



GFirst LEP Business Groups Update: May 2020

The following Business groups met 'virtually' in May 2020:

**Advanced Engineering & Manufacturing | Banking & Finance | Business Membership Groups
Construction & Infrastructure | Visitor Economy & Tourism | Retail and the High Street**

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 virtually on Thursday 21st May. Chair Rob Loveday welcomed Nick Holyoake to the meeting who will be assisting GFirst LEP on their Economic Recovery Plan.
- Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on the work of GFirst LEP at this time: We continue to issue regular updates in relation to support for businesses and all of this information is available in bite size chunks on our website. We have had over 570 Growth Hub Business Impact Surveys completed as of beginning of May. As of 18th May this has been re-issued to include questions on more of a recovery theme. To date more than £114million of business grant payments to Gloucestershire businesses have been confirmed by our six Local Authorities and to help counter the impact, assisting more than 10,600 businesses in the county. Nick Holyoake is continuing his work with GFirst LEP to co-ordinate the county's recovery plan. The aim is to develop an economic recovery plan for Gloucestershire that reflects the county's character, business needs and economic priorities as informed by stakeholder consultation. Nick will be attending the business group meeting as a guest in order to support his work to gather relevant, timely stakeholder recovery plans. Delivery of the final report will be by early July 2020.
- Members were asked 'round the table' to share with the group how the pandemic has impacted on businesses, how they have coped / adapted, and their plans for recovery:
 - More flexibility in relation to furloughing staff would help the productivity levels in this industry – if staff can put on / off furlough as the skills set requirements change, this would help with continuation on production lines.
 - Majority of production lines have remained open fulfilling current supply chain orders as well as adapting to make component parts for ventilators. Surprisingly offering voluntary furlough resulted in several younger members of the workforce and apprentices accepting it (instead of the older age group) which could lead to a high rate of youth unemployment in the future.
 - Some organisations are seeing a monthly reduction in orders of up to 70% compared to last year
 - Investment and funding has already been pulled on some major projects (some out of county) which will have a longer term impact on bottom line.
 - Businesses that work to longer lead times (including Defence projects) are not yet feeling the effects (from a supply chain production viewpoint), however this will impact in 3-6 months time, just as businesses are recovering and government support is being withdrawn
 - Adapting non-manufacturing staff to work remotely has caused issues with IT departments: (remote working licenses / confidential discussions over zoom?). Changing attitudes to remote working and implementation of shift patterns are being accepted as the new normal.
 - Whilst several companies can continue to produce and to ship, often the supply chain is not ready to receive the goods, causing delays.
 - Aerospace industry one of the hardest hit and some companies have reduced their staff levels to compensate for this knock-on effect already

*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***

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 ‘virtually’ on Tuesday 19th May. Chair, Mark Wilton welcomed John Peters from South West Investment Group (SWIG) Finance.
- Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on the work of GFirst LEP at this time: We continue to issue regular updates in relation to support for businesses and all of this information is available in bite size chunks on our website. We had over 570 Growth Hub Business Impact Surveys completed as of beginning of May. As of 18th May this has been re-issued to include questions on more of a recovery theme. To date more than £114million of business grant payments to Gloucestershire businesses have been confirmed by our six Local Authorities to help counter the impact, assisting more than 10,600 businesses in the county. Nick Holyoake is continuing his work with GFirst LEP to co-ordinate the county's recovery plan. The aim is to develop an economic recovery plan for Gloucestershire that reflects the county's character, business needs and economic priorities as informed by stakeholder consultation. Nick will be attending the business group meeting as a guest in order to support his work to gather relevant, timely stakeholder recovery plans. Delivery of the final report will be by early July 2020.
- Members were asked ‘round the table’ to share with the group how the pandemic has impacted on businesses, how they have coped / adapted, and their plans for recovery:
 - Agri-business banking** – general agricultural business is holding up well, however arable and livestock farmers are struggling. Furloughed staff has meant farmers are having to work twice as hard with fewer staff. The pandemic combined with a wet autumn and dry Spring has hit crop production very hard.
 - Commercial banking** – cashflow is the biggest issue businesses have identified. Have seen a huge increase in number of businesses looking for advice on how to stay afloat.
 - Wholesale food business** – supply lines have all closed: schools, airlines and football stadiums. Have taken a further 25% off 2021 projections. We have moved forward 2 years in 2 months. Online delivery and working from home have been the biggest changes in this short timescale, and businesses that can adapt to accommodate this new way of working/living will have the most success. An industry guess would be that up to 20% of businesses would go bust as a result of COVID-19.
 - British Business Bank** – they are looking to have a scheme to help up to 96% of SMEs find the funds they need to survive. The CBILS loan scheme has now increased from £50m to £200m.
 - Highstreet Bank** – a complete change of business model will be required moving forward. Liquidation of businesses 3-6 months from now and issues repaying loans are the main areas of concern that they are encouraging businesses to consider in the long-term.
 - Growth Hub finance guide** – demand for office space has reduced, as firms look to reduce overheads and as more people work remotely/from home. Larger companies are looking further ahead whereas smaller companies are struggling to keep afloat
- John Peters gave an update on **SWIG finance** – offering small business loans to businesses in the South West from £50,001 - £100,000 and businesses up to £250,000 in Cornwall and Isles of Scilly. Funds are designed for those who are unable to secure all their requirements from traditional sources. SWIG Finance can often lend when the bank can't. Have had enquiries of £30 million in first week of CBILS launch. Currently lending approx. £300,000 per month. On average 8 out of 10 applications are being approved <https://www.swigfinance.co.uk/>

The next Banking & Finance meeting will take place on Tuesday 13th October, with a Finance clinic to be held at the end of June 2020.

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 8th July 2020**
For questions about the group please contact Karen Campbell karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com*



Business Membership Groups

- The group met 'virtually' on Monday 18th May 2020. Chair, Ian Mean welcomed NFU Gloucestershire County Chair James Cox to the group.
- Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on the work of GFirst LEP at this time: We continue to issue regular updates in relation to support for businesses and all of this information is available in bite size chunks on our website. We had over 570 Growth Hub Business Impact Surveys completed as of beginning of May. As of 18th May this has been re-issued to include questions on more of a recovery theme. To date more than £114million of business grant payments to Gloucestershire businesses have been confirmed by our six Local Authorities to help counter the impact, assisting more than 10,600 businesses in the county. Nick Holyoake is continuing his work with GFirst LEP to co-ordinate the county's recovery plan. The aim is to develop an economic recovery plan for Gloucestershire that reflects the county's character, business needs and economic priorities as informed by stakeholder consultation. Nick will be attending the business group meeting as a guest in order to support his work to gather relevant, timely stakeholder recovery plans. Delivery of the final report will be by early July 2020.
- Members were asked 'round the table' to share with the group how the pandemic has impacted on businesses, how they have coped / adapted, and their plans for recovery:

NFU – the government support fund for businesses who have seen a drop in income of more than 25% is having a huge impact on the dairy industry – many farmers have seen a fall in income of between 1-24% so do not qualify for this funding. Farmers that have diversified (into B&B/cafes) are really struggling to keep both afloat. It's really important now more than ever that the public buy local and British.

Glos Chamber/Business West – businesses awaiting the new furlough levels as this will have an impact on levels of redundancies. There seems to be little work done in terms of recovery and impact of redundancies. Some companies have less than 6 months cashflow.

Wootton Chamber – noticing a return to shopping locally which has reinvigorated the small high street. Most small traders have claimed their small business grants from Stroud DC. Some sole traders struggle to get online and support from the Growth Hub on how to get sole traders online would be helpful.

Cheltenham Chamber – several shops are offering delivery service now. 150 businesses in Cheltenham fall outside of the rateable value bracket (over £51,000) to qualify for government support. Commercial vehicles businesses are taking off however coach hire companies are struggling (no school contracts or excursions taking place). The Chamber is concerned about reliance on foreign goods and is encouraging people to buy British.

- Looking to the future, more general concerns included the potential demise of apprenticeship schemes, employment for those out of education as they compete with those who will have been made redundant.
- The group will continue to feed into the Recovery Plan.

*The next meeting will take place on **Thursday 2nd July 2020.***

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 as 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@gfirstlep.com



Construction and Infrastructure

- The group met virtually on Wednesday 13th May. Chair, Stephen Limbrick welcomed guests Hannah Millman, to update the group on the Joint Core Strategy, and Nick Holyoake who is working on the county's recovery plan.
- Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on the work of GFirst LEP at this time: We continue to issue regular updates in relation to support for businesses and all of this information is available in bite size chunks on our website. We had over 570 Growth Hub Business Impact Surveys completed as of beginning of May. As of 18th May this has been re-issued to include questions on more of a recovery theme. To date more than £114million of business grant payments to Gloucestershire businesses have been confirmed by our six Local Authorities to help counter the impact, assisting more than 10,600 businesses in the county. Nick Holyoake is continuing his work with GFirst LEP to co-ordinate the county's recovery plan. The aim is to develop an economic recovery plan for Gloucestershire that reflects the county's character, business needs and economic priorities as informed by stakeholder consultation. Nick will be attending the business group meeting as a guest in order to support his work to gather relevant, timely stakeholder recovery plans. Delivery of the final report will be by early July 2020.
- The Gloucestershire Local Development Plan refresh is out for consultation. The group will respond to this, as they have concerns over the potential doubling up of contributions to education from CIL and S.106 contributions.
- Nick explained the recovery work that the LEP is working on, and the importance of contributions from businesses to impact this. The Barriers to Development work that this group has developed, will look at recovery in its next phase. Several Planning departments have been closed during COVID-19 which is further delaying planning processing.
- Business impact comments included:
 - Planning officers need to continue to make decisions to move forward with developments.
 - Virtual planning meetings/systems and consultations could work, however authorities need to have the tech in place to move forward quickly and not be hindered by outdated Terms.
 - Extension of working hours and use of shift patterns to keep the work on whilst maintaining social distancing is one solution
 - The LEP have an opportunity to feed information through quickly and to feedback solutions for this industry. Government have spent a considerable amount of money on this sector to ensure they can return to work safely.
- The next JCS consultation will be out for review by end of 2020. There were concerns as to the speed of the development of this plan compared to other local plans which will be completed by the end of the year, however as this is a full review, it means the process is a longer one, especially as it will need to take into consideration impacts on the Local Transport Plan from COVID-19.

*The next meeting of the C&I group is on **Wednesday 15th July 2020.***

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@gfirstlep.com



Retail and High Street

- The Retail and High Street Business Group met virtually on Wednesday 27th May 2020. Chair, Nigel Jobson welcomed Steve Gardner-Collins and Nick Holyoake as guests.
- Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on the work of GFirst LEP at this time: We continue to issue regular updates in relation to support for businesses and all of this information is available in bite size chunks on our website. We had over 570 Growth Hub Business Impact Surveys completed as of beginning of May. As of 18th May this has been re-issued to include questions on more of a recovery theme. To date more than £114million of business grant payments to Gloucestershire businesses have been confirmed by our six Local Authorities to help counter the impact, assisting more than 10,600 businesses in the county. Nick Holyoake is continuing his work with GFirst LEP to co-ordinate the county's recovery plan. The aim is to develop an economic recovery plan for Gloucestershire that reflects the county's character, business needs and economic priorities as informed by stakeholder consultation. Nick will be attending the business group meeting as a guest in order to support his work to gather relevant, timely stakeholder recovery plans. Delivery of the final report will be by early July 2020.
- As the majority of High Street stores look to re-open on 15th June, the group went 'round the table' to share their thoughts:
 - Cheltenham BID:** Safety must come first for a phased re-opening. With social distancing to be implemented there are concerns over queues onto the pavements, with partial pedestrianism of some areas being investigated by local authorities to prevent overspill into roads.
With localism on the increase, small independent shops seem to be doing well, however several are not equipped for online orders – a good case study for the Growth Hub on how to get your business online would be Wooton
 - John Lewis:** Sport, lifestyle, wellbeing and tech have been the most popular selling items online and this is set to continue as the high street re opens. Strong signage/screens in store with plenty of staff and a deliver-to-car collection service, a corporate decision has been made to re-open on 18th June.
 - Gloucester City:** A slow increase in footfall is predicted which is manageable, with the shopping centre being perceived as a 'safe' place to shop with no queues.

A challenge is managing cashflow with opening times, and adapting the jobs of the existing workforce instead of reducing staff numbers altogether.
Some shops have adopted an 'appointment only' service, such as Specsavers, Vision express, and Scarrots Shoes, as well as several retailers on St Oswalds retail part (carpet and sofa shops)
- Steve Gardner-Collins was invited to illustrate how closely linked the visitor economy industry is with the high street, and despite visitor economy being slightly behind the high street in terms of recovery / re-opening, to encourage the two to work more closely together. www.visit-gloucestershire.uk now has over 400 partners and 25 ambassadors supporting it.

The date of the next meeting is Thursday 16th July 2020

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



Tourism and Visitor Economy

- The group met virtually on Thursday 14th May 2020. Chair, Steve Gardner-Collins welcomed several guests to the meeting, including Nick Holyoake, who is writing the Economy Recovery Plan for the county.
- Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on the work of GFirst LEP at this time: We continue to issue regular updates in relation to support for businesses and all of this information is available in bite size chunks on our website. We had over 570 Growth Hub Business Impact Surveys completed as of beginning of May. As of 18th May this has been re-issued to include questions on more of a recovery theme. To date more than £114million of business grant payments to Gloucestershire businesses have been confirmed by our Local Authorities to help counter the impact, assisting more than 10,600 businesses in the county. Nick Holyoake is continuing his work with GFirst LEP to co-ordinate the county's recovery plan. The aim is to develop an economic recovery plan for Gloucestershire that reflects the county's character, business needs and economic priorities as informed by stakeholder consultation. Nick will be attending the business group meeting as a guest in order to support his work to gather relevant, timely stakeholder recovery plans. Delivery of the final report will be by early July 2020.
- Going 'round the table' businesses gave additional updates on the latest impacts from COVID-19 on tourism businesses in their area since the last time the group met (last month):
 - **Hotelier / B&B:** Government are keen to put dates into place, however guidelines need to be set out beforehand as to how we can operate, otherwise hotels will open all of the rooms up for sale. Re-shaping the offering taking into account social distancing. Booking agents are pushing hoteliers to be open and ready by 4th July however some businesses will be lucky to see occupancy of 30%.
 - **Gloucester Goes Retro** (one of the biggest events for the city) is to be cancelled. 92% of independent festivals are cancelled. The History Festival looking like the first physical event to happen since lockdown (Sept) however a lot of planning as to how to manage staffing, customers, amenities etc will need to be undertaken.
 - **Honey-pot tourist areas** are concerned about being overwhelmed with visitors. Retail offering needs to be ready for business by 4th July as well in order for them to survive in these areas. Restaurant and Bars will be hit particularly hard.
- Feedback from very small businesses in more rural areas in response to the Growth Hub survey is that they are unaware of the Growth Hub or that it cannot help them – incorrect perceptions about the help that is available will be actioned with the Growth Hub.
- Steve Collins will continue to promote the visit-gloucestershire project, and now has 267 agreements with partners and has some funding secured already. www.visit-gloucestershire.uk now has over 400 partners and 25 ambassadors supporting it.

*The date of next meeting is **Thursday 18th June 2020***

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