

LOCAL MEETINGS SUMMARY MARCH 2020

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. In June 2017 the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee (GEGSC) agreed that the two 'stand alone' Committee meeting dates in February and October would be held at one of the six district council offices (arranged on a rotational basis).
- 1.2. This aimed to provide an opportunity for each authority to present to the Scrutiny Committee an overview of the economic growth related issues in their area, and for all members of the respective district to attend the meeting and present questions on local issues.
- 1.3. In addition, the Scrutiny Committee would aim to gain a better understanding of the issues impacting the economic growth agenda for each district and consider how engagement between the GFirst LEP, the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Joint Committee (GEGJC), the GEGSC and District Authorities might be improved.
- 1.4. The following report has been produced to provide the Committee with a summary of points and issues raised at all six local meetings.
- 1.5. Comments and observations from the discussion at this meeting will form an outcome report which will be submitted to the following bodies:
 - a) The GEGJC (via Cllr Cromwell as Scrutiny Chair);
 - b) Gloucestershire County Council (via the scrutiny update report to full council); and
 - c) All six District Authorities (via their local representatives on this Committee).

2. TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL – 19 OCTOBER 2017

2.1. Local Presentations

- 2.1.1. Mike Dawson, Chief Executive, Katie Power, Economic Development Officer, Annette Roberts, Head of Development Services and Lead Member for Economic Development and Promotion, Cllr Rob Bird gave an overview of issues relating specifically to the economic growth of the Tewkesbury area.
- 2.1.2. This included an update on the Joint Core Strategy (JCS), a partnership agreement between Gloucester City Council, Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC) and Tewkesbury Borough Council (TBC).

2.2. Overview of points raised

- 2.2.1. As part of a new 'economic development and tourism strategy', TBC's ambition was to become the 'growth engine' for Gloucestershire. Key

aspirations included; identifying and delivering employment land; maximising the growth potential of Junctions 9 and 10 of the M5 Motorway; the regeneration of the town centre, and delivering major housing development.

2.2.2. The Economic Development Strategy 2017-2021 for Tewkesbury identified several priority areas for consideration. These included; employment land planning; transport infrastructure improvements; providing business growth support; and improvements to employability, education and training.

2.2.3. Economic opportunities included:

- Its unique and centralised geographical location;
- Access to major transport links, (road, rail and air);
- The amount of available employment land;
- The diverse and varied economy;
- Its identity as an established base for high quality manufacturing, (including high tech aero engineering);
- Tourism; and
- Major housing development opportunities.

2.2.4. Details of some of the schemes that had been put in place to encourage businesses to locate/re-locate to the area included; support provided to develop and grow urban localities; funding opportunities; and support of the ongoing regeneration of the town centre.

2.2.5. The Council was committed to facilitating an environment aimed at promoting entrepreneurship and inward investment.

2.2.6. A particular area of interest highlighted was the innovative work being cultivated between TBC and the People's Republic of China.

2.2.7. It was encouraged for members to become more familiar with the work of the LEP in delivering growth projects for the area and requested that the Council be included in strategic planning discussions with the LEP.

2.3. Outcomes

Some of the outcomes from the discussion, included:

- a) Investment in Junctions 9 and 10 of the M5 Motorway would be key to improving accessibility to Tewkesbury and the wider Gloucestershire area.
- b) The current location of Gloucestershire Airport, (with its close proximity to the M5 Motorway), to be promoted as an additional transport link for the county;
- c) Investment in the use of the River Severn for commercial and commuting purposes could create an additional mode of sustainable transport for Gloucestershire;

- d) Tourism and Vision 2050 presentations to be added to the GEGSC work plan for further consideration;
- e) Investment in major housing development for Gloucestershire forms a key consideration for the Tewkesbury Borough Strategic Economic Plan;
- f) Investment in modular housing to be promoted to support delivery of the housing requirement for Gloucestershire;
- g) The GEGSC to consider ways of overcoming barriers to development, including seeking ideas for more collaborative engagement with people aged between 16 to 50;
- h) Issues affecting Broadband delivery in rural areas. Limited coverage in some parts of the county was still considered a barrier to economic growth;
- i) Proposals for seeking elevated status as a National Park could have an impact on future planning/development proposals. The matter was referred to the Economic Growth Senior Officer Group for further consideration.
- j) It was suggested, (as a representative on the Joint Committee and as Chairman of the Senior Officer Group), Mike Dawson attend future Scrutiny Committee meetings, if able to do so.

3. COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL – 22 FEBRUARY 2018

3.1. Local Presentations

3.1.1. Cllr Stephen Hirst, (local representative on the GEGSC), Cllr Christopher Hancock, (Cabinet Member for Enterprise and Partnerships), Nigel Adams, (Head of Democratic Services), and James Brain, (Forward Planning Manager for Cotswold District Council) gave an overview of issues affecting the local economy and the growth ambitions of the Cotswold District.

3.2. Overview of points raised

3.2.1. The adoption of the Cotswold Business Development Plan aimed to protect and enhance the environment, whilst striving to support the economic growth of the local area, ensuring sustainability for the future.

3.2.2. Setting out the corporate objectives from which to support the business plan, officers reinforced the following:

- Joint working with the GFirst LEP and agencies and communities within the district to remove any barriers to the creation of new employment opportunities;
- Supporting sustainable tourism;

- Investigating new means of increasing the number of international visitors to the Cotswolds; and
- Improving the wider economic growth of the county from improved strategic decision making and better utilisation of public sector resources and infrastructure development.

3.2.3. Economic challenges outlined included:

- Housing needs and prices;
- Ageing population;
- The need to invest in the local infrastructure;
- The net loss of B Class employment land since 2011;
- Limitations imposed by transport links in the area (in particular the A417 Missing Link Highway);
- Poor broadband and mobile phone coverage;
- Below average earnings;
- The demographic challenge;
- The low rental value of commercial properties; and
- The potential impact of the National Park status.

3.2.4. Economic opportunities outlined included:

- 'Cotswold' brand;
- The architectural and environmental heritage of the area;
- The number of research, education and training institutes;
- Interest from key employers to expand existing sites;
- Growing significant micro enterprises; and
- Anticipated opportunities from Gloucestershire 2050 initiatives.

3.2.5. The following perceptions were put forward as potential barriers to growth:

- The LEP was struggling to understand the council's economic priorities and needs;
- The local authority questioned why this perception of disconnect existed, and what could the Council, (and other Councils), do to better articulate its needs and ultimately access funding to deliver economic growth for their areas;
- Lack of involvement by the local authority in the Cotswold Business Implementation Plan – CBC requested that the council and partners be allowed to embrace and own the required actions; and
- It was acknowledged that fundamental to everything was the relationship that existed between GFirst LEP, businesses and local communities. Collaboration between the individual factions was essential to the economic growth of the district.

3.3. Outcomes

The following proposals were put forward as suggestions for the GFirst LEP to consider as potential initiatives for the future.

- a) Endorsement of, and support in implementing the Cotswold Business Implementation Plan;
- b) Endorsement of the Royal Agricultural University Growth Bid;
- c) A Physical Growth Hub Presence;
- d) Brokerage for Apprenticeships;
- e) Key Stakeholder Engagement;
- f) Cotswold Parking Study Update/Implementation;
- g) Business Support – Signposting
- h) Business Support – Assistance to address loss of business premises

4. CHELTENHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – 19 OCTOBER 2017

4.1. Local Presentations

- 4.1.1. Cllr Steve Jordan (Leader of the Council), Tim Atkins (Manager Director for Place and Growth), and Tracey Crews (Director of Planning, Place and Growth) gave an overview of issues relating specifically to the economic growth of Cheltenham Borough.

4.2. Overview of points raised

- 4.2.1. A key focus for CBC was the pursuit, enhancement and development of business opportunities in Cheltenham, directed at creating positive impact on the wider Gloucestershire area.

4.2.2. Economic opportunities outlined included:

- Location, (located at the heart of Gloucestershire);
- Connectivity, (rail, road and air);
- Links to the cyber industry;
- Local industry including heritage and tourism; and
- Proximity to the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

- 4.2.3. In relation to tourism, Cheltenham benefits significantly from recognition as a leading location for the hosting of several major cultural and sporting festivals, including; Jazz; Literature; Food and BBC Musical Events. In addition, Cheltenham Racecourse provides significant beneficial value and importance to the local economy.

4.2.4. Economic challenges outlined included:

- The lack of a centralised focal point for the town centre;

- Transport/accessibility concerns, (including limited parking arrangements);
- The controversial matter of access (people versus cars) via Boots Corner;
- Maintaining and creating local businesses on the High Street;
- Housing development;
- The demographic challenge;
- Planning/developer concerns;
- The impact of climate change; and
- Skills and education.

4.2.5. CBC continued to strive relentlessly to bid for future investment by working with local communities and partners to ‘collectively’ present a strong business case for Cheltenham and the surrounding environment.

4.2.6. Key projects underway at the time of the presentation included: Cheltenham Cyber Park Scheme; Cheltenham Spa Railway Station Scheme; investment in improvements to Junction 10 of the M5 Motorway; and creation of the Cheltenham Growth Hub. Cheltenham to also benefit from the £1.8 million investment in Gloucestershire Airport, Staverton.

4.3. Outcomes

Some of the outcomes from the discussion, included:

- a) Improved communication, (between the LEP and the districts).
- b) Lobbying of government to recognise the challenges presented to Cheltenham, (and the wider area).
- c) Collective support to promote the ‘vision’ from which to take the county forward was essential.
- d) It was felt this was a critical and exciting time for Cheltenham, with many schemes about to become reality over the course of the next few years

5. FOREST OF DEAN DISTRICT COUNCIL – 14 FEBRUARY 2019

5.1. Local Presentations

5.1.1. Peter Williams, Head of Paid Service, Wendy Jackson, Regeneration Manager and Cllr Richard Leppington, Vice-Chair of the Forest Economic Partnership, of issues relating specifically to the economic growth for the Forest of Dean.

5.2. Overview of points raised

5.2.1. There were currently around 4000 businesses registered in the area, 91% of which employed less than five people. The largest employer sector was manufacturing, followed by health, construction and education. Tourism was also a growing sector.

5.2.2. Economic challenges outlined included:

- Although appreciated as a benefit as well, its highly sensitive landscape;
- Restraint from transport links, mainly congestion on the roads;
- House prices were up around 12% which was a benefit for home owners but also further increased the affordability gap;
- The Council's capacity and sustainability in light of budget cuts;
- The need for good quality employment land;
- A lack of available skilled careers in the area; and
- The demographic challenge.

5.2.3. In 2018, the Forest Economic Partnership (FEP) was created to be the united voice for delivering a thriving and sustainable economy in the Forest of Dean. The main challenges for the district economy (as outlined above) had formed the basis for four 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 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.

5.2.4. There were now 150 members of the FEP representing more than 100 organisations and businesses and it had submitted to five public consultations, including Vision 2050. It had also won a Federation of Small Business award.

5.3. Outcomes

Some of the outcomes from the discussion, included:

- a) Highways congestion at Chepstow – 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 involved.

- b) A suggestion of rail link upgrades needed at Lydney station and additional stations/services being made available.
- c) 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.
- d) The ongoing issue of blackspots on mobile and broadband connections.
- e) The potential benefits of creating corporate videos to showcase and support business in local areas. It was advised that other areas have produced videos through local donations and it was something the LEP were exploring on a county-wide basis.
- f) The LEP had a number of business groups that represent specific sectors; such as the Visitor Economy and Tourism sector.

6. STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL – 30 OCTOBER 2019

6.1. Local Presentations

- 6.1.1. Andrew Cummings, Strategic Director of Finance, Mark Russell, Head of Planning Strategy and Cllr Simon Pickering, Chair of the Environment Committee, gave an overview of the issues affecting the local economy and the growth ambitions of the Stroud District.

6.2. Overview of points raised

- 6.2.1. Members were shown a short film that showcased the highlights of Stroud: <http://www.visitthecotswolds.org.uk/film/>
- 6.2.2. The economy was dominated by manufacturing with very large organisations such as Renishaw being based in the district. On the other hand, it also had a large number (80%) of very small businesses which did not attract business rates and had less than ten employees.
- 6.2.3. The results of an annual survey of how satisfied residents and businesses were to live and work in the district showed an above national average result reaching 94-96% satisfaction.
- 6.2.4. The Local Plan centred growth around the main towns and areas of employment, whilst also creating two new garden villages at Wisloe and Sharpness.
- 6.2.5. These new settlements would be built around the garden city principles and include 3,900 houses (with more planned post-2040), a secondary school, a sustainable transport system and new/or expanded rail stations.

- 6.2.6. Carbon neutrality would be a golden thread running through the Local Plan and whole council operation in order to keep on track with the Council's targets.
- 6.2.7. There was no reason why economic growth and the protecting of the environment could not go 'hand in hand'.
- 6.2.8. Examples were given of the 'Warm and Well' and 'Target 2050 Loan' schemes retrofitting existing housing to be more energy efficient and reduce their energy consumption. In turn this has reduced energy bills and CO2 emissions in the long-term.
- 6.2.9. The adoption of a Natural Flood Management scheme had seen a significant reduction in flood warnings (at different stages) between 2012 and 2016.
- 6.2.10. Economic challenges outlined included:
- The demographic challenge – over the next 25 years the working population in Stroud would rise by 2.6% whereas those retired would rise by 56%;
 - House prices – the average house in Stroud was just over nine times the average salary in the area;
 - Resourcing Economic Development;
 - Living within our environmental limits;
 - Transport links (including M5 congestion); and
 - Post-Brexit economy.

6.3. Outcomes

Some of the outcomes from the discussion included:

- a) It was vital to have a 'one county' joined up approach towards housing, business and employment land. In the next 25-30 years, the county would need to deliver housing for a 50% rise in its population and it was not viable long-term to continue to build around existing settlements.
- b) It was noted the existing planning techniques also had a knock on effect for public transport capacity and highways congestion.
- c) Members were advised that Cabinet Members, Chief Executive, Leaders and other relevant senior officers and members from across Gloucestershire would be having meetings over the next few months to discuss a number of key issues such as strategic planning, climate change, major infrastructure, Gloucestershire and skills and employment.
- d) It was suggested that there needed to be a county-wide discussion on how to address carbon neutral housing as a collective and attract companies such as WeLink to 'buy into' the area and offer their services locally. This referenced retrofitting existing housing as well as using things such as modular housing for future developments.

- e) An increase in housing demand, coupled with a move to retrofit/produce carbon neutral housing may lead to a void in the availability of skilled tradesperson locally. The move away from traditional trade qualifications and the demographic challenge in the county would also add to this.
- f) Making sure education providers were providing the right qualifications that fit the growth demand in the county.
- g) It was queried how, going forward, all seven authorities would co-ordinate their climate change strategies.
- h) The Committee requested to explore the developing green industry in the county in more detail, specifically in relation to modular building.

7. GLOUCESTER CITY COUNCIL – 26 FEBRUARY 2020

7.1. Local Presentations

- 7.1.1. Cllr Paul James, former Leader and Cabinet Member for Regeneration and the Economy for Gloucester City, David Evans, City Growth & Delivery Manager and Ian Edwards, Head of Place, gave an overview issues affecting the local economy and the growth ambitions of the Gloucester City.

7.2. Overview of points raised

- 7.2.1. Regeneration of the City had been the best part of a 20 year project, dating back to the first major scheme at the opening of the Oxstalls Campus in 2002 to form part of the University of Gloucestershire (UoG).
- 7.2.2. Other projects since have included; Southwest Bypass, the Greyfriars, Railway Triangle, Baker Quay and Blackfriars developments, bus station, Project Pilgrim at the Cathedral, UoG Business School and Kings Quarter.
- 7.2.3. The Council has recently purchased a number of sites including the Eastgate Shopping Centre – this reflected an ambition of the Council to have influence over the future development of major sites in the City to make sure it provided the best benefit for the City as a whole.
- 7.2.4. Unlike the national picture, Gloucester had a mixture of large, traditional employers and new SME's in emerging industries. Large employers in Gloucester are double the South West average- meaning the local economy was exposed to the changing nature of productivity and those sectors in decline e.g. traditional manufacturing.
- 7.2.5. There was a significant challenge with the high street and retails changing role nationally. There needed to be a developed offer for people to spend more time in the city centre.

7.2.6. Economic challenges outlined included:

- Unemployment relatively low but the highest in the county;
- Several areas of deprivation;
- Demographic challenge (although noting a higher population of young residents compared to the rest of the county);
- Low property values but high development costs;
- An over-reliance on public sector jobs – a lot of business growth takes place on the boundary of Gloucester and outside the administrative boundaries;
- Low qualification rates, particularly at NVQ4+;
- Changing role of city centre;
- Affordability issues around grade A office space alongside declining standard of City Centre offices;
- Expanding the success of the Quays and Docks beyond;
- Making sure the economic benefits of growth and investment spread to all in the community; and
- Addressing climate change action.

7.2.7. Economic opportunities outlined included:

- High proportion of young residents;
- Potential to attract niche/specialist retail, leisure operators and offices to the Centre;
- First class higher education facilities at the UoG;
- Development of emerging and growing business sectors e.g. advanced manufacturing, cultural, cyber security, digital, nuclear etc.;
- Environmental technologies and ‘greening business’;
- The developing culture industry to be used a driver of growth;
- Being awarded Purple Flag status; and
- A potential for Gloucester to be the catalyst for action on the demographic challenge due to its younger population.

7.3. Outcomes

Some of the outcomes from the discussion, included:

- a) A recognised need for schools, Higher and Further Education providers to respond to the changing business needs of not just the City, but county-wide and even nationally.
- b) The skills gap in the county not only related to young people but also older workers who might not possess the skills needed for modern day jobs.
- c) A need to provide training and apprenticeship opportunities for all levels of skills and not to focus entirely on the technical end of the job market.

- d) The job market also needed to address an increase in demand for skilled jobs such as retrofitting houses to become carbon neutral.
- e) The need to recognise that projects such as Cyber Central were not just for the benefit of Cheltenham but for the county as a whole.
- f) Due to the decline in retail, there was a need to repurpose city centres to include a retail, business and housing mix.
- g) Cheltenham and Gloucester offered two different culture experiences; this was a growing sector in the City. The need to recognise that the City and the Town have a complementary offer to each other and should not be seen as in competition.
- h) The need to not only providing skills opportunities for young people but also helping them to build resilience against issues they might face.
- i) There was an issue of residents not knowing what's going on in terms of activities or regeneration etc.