

## **GFirst LEP Business Groups Update: July 2020**

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

**Advanced Engineering & Manufacturing | Agri, Food & Rural Business | Business Membership  
Business & Professional Services | Energy | Construction & Infrastructure  
Retail & the High Street | Visitor Economy & Tourism**

- **The Business Group Chairs met virtually on Monday 29<sup>th</sup> June.** GFirst LEP's CEO, David Owen gave an update on the activities of the LEP including the Economic Recovery Plan for Gloucestershire, responses to the Growth Hub's Business Intelligence Survey and outbound business calls to the largest 200 businesses in the county. The update also included various collaboration activities: partnering with [Glosjobs.co.uk](https://www.glosjobs.co.uk), and supporting Punchline with their Business Champions feature.
- Nine of the ten business group Chairs were present at the meeting, and each gave an update on the current state of affairs in their sector. The main areas of concern following COVID-19 were:
  - a reduction of up to 40% in the demand from civil aerospace industry
  - Unemployment and re-training will be major issues over the next 3-12 months as businesses fail to recover
  - The cyber and digital industry is stronger than ever before, and is relevant to all sectors
- David Owen thanked the Chairs for their support in the development of the Economic Recovery Plan. The LEP and its business 'voice' is all the more richer with a diverse, knowledgeable support network, and by feeding this knowledge into the *economic* recovery plan, we have created a business-rich report which will compliment the *place-based* recovery plans being produced by the local authorities and will collectively support Gloucestershire to move forward.

*The date of the next Business Group Chairs Meeting will be early September 2020 date to be confirmed.*



## Advanced Engineering & Manufacturing

- The Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing Business Group met virtually on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> July. Chair Rob Loveday welcomed guest speaker Leah Rider from the National Composites Centre (NCC).
- Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on the activities of the LEP over the last month: our Covid-19 business support updates have started to reduce as the focus changes to recovery, however we will continue to issue weekly newsletters with latest news and information from the county as well as Government updates as they happen. Nick Holyoake will be finalising the information gathered from businesses for the Gloucestershire Economic recovery plan. We believe that we have developed an economic recovery plan for Gloucestershire that reflects the county's character, business needs and economic priorities as informed by stakeholder consultation, the Local Industrial Strategy and the Skills agenda.  
We have just come through an extremely busy time after announcement of Local Infrastructure Stimulus Fund - another round of Growth Deal funding for shovel ready projects. We submitted 15 projects worth up to £52million.  
Growth Hub updates: Forest of Dean – Construction has now resumed. The recruitment process will follow when appropriate and an opening date planned for quarter 2/3, dependent on COVID recovery.  
Cheltenham – Planned opening by April/May 2021. Cheltenham Borough Council are fully supportive of the scheme and see it as a vital element of their economic recovery activity so have ringfenced the funding required to ensure the Hub can open.
- Leah Rider gave the group an overview of what the NCC has to offer businesses. NCC Connect offers dedicated SME training support to generate impact through partnerships and connections. Through access to their facilities they can offer support for small scale projects or technical consultancy. They also offer a line walk service, innovation workshops, training, match funding for UK SMEs to develop composite technologies, as well as an SME affiliate scheme which offers affordable access to a year of benefits including training, equipment and access to the wider BCC network.
- Members were asked 'round the table' to share with the group how the pandemic has impacted on businesses, and their plans for recovery:
  - The NCC are expecting a 50% reduction in aerospace business (in South West). Make UK (driving competitive advantage for the UK) are expecting a 21% drop in output. The South West region is the least confident currently.
  - From a recruitment perspective, businesses are trying as hard as possible to hold onto their staff because they know how hard it is to find people with the right specialist skills.
  - Financially there is an increasing likelihood of a liquidity crisis – customers are reluctant to place orders when they are unsure of their returns. This is likely to continue until at least Christmas 2020.
  - There is likely to be a real drop off after pipeline orders have been completed and throughout 2021. The MOD will be leading a cross-government review into the UK's defence and security industrial strategy this year. It will suggest how defence in particular might better drive investment and prosperity across the UK.

*The date of the next Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing meeting will be **early September 2020 date to be confirmed 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](mailto:karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com)*



## Agri-Food & Rural Economy

- The Agri Food & Rural group met virtually on Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> July. Chair of the group Jo Price welcomed Tom Mason from CLA as a new member, and Carey Ives as interim representative from Gloucestershire County Council.
- Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on the activities of the LEP over the last month: our Covid-19 business support updates have started to reduce as the focus changes to recovery, however we will continue to issue weekly newsletters with latest news and information from the county as well as Government updates as they happen. Nick Holyoake will be finalising the information gathered from businesses for the Gloucestershire Economic recovery plan. We believe that we have developed an economic recovery plan for Gloucestershire that reflects the county's character, business needs and economic priorities as informed by stakeholder consultation, the Local Industrial Strategy and the Skills agenda.  
We have just come through an extremely busy time after announcement of Local Infrastructure Stimulus Fund - another round of Growth Deal funding for shovel ready projects. We submitted 15 projects worth up to £52million.  
Growth Hub updates: Forest of Dean – Construction has now resumed. The recruitment process will follow when appropriate and an opening date planned for quarter 2/3, dependent on COVID recovery.  
Cheltenham – Planned opening by April/May 2021. Cheltenham Borough Council are fully supportive of the scheme and see it as a vital element of their economic recovery activity so have ringfenced the funding required to ensure the Hub can open.
- Members were asked 'round the table' to share with the group how the pandemic has impacted on certain areas of the industry, and plans for recovery:
  - The Co-operative have seen a 40% uplift in sales and the more rural neighbourhood based shops have seen up to 50% uptake in sales – these rural stores tend to sell more local produce. Unfortunately, smaller local farm shops don't have the produce or the infrastructure to upscale with the demand so were running out of items that the consumer is used to having 'on tap'. This became less of an issue as initial demand (and panic-buying) flattened out.
  - Agri-tech advances need to offer a longer-term solution to support the distribution of local, healthier produce to those that need it most, including food banks. The education and means to prepare and cook fresh food needs to be taught / made available as well.
  - Rural communities including farmers are suffering from 'social starvation' – whilst many have adapted to a more virtual world, a blended approach to both physical and virtual interaction is important.
- Tamsyn Harrod-Beck gave an update on the Food strategy which is completed in its draft stage. The three key strands are:
  - **Transform Demand** – create opportunities for farmers to sell produce locally into public sector and food catering contracts
  - **Food culture** - Help people live happier & healthier lives in a county that values food and its producers
  - **Food Security** - Help farmers and land managers prosper: support regenerative farming and sustainable business modelsImmediate short-term funding is required of up to £5k for the development of the Hive and finalisation of the Strategy in its draft stage through to the end of 2020.
- From an academic perspective, students are looking at returning to campus in September. They are currently benefitting from a blended approach to learning and this may continue beyond September. The students and staff are keen to get back up to speed as quickly as possible and to have face to face contact.

*The date of the next meeting is on **Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> October 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](mailto:karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com)*



## Banking & Finance

- The group met 'virtually' on Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> 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 18<sup>th</sup> 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 13<sup>th</sup> 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](mailto:karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com)*



## Business & Professional Services

- The group met virtually on 8<sup>th</sup> July 2020. Matthew Clayton welcomed Sarah Taylor from Career Voyage to the group.
- Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on the activities of the LEP over the last month: our Covid-19 business support updates have started to reduce as the focus changes to recovery, however we will continue to issue weekly newsletters with latest news and information from the county as well as Government updates as they happen. Nick Holyoake will be finalising the information gathered from businesses for the Gloucestershire Economic recovery plan. We believe that we have developed an economic recovery plan for Gloucestershire that reflects the county's character, business needs and economic priorities as informed by stakeholder consultation, the Local Industrial Strategy and the Skills agenda.  
We have just come through an extremely busy time after announcement of Local Infrastructure Stimulus Fund - another round of Growth Deal funding for shovel ready projects. We submitted 15 projects worth up to £52million.
- Sam Hoad gave an update on the Growth Hubs: Forest of Dean – Construction has now resumed. The recruitment process will follow when appropriate and an opening date planned for quarter 2/3, dependent on COVID recovery. Cheltenham – Planned opening by April/May 2021. Cheltenham Borough Council are fully supportive of the scheme and see it as a vital element of their economic recovery activity so have ringfenced the funding required to ensure the Hub can open.
- Members were asked 'round the table' to share with the group how the pandemic has impacted on businesses, and their plans for recovery:
  - There doesn't seem to be a lot of use being made of the flexible furlough scheme which would help businesses who are facing challenges encouraging employers back to work off the full time furloughing scheme
  - Businesses need support in the positioning of readiness for virtual working.
  - Global passenger air travel will have a slow recovery – this is having a direct impact on those in the supply chain e.g Safran (supply landing gear to major airliners)
  - The impact of COVID-19 could set businesses back years – it's affecting all levels of workers from senior managers through to cleaning staff.
  - Mental health is of a real concern as a blended approach of physical and virtual interaction is essential. Government's approaches in getting youngsters back to work is welcomed.
  - Infrastructure investment is very slow. Bigger businesses seem to be coping better with virtual working (and are possibly better equipped to adapt to it?). SMEs are now accepting this as a way of working moving forward which could lead to more opportunities for Gloucestershire businesses of all sizes to get more involved in projects further afield as connectivity has evolved.
  - As people come back to work off furlough, this could cause resentment between staff that have been working throughout the crisis – support needs to be offered to businesses where this has happened, to maintain a team culture. 'Water-cooler' chats and off the cuff conversations don't happen in a virtual world – this could create silos amongst staff. Some companies have adapted very well to virtual working – are there lessons here that could be shared with those companies that are struggling?
  - Re-training and identifying transferable skills amongst those that will be made redundant is key.

*The next Business & Professional Services meeting will take place towards the end of September once the review of shovel-ready projects has been announced.*

*For questions about the group please contact Karen Campbell [karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com](mailto:karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com)*



## Business Membership Groups

- The group met 'virtually' on Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2020. Chair, Ian Mean welcomed guest speaker Nicky Williams from CBI the UK's premier business organization.
- Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on the activities of the LEP over the last month: our Covid-19 business support updates have started to reduce as the focus changes to recovery, however we will continue to issue weekly newsletters with latest news and information from the county as well as Government updates as they happen. Nick Holyoake will be finalising the information gathered from businesses for the Gloucestershire Economic recovery plan. We believe that we have developed an economic recovery plan for Gloucestershire that reflects the county's character, business needs and economic priorities as informed by stakeholder consultation, the Local Industrial Strategy and the Skills agenda.  
We have just come through an extremely busy time after announcement of Local Infrastructure Stimulus Fund - another round of Growth Deal funding for shovel ready projects. We submitted 15 projects worth up to £52million.  
Growth Hub updates: Forest of Dean – Construction has now resumed. The recruitment process will follow when appropriate and an opening date planned for quarter 2/3, dependent on COVID recovery.  
Cheltenham – Planned opening by April/May 2021. Cheltenham Borough Council are fully supportive of the scheme and see it as a vital element of their economic recovery activity so have ringfenced the funding required to ensure the Hub can open.
- Nicky Williams representing CBI South West gave an update on current figures for the South West. As at the end of June 2020: 9.2m people have been furloughed; 1.1m businesses are furloughing staff; 22.9m universal credit claims have been made; £40billion has been loaned through the CBILS and BBILS loan schemes.
- Members were asked 'round the table' to share with the group how the pandemic has impacted on businesses, and their plans for recovery:

**NFU** – There needs to be a better pipeline for enabling industries, and aligning policies for jobs. There are still gaps with jobs roles and availability, and the issue of re-training to ensure individuals are equipped with the right skills for jobs in different careers eg from hospitality to farming is still an issue. Farmers need to have the opportunity to learn digital skills to keep their businesses profitable and have more of an online presence.

**Gloucestershire Chamber/Business West** – We all have to be prepared to do things differently and to act quickly. There is a danger that some businesses will be left behind, so we need to be able to offer the right training / re training to encourage businesses to move forward.

**Wootton Chamber** – A very positive spirit in the High Street, with only one shop not open. All shops have accessed grants. Local restaurants and pubs all opening first weekend of July.

**Cheltenham Chamber** – Chamber is meeting monthly. There have been difficulties in bringing working Mums back from furlough due to schools not being fully operational. Cheltenham Borough Council have relaxed planning rules and allowed pubs and restaurants to have seating on the street, to reduce congestion caused by queueing. The Chamber feel that the council could have used the lockdown time (with 75% fewer cars on the road), to resurface some of the town centre roads as they are in a very bad state.

*The next meeting will take place on **Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> August 2020.***

*For questions about the group please contact Karen Campbell [karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com](mailto:karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com)*



## Cyber-tech

- The group met on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> 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](http://www.goldenvalleyuk.com)

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

*For questions about the group please contact Karen Campbell [karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com](mailto:karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com)*



## Construction and Infrastructure

- The group met virtually on Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> July 2020. Chair, Stephen Limbrick welcomed guest John Baker who has recently finished as Strategic planning co-ordinator for the county.
- Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on the activities of the LEP over the last month: our Covid-19 business support updates have started to reduce as the focus changes to recovery, however we will continue to issue weekly newsletters with latest news and information from the county as well as Government updates as they happen. The Gloucestershire Economic recovery plan has been approved by the Board and will be issued in the next couple of days. We believe that we have developed an economic recovery plan for Gloucestershire that reflects the county's character, business needs and economic priorities as informed by stakeholder consultation, the Local Industrial Strategy and the Skills agenda.  
We have just come through an extremely busy time after announcement of Local Infrastructure Stimulus Fund - another round of Growth Deal funding for shovel ready projects. We submitted 15 projects worth up to £52million. We have started our 'Think Gloucestershire' promotional campaign to 'think local' encouraging people to shop locally, holiday locally and to encourage businesses to think locally with their supply chain procurement.  
Growth Hub updates: Forest of Dean – Construction has now resumed. The recruitment process will follow when appropriate and an opening date planned for quarter 2/3, dependent on COVID recovery.  
Cheltenham – Planned opening by April/May 2021. Cheltenham Borough Council are fully supportive of the scheme and see it as a vital element of their economic recovery activity so have ringfenced the funding required to ensure the Hub can open.
- John Baker gave an overview of the work he has completed to produce a Statement of Common Ground for the county, to include a strategic spatial plan with Local Plans continuing to be developed alongside. The Statement used spatial planning as a contributor to a low carbon future, looked at the development of a 'city region', dedicated transport connectivity and a review of the airport and greenbelt. A draft was issued on 31<sup>st</sup> May.
- Philippa Lowe, from Cotswold District Council, gave an update on the 'Breaking Down Barriers' work in relation to faster planning application processes. This ongoing work has been identified as a key innovator for the Economic Recovery Plan. The group are looking for transformational planning and placemaking projects to use as case studies. Cross connections are to be made between this group and digital connectivity and the high street to ensure a holistic input into the planning procedures. Tewkesbury Borough Council have appointed a new planning co-ordinator and Philippa will take the work forward with them.
- Business impact comments included:
  - Planning policies regarding change of use, especially from business to residential in high street areas needs to happen quickly. COVID-19 has accelerated the demise of the high street shops and the repurposing of retail buildings needs to happen swiftly to reflect this.
  - Furloughed staff are finding it difficult to get mortgages approved due to uncertainty of job security.
  - Building confidence around the housing market will have a positive impact on planning & development decisions.
- Update on Local Plans:
  - Transport Plan has been put on hold whilst government make decisions on more sustainable (walking and cycling) solutions and decarbonisation of transport.
  - Gloucestershire Local Plan: several other letters raising the same concerns as this group had done regarding the potential for duplication of charges through S.106 and CIL.
  - The Sharpness Project has put in a bid for the 'Restore your Railway' fund which is designed to help develop proposals to build or reopen railway lines and stations to help restore rural connectivity. It will submit again in November.

***The next meeting of the C&I group is mid September 2020***

*For questions about the group please contact Karen Campbell [karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com](mailto:karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com)*



## Energy

- The group met virtually on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> July 2020. Elizabeth Weaver welcomed elected co-chairs Rachel Brain and Simon Pickering into their new roles. The group had previously showed their support for the co-chairing partnership in response to the suggestion via email. Elizabeth also welcomed Tom Scott as a guest to the group to discuss the UKAEA nuclear programme.
- Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on the activities of the LEP over the last month: our Covid-19 business support updates have started to reduce as the focus changes to recovery, however we will continue to issue weekly newsletters with latest news and information from the county as well as Government updates as they happen. Nick Holyoake will be finalising the information gathered from businesses for the Gloucestershire Economic recovery plan. We believe that we have developed an economic recovery plan for Gloucestershire that reflects the county's character, business needs and economic priorities as informed by stakeholder consultation, the Local Industrial Strategy and the Skills agenda.  
We have just come through an extremely busy time after announcement of Local Infrastructure Stimulus Fund - another round of Growth Deal funding for shovel ready projects. We submitted 15 projects worth up to £52million.  
Growth Hub updates: Forest of Dean – Construction has now resumed. The recruitment process will follow when appropriate and an opening date planned for quarter 2/3, dependent on COVID recovery.  
Cheltenham – Planned opening by April/May 2021. Cheltenham Borough Council are fully supportive of the scheme and see it as a vital element of their economic recovery activity so have ringfenced the funding required to ensure the Hub can open.
- Members were asked 'round the table' to share with the group how the pandemic has impacted on businesses, and their plans for recovery:
  - Hewitt Studios:** EV transport hub in Woolwich to be completed in December for Transport for London. Working on a second in Portishead.
  - GE Aviation:** French are supporting Airbus to generate hydrogen as a future aviation fuel
  - Kiwa:** Domestic and commercial hydrogen ovens are in development working with Bosch. Working with local and national expertise to repurpose the gas network to carry hydrogen
  - Bromford:** Development is back in full swing despite taking a multimillion pound hit. 6 x modular houses approved for Cotswold development. Reducing office space by 40,000 sq ft which has reduced carbon footprint and has allowed them to connect with the local community more as they work remotely/through hubs
  - Severn Wye:** Working on a retrofit (housing) development project and to work with community groups and schools to ensure local community buy-in and local contractors are used
  - Berkeley GREEN:** Green Fuels were one of the 5 project partners to win the FlexJet EU project of the year for the conversion of waste fats into aviation fuel. Gloucestershire Police training academy have now moved into their new facility at Berkeley – they are proposing the use of solar panels on the building and are the greenest Police force in the country.
  - GCC:** A county-wide climate change co-ordinator role has recently been approved and will be hosted by Gloucester City Council. GCC have committed to be carbon net zero by 2030 (80% reduction, 20% offset) and have reduced their carbon emissions by 73% as of end of March 2020.
  - Ecotricity:** have experienced a 20% drop in commercial energy use due to very few people working in offices at present. This shortfall has not been made up by the domestic market.
- **Tom Scott** (University of Bristol) spoke about the STEP – an advanced modular reactor project. The group were keen to hear the parameters around the building of the first fusion power plant, with a nuclear-savvy workforce, EDF Energy HQ and Berkeley all based in Gloucestershire. Tom is already in discussion with WECA and South West LEPS. There needs to be a strong argument made for the South West versus investment into the Northern Powerhouse.
- **South West Energy Hub** update: the next round of funding for the Rural Community Energy Fund (RCEF) is in September. Philip Morris is the Project Co-coordinator for Bristol and Gloucestershire, working with Local Authorities and LEPS to identify energy projects for assistance via the Hub for funding.

**The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> September 2020.**

For questions about the group please contact Karen Campbell [karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com](mailto:karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com)



## Retail and High Street

- The Retail and High Street Business Group met virtually on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> July 2020. Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on the activities of the LEP over the last month: our Covid-19 business support updates have started to reduce as the focus changes to recovery, however we will continue to issue weekly newsletters with latest news and information from the county as well as Government updates as they happen. The GFirst LEP Board have just signed off the Gloucestershire Economic recovery plan. We believe that we have developed an economic recovery plan for Gloucestershire that reflects the county's character, business needs and economic priorities as informed by stakeholder consultation, the Local Industrial Strategy and the Skills agenda. Our 'Think Gloucestershire' campaign has just started, encouraging business to think locally with their supply chains, and encouraging visitors to have a staycation in the county and to stay local, eat local and shop local. We will be rolling out the campaign over the next few weeks.  
Growth Hub updates: Forest of Dean – Construction has now resumed. The recruitment process will follow when appropriate and an opening date planned for quarter 2/3, dependent on COVID recovery.  
Cheltenham – Planned opening by April/May 2021. Cheltenham Borough Council are fully supportive of the scheme and see it as a vital element of their economic recovery activity so have ringfenced the funding required to ensure the Hub can open.
- Following the opening of 'non-essential' shops on 4<sup>th</sup> July, the group went 'round the table' to share their thoughts:
  - Gloucestershire Market Towns Forum (GMTF):** There needs to be more join-up with smaller towns as they don't benefit from support of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs).
  - John Lewis:** There was initial excitement in the first week when the flagship London store re-opened for the first week and then plateaued after this. There is pent up spend especially in homeware, and a high demand for IT equipment (worldwide) which has led to a supply shortage.
  - Visit Gloucestershire:** It would be good to see the stats on browsers vs spenders as some areas are experiencing a much higher volume of spenders than others, but with similar footfall ratio.
  - Federation of Small Businesses (FSB):** smaller shops have opened to show support but many are unlikely to survive. The wearing of PPE could be an issue for younger age group who are reluctant to wear them. Older age group (50+) are reluctant to venture out at all.
  - Tewkesbury BC:** Shoppers are spending and using #shoplocal. Setting up a retail support group to work with smaller towns. Submitted a bid to the DCMS digital fund getting local businesses to connect better.
  - Hospitality:** room occupancy is 60-70% over weekends. Lunchtime F&B offering is suffering
  - Forest of Dean DC:** The Town Centre performance report shows that footfall figures are down across Cinderford, Lydney & Coleford. Working with Dean Wye Tourism on their social media campaign.
  - Property consultants:** Currently analysing the needs of units for business / residential following enquiries from users about repurposing property or subletting to get the best ROI (business to residential as requirements for office space diminishes).
  - Maybe\*:** Working with Googlemaps to identify companies in 'place' and to monitor their social media platform. Primark couldn't sell over lockdown as they do not have an online platform, but because they kept the conversation going with their customers, they maintained their loyalty and there was queueing once shops began to open.
  - Cirencester Growth Hub:** opened w/c 6<sup>th</sup> July for members only. Small eateries are concerned about the non-existent lunchtime trade as people work from home.

***The date of the next meeting is mid September 2020***

*For questions about the group please contact Karen Campbell [karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com](mailto:karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com)*



## Tourism and Visitor Economy

- The group met virtually on Monday 13th July 2020. Chair Steve Collins welcomed Alex Cottrell Growth Hub Manager who gave an update on the sector-specific support that the Growth Hub have given: The Growth Hub has recently launched a bespoke support service package for the tourism industry – this package of Tourism campaign assets has been sent to local authorities and DMOs so that they have what they need to help their marketing campaigns. They are producing a webinar for businesses in this sector, details of which were sent to the group.
- Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on the activities of the LEP over the last month: our Covid-19 business support updates have started to reduce as the focus changes to recovery, however we will continue to issue weekly newsletters with latest news and information from the county as well as Government updates as they happen. Nick Holyoake will be finalising the information gathered from businesses for the Gloucestershire Economic recovery plan. We believe that we have developed an economic recovery plan for Gloucestershire that reflects the county's character, business needs and economic priorities as informed by stakeholder consultation, the Local Industrial Strategy and the Skills agenda.  
We have just come through an extremely busy time after announcement of Local Infrastructure Stimulus Fund - another round of Growth Deal funding for shovel ready projects. We submitted 15 projects worth up to £52million.  
Growth Hub updates: Forest of Dean – Construction has now resumed. The recruitment process will follow when appropriate and an opening date planned for quarter 2/3, dependent on COVID recovery.  
Cheltenham – Planned opening by April/May 2021. Cheltenham Borough Council are fully supportive of the scheme and see it as a vital element of their economic recovery activity so have ringfenced the funding required to ensure the Hub can open.
- Representatives of the Districts and smaller market towns were asked to give their feedback following opening on 4<sup>th</sup> July:
  - **Gloucestershire Market Towns** were concerned as to how small towns get more involved, and they were advised to link up with the Chambers and Forums, to share advice and gain access to support; enabling them to benefit from it.
  - **Stroud:** Are committed to a very 'local' push and have developed a toolkit to help businesses with this. Consumers are very wary when out and about, but the local shops have put appropriate measures in place to make shopping easier and safer.
  - **Forest of Dean:** have seen a healthy uptake in outdoor attractions such as Puzzlewood and sculpture trails. They have experienced a high number of no-shows especially with campsite bookings, despite deposits being forfeited as visitors are still wary of the current climate.
  - **Gloucester:** running a 'Good to Go' campaign based on Visit England's recent national campaign. They recently held a night time economy webinar with over 60 attendees to support this sector prior to unlocking. Gloucester Quays are experiencing 45% of the footfall compared to this time last year, however spend is at 80% of this time last year, reflecting that more people are buying than just browsing.
  - **Cotswolds:** a better digital presence is needed for attractions – only 32% of attractions have a purely online booking platform, whereas 66% are still relying on phone bookings as well as online bookings. 64% of attractions are currently open with 75% scheduled to open by the end of July. Cotswolds have recently put in a bid for round 2 of the Visit England funding. The Ministerial visit to the area the day after shops opening went very well.
  - **Cheltenham:** the more rurally-based hotels have seen a better uptake than the town centre ones. Currently working on a yoga festival: 60 days in the Park. The Christmas market this year will be a lot bigger – stalls can be reserved through the BID.
  - **Cotswolds AONB** are preparing their voluntary wardens to continue their guided walks after social distancing measures have been removed. Craft courses have restarted. There will be a public launch on 19<sup>th</sup> September of their new name - 'Cotswold Natural Landscape' with supporting media activity.
- Social distancing signage is having a direct impact on consumer confidence. It's advisable to get someone from outside of your organisation to 'walk your flow' to ensure appropriate signage is giving an advisory message.

**The date of next meeting is 19<sup>th</sup> August 2020**

For questions about the group please contact Karen Campbell [karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com](mailto:karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com)