

CONFIDENTIAL

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LEP (BLEP) CAPITAL PROGRAMME SUB GROUP MEETING

Held Thursday 7 January 2021 from 3.30pm via Teams

Present:	Adrian Brown (Chair)	(AB)
	Cllr Steven Broadbent	(SB)
	Hiren Gandhi	(HG)
	Richard Harrington	(RH)
	Clare Pelham	(CP)
In attendance:	John Rippon	(JR)
	Sarah Fraser	(SF)

MINUTES

ACTION

1 PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Sub Group noted the update provided on Local Growth Fund (LGF) and Getting Building Fund (GBF) programme expenditure, and the progress being made with each of the projects outlined.

Further discussion centred around the below.

1.1 University of Buckingham

It was confirmed the University is in receipt of several allocations of funding from the LEP to establish a School of Computing, Centre for AI and an iHub Living Lab:

- £2m LGF agreed in 2018/19, following full business case appraisal, to refurbish existing premises.
- A further £750k LGF loan and £2m GBF agreed in July 2020 to broaden plans and create a brand new facility developed on the Tingewick Road site.

As a direct result of the impact of Covid-19 it was reported the University is no longer able to develop the Tingewick Road site, wishes to revert to the original scheme agreed to refurbish existing premises, and has asked the LEP to withdraw the additional funding allocated in July 2020.

The Sub Group considered the delay in the University sharing this decision with the LEP was disappointing, recognising the University has been dealing with Covid-19 and has been through a significant management restructure in the last few months.

Reassurance was offered that the University is able to utilise the remaining £2m LGF allocated against the original scheme by the end of March 2021, as per the agreement in place between the LEP and the University.

The Sub Group:

- Requested a review of the original scheme be carried out in short order to ensure this remains fit for purpose and, if so, supported the recommendation to revert to the original project for the School of Computing and AI Centre, withdrawing funding allocated in July 2020.
- Agreed that any future request from the University for further funding (eg if the Tingewick Road site comes forward again for development) would be considered within the round of open calls issued and would be subject to full appraisal.

JR

1.2 National Film and Television School (NFTS)

Further to the paper circulated, the Sub Group noted the additional financial contribution being sought by the NFTS from DCMS (the LEP having awarded £2.99m GBF and £150k LGF in July 2020) in order to achieve the necessary match and progress expansion plans at the school; DCMS support being required to progress plans.

The Sub Group:

- Requested a letter of comfort be sought from the Finance Director at the NFTS regarding the significant donation to be received by the school towards the cost of expansion by an unnamed donor, assuming the DCMS funding is secured.
- Supported the recommendation to withdraw and reallocate £150k LGF funding awarded in July 2020 that will not now be defrayed prior to the end of March 2021.
- Supported the recommendation to delay any decision on GBF funding awarded in July 2020 (and an additional £150k GBF to offset LGF funding removed) for this scheme pending the outcome of discussions with DCMS (decision expected March 2021). JR to update the Sub Group once the DCMS decision has been received.

JR

JR

1.3 Eastern Link Round South

(SB declared an interest in these discussions and left the meeting at this point)

The Sub Group:

- Noted the update on the Eastern Link Road South transport scheme, and that a final decision is expected around planning permission on 25 February 2021 when the Planning Committee next meet, at which point arrangements around Section 106 agreements will also be considered.
- As per the discussion at the last meeting of the full BLEP Board, supported the continued £9.96m investment in this scheme.

(SB rejoined the meeting)

2 REALLOCATION OF GRANT FUNDING

The Sub Group noted the possible options outlined in the paper provided to use funds requiring reallocation (currently £750k LGF and £2m GBF to be withdrawn from the University of Buckingham, and £150k LGF to be withdrawn from the NFTS).

The Sub Group:

- Supported the recommendation to ‘flip’ £750k funding on the Westcott DISC project, replacing £750k GBF allocation with £750k LGF monies to be used by end March 2021, noting that there is precedent within the programme for ‘flipping’ funding (reducing Westcott’s initial GBF allocation by £750k). JR to confirm how the remaining £150k LGF will be utilised prior to 31 March 2021. JR
- Supported the recommendation to move to open call before the end of January for expressions of interest for new projects to utilise £2.75m returned GBF funding (£2m from University of Buckingham and £750k ‘flipped’ at Westcott).
- Asked that the selection criteria for the open call be carefully considered prior to publication of the call to ensure applications are received under these criteria to assist with scoring/assessment. JR to share the call criteria and timescale for receipt of bids/appraisal/decision, etc, with the Sub Group for comments prior to publication. JR/ALL
- Asked that the open call be issued through the LEP website, Buckinghamshire Business First website, local press, radio etc, to ensure as wide a range of project applications as possible. JR
- Recognising that GBF project allocations were initially decided by Government and that going to open call may open up alternative options (including the LEP bidding for the funding to progress the Broadband agenda), asked that the executive take soundings from Government around the process for agreeing reallocation of funding, possibly to projects not previously agreed by Government. RH

3 GENERAL POINTS**The Sub Group requested:**

- Future papers provide options as well as recommendations. JR/RH
- Suggested, in future, the LEP include the option of returning funding to Government in the event project sponsors are unable to deliver projects to programme deadlines, leaving the LEP too little time to “spend money well”. JR/RH
- The LEP ensures that positive publicity opportunities are taken eg around the new Innovation Hub being established at Stoke Mandeville Hospital. JR

4 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Nothing of note.

5 DATES OF 2021 MEETINGS (all 2-4pm)

- 16 February
- 13 May
- 4 August
- 9 November