

GFirst LEP Business Groups Update: November 2020

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

**Advanced Engineering & Manufacturing | Business & Professional Services
Energy | Business Membership Groups | Cyber-tech | Retail & High Street**

- **The Business Group Chairs** met virtually on Monday 19th 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 4th 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 1st 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 19th 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 7th December.



Advanced Engineering & Manufacturing

- **The Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing Business Group** met virtually on Monday 9th November. Chair Rob Loveday welcomed guest Sarah Scott, Director of Public Health, Gloucestershire County Council to the meeting.
- Sarah Scott and her team are giving a series of presentations to the business groups, to give an update on the Covid-19 situation in Gloucestershire, offer a summary of the work undertaken to date to prevent, mitigate and contain the virus and to discuss what group members, and businesses can do to help. The team are keen to gain views from businesses on our approach to date and suggestions for future work. The presentation was sent to the group members following the meeting.
- 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.
- 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, overall, we are busy and market is quite buoyant, although obviously some sectors are bearing the brunt of the ongoing Covid-19 crisis. Hospitality, catering and retail sectors have been significantly hit and this is where we are seeing a lot of candidates apply for jobs from...i.e. looking to reskill and change sector. Extension of furlough scheme, plus businesses trying to hold on to talent they know it will be hard to replace, and candidates happy to sit out uncertain times where they are means that (away from the aforementioned sectors that are being hit hard) it is still quite a tight labour market in terms of candidate availability.
 - There is still a lot of uncertainty around Brexit. There seems to be a good flow of business for now, but uncertainty around the next 6 months, both with supply chain and Brexit.
 - The speed of change with government announcements has made it difficult to keep up for smaller SMEs with an HR team of only one or two people. Plus a brutal redundancy scheme has been difficult to manage.
 - There have been huge efforts made by engineering and manufacturing companies to protect their staff while in the work environment. There is a concern that many businesses are either under prepared or don't understand what's needed in relation to Brexit.

- 100% export businesses have had to take huge protocol measures to keep their business afloat, as they still need to send staff overseas to do business. This together with some redundancies has had a mental health impact on staff.
- Hoping to see some 'green shoots' within the aviation industry but it will take a long time before it's up and running again, although there is a pent-up demand from domestic market.
- The group also discussed the intervention within the Recovery document, which they have been tasked with: **Engineering and Manufacturing Capability Index** to match redundancies to vacancies and contract fulfilment requests to the Gloucestershire's wider capability.

The date of the next Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing meeting will be 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



Agri-Food & Rural Economy

- **The Agri Food & Rural Business group** met virtually on Thursday 8th 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.
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- 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



Banking & Finance

- **The Banking & Finance Business group** met 'virtually' on Tuesday 13th 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 1st December, preceded by and clinic if there is demand.

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



Business & Professional Services

- **The Business & Professional Services group** met virtually on Wednesday 11th November. Chair Matthew Clayton welcomed Sarah Scott, Director of Public Health Gloucestershire to the meeting.
- Sarah Scott gave a presentation updating the group on the current situation with COVID-19 within the county in comparison to the National picture. Key themes from the presentation included: outbreaks in workplaces, and how to prevent them; maintaining space during physical meetings; further promotion of the current picture; the importance of maintaining social distancing, hands, face, space as it's easy to forget. Member feedback also included the health & wellbeing aspect of not meeting up physically, and nerves around returning to the workplace. The presentation was circulated to the group following the meeting.
- 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. We have circulated a survey asking questions on peoples work habits and flexible working / life at work after COVID-19. From 1st November we started 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 have developed a skills portal on our website: <https://www.gfirstlep.com/news/jobs-skills-and-business-support-for-gloucestershire/> - it aims to capture what's available locally and nationally for those recently unemployed or facing redundancy. Our Careers Hub also launched this month: <https://www.gloscareershub.com/>
- 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.
- This group has been identified in offering support to two of the interventions in the Recovery plan: Digital transformation, and mentoring support. The group brainstormed ideas as to what Digital Transformation means to businesses, and to expand the Mentoring support discussion. Initial thoughts on how to progress these will be taken to the Interventions meeting next month.
 - 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.
- It was agreed that signposting about latest information and support from GFirst should be primarily shared using LinkedIn so members can easily share the information to their wider networks with one click.

The next Business & Professional Services meeting will take place in February 2021 date to be confirmed.

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



Business Membership Groups

- **The Business Membership group** met 'virtually' on Thursday 19th November 2020. Chair, Ian Mean welcomed guests Katie Hopgood from Public Health Dept, Gloucestershire County Council.
- Katie Hopgood gave a presentation updating the group on the current situation with COVID-19 within the county in comparison to the National picture. Key themes from the presentation included: outbreaks in workplaces, and how to prevent them; maintaining space during physical meetings; further promotion of the current picture; the importance of maintaining social distancing, hands, face, space as it's easy to forget. Member feedback also included the health & wellbeing aspect of not meeting up physically, and nerves around returning to the workplace. The presentation was circulated to the group following the meeting.
- Elizabeth Weaver and Sam Hoad gave an update on GFirst activities and those of the growth Hub network, respectively. 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. We have circulated a survey asking questions on peoples work habits and flexible working / life at work after COVID-19. From 1st November we started 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 have developed a skills portal on our website: <https://www.gfirstlep.com/news/jobs-skills-and-business-support-for-gloucestershire/> - it aims to capture what's available locally and nationally for those recently unemployed or facing redundancy. Our Careers Hub also launched this month: <https://www.gloscareershub.com/>
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- Roundtable reviews:
 - Cheltenham Chamber are continuing with virtual events with Alex Chalk speaking this month, and David Owen CEO Gfirst arranged to speak in December. Cheltenham Recovery Task Force is looking for representation from the Chamber. Vacant retail units are still a real concern.
 - Recent Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) survey shows a lack of confidence in business. News of several vaccines has given businesses hope of returning to 'normal'
 - Test & trace and asymptomatic testing will take place on campus for students and staff who are visiting campus regularly. Students will then be able to go home once they have had a negative result. The council have been very helpful in setting the testing units up.
 - Health & Wellbeing is of real concern within the rural community – keen to ensure connectivity here. Concern as to how Brexit and the Agriculture Bill changes will affect farmers and rural workers.
 - The next few weeks and beginning of 2021 will be problematic as businesses try to pick themselves up, and employees find themselves alternative employment / re training opportunities. We need to be ready to help straight away.

*The next meeting will take place on **Wednesday 17th February 2021 virtually.***

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



Cyber-tech

- **The Cyber-tech Business group** met on Monday 23rd November via Zoom. Chair Cave Woodfine welcomed guests Reid Derby from Cyber Central Project, Piers Slater & Jeffrey Thomas from REEF Digital and Sarah Scott, Director of Public Health, Gloucestershire County Council.
- 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. We have circulated a survey asking questions on peoples work habits and flexible working / life at work after COVID-19. From 1st November we started 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 have developed a skills portal on our website: <https://www.gfirstlep.com/news/jobs-skills-and-business-support-for-gloucestershire/> - it aims to capture what's available locally and nationally for those recently unemployed or facing redundancy. Our Careers Hub also launched this month: <https://www.gloscareershub.com/>
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- Reid Derby gave an update on the Golden Valley / Cyber Central developments where they are going through procurement stages. It's important that it's a holistic collaboration, bringing together communities and stakeholders: partners, skills, apprenticeships, industry, start-ups etc and tenders should reflect this ecosystem. Keen for the two way communication flow to continue throughout the development, to encourage the promotion of this development to be the centre of gravity for UK cyber resilience..
- Jon McGinty, Piers Slater and Jeffrey Thomas gave a presentation on 'The Forum' innovation exchange in Kings Square, Gloucester. The aim is to bounce ideas off this group, to use the space as a cyber test bed to help Kings Walk reach it's cyber ambitions. REEF Digital plan to create a physical and digital cyber community here, access the latest technology to create a multi-use space. Further input from this group would be really useful in it's development.
- Sarah Scott gave a presentation updating the group on the current situation with COVID-19 within the county in comparison to the National picture. Key themes from the presentation included: outbreaks in workplaces, and how to prevent them; maintaining space during physical meetings; further promotion of the current picture; the importance of maintaining social distancing, hands, face, space as it's easy to forget. Member feedback also included the health & wellbeing aspect of not meeting up physically, and nerves around returning to the workplace. The presentation was circulated to the group following the meeting.
- The group are looking to contribute to a newsletter to be sent out before Christmas focusing on top 10 tips for working from home around cyber safety.

*The next meeting of the Cyber Security Business Group is on **Monday 11th January 2021.***

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



Construction and Infrastructure

- **The Construction & Infrastructure Business group** met virtually on Wednesday 21st 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 29th October.
- Public Consultation on the A417 missing link closes on 12th November, and consultation for M5 J10 closes on 25th 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 2nd December 2020.

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



Energy

- The **Energy Business group** met virtually on Tuesday 17th November 2020. Simon and Rachel welcomed guests Katie Hopgood from Public Health Dept, Gloucestershire County Council and Nail Hopwood, Cheltenham Borough Council (Golden Valley Development Project Manager) to the meeting.
- Katie Hopgood gave a presentation updating the group on the current situation with COVID-19 within the county in comparison to the National picture. Key themes from the presentation included: outbreaks in workplaces, and how to prevent them; maintaining space during physical meetings; further promotion of the current picture; the importance of maintaining social distancing, hands, face, space as it's easy to forget. Member feedback also included considering how the use of the WPD Priority Services Register to identify persons at risk that might not be identified by other means, and linking with local community groups coordinating community support such as GL11. The presentation was circulated to the group following the meeting.
- Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on GFirst activities and those of the growth Hub network. 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. We have circulated a survey asking questions on peoples work habits and flexible working / life at work after COVID-19. From 1st November we started 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 have developed a skills portal on our website: <https://www.gfirstlep.com/news/jobs-skills-and-business-support-for-gloucestershire/> - it aims to capture what's available locally and nationally for those recently unemployed or facing redundancy. Our Careers Hub also launched this month: <https://www.gloscareershub.com/>
- 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.
- Neil Hopwood, Project Manager Golden Valley Development gave an update on the Cyber Central Development. Main points from the group were: ensuring carbon neutrality with green areas. Are you planning to use reject heat from local data centres as a heat source for space heating /water heating - perhaps enhanced by heat pumps? Any emphasis on sustainable timber construction for carbon embedding? Concern over the continued requirements for office space - strong element of home working and 'shared spaces' within the industry so that was planned into the project. Enabling planning permission will be key even combined with Solar/Storage but will need good grid capacity to spill into when over generating.
- A smaller task force group met prior to the meeting to discuss 'Decarbonising Gloucestershire' with retro fit ready housing and retrofitting existing housing with carbon neutral solutions. The desire is for Local Authorities to get on board, lead by this group to influence new home development as well as existing stock transformation. A separate meeting is to be held to discuss further.
- Pre-agreed additional objectives of the group now appear on the group's web page on the GFirst website: <https://www.gfirstlep.com/about-us/energy/>

- Business updates:
 - Report on Tree Strategy with a bid of £300,000 to support an Emergency Tree Fund scheme will be put to Cabinet shortly.
 - EV deployment is going out to tender with the plan for 200 charging installations to be in place by 2030.
 - KIWA are currently developing and building a small-scale hydrogen plant to supply development and testing laboratories. Engaging in further discussions regarding hydrogen and other LCA/carbon footprinting work in the local area.

- **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/> a link to this also appears on the Energy page of the Gfirst website. 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 Tuesday 19th January 2021 virtually.

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 25th November 2020. Chair Nigel Jobson welcomed guest Beth Bennett-Britton from the Gloucestershire County Council Public Health team. Beth gave a presentation updating the group on the current situation with COVID-19 within the county in comparison to the National picture. Key themes from the presentation included: outbreaks in workplaces, and how to prevent them; maintaining space during physical meetings and in staff rooms; further promotion of the current picture; the importance of maintaining social distancing, hands, face, space as it's easy to forget. Member feedback also included the need for two-way communication especially between the smaller market towns 'on the ground', the need to enforce the wearing of face coverings in shopping centres. The presentation was circulated to the group following the meeting.
- Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on behalf of GFirst: 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. We have circulated a survey asking questions on peoples work habits and flexible working / life at work after COVID-19. From 1st November we started 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 continuing to push out tier 4 of our comms plan: to encourage people to shop locally, especially as the second lockdown finishes on 2nd December.
We have developed a skills portal on our website: <https://www.gfirstlep.com/news/jobs-skills-and-business-support-for-gloucestershire/> - it aims to capture what's available locally and nationally for those recently unemployed or facing redundancy.
- 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.
- Members shared their thoughts and plans for coming out of lockdown #2 and the run up to Christmas and beyond:
 - **Tewkesbury BC:** have invested in more signage and hand sanitizing stations in the town centre. They are preparing for business after lockdown #2 and have messaging prepared as they come into the New Year.
 - **John Lewis / Waitrose Cheltenham:** Looking at trading hours and taking to other traders to coincide with theirs – sporadic later opening as and when staff are available. Online trade has seen an increase in demand for Christmas spending. Waitrose have already seen growth in pre orders for smaller Christmas gatherings (before announcement on 24th November). JL are not expecting a busy Christmas and have diverted a third of their staff to the Waitrose stores.
 - **Cotswolds DC:** There is a focus on shopping locally and safely.
 - **Federation of Small Businesses (FSB):** There is a sense that the second lockdown is unfair as many gifting items can be bought from larger stores that are allowed to be open as they sell 'essential' items, when individual gifting shops have to remain closed. December is often the most profitable month for smaller retail businesses so are expecting to see big losses despite lockdown #2 finishing on 2nd December.
 - **Forest of Dean DC:** Have completed some survey work on shop vacancies and closures in the town in the District – this will be shared with the group. They are liaising with local town councilors on a monthly basis. They are launching Festive Forest campaign on 5th December, to link up with 'small business Saturday' to further support local businesses.
 - **Gloucester Quays:** Businesses seem to be better informed since the first lockdown. They are encouraging shoppers at quieter times, to try to reduce the Saturday 12-3 peak time, and have reduced car parking rates before 10am and after 6pm each day to try to encourage this.
- Nigel Jobson gave an update on the 'Reopening the High Streets Safely' Fund. Working with Cotswold and Cheltenham to capture information in these areas. Final conversations with Gloucester City and Forest as well as Tewkesbury, with the plan to have a county-wide view.

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

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



Tourism and Visitor Economy

- **The Tourism & Visitor Economy Business group** met virtually on Tuesday 29th 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 28th 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 20th 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 7th December 2020 via Zoom

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