

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

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

**Business Group Chairs | Agri, Food & Rural | Business Membership Groups  
Banking & Finance | Construction & Infrastructure**

- The Business Group Chairs met virtually on Monday 19<sup>th</sup> October. 9 out of the 10 Chairs attended the meeting. Dev Chakraborty gave an update on GFirst LEP and Sarah Danson gave an update on the Growth Hub activities:

Getting Building funded projects have had final approval and all are ready to go. The 4<sup>th</sup> tier of the Comms plan will focus on shopping locally for Christmas instead of shopping online. A skills portal will be launched in December, to include click-throughs to what is available locally and nationally for those facing redundancy. On 1<sup>st</sup> November we start our campaign for a new GFirst Chair.

**Growth Hub:** Lots of interest in the SME kick starter and visitor economy grant schemes with over 250 business applying for 140 grants. Application have been put on hold whilst this initial interest is evaluated. We will ensure that those businesses that have not been successful receive support in other ways. Out of 104 contacted who originally expressed interest in grants but did make an application, 102 have asked for Growth Hub support.

The Kick start placement scheme is getting a lot of interest. GFirst LEP decided not to be an intermediary for the scheme and will be signposting businesses to local intermediaries such as Gloucestershire County Council and Adviza.

Three specialist advisors started on 19<sup>th</sup> October to offer support with change management, sustainability and digitalisation they will work alongside existing Growth Hub support, until March 2021.

- **Business Membership groups:** There is a real concern over skills and re training, with a shortage of all of the available information in one place with easy access. Government needs to work harder to offer better apprenticeship opportunities with bigger incentives for businesses. To support businesses further, tourism needs to be promoted quickly and out of town, to attract people into Gloucestershire, alongside the campaign for locals to 'think local'. Positivity at this time is crucial for business confidence, and this group is keen to work with the Growth Hub to support start-ups.
- **Advanced Engineering & Manufacturing:** When are companies going to start making Capital investments? The Aerospace industry is only getting worse. There needs to be an understanding of the needs of future talent and a reduction in the fade of existing talent. There is a need for a combined training resource to encompass these and prevent industry talent from draining not just from Gloucestershire, but from the UK. Where is the investment plan to keep skills and technology development in the UK?
- **Cyber-tech:** Smaller cyber businesses are back in their office spaces or are having physical meetings. It is felt that in this industry, the physical element is important. The members work closely with 'cyber in schools' to encourage early engagement with the basics, and encourage businesses to keep a focus on young talent by working in partnership with schools. There has been some concern from businesses over the potential for exploitation of employees working from home – where individuals' online security systems may not be as robust as the business requires, which can leave them (the business) more vulnerable to cyber attacks – this group is always happy to help industries to identify any cyber issues and offer support.

- **Construction & Infrastructure:** The UK is experiencing differing levels of optimism: Wales and West are the most optimistic, with London the least. The group is re igniting the 'breaking down barriers to development' work. There are still issues in the county with planning delays, especially since Covid. The on-boarding of Rupert Waters at Gloucestershire County Council has opened up a direct link with their planning policies which will help to unblock this. The Statement of Common Ground will also be pushed for publication by GCC as this offers opportunities for Districts to work collectively on planning issues.
- **Energy:** Looking at connecting up with existing carbon neutral projects with wider District campaigns. They are keen to ensure that sustainability is a key fundamental in the development of Cyber Central, and that it is incorporated into planning / energy demands can be met etc. Connectivity with the work of other sectors is crucial – especially with cyber and AEM.
- **Business & Professional Services:** The group are currently working on two of the interventions from the recovery plan: Digital Business Transformation and Mentor Hub development. A taskforce group will meet at the beginning of November to carry the initial discussion forward as to how these interventions can work for businesses and what it would mean to them.
- **Retail & the High Street:** It's going to be a tricky run-up to Christmas. Retailers feel lucky that they are not in a current tier 3 lock down however we could be heading for one, which would wipe out a lot of local shops. Landlords have taken the pressure off rent collection for now, however there is such uncertainty around retailers cashflow, there could be problems in the future.
- **Banking & Finance:** The BBLS finishes shortly. There is concern over the high number of apparently fraudulent businesses claiming this loan, as well as businesses that won't be able to afford to pay it back. There has been an increase in the number of fraud attempts within the industry since COVID which is concerning. Some offices will not reopen, with staff working from home on a permanent basis with virtual meetings with clients.
- **Agri, food & Rural:** There is immediate concern over what farmers need in the next 6 months, with the impact of COVID, and EU Exit this has had a double impact on farmers. There are also discussions around [Natural Capital](#) and the climate change strategy to being together 'Green Gloucestershire', sustainability with food systems and the rural economy.

*The date of the next Business Group Chairs Meeting will be Monday 7<sup>th</sup> December.*



## Advanced Engineering & Manufacturing

- **The Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing Business Group** met virtually on 17<sup>th</sup> September. Chair Rob Loveday welcomed guests Andrew Peaty (DASA), Lorrin White (Bamboo technology) Marc Funnell (NCC) and Matthew Large (Stroud Metal) to the meeting.
- Karen Campbell gave an update on the activities of the LEP over the last month: our Recovery and Restart plan was published at the end of July with interventions identified to help support the restarting of the Gloucestershire economy. GFirst LEP has secured £11.3 million to help the county recover. The funding is part of central Government's £900million nationwide 'Getting Building Fund'. The 'shovel ready' projects will create 959 jobs, aid recovery and support the green agenda. We have compiled both a Redundancy support pack and a business recovery toolkit covering some essential solutions for businesses re assessing their practices. Our 'Think Gloucestershire' campaign continues through September to encourage individuals and business to think locally for supply chain procurement and staycations. A 'Good news' stories campaign started in September with some really great business stories coming through.
- Marc Funnell, Head of Digital for DETI, National Composites Centre, Bristol (NCC) gave a presentation on the digital transformation of engineering, and the skills and innovation required for its development. Marc has offered members the opportunity to visit NCC to see Test Bed 5G. The DETI team is available to industry for diagnosis of digital transformation i.e. a free virtual survey to SMEs if needed.
- Andrew Peaty from UK Defence & Security Accelerator (DASA) gave an update on their latest funding announcements for Defence and Security projects. They have competitions open currently for project ideas based around unmanned air systems, robotic and autonomous systems, and explosives and weapon detection.
- Lorrin White from Bamboo Technology gave a presentation on 'Industry 4.0 and how to approach digital transformation'. Lorrin talked about the ongoing automation of traditional manufacturing and industrial practices, using modern SMART technology, gathering and analysing data across machines, enabling faster, more flexible, and more efficient processes to produce higher-quality goods at reduced costs.
- Members were asked 'round the table' to share with the group how the pandemic has impacted on businesses, and their plans for recovery:
  - From a recruitment perspective, the market is buoyant with demand for recruitment within IT and Engineering sectors. There is growing concern on the impact on the labour market at the end of the furlough scheme as well as Brexit.
  - A better recovery within the automotive and aviation industries is encouraging, however tariffs associated with Brexit is a concern especially amongst businesses who currently export up to 50% of their goods overseas. Cutbacks in production of civil aviation production has had major impacts financially.
  - There is concern as to how manufacturers of EV vehicles and components can keep up with consumer demand for EVs. A lack of government funding to aid innovation combined with a reduced workforce will mean new ways of working. On a positive note the blended approach has helped the industry to become more inclusive and is encouraging for enabling more diversity in the future workforce for innovation.
  - There is a strong desire from employers to offer virtual work experience to young people. A blended approach to training and development is helping both parties to become more inclusive which is encouraging for enabling more diversity in the future workforce.

*The date of the next Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing meeting will be 9<sup>th</sup> November 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 Business group** met virtually on Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> October. Chair of the group Jo Price welcomed Dr Bryonny Goodwin-Hawkins Senior Research Fellow, NICRE was welcomed to the group.
- Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on behalf of GFirst and the Growth Hub: All 5 projects in the region receiving part of the government's Getting Building Fund have had final approval and are ready to move ahead with getting spades in the ground. GFirst's Think Gloucestershire campaign has recently launched tier 4 with a revised version of the shop local campaign, with a focus on shopping locally for Christmas instead of online. We have circulated a survey asking questions on peoples work habits and flexible working / life at work after COVID-19. From 1st November we will also be starting a campaign for a **new GFirst Chair** - Diane Savory agreed to stay on, so we could maintain continuity and to focus our messaging on government advice around COVID and recovery.  
We are developing a Skills portal on our website which be launching in December - it aims to capture what's available locally and nationally for those recently unemployed or facing redundancy.  
The Growth Hub have 3 new specialist sector-specific advisors who have started on 19th October. These consist of specialists in digitalisation, change management, and carbon neutrality and sustainability. They will be in post until March 2021 and will work alongside our existing Business Navigators and Guides.
- Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Stroud **Growth Hubs** are currently closed. Cirencester is open by appointment to members only with social distancing measures in place. Staff are working remotely to provide business support as well as workshops and events online.  
Forest of Dean are progressing with their refurbishment, opening is now intended by Dec 2020. Cheltenham Growth Hub is progressing, still on plan to begin local business support by March 2021.  
Our **Peer to Peer Network** launched recently - it is a fully funded programme offering 18 hours of facilitation from a trained mentor and potential one to one support of up to 3 hours. The aim is to discuss issues and potential solutions to business problems that may have been exacerbated by COVID19 or are anticipated due to BREXIT.
- Tamsyn Harrod-Beck gave an update on the Food strategy which is completed in its draft stage. Discussion around further funding to future-proof the delivery of the strategy, as well as the need for co-ordination with farmer engagement. Grass roots discussions such as what farmers need to fulfill contracts, and the cost involved to get farmers into the local supply chain are now needed. Everything needs to start to align in order to get the markets and the farmers ready.
- Janet Dwyer and Bryonny Goodwin-Hawkins gave an update on NICRE (National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise) a joint initiative between the University of Newcastle and CCRI. Bryonny will be leading the team for Gloucestershire and are looking for another member from RAU. We will be engaging on a local level for opportunities (with this group and their connections) as well as nationally, to put into action the 3 strands of the project: Research / fostering innovation; Farm based demonstrations; Dynamic Procurement.
- Three areas were identified within the group that need action / intervention:
  1. Critical support for farmers and growers in Gloucestershire over the next 6 months: what is on offer e.g lump sum/productivity grant / ELMs to replace CAP? Tamsyn Harrod-Beck to organise
  2. Briefing to local MPs on Agri food in the county including data on the impact of COVID-19 on the rural economy. Jo Price to organise
  3. Joining the dots: Natural Capital, Land Use and the county's Climate change strategy – potentially triangulating these work strands through the Local Nature Partnership to strengthen outcomes. Janet Dwyer / Bryonny Goodwin-Hawkins to organise.

*The date of the next meeting is in January 2021 date to be confirmed.*

*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 Banking & Finance Business group** met 'virtually' on Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> October, which was preceded by a banking and finance clinic. Chair, Mark Wilton welcomed Richard Neale and Hayley Parker from Ops-Box as guests.
- Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on behalf of GFirst and the Growth Hub: All 5 projects in the region receiving part of the government's Getting Building Fund have had final approval and are ready to move ahead with getting spades in the ground. GFirst's Think Gloucestershire campaign has recently launched tier 4 with a revised version of the shop local campaign, with a focus on shopping locally for Christmas instead of online. We have circulated a survey asking questions on peoples work habits and flexible working / life at work after COVID-19. From 1st November we will also be starting a campaign for a **new GFirst Chair** - Diane Savory agreed to stay on, so we could maintain continuity and to focus our messaging on government advice around COVID and recovery.  
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- Richard Neale and Hayley Parker presented to the group their full scale business planning service: Planning, Operations, People, Growth & Finance. Ex Lloyds Bank, they have the knowledge and expertise to advice, and to help businesses apply the tools to help them develop and grow. Support with implementing business plans is an area that they feel is lacking which is where their focus will be. They are in the process of becoming Growth Hub Delivery partners, participating with Growth Hub workshops and events in the future.
- 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:
  - There are major concerns with fraud over the Bounce Back Loans; as a result, very few high street banks are opening new accounts, even for existing customers. This is partly due to the sheer volume of requests and getting through backlog.
  - There are good news stories where business have adapted and are growing.
  - Banks are offering support with getting online and operating safely – meeting remotely is working well
  - Some banks will not be going back to a permanent office: customer contact is done virtually and is working well, however banks need to be aware of the mental health of their employees and customers – some businesses were really grateful for a call and a chat that may not have been business-related. Some businesses are finding it difficult so banks need to offer that support too.

*The next Banking & Finance meeting will take place on Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> December, preceded by and clinic if there is demand.*

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



## Business & Professional Services

- **The Business & Professional Services group** met virtually on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2020. Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on the activities of the LEP over the last month: our Recovery and Restart plan was published at the end of July with interventions identified to help support the restarting of the Gloucestershire economy. GFirst LEP have secured £11.3 million to help the county recover. The funding is part of central Government's £900million nationwide 'Getting Building Fund'. The 'shovel ready' projects will create 959 jobs, aid recovery and support the green agenda. We have compiled both a Redundancy support pack and a business recovery toolkit covering some essential solutions for businesses re assessing their practices. Our 'Think Gloucestershire' campaign continues through September to encourage individuals and business to think locally for supply chain procurement and staycations. A 'Good news' stories campaign started in September with some really great business stories coming through.
- Growth Hub Activity: over 200 businesses have received support since lockdown. Support in the form of workshops and one to ones has continued virtually, working alongside Local Authorities to ensure our signposting is aligned, accurate and relevant. Gloucester and Cirencester Growth Hubs are open by appointment only. Tewkesbury and Stroud are in the planning stages to open their doors safely in October. Half of the library sites are open by appointment with the remaining half due to open by October.
- This group has been identified in offering support to two of the interventions in the Recovery plan: Digital transformation, and mentoring support. Initial thoughts on how to progress these were discussed:
  - There needs to be a clearer definition of 'digital transformation' as this will mean different things to different businesses. Once this has been identified, specialist expertise can be utilized to see this through, varying from basic to specialist support.
  - Identifying what is happening on a national level in this area is important, to ensure we are aligned with this offering.
  - How do businesses overcome financial barriers to develop their digital platforms? Does this group's advice need to include signposting for this?
  - Mentoring needs to be clearly defined with expected outcomes. It's likely that this won't be the top of businesses' agendas as they come out of recovery.
- The group will meet again before the next meeting, to brainstorm exactly how these interventions can be defined and applied to businesses with a full understanding from them.

*The next Business & Professional Services meeting will take place on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2020.*

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



## Business Membership Groups

- **The Business Membership group** met 'virtually' on Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> October 2020. Chair, Ian Mean welcomed guest Matt Tipper from Unite to the group.
- Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on behalf of GFirst and the Growth Hub: All 5 projects in the region receiving part of the government's Getting Building Fund have had final approval and are ready to move ahead with getting spades in the ground. GFirst's Think Gloucestershire campaign has recently launched tier 4 with a revised version of the shop local campaign, with a focus on shopping locally for Christmas instead of online. We have circulated a survey asking questions on peoples work habits and flexible working / life at work after COVID-19. From 1st November we will also be starting a campaign for a **new GFirst Chair** - Diane Savory agreed to stay on, so we could maintain continuity and to focus our messaging on government advice around COVID and recovery.  
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The Growth Hub have 3 new specialist sector-specific advisors who have started on 19th October. These consist of specialists in digitalisation, change management, and carbon neutrality and sustainability. They will be in post until March 2021 and will work alongside our existing Business Navigators and Guides.
- Pete Carr (Gfirst) is working with the DWP (Dept for Work and Pensions) and Paul Woodhouse (Gfirst) I working with GET (Gloucestershire engineering Training) to look at re-training opportunities, particularly within the engineering sector, who are facing a high number of redundancies. Increasing concern over those in middle and senior management who find themselves redundant as they may be less likely to look at retraining opportunities.
- The option for people to work remotely has now been realised, and increasing numbers of people are looking to relocate to rural areas, as they are no longer bound to a commuter-friendly place to live. Gloucestershire has seen an increase in the umber of people looking to relocate here, but the infrastructure needs to be in place in order to support remote working; some areas of Gloucestershire still don't have full fibre broadband which needs to be addressed.
- An increasing amount of office space is becoming available to rent in order to meet the increased demand; some tenants from the construction, education, research and solar power industries are doing well.
- People looking to start their own business have had difficulties opening bank accounts. Several high street banks are reluctant to open new business accounts due to the uncertainty of solvency.
- There needs to be a collective approach to those facing redundancy, however it is difficult to capture these individuals before redundancies have been officially announced; and quite often this information is difficult to obtain if an organisation is not making 'large-scale' (more than 20) redundancies.

*The next meeting will take place on **Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> November.***

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



## Cyber-tech

- **The Cyber-tech Business group** met on 21<sup>st</sup> September via Zoom. Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on the activities of the LEP over the last month: our Recovery and Restart plan was published at the end of July with interventions identified to help support the restarting of the Gloucestershire economy. GFirst LEP have secured £11.3 million to help the county recover. The funding is part of central Government's £900million nationwide 'Getting Building Fund'. The 'shovel ready' projects will create 959 jobs, aid recovery and support the green agenda. We have compiled both a Redundancy support pack and a business recovery toolkit covering some essential solutions for businesses re assessing their practices. Our 'Think Gloucestershire' campaign continues through September to encourage individuals and business to think locally for supply chain procurement and staycations. A 'Good news' stories campaign started in September with some really great business stories coming through.
- Neil Hopwood gave an update on the **Golden Valley development**, home of Cyber Central UK. Gloucestershire has the second largest cluster of cyber companies in the UK after London. The Cyber Leadership Board has been formed. Elements of the scheme will need to be developed in a cohesive way that encompasses all aspects of the park: academic, historic, educational, Garden Village status. Businesses and academia are being approached to feature in a video to promote the opportunities in the cyber sector - due for launch in October.
- Lorrin White, CEO of Bamboo Technology gave a presentation on operational resilience for businesses: the ability of an organisation to absorb and adapt in a changing environment will enable it to deliver its objectives and survive. The decision for a business to be more resilient is often only undertaken as a reaction. With the right marketing and support, businesses of all sizes can have a resilience plan in place and therefore act on it much quicker when needed. This is even more crucial in the current climate and with Brexit.
- Steven Murray from Harrison Clark Rickerbys gave a presentation on the legal perspectives of cyber in context. It is important for businesses to monitor homeworking employees by only allowing access to certain areas of the network as necessary. Remote working – where does a company stand legally if employees are using a less secure VPN on their own PCs? HCR are able to offer advice to companies where employees are working remotely / from home to ensure that legal compliances are met whilst preventing security breaches.
- This group will look at producing a workshop for small businesses in early 2021 covering the basics of doing business safely online, operational resilience, top tips for basic online protection (cyber and legal), myth busting on the 'scary' nature of cyber.

*The next meeting of the Cyber Security Business Group is on **23<sup>rd</sup> November 2020***

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





## Construction and Infrastructure

- **The Construction & Infrastructure Business group** met virtually on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> October. Chair, Stephen Limbrick welcomed guests Ian Smith (Cheltenham & Tewkesbury Building Control Services), Neil Hopwood and James Garrod (Gloucester Culture Trust). Both presentations were circulated to the group.
- Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on behalf of GFirst and the Growth Hub: All 5 projects in the region receiving part of the government's Getting Building Fund have had final approval and are ready to move ahead with getting spades in the ground. GFirst's Think Gloucestershire campaign has recently launched tier 4 with a revised version of the shop local campaign, with a focus on shopping locally for Christmas instead of online. We have circulated a survey asking questions on peoples work habits and flexible working / life at work after COVID-19. From 1st November we will also be starting a campaign for a **new GFirst Chair** - Diane Savory agreed to stay on, so we could maintain continuity and to focus our messaging on government advice around COVID and recovery.  
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- Philippa Lowe, from Cotswold District Council, gave an update on the 'Breaking Down Barriers' work in relation to faster planning application processes. Philippa will be discussing with Sandra Ford (Tewkesbury Borough Council) Section 106 and validation processes. A new page showcasing the work on Barriers to Development will be hosted by GFirst LEP on their website. Information and text for this is being collated. The page will sit within the C&I group page.
- The group will respond collectively to government's 'Planning for the Future' White Paper – the consultation of which finishes on Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> October.
- Public Consultation on the A417 missing link closes on 12<sup>th</sup> November, and consultation for M5 J10 closes on 25<sup>th</sup> November. The group plans to respond collectively to the proposed plans for each of these projects, and separate working groups will be set up before the deadlines, to formulate responses.
- Neil Hopwood and James Garrod gave a presentation on the development of 'Jolt' a low-cost arts and creative industries incubator in the heart of Gloucester. The Gloucester Culture Trust are awaiting announcements from DCMS in relation to City of Culture information, and the Culture Trust would encourage Gloucester City Council to put in a Bid.
- Ian Smith gave a presentation on the services provided by the Building Control Team, who's aim is to enforce Building regulations to ensure buildings meet the minimum health, safety, welfare, convenience and sustainability standards on residential and commercial buildings. They cover Cheltenham and Tewkesbury with this shared service commencing in November 2009.

**The next meeting of the C&I group is Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2020.**

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



## Energy

- **The Energy Business group** met virtually on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2020. Simon and Rachel welcome Neil Stovold to the meeting in place of Bethan Winter (Wales & West Utilities).
- Karen Campbell gave an update on the activities of the LEP over the last month: our Recovery and Restart plan was published at the end of July with interventions identified to help support the restarting of the Gloucestershire economy. GFirst LEP have secured £11.3 million to help the county recover. The funding is part of central Government's £900million nationwide 'Getting Building Fund'. The 'shovel ready' projects will create 959 jobs, aid recovery and support the green agenda. We have compiled both a Redundancy support pack and a business recovery toolkit covering some essential solutions for businesses re assessing their practices. Our 'Think Gloucestershire' campaign continues through September to encourage individuals and business to think locally for supply chain procurement and staycations. A 'Good news' stories campaign started in September with some really great business stories coming through.

Gloucester and Cirencester Growth Hubs are open by appointment only. Tewkesbury and Stroud are in the planning stages to open their doors safely in October. Half of the library sites are open by appointment with the remaining half due to open by October.

- A smaller task force group met prior to the meeting to discuss progress against the Gloucestershire Energy Strategy. Whilst the work being done in this sector is in line with the strategy, there is greater scope to join up with Local Authorities to deliver outcomes. There are also opportunities to connect with other business group sectors even more, to deliver sector-specific sustainable energy solutions. Members agreed with the two proposed additional objectives for the group, offering a strategic approach to future-proofing projects. (These will soon appear on the Energy business group section on the GFirst LEP website):  
<https://www.gfirstlep.com/about-us/energy/>
- Members were asked 'round the table' to share with the group business updates. General comments:
  - New developments in the county are now beginning to include strong sustainable energy criteria for zero carbon emissions such as Cyber Central and the Tewkesbury Garden Village developments. With electric being the main source of energy, there is some concern over capacity on the grid, especially with both developments including a high volume of new homes, and around the Berkeley site.
  - A more difficult concern is the retrofitting of renewable energy solutions in the domestic market.
  - EV strategy for the county is in progress. GCC are working with several partners across the county, including developers, to take their report on tree planting to Cabinet in November.
  - University of Gloucestershire are about to update their Carbon Management Plan; there is a lot of demand from students to reach net zero by 2035. Severn Wye are keen to assist in the application of the plan, having previously worked with the Student's Union. The University have a reputation for being one of the most sustainable universities in the country and support from businesses on this group is forthcoming.
  - Bromford Housing are encouraging employees with a car allowance to lease an EV and is working with GCC on EV deployment.
  - Fuel poverty solutions including gas/hydrogen hybrid systems are being piloted.
- **South West Energy Hub** update: deadline for the next round of funding for the Rural Community Energy Fund is December and then March 2021. Up to £40,000 per project is available. A new website has been launched for the Hub: <https://www.swenergyhub.org.uk/> The Green Homes Grant scheme will be launched in phases: phase 1 up to £200m. Phase 2 £300m next April 2021 together with a large scheme around retrofit for vulnerable customers.

***The next meeting will take place on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2020 via Teams.***

*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 Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2020. Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on the activities of the LEP over the last month: our Recovery and Restart plan was published at the end of July with interventions identified to help support the restarting of the Gloucestershire economy. GFirst LEP have secured £11.3 million to help the county recover. The funding is part of central Government's £900million nationwide 'Getting Building Fund'. The 'shovel ready' projects will create 959 jobs, aid recovery and support the green agenda. We have compiled both a Redundancy support pack and a business recovery toolkit covering some essential solutions for businesses re assessing their practices. Our 'Think Gloucestershire' campaign continues through September to encourage individuals and business to think locally for supply chain procurement and staycations. A 'Good news' stories campaign started in September with some really great business stories coming through.

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- Members shared their thoughts as business face more changes in light of the pandemic:
  - **Coffee house chain (Chelt, Glos and Nationwide):** Arcade stores are slow to build back up business with 2 stores yet to re-open. Railway station store is trading 30% above forecast and will soon have first store in Bristol airport. Brewery Quarter store doing well.
  - **Cheltenham:** some stores have closed and will not return. A couple of new shops opening within the food & beverage offering. A bigger Christmas market was planned this year which has now been cancelled. Now looking at family attractions and interactive trails to keep up footfall in the town.
  - **Gloucester Quays:** The 'Eat out to help out' scheme saw restaurants have their best trade in months, and some have continued with their own promotions on the back of it, to maintain trade. Four new businesses coming into the Quays, with a high demand for temporary space. Overall sales down 30% year on year. Christmas markets and ice rink cancelled.
  - **Gloucester City:** Larger proportion of people back working from home has hit cafes with a drop in lunchtime trade again. Customer service is hugely important to maintain the consumer confidence. Driving footfall around the city with street art attractions.
  - **Tewkesbury BC:** The council has engaged with local businesses through surveys keeping the two way communication open. The opening of the caravan park has had a positive impact on footfall in the town. Heritage Zone Action Funding has been awarded to the town which will help towards shop front improvements.
  - **Wotton under Edge:** Independent shops with an online presence continue to do well. Five new businesses waiting to open with no vacancies in the town. Landlords have changed terms from 6-12 months instead of 2-5 years.
- There is concern from the 'honeypot areas' that a high footfall is not translating into high spend.
- Maybe\* identified that online interaction dropped off over lockdown and has only just started picking up again. Offering a comms plan and social media assets to Cotswold District Council. Business need to get online and start the conversations to attract footfall towards Christmas, as with attractions such as markets and ice rinks being cancelled, this will have a big impact on sales.

***The date of the next meeting is 25<sup>th</sup> November 2020***

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



## Tourism and Visitor Economy

- **The Tourism & Visitor Economy Business group** met virtually on Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> September 2020. Chair Steve Collins welcomed Alex Cottrell, Growth Hub Manager to give an update on the Tourism grant funding applications.
- Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on the activities of the LEP over the last month: our Recovery and Restart plan was published at the end of July with interventions identified to help support the restarting of the Gloucestershire economy. GFirst LEP have secured £11.3 million to help the county recover. The funding is part of central Government's £900million nationwide 'Getting Building Fund'. The 'shovel ready' projects will create 959 jobs, aid recovery and support the green agenda. We have compiled both a Redundancy support pack and a business recovery toolkit covering some essential solutions for businesses re assessing their practices. Our 'Think Gloucestershire' campaign continues through September to encourage individuals and business to think locally for supply chain procurement and staycations. A 'Good news' stories campaign started in September with some really great business stories coming through.

Gloucester and Cirencester Growth Hubs are open by appointment only. Tewkesbury and Stroud are in the planning stages to open their doors safely in October. Half of the library sites are open by appointment with the remaining half due to open by October.

- Alex Cottrell Growth Hub Manager gave an update on the Tourism grant funding process. Grant application opened on 28<sup>th</sup> September, with over 200 applications within 1 hour. Taking into consideration the total amount of funding available (£210,000) and the value of grants being between £1,000 and £3,000, 39 applications that met the criteria are currently being considered: 3 from Cheltenham, 12 from Cotswold, 6 from Forest of Dean, 2 from Gloucester and 8 each from Stroud and Tewkesbury. The majority were applying for tech solutions or support for improved use of outdoor space. With such a high volume of applications compared with the amount to be allocated, only 20% of those applying are likely to be successful; with this in mind, it is the Growth Hub's priority to get in touch with those that have not been successful to offer up alternative support. This group's advice regarding eligibility criteria will certainly come into play.
- Representatives of DMOs and market towns were asked for their business updates:
- **Hospitality:** Hotels were generally fully booked up until October and then these drop off drastically. The Staycation campaign is picking up pace with a second meeting scheduled for 20<sup>th</sup> October – keen to start putting plans into action before the end of the year.
- **Cheltenham:** Strong summer and a good September but Oct – Dec is not looking positive for group/corporate bookings. A new enquiry management system for 'meet Cheltenham' is planned for launch in October. The impact of cancelling physical shows and events has had a drastic knock-on effect on footfall to other parts of town. A 'Great Taste of Cheltenham' campaign is just about to be launched.
- **Cotswold:** Working with Adam Henson (Cotswold Farm Park) to encourage Oct-Dec visits to the area aiming at local market. Starting a marketing campaign to promote a less well-known town to visit each month, to try and take some pressure off the honeypot areas. The 'what's new for 2021' campaign hasn't gained much traction due to customer uncertainty.
- **Forest of Dean:** A new website is to be launched in October. This will coincide with the 'autumn colours' and 'escape the everyday' campaigns to drive visitors to the area over winter. Are putting in a bid for Discover England Emergency funding.
- **Stroud:** 'SiverFestival' encourages local people to shop in the town and spend £5 each in an independent shop – a campaign backed by Stroud Chamber. An increase in last minute overnight bookings, especially from people looking to buy property in Stroud and staying to explore the area.
- **University of Gloucestershire:** An increase in Indian students arriving. They continue with a blended learning approach and have launched a new module: Special Interests Tourism which is gaining popularity. The University are preparing for a second lockdown but are also preparing field trips.
- Gloucestershire County Council and partners have been successful in achieving funding from Discover England for their Connections project: repurposing US content for the domestic market over the next 6 months.

**The date of next meeting is 7<sup>th</sup> December 2020 via Zoom**

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