

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

Held Friday 27 January 2023 from 9.30am at Buckinghamshire New University,
Queen Alexandra Road, High Wycombe, Bucks HP11 2JZ

Present: Andrew M Smith, Pinewood Studios (Chair) (Part meeting)
Philippa Batting, Buckinghamshire Business First
Adrian Brown, The Berkeley Group plc (Chairing for item 5.1)
Jenny Craig, Bucks College Group
Hiren Gandhi, Blaser Mills
Richard Harrington, BLEP Chief Executive
Eman Martin-Vignerte, Bosch
Martina Porter, All Spring Media
Cllr Steven Broadbent, Buckinghamshire Council
Cllr Martin Tett, Buckinghamshire Council
Cllr Gareth Williams, Buckinghamshire Council

Apologies Lucy Edge, Satellite Applications Catapult
Clare Pelham, Epilepsy Society

In attendance: Robert Curtis, BEIS/DLUHC, Cities and Local Growth Unit
Richard Ambrose, Buckinghamshire Council (Part meeting)
Claire Hunter, Buckinghamshire Council (representing Section 151 Officer)
Ian Barham, BLEP, Partnership Director
Sarah Fraser

SUMMARY MINUTES

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- Andrew Smith declared a conflict of interest with an item to be raised under any other business, Pinewood Studios' request for a letter of support for its changed expansion plans.

2 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING – 9 December 2022

- The minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2022 were agreed as an accurate record.

2.1 Matters arising (not covered elsewhere on the agenda):

- 2.1.1 • **NFTS Costar Bid** – A letter of support has been drafted for this bid and work is underway with Royal Holloway to ensure alignment with the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) in terms of skills required. Shortlist decisions are due mid February; the process taking 3 months thereafter to reach a decision.
- 2.1.2 • **Plastron/European Astrotech Proposal** – Further to completion of satisfactory due diligence, funding of £15k has been approved for this project.
- 2.1.3 • **Oxford-Cambridge Pan-Regional Partnership:**
- Government is supporting this project; £2.5m provided for establishment of the Partnership.
 - A Shadow Board is in place progressing establishment; the Partnership ultimately being led by an independent Chair and independent Board, focussing on key industries operating in the region.
 - To date, Buckinghamshire representatives have received no approach re involvement with this project and questioned whether it is required when England's Economic Heartland is already established and operating across a similar geography.
 - Government will not enforce Buckinghamshire being part of this new partnership; not being a member will not preclude bidding for funding available. Board members did not wish economic development for Buckinghamshire to be restricted by "red lines" of the new partnership.

- Board members questioned how priorities identified for the pan-regional partnership align/will be fed into LSIPs, where LEP areas are being encouraged to work with those geographies with whom they have an affinity/shared priorities. **Robert Curtis to confirm.**
- **Robert Curtis to confirm whether planning/housing considerations are included in the remit for this pan-regional partnership – reports currently are contradictory.**
- **Robert Curtis to confirm what the pan-regional partnership is designed to do and geographies to be covered.**

- 2.1.4 ● **Brownfield site development** – Submissions re the opportunity to bid for development on Brownfield sites are required by March. BLEP will assist the Council, as required.

All other actions arising had been completed, were to be discussed within the context of the current agenda or are ongoing workstreams.

3 BUCKINGHAMSHIRE PLACE-BASED GROWTH MODEL

- The future for LEPs is unclear; Government funding has ceased for capital investment, and core funding announcements are awaited for 2023/24, both for LEPs and for Growth Hubs.
- Discussions at the Buckinghamshire LEP Board and the current Buckinghamshire Growth Board have confirmed a wish for Buckinghamshire to be “master of its own destiny”, removing reliance on central government, to enable the county to progress local priorities.
- A steering group is investigating a new place-based growth model for Buckinghamshire, which would see the suggested establishment of a number of new Boards (membership to be agreed), including an Enterprise & Investment Board (built upon the existing LEP Board) to act as a catalyst for interventions around employment, skills, growth, etc.
- This new model would see the establishment of a Pooled Investment Fund (PIF), utilising local resources, primarily from the LEP and the Council, as seed funding (other funding to be pursued/sourced) through which to progress local priorities; recognising there will need to be checks and balances in place in spending/investing this money.
- Buckinghamshire Business First (BBF) will continue to manage the Growth Hub and Skills Hub/Skills Board programmes, with key metrics to be agreed on what is to be delivered for funding provided.
- BBF will continue to be important within this structure, being the organisation focussed on and working most directly with, particularly, SMEs. The Enterprise & Investment Board will be focussed on larger strategic investment/programmes but will also likely establish a small fund for SME projects, as well as running a longer term investment programme to address key challenges being faced by businesses, facilitating open infrastructure to allow SMEs to grow and develop.
- More work/clarity is needed around Terms of Reference/governance for each of the planned Boards, acknowledging that, whilst the need for pace is recognised, appropriate scrutiny is also required.
- Population of the new Boards (open recruitment vs nomination) is to be agreed, with the suggestion that business representation be drawn from small and large businesses and businesses offering specific knowledge/expertise. It was also suggested each of the Boards in the structure be 50/50 private business/public sector, acknowledging there is a desire to reduce duplication of personnel/agenda.
- There needs to be greater consideration of work being carried out to develop the LSIP to ensure alignment, to harness to best effect the work already being undertaken, and to take full advantage of future funding that may be available to support this agenda.
- Government agenda is focussed on delivering more autonomy to local areas and the current proposal delivers this for Buckinghamshire; noting relationships are developing with other regions with similar sector priorities.
- Board members questioned capacity/experience available to manage the transition process and take forward proposed new structures, whilst maintaining agility seen in the current structures.
- The initial PIF will be relatively small and there will be a need to be more “commercial” going forward to maintain/increase the size of the investment pot leveraging further public/private sector funding. Further investment will require strong business cases being brought forward.

- There is more work to be done to establish Buckinghamshire’s “identity/brand” and consider where the county sees itself in the next 2/5/10 years, accessing funding to support this vision, and seeking to “future-proof” the county for what may develop in years to come.

The Board:

- **Agreed unanimously, in principle, and subject to satisfactory governance and evaluation and monitoring frameworks being in place, to move towards a new Buckinghamshire Place-Based Growth Model, noting that greater detail on governance/structure/ membership etc will be brought to the next BLEP Board meeting.**
- **Agreed to write to the DLUHC Secretary of State (cc BEIS Secretary of State) questioning whether there would be any objection/impediment to progressing an accelerated path to early integration of the LEP in preparation for a County Deal agreement.**
- **Agreed the transfer of Broadband Gainshare income into a PIF and for the Enterprise & Investment Board (and BLEP Board in the interim) to take over management of the Enterprise Zone programme, in line with the current approved Memorandum of Understanding between Buckinghamshire Council and BLEP, noting currently no surplus in the Enterprise Zone will be distributed until 2026.**
- **Requested the BLEP executive work with Buckinghamshire Council and partners on a financial projection for the PIF to set a 5 year financial framework and target for future programme.**

4 CHIEF EXECUTIVE’S REPORT

The Board noted the contents of the Chief Executive’s report previously circulated, and particularly:

- 4.1 • **Delivery Plan** - The focus remains on local assets with latency for growth, creating the framework to enable growth and to facilitate fusion with different sectors; this has been successful to date.
- 4.2 • **Capital Investment Programme:**
 - Agreements have been signed around development of a swimming flume testing facility at the Silverstone Sports Engineering Hub.
 - Consultants have been commissioned to produce a business case for the next Westcott DISC aiming to open the site up, creating a hub for business, a conference facility, space for SMEs and skills development (possibly through an academy) and creation of a facility that will tell the story of Westcott, open to the public.
- 4.3 • **Annual Performance Review** – This will take place with Government in the next few weeks; there are no concerns around BLEP’s performance.
- 4.4 • **Budget** - Board members noted the update provided on the current financial position and that a more detailed update will be provided at the March Board meeting.
- 4.5 • **Growth Hub** - Board members noted the update provided on Growth Hub activity and the feedback received from businesses at a recent MP roundtable around delays experienced obtaining planning decisions on commercial space. Businesses have questioned the possibility of implementing an accelerated planning process where employment is involved.
- 4.6 • **Enterprise Zone:**
 - **Silverstone:** Work is progressing well at Silverstone with new high profile tenants taking up occupation in recent weeks. The end of the current programme is approaching and discussions are underway around the long term growth potential of the site.
 - **Woodlands:** Work is underway to develop a strategy to deliver the wider Woodlands site. Once a realisable planning consent is achieved the site will be taken to market to seek development partners.
 - **Accelerator Fund:** Applications have been received for the first round of Accelerator Fund funding.
- 4.7 • **Skills Advisory Panel (SAP)**
 - Work is focussed on development of the LSIP. The first meeting of the Provider Network took place w/c 16 January with 26 organisations represented, and sector work is progressing. The first draft of the final LSIP will be presented at the next SAP meeting (10 March 2023).

- Buckinghamshire has benefitted greatly from the involvement of BBF as the Employment Representative Body leading production of the LSIP; the county being far ahead of many other areas in the country.
- SAP member, Community Impact Bucks, is struggling to recruit volunteers and would be delighted to hear from anyone able to volunteer time, or businesses able to support staff in volunteering.
- Work is underway to collate a Skills calendar on the Skills Hub website, bringing together all skills events taking place in the county in one place, avoiding duplication and overlap. It was suggested skills events would benefit from targeted promotion, particularly in deprived wards, to ensure everyone is aware of the opportunities available, and that it may be useful to try and arrange an “Opportunity Bucks” coach to pick up students/job changers unable to get to key events for whatever reason.

5 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(Andrew Smith and Richard Ambrose left the meeting; Adrian Brown took over as Chair)

5.1 Pinewood Support Letter

- Philippa Batting declared an interest in these discussions in that BBF are involved with plans for the Centre Stage Growth Hub to be established as part of the development.
- Further to discussion, and acknowledging the significant new employment opportunities offered, Board members voted to submit a letter of support for the revised application presented by Pinewood Studios Group, noting that Local Authority members of the BLEP Board voted as BLEP Board members rather than as Buckinghamshire Council Members.

6 FUTURE MEETINGS

- **Board meetings:** 24 March, 26 May, 28 July, 13 October, 15 December 2023
- **Audit & Finance Sub Group:** 4 May, 21 September, 30 November
- **Capital Programme Sub Group:** 5 May, 22 September, 1 December
- **AGM:** 17 November 2023