

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP (BLEP) BOARD MEETING

Held Friday 21 May 2021 from 9.30am, via Teams

- Present:** Andrew M Smith, Pinewood Studios (Chair) (Part meeting)
Philippa Batting, Buckinghamshire Business First
Adrian Brown, Berkeley Strategic Land Limited
Lucy Edge, Satellite Applications Catapult
Richard Harrington, BLEP Chief Executive
Eman Martin-Vignerte, Bosch
Clare Pelham, Epilepsy Society
Prof James Tooley, University of Buckingham
Cllr Martin Tett, Buckinghamshire Council
- Apologies:** Hiren Gandhi, Blaser Mills
Martina Porter, Allspring Media
- In attendance:** Emily Cashen, MHCLG as Deputy Area Lead for Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire
Kevin Hoctor, BEIS/MHCLG Cities and Local Growth Unit
Richard Ambrose, Buckinghamshire Council (Section 151 Officer)
Ian Barham, BLEP, Partnership Director
John Rippon, BLEP, Programme Manager
Sarah Fraser

SUMMARY MINUTES

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- There were no new declarations of interest at this meeting.

2 BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL

- The Board offered congratulations to Cllr Martin Tett on being re-elected through the recent local elections, and thanks to all those that stood as candidates, whatever their particular result; participative democracy only succeeding with participation.
- Cllr Tett reported he would be the sole Local Authority BLEP Board representative until Buckinghamshire Council Cabinet and nominations to the LEP Board have been formally announced.

3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING – 26 March 2021

- The Minutes of the above meeting were agreed as an accurate record, all matters arising having been actioned or addressed within the scope of the agenda.

4 CEO REPORT

4.1 Getting Building Fund Reallocation

- The Board approved the full final list of projects to be supported as:

Bucks Rural Broadband Voucher Top Up	£300,000
Innovation Ecosystem at Westcott	£2,609,530
TESTA – Novel Test Facility at Westcott	£250,000
Bucks Operator Skills Hub	£750,000
Centre of Excellence for Rocket Engine and Flow Tests Facility	£740,000
East West Rail-Fibre provision Upgrade	£643,000
LUNAZ Applied Technologies	£250,000
D2H Technologies – Advanced Braking Facility, Buckingham	£247,470
TOTAL	£5,790,000

- The Board noted projects agreed will form the basis of a change order request to be submitted to MHCLG. It was hoped to receive an early decision from Government following submission.
- Regular progress updates on project performance will be provided to the Capital Programme Sub Group, and thence to the BLEP Board to ensure delivery/outputs are achieved.

4.2 Audit & Finance Sub Group

- It was confirmed Richardsons Accountants have been recommissioned to run the LEP's financial reporting processes, producing year end accounts for approval on 8 October 2021.
- The Board endorsed the Audit & Finance Sub Group's suggestion to undertake an advisory audit this year, moving to full audit in subsequent years.

4.3 Remuneration & Nominations Sub Group

- The Board noted the appointment of Bharti Bhoja to the position of Head of Finance & Assurance, commencing with the LEP on 7 June 2021.

4.4 Enterprise Zone Board – Implementation Plan

- The Board noted the draft EZ Implementation Plan shared with the Board papers and endorsed the opportunity to bring additional private sector directors on to the Enterprise Zone Board.

4.5 Buckinghamshire Advantage (BA)

- The Board requested Richard Harrington, Philippa Batting and Ian Thompson consider the principle (pros and cons) of retaining BA as a delivery vehicle for use with future funding streams/capital funded projects in a joint venture manner, bringing a paper back to the Board at its next meeting.

4.6 Growth Hub

- The Board noted the performance achieved by the BBF Growth Hub over the last year during the pandemic, including the creation of 804 new jobs, 266 new products and services being brought to market, and £6m funding (on top of Local Authority grants) distributed to the county's businesses.
- The leveraged funding model used by BBF, utilising core funding from Buckinghamshire Council and the LEP, has enabled BBF to return £9 towards the council and the LEP's priorities for every £1 spent.
- BBF is well embedded in growth programmes, leadership & management work, rural business support, and skills programmes. The Growth Hub has a particular expertise in facilitating decarbonisation/net zero programmes and is leading by example, recently being confirmed, following audit, as a carbon neutral organisation.

4.7 Core Funding

- £462k Growth Hub funding has been confirmed. It was anticipated LEPs will also receive Capacity Funding, as in previous years, but this is still to be confirmed.

4.8 Risk Register

- The Board endorsed the updated Risk Register, as reviewed by the Audit & Finance Sub Group.

5 **LEP REVIEW**

- The Board noted the progress made to date with the LEP review and the engagement being undertaken with individual LEPs in the various review subject areas.
- The outcome of the review was expected pre summer recess, but absolute clarity may take some time.
- LEPs within the Arc geography, plus East Anglia, have stated current geographical arrangements are most appropriate; LEPs operating a federated approach on cross border projects and with the freedom to deal with LEPs that are not immediate neighbours.
- A key element of BLEP's strength, offering the ability achieve real growth, lies in the coterminosity of the borders of the LEP, Local Authority, BBF, Health Service, etc.

6 DELIVERING AN INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

- Board members noted the paper provided, BLEP's track record in attracting innovation/R&D funding, and the companies that have most recently succeeded in bidding for this funding.
- Reflecting on Government's focus on Levelling Up and Community Renewal, it was suggested Buckinghamshire should focus on supporting businesses, particularly those aligned with Government policy and strategy, to apply to innovation funding streams; the LEP working currently with companies with an interest in Hydrogen and Space.
- It was suggested offering support to 'de-risk' the application process may accelerate the number of applications forthcoming.
- There may be a role for Buckinghamshire's universities to play in supporting businesses spinning out from university space to apply for innovation/R&D funding.
- It was suggested acquiring successful applications for this type of funding, removing confidential information, and sharing these as a 'template'.
- Reflecting on the excellent work of lead organisations, it was suggested there is also a need to quickly try and broaden the innovation message across multiple smaller organisations.

7 ECONOMIC FUNDING UPDATE

- Board members noted the report, acknowledging the increasingly fractured funding landscape and Government's move away from local priorities to discussions across broader geographies, etc.
- The Board noted the work being undertaken on submissions to the Community Renewal and Levelling Up Funds, timescales being tight and, certainly in the Levelling Up agenda, Buckinghamshire sitting as a low priority in Government's assessment, although with a clear need to 'Level Up' across the county.
- Buckinghamshire has seen growth over the last few years within sectors prioritised by the LEP, supporting Government strategy, but there is currently no funding allocated to continue this momentum. Conversations are being held with departments ahead of the planned Spending Review later in the year to try and progress this work.
- Discussions with Government continue on a Buckinghamshire Growth Proposal, with particular reference to town centre renewal and innovation.
- The Board noted the advice from the Skills Advisory Panel not to pursue the opportunity to bid to the pilot scheme to become a Skills Improvement Plan Trailblazer, there being a high resource requirement with little to be gained in return and no real clarity around the guidance received from Government.
- Reflecting on the changing funding landscape, it was suggested there is perhaps a role for LEPs to play in helping and facilitating those seeking grants, promoting growth sectors, and assisting in delivery.

8 LEP CHAIR APPOINTMENT UPDATE (Andrew Smith left the meeting; Adrian Brown assumed the Chair)

- Referring to the papers previously circulated, the Board noted the revised draft recruitment pack, the outline recruitment plan/timetable, and the Board engagement 'touch points' through the process.
- The Board, again, raised concerns around the timing of recruitment to this key post in a period of great uncertainty, considering there to be significant merit in delaying the process until the outcome of the LEP Review is received and a clear understanding of any implications has been assessed.

The Board:

- Agreed the current Chair should be part of the appointment panel, subject to any conflict of interest.
- Agreed to reprogramme the recruitment process, bringing the final recruitment pack to the Board meeting on 8 October, incorporating any changes received from Board members in the meantime, and updated in light of the LEP Review outcome.

9 DATES OF 2021 MEETINGS

- Friday 16 July 2021, 9.30am-12pm, Bosch Innovation Centre