

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

Held Friday 22 July 2022 from 9.30am at Westcott Innovation Centre, Westcott, HP18 0XB

Present: Andrew M Smith, Pinewood Studios (Chair) Richard Harrington, BLEP Chief Executive
Philippa Batting, Buckinghamshire Business First Eman Martin-Vignerte, Bosch
Adrian Brown, The Berkeley Group plc Clare Pelham, Epilepsy Society
Lucy Edge, Satellite Applications Catapult Cllr Steven Broadbent, Buckinghamshire Council
Hiren Gandhi, Blaser Mills Cllr Martin Tett, Buckinghamshire Council

Apologies: Martina Porter, All Spring Media
Cllr Gareth Williams, Buckinghamshire Council

In attendance: Nigel Mackenzie, Bentley Property Developments Ltd (Part meeting)
Robert Curtis, BEIS/DLUHC, Cities and Local Growth Unit
Richard Ambrose, Buckinghamshire Council (Section 151 Officer)
Ian Barham, BLEP, Partnership Director
Sarah Fraser

SUMMARY MINUTES

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- There were no new declarations of interest at this meeting.
- With the Section 151 Officer's acknowledgment, and with no decision to be taken at this meeting re Growth Hub funding, BLEP Directors also sitting on the BBF Board would remain present for the entirety of the meeting.

2 WESTCOTT DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

- Nigel Mackenzie shared outline details around future investment plans at the Westcott site for further development of science and research facilities, primarily clean rooms and centres linked to propulsion, noting the intention to make these facilities as flexible as possible in design.
- The Board noted recruitment on site remains an issue, possibly due to Westcott's location.

The Board:

- **Agreed to set time aside at the next meeting to discuss the skills/jobs mismatch being seen in the county and the difficulties in recruiting staff being reported by businesses in the county.**

(Nigel Mackenzie left the meeting)

3 MATTERS ARISING – 27 MAY 2022 BOARD MEETING

- The minutes of the meeting held on 27 May 2022 were agreed as an accurate record.

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

- 3.1.1 • **Growth Hub 'gap funding'** – The Audit & Finance Sub Group has requested further information which has now been received and will be considered by the Sub Group before end July.
- 3.1.2 • **Space economy:**
 - The value of space to the UK economy was valued at £16.4bn in 2020, Bucks' share being c 1%.
 - Estimated growth in the space market to 2030 is in the region of £400bn, the UK attempting to secure 10% of this; the anticipation is that Bucks will continue to secure 1% of this market.
 - Speculative development of floorspace will be important in meeting the needs of companies playing into this agenda.
 - The Space Applications Catapult is continuing dialogue with Patrizia (an excellent landlord) re moving away from development of generic buildings and it was suggested the LEP may wish to be involved in these discussions.

4 CHAIR UPDATE – NATIONAL POLITICAL OUTLOOK

- The Board reflected on recent positive meetings held with Ministers to progress discussions on a County Deal; these discussions subsequently being paused by the spate of Ministerial resignations leading to the Prime Minister agreeing to step down.
- The Board noted engagement will resume with central Government once Ministerial appointments are announced in September.

5 ASSURANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK/ENTERPRISE ZONE BOARD DELEGATION

5.1 Assurance & Accountability Framework

- Board members noted the annual review of the Assurance and Accountability Framework and the revised document circulated thereafter with the Board papers.
- **A number of amendments to the document were suggested. The Board requested the document clarify whether powers are delegated to the Chair of a Sub Group or to the Sub Group as a whole, who would then only make decisions with a quorum present.**

5.2 Enterprise Zone

- The Board noted the Terms of Reference shared for Enterprise Zone Board operation, bringing this Sub Group into line with the Audit & Finance and Capital Programme Sub Groups, and creating a degree of consistency across all.
- The Board were reminded it is incumbent upon BLEP to report to Government on progress with the Enterprise Zone programme.
- A Memorandum of Understanding between the LEP and Buckinghamshire Council has now been finalised for the next 5 year period.
- Enterprise Zone Director, Anthony Sowden, will be retiring in September and recruitment is underway for a replacement to maximise returns from this programme in the coming few years. It was confirmed the intention is to provide more structured and comprehensive reporting to the Enterprise Zone and LEP Boards on financial elements of the programme going forward.

It was agreed:

- **To invite Anthony Sowden to provide an update at the next BLEP Board meeting on progress with the Enterprise Zone programme, the delivery plan in place for the coming 5 years, and powers delegated from the BLEP Board to the Enterprise Zone Board to deliver this programme.**

6 BUSINESS/DELIVERY PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

- Following discussion at previous meetings with regards to Business Plan and Budget for the 2022-25 period, the LEP submitted a Delivery Plan to Government at the end of June to trigger release of agreed core funding. The Board report circulated, provided an overview of activity against the approved Business and Delivery Plans.
- Targets outlined in the Delivery Plan are aimed at driving GVA growth, innovation and inclusivity, linking talent and skills to opportunity. In the absence of any surety around future Government policy/programme, the Delivery Plan also looks at utilising LEP assets in order to maintain momentum.

The Board suggested:

- **Operationalising the Delivery Plan to include KPIs, reporting timetables, expected trajectory, gap analysis, risks, capacity etc. Richard Harrington to raise with the Capital Programme Sub Group for consideration, bringing back to the main BLEP Board thereafter.**
- **Providing additional narrative on Enterprise Zone investment around the future potential business rates receipts and to what priorities these might be applied.**
- **Providing an update at the Capital Programme Sub Group on the success of the grants given out to businesses by the LEP during the pandemic, and also providing feedback on the impact of the Additional Restrictions Grants provided to businesses.**

- **Establishing a “learning group” to share best practice where the LEP has been successful in delivery in whatever form.**
- Board members noted the recent bid submitted by the LEP with BBF to the DCMS Creative Industries Sector Fund for £1.4m (no match funding required) has been successful in progressing to the next round; final applications due to be submitted by end August.

7 INTEGRATION PLAN UPDATE

- With publication of the Levelling Up White Paper, Government policy has clearly moved towards devolution and LEPs received a ministerial letter in March explaining what this might entail. LEPs have also received a request to complete a pro-forma outlining what integration might look like in the local area within the context of a County Deal.
- In order to secure a future County Deal, Government requires LEPs to integrate into a local democratically-led structure; the form this structure would take is to be determined locally. Metro Dynamics were commissioned jointly by BLEP and Buckinghamshire Council to look at possible governance structures to meet this requirement.
- As investigation into the opportunities presented through this changing agenda progress, two new groups are being established:
 - Joint Growth Partners Steering Group, with membership being drawn from the LEP Board and the Growth Board, tasked with developing an Integration Plan.
 - Integration Working Group (draft Terms of Reference previously circulated), to define the benefits/risks/pros/cons, etc, of integration, and opportunities available for closer working, in addition to carrying out any relevant due diligence.
- Board members voiced an ambition to look at all resources available and what might be achieved through pooling these resources (seeking additional private sector match) to deliver some really significant new and exciting projects.
- It was suggested the Integration Working Group could consider integration of other institutions, not just Buckinghamshire Council with BLEP, should this better support what is needed to deliver programme in the county; recognising that to achieve a County Deal would require the LEP to be integrated into a democratically-led organisation. The Working Group might also like to consider whether organisations retaining their independence but working in Partnership would also offer opportunities.
- It is critical Buckinghamshire has a clear and inspiring vision of what it wishes to achieve in the medium/long term so that people might come together around this. Consideration also needs to be given to ensuring the vision agreed has longevity, even in the face of changing political scenarios.
- Whatever structure is finally agreed upon, and no decisions have been made at this stage, Board members were clear that the voice of business must be heard and remain central to discussions around the future of economic development in the county, and that the final structures must be able to access all available funding eg bids for skills funding must now be led by employer representative bodies (not LEPs or Local Authorities) and visitor economy/tourism monies are to be channelled through Destination Management Organisations (not LEPs or Local Authorities).
- The Integration Working Group met on 20 July 2022, agreed Terms of Reference and workstreams to be covered in due diligence, the outcome of which will be fed back to Growth and BLEP Boards.
- In the absence of a County Deal, it was noted Government has made it clear it would continue funding LEPs for the next year; there are also funds available to BLEP within the Enterprise Zone. The Board noted the significant contribution BLEP has made to the economic development landscape since inception, eg hundreds of thousands of sq ft of floorspace delivered that would not have happened without the direct intervention of the LEP.
- Board members agreed the route to securing private investment in the county revolves around being able to tell a compelling story, and this must be a prime consideration in a vision for the future, and a guiding principle in operation of the Growth Partners Steering Group and Integration Working Group.
- Robert Curtis was asked to confirm the team in Government to liaise with around a County Deal.

The Board:

- Supported establishment of the joint Growth Partners Steering Group (full membership to be agreed, but to include the Chairs of the Growth Board and BLEP) to develop an Integration Plan for joint Boards' approval under the guiding principle of maximising investment in Buckinghamshire's economy to effect inclusive growth.
- Supported establishment of the Integration Working Group, reporting to the Growth Partners Steering Group, to define the benefits/risks, pros/cons (incorporating points raised above) of County Deal integration, of early integration, and to carry out a due diligence review.
- Agreed to submit a joint letter from the Growth and BLEP Boards to Government signalling Buckinghamshire's general direction of travel, its ambition to pursue a County Deal, and the intention to investigate development of an integration plan in line with this; the final decision re integration to be made once the Integration Working Group has completed its full due diligence and reported.
- Requested the executive team provide an updated indicative timetable (in discussion with the Growth Partners Steering Group and Integration Working Group).

8 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

- The Board noted the contents of the Chief Executive's report, previously circulated and offered its thanks to Richard Ambrose, as he steps down from his role as Section 151 Officer, for all the support shown to the LEP in this capacity over many years. Richard will continue to attend BLEP Board meetings in his capacity as lead on the Integration Working Group.
- Further to the report provided, the Board noted:
 - Recruitment is underway for new BLEP Board directors and a number of vacant executive roles.
 - The Space Expo will be taking place at Westcott on 28 July 2022.
 - Work on the annual report is in the process of being concluded; a draft will be shared with Board members in the next few weeks.

The Board:

- Endorsed the "Opportunity Bucks – Succeeding For All" document produced by the Levelling Up Board in response to Government's Levelling Up policy, dealing with the inclusion agenda.
- Noted and approved the updated Risk Register circulated with Board papers.

8.1 Growth Hub Update

- The Board noted the successful events held in the last few months, including the county's first SEND Skills Show, and the upcoming events:
 - 28 September – Buckinghamshire Business Awards at the Waterside Theatre
 - 10 November – "Finance As Funds For Growth" with British Business Bank at Pinewood.
- The issues being faced by businesses at the coalface were reported to be around: energy costs; inflation; Ukraine war/supply chains; absenteeism due to covid and norovirus; recruitment issues; the increased cost of being in business; and shipping costs.
- **The Growth Hub is currently underwriting costs of £600k in unpaid invoices submitted to Government for activity undertaken during the last year. It was suggested approaching the LEP Network for assistance in bringing pressure to bear on Government to settle these outstanding invoices.**

9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 9.1 • **East West Rail** - Once new Ministers are appointed the LEP will submit early correspondence restating the case for East West Rail and, particularly, the Aylesbury link to this railway.
- 9.2 • **Kevin Hocter** - The Board offered its thanks to Kevin Hocter, who is moving to a new role with BEIS/DLUHC supporting SEMLEP, for all the support shown in Government for Buckinghamshire in the last few years.

10 FUTURE BOARD MEETINGS

- **Board meetings** (9.30am-12pm) - 30 September, 9 December 2022.