



GFirst LEP Business Groups Update: April 2020

The following Business groups met 'virtually' due to Coronavirus, in April 2020:

Visitor Economy & Tourism

Cyber-tech

Energy

Retail & High Street

- The **Chairs of the Business Groups** met at the Gloucester Growth Hub on Monday 9th March 2020. David Owen, CEO GFirst LEP, gave an update on the activities of the LEP including on the Western Gateway initiative. The Masterplanning sessions have been completed across five of the business groups by Nick Holyoake. This document will support the Local Industrial Strategy and the project pipeline plans that are identified in it.
- The Chairs of the following groups gave an update:
 - Banking & Finance:** The Access2Finance event due to take place on 31st March is proving popular again. The clinics prior to each business group meeting are also well received by clients, and the Growth Hub is encouraged to remind their clients of this facility.
 - Business Membership groups:** Business West are moving away from breakfast networking events and have started to run business and economy meetings. Stroud Business Voice may become a Chamber in future. There is a lot of focus over the next few years on Tewkesbury.
 - Energy:** Andy Slaney is stepping down from Chair this year as he starts to focus on his own company, and leaves SGS College. He is happy with where the group is at: the two energy distributors that sit on the group are heavily involved in new innovations and committed to delivering the County Energy Strategy.
 - Advanced Engineering:** Elizabeth Weaver gave an update in Rob Loveday's absence. The group have identified some areas for development following the masterplanning session and the need to bring together the variety of skills that exist in the county, and the opportunity to 'pool' these to avoid them disappearing for good. Rob is in discussion with Tewkesbury about an advanced manufacturing 'Hub'.
- David Owen mentioned that businesses in the county have a duty to get involved, and for the Chairs to encourage businesses to do so. The LEP and its business 'voice' is all the more richer with a diverse, knowledgeable support network.

*The date of the next Business Group Chairs Meeting will be **Monday 19th October.***



Advanced Engineering & Manufacturing

- The Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing Business Group met on Monday 2nd March 2020 at Park Campus, University of Gloucestershire School of Engineering. Dr Salah Al-Majeed gave a tour of the facilities before the meeting.
- This group were chosen to continue the work from the Local Industrial Strategy; using a logic chain approach the group were asked to identify where they see the engineering and manufacturing industry now, where they want it to be in the future, and what steps are required to get there. Key discussion points from this were for the group to become more involved with government and gain a better understanding of Apprenticeships in this area, to better reflect the skills required by UK companies in this sector. For schools to get students involved at a much earlier stage, to reduce the skills gaps. To bring together companies of all sizes to pool skills resources under one roof, offering a network of skilled personnel. Consultant Nick Holyoake managed the session and will feedback on the results over the next couple of months.
- Alun James from South West Manufacturing Advisory Service (SWMAS) gave an overview of the Gloucestershire Manufacturing Advisory Programme (GMAP) which offers specialist support to SMEs, offering funding, business reviews as well as hands-on specialist consultancy to support business goals.
- Brian Fowler, gave an update on the apprenticeships available at Gloucestershire College, including Level 6 Electronics apprenticeship, one institution of only a handful in the country that are offering this level. The focus is much more practical in its delivery, designed for those that want to earn while they learn.
- The GFirst LEP Inward Investment Team updated the group on their Engineering and Manufacturing proposition and are particularly interested in hearing from companies that focus on sub-sectors within the sector.

*The date of the next Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing meeting will be **Monday 6th July 2020**.*

For questions about the group, or if you would like to be considered to become a member, please contact Karen Campbell karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com



Agri-Food & Rural Economy

- The Agri Food & Rural group met at the Gloucester Growth Hub on Thursday 6th February 2020. Representatives from Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC) and Countryside Land Agency (CLA) are stepping down from the group, and have been replaced with suitable colleagues to ensure representation on the group. Jo Price, Chair of the group is looking to step down this year, so asked the group to suggest alternative Chairs for consideration.
- This group were chosen to continue the work from the Local Industrial Strategy; using a logic chain approach the group were asked to identify where they see the Agri industry now, where they want it to be in the future, and what steps are required to get there. Key discussion points from this were the development of a robust food economy, helping farmers to diversify and maintaining sustainable productivity. Consultant Nick Holyoake managed the session and will feedback on the results before the end of March 2020.
- Katharine Cripps, Barclays Bank mentioned that bringing farmers together had been a very positive idea-sharing exercise in the past, and the idea of holding an event in one of the Growth Hubs to showcase farmers who have diversified was discussed with the group. Katharine has had a conversation with Will Frazer (NFU Mutual) to move this forward.
- The Tech to Plate project at Hartpury University will be launched in February 2020 – Claire Whitworth gave a presentation on the project, its partners and what it plans to achieve. More information can be found here: <https://www.hartpury.ac.uk/commercial/hartpury-agri-tech-centre/>
- The Food policy sub-group gave an update on developments – the food agenda is of high importance to the County Council. Food is mentioned in the Cyber Central Planning document, with companies considering food productivity, so the group are keen to have an influence on this development.
- RAU is celebrating it's 175th Anniversary this year, with a series of events taking place, as well as the Three Counties show being hosted by Gloucestershire this year.

*The date of the next meeting is on **Wednesday 3rd June 2020 at RAU, Stroud Road, Cirencester.***

For questions about the group, or if you would like to be considered to become a member, please contact Karen Campbell karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com



Banking & Finance

- The group met at the Gloucester Growth Hub on Tuesday 11th February 2020, this was preceded by a Banking and Finance clinic.
- Sarah Danson gave an update on the Growth Hub Network. Gloucester Growth Hub now have a 'Better Business for All' champion – this mentoring service is now fully established and bridges the gap between the Growth Hub's Business Navigators and Guides. The Forest of Dean Growth Hub is due to open in Spring 2020, Stroud plan to open officially in February 2020 and Cheltenham is planned to open in late 2020. Funding for the Growth Hub (revenue) has been extended for a further 2 years until 2022. More workshops are taking place to find new clients, and several Director Strategy workshops are being held, to de-mystify business jargon.
- Sue McIntosh-Gibbs from UK Agricultural Finance gave a presentation to the group. Their aim is to provide the agricultural sector with finance options that help it develop and grow. They offer financial guidance and advice in relation to the purchase of land, livestock finance, recovery and restructure. The group welcomes Sue back into the group with her new role.

*The next Banking & Finance meeting is at the **Gloucester Growth Hub on Tuesday 19th May 2020** and will be preceded by a Banking & Finance clinic.*

For questions about the group please contact Karen Campbell karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com



Business & Professional Services

- The group met at the Gloucester Growth Hub on Wednesday 2nd October 2019. An update was given on the timeline of the planned Growth Hubs: Forest of Dean is due to open in Spring 2020. Stroud have decided to complete the work in stages. They plan to open officially in February 2020. Cheltenham is planned to open in late 2020. [Hub8](#), an incubation space for cyber-tech startups, has now opened in the Brewery Quarter, providing Cheltenham with a co-working space. Tewkesbury, Cirencester and Gloucester are going from strength to strength, with Gloucester considering reaching out to businesses with a view to sponsorship, enabling start-ups to use the office space for free.
- Members were also advised to inform businesses about the Growth Hubs, to continue to spread the word about the services that they offer for free. It was mooted that current networks and larger private digital companies could be encouraged to use the Growth Hub spaces for their events which would raise the Growth Hub profile, as a solid digital infrastructure is important.
- Katie Jenkins, Director of Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) gave an overview of where we are with feedback following the launch of the draft LIS. To summarise, the members thought that the draft LIS was a good synthesis of the strengths and of the opportunities in the county. A key theme that emerged was that we need to be able to offer easy access to upskilling, to ensure businesses of all sizes are equipped for challenges and changes for an increasingly digital economy with cyber-tech protection capabilities. The group's feedback has been sent to the GFirst LEP LIS team.

*The next Business & Professional Services meeting will take place on **Wednesday 4th March 2020 at Gloucester Growth Hub.***

For questions about the group please contact Karen Campbell karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com



Business Membership Groups

- The Business Membership Group met at the Gloucester Growth Hub on Wednesday 27th November 2019. Peter Doyle from the Growth Company talked to the group about his work with SMEs to encourage mentoring, with an increasing amount of “reverse mentoring” taking place, where the smaller SME mentees mentoring Corporate Mentors (such as John Lewis Partnership, BAe Systems, Rolls-Royce, Amazon, GSK) - about how SME’s can be agile, creative and innovative. Peter compliments the work that Rod Horrocks is undertaking for GFirst LEP.
- Dr Polly Pick, Director of Business Engagement at the University of Gloucestershire gave an update on the latest Business degrees, degree apprenticeships and work-based training programmes, which can be part funded through the Apprenticeship Levy for larger companies. The group were especially keen to develop the relationships between businesses and schools/Higher education establishments, to get students more interested in business at an earlier age.
- An update was given on the timeline of the other Growth Hubs: Forest of Dean and Stroud due to open in Spring 2020. Cheltenham is planned to open in late 2020. Funding for the Growth Hub (revenue) has been extended for a further 3 years until 2022. More workshops are taking place to find new clients, and several Director Strategy workshops are being held, to de-mystify business jargon.
- The group fed back on the draft Local Industrial Strategy, and comments have been given to the LIS team for inclusion. They reiterated the importance of the voice of young people and the need for a good public transport system throughout the county, and the group welcomed the rail strategy as part of this. A good transport infrastructure will be imperative to support the development of Cyber Central. Housing affordability and availability will be another key factor in retaining young people and this needs to be addressed.

*The next meeting will take place on **Thursday 5th March 2020 at the Tewkesbury Growth Hub.**
For questions about the group please contact Karen Campbell karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com*



Cyber-tech

- The group met on Monday 20th April via Zoom. Due to the Coronavirus outbreak we have decided to hold the business group meetings virtually where possible. It is vital that we continue to hear the voice of businesses in the county, now, more than ever, and to disseminate messages up to central Government. Likewise, it's vitally important that we keep the lines of communication open, to filter down information from central Government to businesses. During this time, the meetings took place for one hour, and members were asked to share with the group how the pandemic has impacted on businesses, how they have coped / adapted, and their plans for recovery.
- Madeline Howard, Director of CyNam gave an update on Cyber First: connecting cyber businesses with students and encouraging schools to get involved with teaching cyber skills. They are planning an event later in the year with over 1,000 students and are keen to get more businesses involved.
- Brian Fowler gave an update on Gloucestershire College's first Cyber degree apprenticeship programme which launched online in April. The University of Gloucestershire also hold a professional cyber security degree apprenticeship level 6.
- Since the outbreak of Coronavirus, businesses have seen an increase in the number of phishing and spam emails, aimed not just at businesses, but to individuals who have for example claimed free school meals. CSA (Cyber Security Associates) together with GFirst LEP have sent out a handy guide on staying safe online, especially with so many people now working from home.
- Cheltenham Borough Council will be formally launching the search for a development partner for Cyber Central in early May. The launch will be via the OJEU portal on the basis of a competitive dialogue process, with the initial expressions of interest phase open until 10th July. The promotional website is up and running at: www.goldenvalleyuk.com

*The next meeting of the Cyber Security Business Group is on **Monday 21st September 2020 at C11 Cyber Security & Digital Innovation Centre, Berkeley.***

For questions about the group please contact Karen Campbell karen.campbell@qfirstlep.com



Construction and Infrastructure

- The group met on Wednesday 12th February 2020 at the Gloucester Growth Hub. All responses to local plans have been submitted and Steve thanked the group for their contributions towards these.
- The group discussed what would be involved in the Masterplanning session, and the main points raised were: lack of employment sites, building to carbon neutrality, rail network, re-classification of the green belt. These topics will be discussed in more detail at the Masterplanning session at the meeting next month.
- A call for speakers that have experience in 'futuristic' building and new site development was put out to the group for consideration.
- Paul Fong is managing a 'Planning Matters' Forum at the end of April, as well as another at the end of October looking at planning policies 6 months after Brexit. These forums support the work of the sub-group: Breaking down barriers to development.
- The GFirst LEP Board has approved Phases 1 and 2 of the West Cheltenham Highways scheme: Arle Court roundabout (phase 1) and M5 Junction 11 (phase 2).

*The next meeting of the C&I group is on **Tuesday 3rd March 2020 at the Gloucester Growth Hub.**
For questions about the group please contact Karen Campbell karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com*



Energy

- The group met on Tuesday 21st April via Microsoft Teams. Due to the Coronavirus outbreak we have decided to hold the business group meetings virtually where possible. It is vital that we continue to hear the voice of businesses in the county, now, more than ever, and to disseminate messages up to central Government. Likewise, it's vitally important that we keep the lines of communication open, to filter down information from central Government to businesses. During this time, the meetings took place for one hour, and members were asked to share with the group how the pandemic has impacted on businesses, how they have coped / adapted, and their plans for recovery.
- The group welcomed Dr Jon Furley to the group who will be the University of Gloucestershire's new Sustainability Officer going forward and will be representing the group at meetings.
- SGS Berkeley has now moved to online teaching for all courses and only key workers remain in the building. They possibly have more student engagement now than they had before lockdown which will lead to a blended approach moving forward.
- Domestic energy demand has increased due to more people working from home, however commercial /industrial demand has crashed. Wind power cannot be stored which meant a lot of this was lost over March/April.
- Several calls to energy agencies due to financial difficulties with energy usage through the roof as we spend more time at home.
- Businesses are seriously re-considering their working patterns post lockdown, especially travel plans, with as few as 1 in 5 meetings planned to be face to face – this will have a positive impact on the carbon footprint, but a negative one for the travel sector.
- Andy Slaney has started his new business in Exeter and as a result, has decided to step down as Chair of this group. GFirst LEP on behalf of the group thanked Andy for his hard work and noted that Andy has been instrumental in aiding the many achievements of the group thus far. Pete Barrett represented Berkeley GREEN on Andy's behalf.
- A South West Energy Hub meeting was held virtually the following week, with plans to look at the sustainability of the Hubs moving forward, and funding for the next three years.

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 15th September 2020 – venue to be confirmed.
For questions about the group please contact Karen Campbell karen.campbell@qfirstlep.com



Retail and High Street

- The Retail and High Street Business Group met on Wednesday 29th April via Zoom. Due to the Coronavirus outbreak we have decided to hold the business group meetings virtually where possible. It is vital that we continue to hear the voice of businesses in the county, now, more than ever, and to disseminate messages up to central Government. Likewise, it's vitally important that we keep the lines of communication open, to filter down information from central Government to businesses. During this time, the meetings took place for one hour, and members were asked to share with the group how the pandemic has impacted on businesses, how they have coped / adapted, and their plans for recovery.
- Diane Savory, Chair of GFirst LEP explained how she has been selected to sit on the National Economic Recovery Working Group Chaired by Simon Clarke MP. Building confidence back into the High Street is a key criteria for the group. Diane advised everyone to sign up to the High Streets Task Force website: www.highstreetstaskforce.org.uk; it was already guiding central government funding to help reinvent towns and is now focusing on how to recover after Covid-19.
- The group fed back on the impact of COVID-19 to various retail businesses: The Peel Centre closed at the end of March and they are currently developing plans to re-open safely. It's likely shops will start with shorter opening hours and a skeleton staff as they phase their return. Five Valleys have 6 key shops open. There are no contractors working on site for now, possibly until end of May. Looking to launch the Five Valleys indoor market offering online. 25% of John Lewis staff are now working at Waitrose. JL online offering is selling well. The store is looking to re-open in the next few weeks, subject to government guidelines. Smaller shops have diversified into take away or delivery services. Some find it difficult to get online with poor broadband connection in rural areas.
- Concern over market town shops never making a recovery and it was felt the market towns need more leadership with this. Discussion of a shared partnership of market towns forming a market town-level BID – this would help small independent shops adapt and improve their presence. This is to be discussed separately.
- The #raisethebar is a campaign designed to encourage government to offer retail and leisure businesses with a rateable value of over £51,000 more financial help by raising the bar from £51,000 to £150,000. Landlords have offered some tenants rent holidays and better conversations are now taking place between tenants and landlords.
- The 'pop-up' style shop offer in John Lewis will still be going ahead later in the year, giving small individual businesses the opportunity to take over premium retail space temporarily in the John Lewis store.

*The date of the next meeting is on **Wednesday 20th May 2020 via Zoom.***

For questions about the group please contact Karen Campbell karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com



Tourism and Visitor Economy

- The group met on Thursday 16th April via Zoom. Due to the Coronavirus outbreak we have decided to hold the business group meetings virtually where possible. It is vital that we continue to hear the voice of businesses in the county, now, more than ever, and to disseminate messages up to central Government. Likewise, it's vitally important that we keep the lines of communication open, to filter down information from central Government to businesses. During this time, the meetings took place for one hour, and members were asked to share with the group how the pandemic has impacted on businesses, how they have coped / adapted, and their plans for recovery.
- Several major events in the county have been cancelled, with employees furloughed. Companies of all sizes are struggling. Subject to Government guidelines, it will be September at the earliest before any events are running.
- Several businesses have diversified where possible, with restaurants and pubs offering a takeaway and / or delivery service, and two Gin distillers in the county now making hand sanitizer.
- Leisure and hotel trade saw a 70-90% drop the week preceding lockdown, with the postponement of all business and leisure events until at least the end of June. The industry has seen an increase in enquiries for events and weddings for 2021. As the restaurant trade is likely to be one of the last to return to 'normal' there is increased concern over financial support for furloughed staff as well as their health & wellbeing.
- GFirst LEP are collating information for Government and are sending weekly. Diane Savory has been chosen to sit on the Government's National Economic Recovery Task Force. Gloucestershire Economic Recovery Plan working group has also been created to draw contingency plans and exit strategies together to provide the information to help businesses move forward. GFirst also send weekly reports to BEIS, detailing business news stories as well as results from the Growth Hubs Business impact survey: bit.ly/glos-covid19

*The date of next meeting is **Thursday 14th May 2020 virtually using Zoom.***

For questions about the group please contact Karen Campbell karen.campbell@qfirstlep.com