021/22

- The Board approved the operational revenue budget for 2021/22, as presented and as recommended by the Audit and Finance Sub Group.

### 7.2 Enterprise Zones

- The Board noted the issue that has arisen very recently around Enterprise Zone financial reporting relating to loan repayments for advance infrastructure. It was anticipated this is a simple misunderstanding that will be rectified following reconciliation and Richard Harrington will contact Buckinghamshire Council’s Chief Executive to resolve the matter.
- Board members noted the intention to pursue use of Enterprise Zone revenue going forward to help support the work of the LEP.

### 7.3 Economic Recovery Plan

- The Board noted progress with the Economic Recovery plan, the LEP working with Buckinghamshire Council and BBF to support businesses in the county to best effect.
- Work also continues to support assets identified in the Local Industrial Strategy, particularly the Space Applications Catapult currently promoting the DISC concept to Government in the hopes of gaining support at the forthcoming Budget.

### 7.4 Risk Register

- The Board reviewed the current Risk Register as circulated, and:
  - Suggested the addition of a column on the Risk Register providing a rating for raw risk pre-mitigation, in addition to the risk post-mitigation.
  - Requested the Audit & Finance Sub Group review the LEP’s contractual relationships and consider strengthening/formalising these where required.

- Noted the delayed response from the Environment Agency to issues around the Woodlands planning application and that the executive continue to push for a response ahead of the Planning Committee meeting on 25 February 2021.

#### 7.5 Heathrow Freeport Submission

- The Board noted the information provided on the Heathrow Associated Freeport submission being prepared and the request that Buckinghamshire LEP (in addition to Thames Valley Berkshire and Enterprise M3 LEPs) become a signatory to this submission.
- It was agreed to support a carefully worded indicative expression of interest, committing neither the LEP nor its Board members to anything at this stage.

#### 7.6 Growth Hub

- The Board noted the update on the BBF Growth Hub/Skills Hub activity. BBF is receiving reports of the increasing cost for SMEs to remain in business as a result of furloughing, PPE/Covid testing requirements, shipping costs, Brexit rules of origin regulations, etc. Businesses are reporting new VAT rules are giving some cause for concern and that increased border costs following Brexit are adding further pressures.
- Reports are being received of the increasing need for ultrafast Broadband to support and facilitate businesses working efficiently from home. Improved access to appropriate digital infrastructure will be vital in the future to support skills/health service requirements.
- BBF is working on an initiative with a number of Community Boards across the county to support people into self-employment and looking at how to ensure longevity of these new Start Ups.

#### 7.7 Start Up Harbour UK Concept

- The Board noted the opportunity presented by the Start Up Harbour concept, which has been successfully deployed in other parts of the world, and the links with core elements of both the LEP's Local Industrial Strategy and Government's agendas around Green Growth and Net Zero Carbon.
- The Board also noted the ability provided through the programme to support innovation and entrepreneurship, developing and accessing much needed skills within the workforce, and creating a global innovation network.
- The Board discussed the possibility of part funding the project from unused Apprenticeship Levy (if approved) and ring-fencing part of any funding received to support those from lower socioeconomic demographics accessing the programme.

#### 8 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- The Board noted Government's announcement of £760m funding towards East West Rail; and the final round within this of the "Ideas Fund" questioning whether this might unlock branch line issues.

#### 9 **DATES OF 2021 MEETINGS**

- Friday 26 March 2021, 9.30am, venue TBC or via Teams.