

GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECONOMIC GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 14 February 2019 commencing at 1.30 pm at the Forest of Dean District Council Offices, Coleford.

PRESENT MEMBERSHIP:

Cllr Matt Babbage	Cllr Kate Haigh
Cllr Brian Robinson	Cllr Joe Harris
Cllr Kevin Cromwell	Cllr Bruce Hogan
Cllr Stephen Davies	Cllr Victoria Atherstone

1. WELCOME

- 1.1 Chairman of the Committee, Cllr Kevin Cromwell, opened the meeting by thanking Forest of Dean District Council (FODDC) for hosting the meeting.
- 1.2 It was explained that the purpose of the meeting was to focus on issues relating specifically to the economic agenda of the FODDC and for members to consider proposals on how engagement between the Gloucestershire First Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Joint Committee, the Joint Scrutiny Committee and the District Authorities might be improved.
- 1.3 The Chairman informed members that, from the discussion, an outcome report would be produced, incorporating the responses to any questions considered at the meeting.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllrs Klara Sudbury, Phil Awford (Tewkesbury Borough Council), Paul McCloskey (Cheltenham Borough Council) and Martin Whiteside (Stroud District Council).

Cllr Victoria Atherstone substituted for Cllr Paul McCloskey.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Brian Robinson, a member of the Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee declared he was also a member of FODDC.

4. FOREST OF DEAN DISTRICT COUNCIL

- 4.1 The Chairman invited Cllr Bruce Hogan to open the first section of the meeting, a presentation from FODDC officers on key issues and concerns affecting the economic growth and development of the Forest of Dean.
- 4.2 Cllr Hogan first introduced Peter Williams, Head of Paid Service to give an overview of the planning for economic growth in the Forest of Dean.
- 4.3 The Committee were shown the 'Vision for the District' document (Appendix 1) which gave an outline of the community outcomes & objectives for the future.
- 4.4 Members then heard an overview of the constraints that impact the district. The following points were highlighted:
 - Although appreciated as a benefit in other areas, the Forest of Dean's main constraint is its highly sensitive landscape;
 - Geographically there are good links to the south and west which provide good opportunities but these are restrained by transport links, mainly congestion on the roads;
 - A lift in house prices of around 12% which is a benefit for home owners but also further increases the affordability gap;
 - The Council's capacity and sustainability in light of budget cuts;
 - Poor attainment for education and a lack of available skilled careers in the area; and
 - The declining number of young people with an increase on an aging population (65+).
- 4.5 The second presentation was given by Wendy Jackson, Regeneration Manager at the district, who gave members an overview of the regeneration priorities.
- 4.6 It was first highlighted that there is currently around 4000 businesses registered in the area. 91% of these businesses only employ less than 5 people, with around 5 employing over 250.
- 4.7 The largest employer sector is manufacturing followed by health, construction and education which employ little over 8% in each. Members heard that tourism was emerging as a growing sector, with well over half of the commercial planning applications in the last year being tourism related.
- 4.8 The Regeneration Manager informed the Committee that in 2015 the Government set up the 'Coastal Revival Fund' to help restore coastal landmarks and bring economic growth to communities up and down the Great British Coast. Due to the District's links with the Seven and Wye, they were able to apply for £60,000 to support access improvements at Lydney Docks and Harbour. For the next stage of regeneration at Lydney Harbour, there is currently a bid in process for £1.9 million to improve accessibility and introduce facilities to encourage visitors.

- 4.9 Members heard that in Cinderford there is a committed regeneration board that is delivering sustainable projects to benefit the town and the district as a whole. The main focus for regeneration in Cinderford currently is education led. There is a £150 million investment, which has started with the completion of the new Gloucestershire College Campus.
- 4.10 The Council are also awaiting land at '5 Acres' to be transferred in order for a business case to be prepared for a new leisure facility.
- 4.11 Finally Members were advised that there is project taking place in Coleford, to build 10 new apartments and 3 new commercial buildings for rent.
- 4.12 The Committee then heard from Cllr Richard Leppington, in his role as the Vice Chair of the Forest Economic Partnership (FEP). The body was created in 2018 to be the united voice for delivering a thriving and sustainable economy.
- 4.13 Cllr Leppington reiterated the strengths and weaknesses for the district as mentioned above. He then explained these concerns have now formed the basis of 4 sub-groups within the Partnership:
- **Education and Skills:** How to get the workforce needed for the District now and in the future to power and sustain the economic growth.
 - **Transport and Infrastructure:** To look at the transport routes in the District to enable them become fit for purpose.
 - **Digital Connectivity:** To take practical steps to get the speed, reliability and connectivity to support the ways people increasingly work, live, study and play now and in the future.
 - **Bridges & Borders:** To consider the benefit of participating in the South Wales-West of England economic powerhouse.
- 4.14 Members were informed that the FEP now has 150 members representing more than 100 organisations and businesses and has submitted to 5 public consultations, including Vision 2050. The FODDC also won a Federation of Small Business award for the most innovative small business campaign in creating the FEP and facilitating its work.
- 4.15 The FEP is currently bidding for funding to support a project on electric vehicles and charging points throughout the Forest. As well as working to introduce a flexible work placement scheme for Dene Magna School.
- 4.16 Next, the Chairman introduced Dev Chakraborty, Deputy Chief Executive of GFirst LEP, who gave an update to members of their engagement with the Forest of Dean's economic growth.
- 4.17 Members were informed that the Forest had received a number of high profile funded projects in recent years, including Gloucestershire College at £2.6 million, Cinderford Link Road at £3.8 million, support for the Lydney Transport Cycle scheme at £1 million and Hartpury University developments received £1 million worth of funding.

- 4.18 GFirst have identified the following five economic challenges in the Forest:
- Not building enough affordable homes;
 - The need for a better supply of good quality employment land;
 - The provision of skills needs to better match needs of business;
 - The lack of a joined up county approach; and
 - The demographic issues of keeping and attracting young people.
- 4.19 Members were advised that GFirst is currently leading on the development of a Local Industrial Strategy for Gloucestershire. This will be in partnership with the Government and will help identify priorities to improve productivity, increase innovation and enhance infrastructure and business growth.
- 4.20 This development has a deadline of March 2020 and members of the GFirst LEP are keen to encourage all local authorities to actively engage with them on this process. There will be a timetable issued in the next few weeks for workshops.
- 4.21 The Committee heard that GFirst are looking to grow their LEP board. There is currently work underway to identify where they have gaps in representation in relation to diversity, geographical spread and the private/public organisation split.
- 4.22 Finally, members were informed that GFirst had started to produce a fresh pipeline of potential projects to invest in. There was a strong ask to members to have a think about potential developments in their area that could be put forward.
- 4.23 Following the presentations, local and county members were invited to ask questions of GFirst LEP and GCC/FODDC council officers.
- 4.24 Several local members raised concerns relating to the congestion problems at Chepstow. In response, members were advised that GCC were in ongoing discussions with Monmouthshire County Council to find a joint solution. It was emphasised however that any solution would carry a huge financial pressure on the local authorities.
- 4.25 A discussion followed on potential rail solutions for the District. Local members suggested a rail link to Lydney from the dock area, an upgrade of the current Lydney station or a second station at Elton Corner would all be possible options.
- 4.26 Members were informed that GCC are currently reviewing the Local Transport Plan, which will go to public consultation later in the year, as well as creating a new county-wide rail strategy. The latter is currently undergoing public consultation and FODDC members are encouraged to feed into this. It was acknowledged that another good opportunity for connectivity could be an idea being suggested in Bristol of a Swansea to Swindon 'corridor'.

- 4.27 In addition, members noted the downgrading of bus services in the area due to Stagecoach consistently losing money on many services. Members acknowledged the funding pressures on GCC to support bus services where stagecoach could not and noted that the FEP is currently looking into this issue.
- 4.28 The FEP is also considering an alternative approach to transport issues in the District. The group are keen to target ambition and raise aspirations for young people and parents, whilst creating opportunities within the Forest to avoid the need to constantly travel out.
- 4.29 On the topic of broadband/mobile signals, local members heard that officers were actively engaged in closing off black spots still existing in the District. In addition, by 2020 98% of the County will have superfast broadband, and discussion have started to prepare for the next stage which is fibre. Local authorities have been advised that providers for fibre/5G will approach areas that have pre-planned and are ready for installation.
- 4.30 Members discussed the benefits of creating corporate videos to showcase and support businesses in the area. Whilst the FEP has no budget to undertake something like this, it was advised that other areas have produced videos through local donations. GFirst also advised that they are currently in discussions on producing a County-wide video and so would feedback the idea of this being split per District.
- 4.31 On exploring the impact of increasing tourism links in the District, members were advised that the FODDC work with the Wye Valley Tourism Association on delivery and alignment of services. There is also a formal application for AONB status with DEFRA at the moment.
- 4.32 GFirst highlighted that the LEP has a number of business groups that represent specific sectors; one of these represents the Visitor Economy and Tourism sector. There are clear advantages of collaboration when it comes to joint bidding, for example.
- 4.33 The meeting was brought to a close by the Chairman thanking the FODDC, officers and members for their contributions.

5. FUTURE MEETINGS

20 March 2019
5 June 2019
4 September 2019
30 October 2019
20 November 2019

CHAIRPERSON

Minutes subject to their acceptance as a correct record at the next meeting

Meeting concluded at 15:40