

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE JOINT SHROPSHIRE AND
TELFORD & WREKIN BUSINESS BOARDS**

HELD ON

TUESDAY 15 APRIL 2014 5.10pm – 6.55 pm

AT HARPER ADAMS UNIVERSITY

Present:

Representatives of Shropshire Business Board

Cllr Steve Charmley	Portfolio Holder Business Growth, Shropshire Council
Karen Davies MBE	Heart of England Fine Foods
Katie Foster	Chair Shropshire & Telford Tourism Strategy Board
Arthur Hill	CH Hill and Sons (Vice Chair Shropshire Business Board)
Will Morris	Utilities Representative
Richard Sheehan	Shropshire Chamber of Commerce & Enterprise Ltd
Mandy Thorn (Chair)	Chair of Shropshire Business Board and Chair for the meeting - Marches Care Ltd
Steve Wain	Shropshire Learning Network

Representatives of Telford & Wrekin Business Board

Lindsay Barton	Golden Kite Solutions
Anna Brennand	Ironbridge Gorge Museum
Paul Hinkins	Business Watch
George Kinnell	Telford Cog
Cllr Bill McClements	Borough of Telford & Wrekin
Paul O'Neill	Telford College
Peter Roach	Bournville Village Trust
Andy Whyte	BESST
Graham Wynn	Chair of Telford & Wrekin Business Board
	TTC Group
Professor Ralph Early	Head of Department of Food Science and Agri-Food Supply Chain Management , Harper Adams University
Dr David Llewellyn	Vice-Chancellor, Harper Adams University

Officers

Kate Callis	Assistant Director for Development, Business & Housing Borough of Telford & Wrekin
Mark Pembleton	Service Manager for Business and Enterprise, Shropshire Council
Amanda Holyoak	Committee Officer, Shropshire Council

1. Welcome, Apologies and Introductions

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and thanked Harper Adams University for its excellent hospitality and tour of the fantastic facilities.

Apologies were received from Dr Catherine Baxter – Harper Adams University, Tony Bywater – Salop Leisure, Shaun Carvill – Clickingmad, Nick Chavasse – NRG Direct Mail Ltd, Fay Easton – Shropshire Enterprise Partnership, Andy Evans – Group Manager, Business Growth & Prosperity, Shropshire Council, Kairen Francis – Jobcentre Plus, Duncan Gray - Muller, Tudor Griffiths – Tudor Griffiths Group Ltd, Rob Hudson - Handelsbanken, Ann Johnson – Federation of Small Businesses, Professor Ian Oakes – University of Wolverhampton, Cllr Mike Owen – Shropshire Council, David Sidaway – Borough of Telford & Wrekin and Mandy Stoker – E4 Environment.

The Chair and Members paid tribute to John Clayton, who had given many years of dedication to the Shropshire Business Community, who had sadly recently passed away.

2. Declarations of Interest

Members were reminded to declare any interests either at this point or if they became apparent during the meeting.

3. The Agri-Tech Strategy – establishing a Marches Response

3.1 Professor David Llewellyn, Vice-Chancellor, Harper Adams University made a presentation to the Board, outlining the profile and structure of the University, its strong academic performance, its international links with government outside the UK, some of the top universities in the world and its local, national and international recruitment base.

It was the only one of four agricultural specialist higher education institutions in the country, and the only one which had its own Degree and Research Degree awarding powers. The University's 2013 graduate employment rate was 96%.

3.2 The University's focus was on food production, managing natural resources and the environment and renewable energy production. Its five academic departments covered the entirety of the agri-food supply chain. Students undertook a one year industry placement which brought the opportunity for applied research back to the university.

3.3 The University had been lobbying the Government's Chief Scientific Advisor to recognise the importance of food security in policy making, and the contribution of agricultural engineering to food security.

3.4 Agri-Tech Strategy

Harper Adams University was not yet represented on the Agri-Tech

Strategy's Leadership Council but lobbying was underway. In the meantime Professor David Pink was a member on the Leadership Council's Sub Group on Research Skills.

- 3.5 There were two strands of funding attached to the Strategy and Harper Adams was uniquely placed as a potential Centre for Agricultural Innovation with a capacity to focus on engineering. The Strategy suggested cross cutting innovation centres for Informatics, Engineering, Soil and water had been suggested, as well as sustainable livestock, sustainable arable and sustainable edible horticulture
- 3.6 The largest concentration of agri business was to be found in the Marches area and it was suggested that there should be something in the SEP and EU ESIF relating to agri-tec and food and drink. The LEP had agreed that a Task and Finish Group be established with relevant industry input to ensure the Marches stayed ahead of other areas.
- 3.7 This work would have an impact on business clusters, start ups, inward investment and export potential. Work was underway to arrange a national stake holder meeting in the summer to organise lobbying and business support for a strong bid.
- 3.8 In response to questions, Dr Lewellyn explained:
- The mechanism for industry input into the Task and Finish Group would be through membership of 4 or 5 private businesses from across the LEP.
 - A local agri-tec strategy was being developed to see if it worked across the LEP.
 - There might be a need to connect and work with other LEPs on this, for example, Stoke and Staffs LEP.
 - The value of Harper Adams to the local economy was significant, a study estimated around £40 million a year but it was the biggest employer in this part of Telford & Wrekin.
 - As research into agri-tec gathered place there would also be positive benefits for the local area.
 - An Agri-Tec University Enterprise Zone had been mooted as a possibility. A local agri-tec cluster would help with start ups and attract co-location to other businesses.
 - It was important to remember that Agri-Tec was not simply about agricultural technology, informatics was equally important.
 - Bids with other universities in consortia might be desirable.
 - Harper Adams students predominantly became employed in the land based and food chain sector although some did go into other sectors

- The Harper Adams employment rate was so good partly because many companies were prepared to support people through sponsorships from year 2 onwards, placements and into a job. Some students gained multiple job offers to choose between. 120 companies had visited the campus in the Autumn term to recruit students.
- There was currently a significant gap in land based students – 245,000 undergraduate and 100,000 postgraduates would be needed to address future needs, and there were only 6,500 current students in the UK.
- The University felt that agriculture, global food supply and national food security were globally important subjects which should be included under the National Funding Council's definition of strategically important subjects.

3.9 Graham Wynn, Chair of the Marches LEP, reported that he had met and conversed with the Prime Minister on the subject of clusters and there was an opportunity to develop a strategy which would help keep highly skilled people in the area.

4. **Update On LEP**

4.1 Graham Wynn, Chairman of the LEP explained that in the absence of any Central Government guidance or framework for the SEP, a strong bid had been developed for £107 million over the duration of the 20 year strategy. This aimed to deliver 70,000 new homes and 40,000 new jobs. Fourteen priority projects had been identified in the Marches Area. He reported that in his recent meeting with the Prime Minister he had been informed that the £2 billion fund available to LEPs had been oversubscribed by three times.

4.2 The next stage would involve scrutiny of the Plan by a Panel at Westminster and this would involve challenge on deliverability. There was already a good track record in the Marches LEP area on delivering jobs, housing and infrastructure projects and a newsletter was about to be circulated with a full update.

4.3 Mark Pembleton, Service Manager for Business and Enterprise, Shropshire Council, reported that Government was looking for projects that could be delivered quickly and £41 million of spending in year 1 for 14 projects was clearly set out. He described the projects planned in the Shropshire Council area. Kate Callis, Assistant Director for Development, Business & Housing, Borough of Telford & Wrekin set out the projects planned for the Telford and Wrekin area.

4.4 Next steps would also involve putting a LEP structure in place, and employing personnel to be ready to hit the ground running once funds came through.

4.5 Mandy Thorn emphasised that infrastructure improvements would be vital in making the Marches an attractive place to be.

4.6 In response to a question about how the Business Boards could help, Mr Wynne explained that the Business Boards of the Marches were a unique

selling point as other LEPs did not have this structure. This helped provide two way communication with all kinds of businesses, especially SMEs, along with other events and consultations via the website. Involvement from businesses in developing the SEP had been sought from day one and it was intended this involvement would continue to ensure developments were what was wanted and needed.

5. **Round the Table Business Update – current business climate in your sector**

Those present were invited to provide a brief update on the current climate in their business sector.

5.1 **Andy Whyte – Business Environment Support Scheme Telford** (www.telfordbesst.co.uk)

Andy explained that BESST was a business led environment network with a mission of developing and sharing sustainability best practice increasing the business continuity of its member organisations. It was supporting the Marches SEP in the areas of Supporting Business, Physical Infrastructure and Low Carbon Economy.

Its current focus was on membership development and future events would include: 'Focussing on the Bottom Line' to help members address their utility costs; Corporate Biodiversity and the 3B's (business benefits, business continuity and biodiversity); Legislative Review; and ISO 14001-2015 Transition Workshop.

5.2 **Peter Roach – Bournville Village Trust**

Peter reported on two large building projects in Telford: Lightmoor which involved creation of a village centre, school and nursery along with additional housing; and Lawley which was currently in the hands of house builders and would unfortunately have a reduced proportion of affordable homes than originally planned.

He reported that the Government's 'Help to Buy' scheme had been a significant stimulus to house building but this was causing concerns about the housing market overheating.

5.3 **Anna Brennand – Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust**

Anna reported that the national sector was in crisis due to funding issues. However Ironbridge Gorge Museum was seen as an entrepreneurial lead in the sector and business had grown to the extent that development to the next level was needed. BIS had funded a consortium to deliver up skilling to make the sector more resilient and this was currently in the delivery phase.

5.4 **Katie Foster - Chair Shropshire & Telford Tourism Strategy Board**

Katie reported on the successful development of Shrewsbury Music Hall at a very difficult time. She reiterated the importance of the Marches area

retaining quality of development, its physical environment and uniqueness at all costs. She circulated information related to the Redundant Building Schemes Grant.

5.5 Paul Hinkins – Business Watch

Paul reported on successful development of Apprentice Workplace Learning at both large companies and SMEs.

5.6 Lindsay Barton – Golden Kite Solutions

Lindsay said support for small businesses to access funds for skills and training would be welcomed. She reported on work related to trading and procurement in the local area through COGS and a recent successful 'meet the buyer' event held in Shrewsbury.

5.7 Arthur Hill – Agriculture

Arthur reported on a fairly positive picture. Agriculture contributed £1.5 billion gross value added to the economy per annum. The Marches LEP area had the biggest concentration of poultry in the country. Other updates were covered in his agriculture update briefing note.

5.8 George Kinnell - Telford Cog

George reported on developments within the Marches area and a successful partnership approach between local authority areas.

5.9 Paul O'Neill Telford College

Paul reported on the importance of the service sector to the economy. Telford College Work Academy was looking to grow both its physical and staff resources.

5.10 Cllr Steve Charmley – Portfolio Holder Business Growth, Shropshire Council

Cllr Charmley reported on positive developments with Shrewsbury Museum and a University based in Shrewsbury at which postgraduates were currently being recruited for September 2014.

5.11 Karen Davies – HEFF

Karen reported on work undertaken on supply chains, pressure on SMES and more strategic work related to export to assist HEFF members.

5.12 Will Morris – Utility Representative

Will reported on wholesale energy prices which were at the lowest for a number of years. From 31st April auto roll over on contracts would no longer be permitted making it easier for customers to make savings.

He was pleased to report that Carluccios had now opened in Shrewsbury

following successful intervention by the Shropshire Business Board and practical support from Business and Enterprise.

5.13 **Richard Sheehan - Shropshire Chamber of Commerce & Enterprise Ltd**

Richard reported on the successful delivery of the UKTI contract resulting in significant growth in activity around exports in Shropshire. Two more international trade advisors had been recruited and a new office set up in the Shropshire Food Enterprise Centre which offered video conferencing facilities for communicating with contacts overseas. He referred to 152 events run successfully in the past year with over 6,000 attendees.

There had been around 700 entries for the Business Awards.

He undertook to send out the quarterly economic survey to Business Board Members electronically.

6. **Opportunity for More Joint working between Business Boards**

All present agreed that joint working between Business Boards was essential and that one joint meeting should be held each year.

7. **Membership**

Katie Foster reported that she would shortly be stepping down thus creating a vacancy on the Shropshire Business Board. The Chair paid tribute to Katie's hard work commenting that she had been a stalwart member of the Shropshire Business Community. The Board would be very sorry to lose her.

8. **Date of Next Meeting**

Shropshire Business Board: Tues 8 July 2014 at 4.30 pm at Shrewsbury College of Art and Technology.