

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

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

**Business Group Chairs | Agri, Food & Rural | Banking & Finance  
Construction & Infrastructure | Tourism & Visitor Economy**

- **The Business Group Chairs** met virtually on Monday 7<sup>th</sup> December 2020. 7 out of the 10 Chairs attended the meeting. David Owen gave an update on the activity within the LEP including with the Careers Hub launch, the skills portal, the business recovery toolkit. Dev Chakraborty gave an update on business grants, with the Growth Hub receiving £500,000 worth of grant enquiries within 65 minutes. There may also be opportunities for further funding for the county's 'Top 3' infrastructure investments. All Growth Hubs have had funding for EU Exit Advisors which will be in place to offer support until March 2021. GFirst LEP and the Growth Hub will be sponsoring the SoGlos Business Awards in October 2021 with the Annual Review held on the same day as the awards ceremony.

Updates from Chairs:

- **Visitor Economy & Tourism:** Gloucestershire is suffering but not as badly as some Northern Towns. Shopping Centres and Market towns seem busy however some shops have decided to remain closed. Christmas markets not taking place will be another blow for the industry. Working with Local Authorities and DMOs to develop a framework for a Tourism Strategy for Gloucestershire.
- **Retail & the High Street:** Place managers are encouraging people to shop locally as independents try to make the most of the weeks running up to Christmas. People spent a lot of money online shopping early on so it's likely we will see more independent retails fail in the New Year.
- **Advanced Engineering & Manufacturing:** EU Exit is becoming more of an issue than COVID-19 as manufacturers stockpile raw materials, driving up demand and prices. Uncertainty is stalling orders, affecting cashflow and supply chains. Aerospace has been the worst affected within this sector.
- **Energy:** The energy demands and ensuring the development of Cyber Central is futureproofed are two areas of interest to the group following a presentation on the sustainability of the project. Retrofitting Gloucestershire is a project looking at private and public sector housing – the skills needed to do this, and securing funding.
- **Construction & Infrastructure:** Group has responded to several projects that are out for consultation. The Barriers to Development work is moving forward, with this to be hosted on the Gfirst website. There is a good level of demand for office stock despite the increase in people working from home, so the focus is on flexible use of space. Private housing stock has seen an increase in demand over both lockdowns, with the social housing market remaining stable.
- **Business Membership groups:** Rural community have concerns over mental health and support for farmers and rural workers. Smaller retail centres are doing better than larger, out-of-town stores. January uptake for apprentices is down 30% compared with last year – there is concern that this type of recruitment is not the focus for many businesses at present.
- **Cyber-tech:** Important that we look at cyber safety for businesses as well as for individuals. The group is key in the development of Cyber Central, and the 'Forum' project group are keen to keep the group involved in developments also.

*The date of the next Business Group Chairs Meeting will be **Monday 15<sup>th</sup> March 2021**.*



## Advanced Engineering & Manufacturing

- **The Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing Business Group** met virtually on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> 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 is on **Monday 25<sup>th</sup> January 2021.***

*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 Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> December 2020. Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on the activities of the LEP over the last month: 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 to shop local prior to Christmas is gaining traction. Other Local Authorities are also pushing out this message.  
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.  
Our Skills Portal, developed with Gloucestershire County Council is live on our website: [www.skillsportalglos.com](http://www.skillsportalglos.com) - 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. The Growth Hub have also put three EU Exit advisers in place and are requesting that any business with concerns around EU Exit to get in touch with them: [brexit@thegrowthhub.biz](mailto:brexit@thegrowthhub.biz)  
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- Sarah Scott from the GCC Public Health team gave an update on the COVID-19 situation in the county, latest figures, current messaging and asked what more businesses would like support with. Responses from the group: concern over outbreaks in food factories, so messaging has concentrated on how groups interact outside of work, and different family members living together who work in factories / processing plants. Swift system in place for GPs to roll out vaccine. Good opportunities for Gloucestershire with people wanting to live healthier lives, flexible working options and living in the country.
- Tamsyn Harrod-Beck gave an update on the Food strategy which is completed in its draft stage. A roadmap to identify the next steps is now needed – the strategy needs to be impactful. There is an opportunity to incorporate the Local Nature Partnership's Natural Capital Mapping tool, with a view to using it with ELMS and review how this tool can be used with farmers 'on the ground'.
- Charles Mann discussed the barriers to sustainable Planning when rural businesses wish to diversify in order to survive. The work of the Construction & Infrastructure group on 'breaking down barriers to development' was mentioned to the group, and the Local Authority leading this work has been invited to update the group at the next meeting.
- Increasing concern over farmer wellbeing and isolation especially at the moment. A number of networks offering one to one support have not been able to conduct visits or arrange gatherings. Webinars are available although this isn't farmer's preferred method of communication. The group have identified the need to reach out to as many farmers as possible and plan to look at options to host something socially distanced as soon as restrictions are lifted.

*The next Agri, Food & Rural Economy meeting is on **Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> January 2021.***

*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 1<sup>st</sup> December 2020, which was preceded by a banking and finance clinic.
- Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on the activities of the LEP over the last month: 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 to shop local prior to Christmas is gaining traction. Other Local Authorities are also pushing out this message. 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. Our Skills Portal, developed with Gloucestershire County Council is live on our website: [www.skillsportalglos.com](http://www.skillsportalglos.com) - 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. The Growth Hub have also put three EU Exit advisers in place and are requesting that any business with concerns around EU Exit to get in touch with them: [brexit@thegrowthhub.biz](mailto:brexit@thegrowthhub.biz) 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. 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.
- Beth Bennett-Britton from the GCC Public Health team gave an update on the COVID-19 situation in the county, latest figures, current messaging and asked what more businesses would like support with. Responses from the group: Have you noticed a reduction in death rate with better treatment and testing available? Will there be a time we can meet clients face to face safely in the next 6 months?
- Business updates included:
  - Concern over EU Exit especially in the US as they are the UK's biggest investor. There is unease over tax changes associated with EU Exit and advisors need to help businesses to understand this.
  - Those businesses that have diversified will survive. Those that are not able to adapt are in trouble for example event hire companies / equipment.
  - There are concerns over the number of deferments on CBILS loans. Highly geared companies will find it extremely difficult to survive. There has been a 40% increase in the take-up of start-up loans compared to last year, with almost two new businesses starting up every week since September.
  - As furlough is extended to March 2021, the jobs are getting done with fewer employees working fewer hours – it will be difficult to change contracts to match this way of working
  - Still very few new accounts being opened. HSBC are looking at December, as are NatWest with their new start-up accounts being launched.

*The next Banking & Finance meeting will take place on **Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> February 2021**, preceded by and clinic if there is demand.*

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



## Business & Professional Services

- **The Business & Professional Services group** met virtually on Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> 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 is on **Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> February 2021.***

*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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 17<sup>th</sup> February 2021.***

*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 Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> 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/>
- 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
- 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 11<sup>th</sup> January 2021.***

*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 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2020. Chair, Stephen Limbrick welcomed guests Andrew Carpenter (Constructing Excellence South West), and David Oakhill (Cheltenham Borough Council).
- Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on the activities of the LEP over the last month: 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 to shop local prior to Christmas is gaining traction. Other Local Authorities are also pushing out this message. 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. Our Skills Portal, developed with Gloucestershire County Council is live on our website: [www.skillsportalglos.com](http://www.skillsportalglos.com) - 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. The Growth Hub have also put three EU Exit advisers in place and are requesting that any business with concerns around EU Exit to get in touch with them: [brexit@thegrowthhub.biz](mailto:brexit@thegrowthhub.biz) 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.
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- Sarah Scott, Director of Public Health gave an update on the COVID-19 situation in the county, latest figures, current messaging and asked what more businesses would like support with. Responses from the group: We have had problems with teams working around the country within different Tier systems. Has caused problems finding accommodation for those working away from home. Working practices have put strain on construction site teams, however cases on our sites are low because we have got into a routine of working safely.
- Andrew Carpenter gave a presentation on the opportunities for multi-use spaces for businesses. Responses from the group: office use has changes forever now, with being in the office 40 hrs a week a thing of the past. The technology needs to be capable of supporting 'work from anywhere' culture. This will reduce carbon emissions with people choosing to cycle or walk (if the infrastructure is there to support this) instead of taking the car.
- David Oakhill gave an update on the Statement of Common Ground. The Planning committee will take the draft paper to Joint Growth Committee in January for approval and will be the start of a spatial plan for the county. The group plan to respond to the Sustainable Transport Strategy by 8<sup>th</sup> January.
- Barriers work will be hosted on the GFirst LEP website in the New Year. Philippa Lowe is looking at specific issues within the planning process that are currently causing delays such as S.106. The Barriers sub group will be meeting more regularly to move the project forward in 2021.

***The next meeting of the C&I group is Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2021.***

*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 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/>
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- 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 19<sup>th</sup> January 2021.***

*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 25<sup>th</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 24<sup>th</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> January 2021.**

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 Monday 7<sup>th</sup> December 2020. Chair Steve Collins welcomed Becky MacLean (GCC), Deborah Potts (The Music Works and LEP Board Member), Jonathan Duckworth (Nailsworth), and Rebecca Clay (Gloucester City Council) to the meeting.
- Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on the activities of the LEP over the last month: 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 to shop local prior to Christmas is gaining traction. Other Local Authorities are also pushing out this message. 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. Our Skills Portal, developed with Gloucestershire County Council is live on our website: [www.skillsportalglos.com](http://www.skillsportalglos.com) - 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. The Growth Hub have also put three EU Exit advisers in place and are requesting that any business with concerns around EU Exit to get in touch with them: [brexit@thegrowthhub.biz](mailto:brexit@thegrowthhub.biz) 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. 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.
- Becky MacLean from the GCC Public Health team gave an update on the COVID-19 situation in the county, latest figures, current messaging and asked what more businesses would like support with. Responses from the group included the frustration with the lack of notice given to changes, confusion with current guidelines associated with eating out, and taking visitors from Tier 3 areas such as Warwickshire which is in Tier 3 and borders Gloucestershire.
- Representatives of DMOs and market towns were asked for their business updates:
- **Gloucester City:** Reinforcing the message that it is safe to shop and to encourage the shop locally messaging. Running 'Bright lights' socially distanced event around the City consisting of light installations designed to bring vibrancy and colour to the City after nightfall. Christmas seems a little chaotic but are hoping that Jan/Feb will be more settled.
- **Stroud:** Cotswold Canals Trust have been successful in receiving £9m lottery funding so work can continue. Trade has been non-existent through the shop and not being able to run events. Have used the time to update the website. Focus is on Easter now. Tricky to keep customers socially distanced in small shops whilst encouraging them to shop to keep the independents afloat. Messaging during second lockdown seems to be non-existent – much less signage and no emphasis on the 'one person per household' message. Co-ordination needed with the expected post-lockdown desire to 'get away' – trying to balance profits with safety.
- **Tewkesbury:** Pushing out shop local message. Free parking offered in Tewkesbury to encourage this. Winchcombe will be offering late night shopping but not Tewkesbury, as the footfall seems to be heavier in the morning and drops off in the afternoons.
- **Cheltenham:** Ongoing shop local campaign using local media to push the message – shop safely. 250 shops are now listed on the 'Visit Cheltenham' website  
**Cotswolds:** Working with West Oxfordshire and Cirencester Towns and have applied for the DMO recovery Fund. Cotswold National Landscape: [www.kingfishertrail.org](http://www.kingfishertrail.org) is now live consisting of kingfisher sculptures created by local artists along the routes. Celebrating the Cotswolds Way's 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday next year – a year later than planned.
- **University of Gloucestershire:** The 'Specialist Tourism' Module is now up and running. The majority of students have coped well with the situation however we will be teaching virtually until at least Feb 2021.

- **Cotswold Edge & Severn Vale:** 3 new retail premises have been taken on. Berkeley Castle and other attractions are open and enjoying plenty of visitors. Putting up 300 visitor points in the area which will consist of QR codes giving visitors access to more information about the area.
- **Nailsworth:** Footfall cameras coming to town shortly as well as a 20mph scheme. Looking at limiting traffic altogether, and to encourage cycling or pedestrian only areas.
- **Hospitality:** midweek occupancy very low, with key workers mainly. Concern over accepting bookings from visitors coming from a Tier 3 area. Weekends are very busy.
- **Visit Gloucestershire:** £30,000 of the £50,000 funding will be put towards a county-wide Tourism Strategy. Meeting with Local Authorities and DMOs to shape the framework for this. First draft is to be completed by March 2021.
- Growth Hub have awarded more than £170,000 in Visitor Economy grants and are currently considering a second call in January 2021.

***The date of next meeting is Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2021.***

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