

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

Held Friday 28 July 2023 from 9.30am at Pinewood Studios, Pinewood Road, Iver Heath, Bucks SLO 0NH

Present: Andrew M Smith, Pinewood Studios (Chair) (Part meeting)
Philippa Batting, Buckinghamshire Business First
Adrian Brown, The Berkeley Group plc
Jenny Craig, Bucks College Group
Richard Harrington, BLEP Chief Executive
Martina Porter, All Spring Media
Cllr Steven Broadbent, Buckinghamshire Council
Cllr Martin Tett, Buckinghamshire Council

Apologies Hiren Gandhi, Blaser Mills
Clare Pelham, Epilepsy Society
Eman Martin-Vignerte, Bosch
Cllr Gareth Williams, Buckinghamshire Council

In attendance: Nigel MacKenzie, Patrizia (Part meeting)
Jon Wardle, National Film & TV School (Part meeting)
Robert Curtis, BDT/DLUHC, Cities and Local Growth Unit
David Skinner, Buckinghamshire Council (Section 151 Officer)
Ian Barham, BLEP, Partnership Director
James Moorhouse, BLEP, Economic & Labour Market Analyst
Matt Peachey, BLEP, Head of Enterprise Zone Development
Sarah Fraser

SUMMARY MINUTES

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- Andrew Smith declared an interest in discussions around the Co-Star programme and confirmed he would withdraw from the meeting at the point this was discussed.

2 WESTCOTT HUB DEVELOPMENT AND MASTERPLAN UPDATE

- Nigel MacKenzie provided an overview of the state of play at Westcott, where the LEP has invested funding, the level/shape of demand for further development, and the Westcott Masterplan.
- The Board noted the opportunity to develop additional floorspace over the next 10-15 years. The rationale for prioritising development within the Enterprise Zone site being the ability to retain future business rates for locally determined economic development initiatives.
- It was suggested the Westcott site is now of a magnitude to requires appropriate facilities in terms of meeting/co-working space, catering, training facilities, etc, to support the future key cluster growth.
- BLEP Board members were reminded of the competitive bid submitted, with support from the LEP, to the UK Space Agency Space Cluster Infrastructure Fund (SCIF) to enhance space capability at the site for the benefit of the whole of the UK. The outcome of this bid is expected in September.
- BLEP has previously approved a £500k Westcott Incubator and Accelerator programme. The Enterprise Zone Board, when in operation, approved commissioning a business case to establish the need for a hub facility at Westcott and to use this to leverage external investment into the site.
- No BLEP funding commitment has been given to the hub development proposal at this stage. Once the outcome of the SCIF bid is known, a future request may come to the BLEP Board for financial support, the quantum of this not known at present.

- BLEP has a continued commitment to Government through the 25-year Enterprise Zone programme, an element of which delivery of additional floorspace, in turn generating revenue; the revenues from current floorspace currently building in BLEP reserves. By providing additional/improved infrastructure at the site, BLEP would be continuing to help build the space community at Westcott, meeting the needs of both existing and future businesses located there.
- Board members noted the need to consider a skills plan running alongside the Westcott masterplan and the role that local schools, colleges, and universities might play in meeting the needs of businesses on site and the wider space community.
- Westcott is possibly the largest employment site in Buckinghamshire, offering enormous potential. Clarity is required on the vision for the site, with a defined framework for development and consideration of challenges at the site around, for example, power supply and battery storage.

(Nigel MacKenzie left the meeting)

3 CO-STAR PROGRAMME – FUNDING SUCCESS AND NEXT STEPS

(Jon Wardle joined/Andrew Smith left the meeting, Adrian Brown assumed the Chair)

- Jon Wardle provided an update on progress with the Co-Star bid, a six-year programme to design, develop and build state of the art facilities, resources and expertise to underpin the long-term competitiveness of the UK screen and performance sector, ensuring world class R&D in the application of current and future waves of advanced computing technology.
- StoryFutures, a consortium led by Royal Holloway University and the National Film and TV School, has been selected as the preferred provider for this UKRI project, in no small measure due to the support offered by BLEP. Detailed discussion is ongoing in order to release funding to progress the project.
- It was confirmed the intention is for the new facility to be based at Pinewood Studios, a requirement of the original bid being that the facility would be sited at a commercial studio, and Heads of Terms are in the process of being produced.
- Government will be providing £55m towards this programme with a further £102.2m leveraged funding (a mix of capital, revenue and in kind) required.
- The Board noted that if match funding is not forthcoming locally, there is a possibility the programme could move outside of Buckinghamshire, but this is not the desired solution by the bid sponsors.
- Board members commented they would like to see more ambition in the local targets outlined in the presentation, for example around the provision of local jobs, adding that there is a local knowledge base available within the county to draw on around skills and training needs, acknowledging that these elements would not be funded by UKRI.
- It was also commented the due consideration must be given to socio-economic diversity, considering transport, accommodation and housing needs for those wishing to work within the programme.
- The Board noted the initial asks in the presentation for both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the project; further details in relation to these asks will be provided to enable future consideration by the Board.

(Jon Wardle left the meeting; Andrew Smith rejoined the meeting and resumed as Chair)

4 FINANCIAL POSITION

- Board members reflected on the two presentations received, both of which had significant merit.
- The Board discussed the need for absolute clarity around financial expenditure committed to/being requested of the LEP, both now and in the future, and the need to ensure robust governance arrangements continue to be implemented with regards to the request for and management of any/all funding granted.

It was agreed the executive team will:

- **Provide an updated financial position outlining BLEP funds currently available, commitments entered into, the level of funding requested/required by new projects, including those from Westcott and Storyfutures, ongoing costs, and likely future income.**
- **Circulate an updated Reserves Policy.**

5 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING – 26 May 2023

- The minutes of the meeting held on 26 May 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

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

- 5.1.1 • **Ministerial Visit** – News is awaited from Government with regards to Ministerial visits to Buckinghamshire, including the possibility of George Freeman MP visiting Westcott.
- 5.1.2 • **Cities & Local Growth Team Area Lead** –Emily Manser will be commencing in post on 17 August, replacing Ross Burton.

6 CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER REPORT

- The Board noted the contents of the Chief Executive’s report, previously circulated.

6.1 Government Defunding LEPs

- Government announcement around LEP core funding post 2024 is still awaited and will be shared with Board members once received.
- In the meantime, work continues to establish and embed the Place Based Growth Board and its underlying structure.

6.2 Capital Programme

- £124k of £1m Getting Building Fund monies allocated to Buckinghamshire Council under the broadband Gigabit Britain programme remains unspent following transfer of the programme from the Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) to the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT). This funding will be returned to BLEP to review appropriate reinvestment routes.
- Noting the financial commitment already made to England’s Economic Heartland in support of East West Rail, it was reported Buckinghamshire Council, supported by BLEP, could be part of a consortium to bid for funding through DSIT’s Innovation Regions funding programme to drive take up of 5G along the East West Rail route using 5G infrastructure already provided. It is hoped this work will help address rural broadband ‘dead spots’ along the route.
- Board members noted a correction to the Chief Executive’s report in that a lease on the Brunel Shed has been acquired by Buckinghamshire New University; ownership of the property remains with Buckinghamshire Council.

6.3 Risk Register

- The Board noted the risks arising to the organisation connected to delivery of the Woodlands site.
- Reflecting on the time taken to secure planning, it was suggested swift progress now needs to be made to market the site. Buckinghamshire Council is in talks with landowners around infrastructure provision and this is an ongoing, live discussion.
- Acknowledging that this is Bucks Advantage rather than BLEP activity, but also recognising the importance of the Woodlands site to the LEP’s programme, the Board requested clarity be sought around the state of the land contracts involved.

6.4 Ward Profiles

- Board members congratulated James Moorhouse on the work undertaken to develop ward profiles for the ten wards within the Opportunity Bucks workstream.
- The profiles reflect existing anecdotal evidence and will provide tremendous support to the work being undertaken on the Buckinghamshire Skills Strategy/where funding should be directed.

6.5 Skills Update

- An update was provided on the bid submitted to Government for funding under the Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF), building on, and seeking to work towards delivering the requirements of, the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP). It was reported funding under the LSIF is heavily skewed towards capital rather than revenue funding.
- Buckinghamshire will also be bidding for funding to provide sector focussed Bootcamps, aligning these with LSIP priorities to ensure work benefits Buckinghamshire's economy.
- The Board noted that the college, universities, NFTS and independent training providers in Buckinghamshire are all well aligned and working together to leverage as much skills funding as possible into the county.

6.6 Communications & Events Update

- Reflecting on recent events held, key events due to take place in the coming months, and press/TV coverage of LEP supported facilities, Board members suggested more should be made of the 'good news' stories arising, cascading these through Buckinghamshire.

6.7 Growth Hub Update

- Funding for the Growth Hub in the current year is being received from BLEP and Buckinghamshire Council under separate but complementary contracts, with no duplication of activity.
- Going forwards, it was confirmed the intention is to have a single contract covering BBF activity for the council and the LEP.

6.8 Board Recruitment

- Acknowledging the exceptional circumstances that LEPs find themselves in, the Board endorsed the Remuneration and Nominations Sub Group recommendation that, following the successful interview on 26 July 2023, Emily Dingle be invited to join the BLEP Board.

7 **POOLED INVESTMENT FUND (PIF) – DESK RESEARCH AND PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT**

- It was agreed discussion on this subject will pause pending receipt of Government's announcement on the future of LEPs and the funding to be passported to Local Authorities to fulfil LEP functions.

8 **WESTCOTT INCUBATOR AND ACCELERATOR FUND**

- Further to discussion at the last Board meeting and to the paper provided an overview of the importance of the Westcott Incubator and Accelerator fund was provided. The aim of the fund being to support businesses of various sizes and maturity operating in the space sector, and to attract inward investment to Westcott.

Following detailed discussion, the Board:

- **Approved £20k grant funding to Hybrock Ltd as discussed above.**
- **Requested Matt Peachey and Adrian Brown review the criteria against which proposals to this fund are assessed, to include a geographical consideration.**
- **Agreed an approval process for all future applications which would see these being circulated via email to all Board members, giving Board members five working days to respond, a nil response being taken as approval to the application.**

9 **FUTURE MEETINGS**

- **Board meetings** (all 9.30am-12pm): 13 October, 15 December 2023
- **Audit & Finance Sub Group** (all 2-3pm): 21 September, 30 November 2023
- **Capital Programme Sub Group:** 22 September (11am-12pm), 1 December (1-2pm) 2023
- **AGM:** 17 November 2023 (9.30-11am)