

GFirst LEP Business Groups Update: January 2021

The following Business groups met 'virtually' in January 2021:

**Advanced Engineering & Manufacturing | Agri, Food & Rural | Cyber-tech
Energy | Retail & the High Street**

- **The Business Group Chairs** met virtually on Monday 7th 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 retailers 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 15th March 2021.***



Advanced Engineering & Manufacturing

- **The Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing Business Group** met virtually on Monday 25th January 2021. Chair Rob Loveday welcomed guest Barbara Singleton, Advanced Engineering Specialist, DIT Western Gateway, and Chris Lau from GFirst LEP's Inward Investment team to the meeting.
- Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on the activities of the LEP since the start of the year: Following the introduction of the latest lockdown, Chancellor Rishi Sunak has announced one off top up grants available to Retail, hospitality and leisure businesses. These businesses will be eligible to receive grants of up to £9,000 and we will be working with partners to do everything we can to support businesses and individuals during the next few tough months - and making the case for the right support to protect our Gloucestershire economy.

The Growth Hub have three EU Exit advisers in place who have been working over the Christmas and New Year period to offer support to businesses. They have reached out to businesses in the county, and are gathering feedback on the issues that are of most concern, so that they can start to offer tailored support as well as webinars. They are requesting that any business with concerns around EU Exit to get in touch with them: euexit@thegrowthhub.biz

- Barbara's presentation was circulated to the group following the meeting. 95% of UK Manufacturers were exporting to the EU before EU Exit and with a high level of enquiries following 1st Jan, DIT are helping businesses on a one to one basis, with a 48 hr turnaround on support. DIT are also helping companies with their ESIF grant applications and to raise awareness of this funding opportunity.
- Industry updates:
 - Oil, gas and automotive sectors are struggling to move forward. The International scene is more positive, having been affected less by EU Exit (and to a certain extent COVID). Construction industries seem to be holding up well. Aerospace demand has stalled as demand from the East has fallen. Innovation is currently non-existent in this area and will take a long time to recover.
 - Some firms have put stringent plans in place to enable employees to visit clients overseas, to keep business going and to forge new relations. They are also recruiting apprentices and conducting interviews with a blended approach to virtual and physical interviews, due to the nature of the jobs.
 - Product delays at road, rail, sea and air ports due to paperwork issues following EU Exit has meant international customers have lost some confidence in some UK companies. Raw materials costs have increased due to stockpiling reducing a steady, available supply. Prices exporting to and importing from China have therefore increased, with steel seeing the biggest price hikes. Freight costs have increased, and companies need to absorb this in their margins in order to stay competitive, which is affecting profits.
 - Recruitment perspective: Temporary positions are being filled quickly, to fill the short-term productivity gaps. Candidates applying from retail & hospitality industries has led to skills mis-matches. Furlough scheme has been applied to mainly mid / senior management level positions instead of making these skills redundant which will hopefully avoid a skills seepage, as long as they are not made redundant once furlough is finished.
 - Delivery delays of months has impacted on production and turnover. Concerns over raw materials and components origin and onward export: component parts shipped as they are, have to state their original country of origin which is causing delays, whereas when incorporated into a final product made in the UK this is less of an issue.
- Engineering UK are working with City and Guilds to establish an Engineering and Manufacturing T Level Board, to progress development of the new T Level qualifications in Engineering & Manufacturing, due for release in September 2022. Currently recruiting for Board members from the industry.

*The date of the next Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing meeting is on **Monday 26th April 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



Agri-Food & Rural Economy

- **The Agri Food & Rural Business group** met virtually on Thursday 7th January 2021. Chair Jo Price welcomed guests Philippa Lowe, Cotswold District Council and Judith Norris, the Rural Practice Planning Team.

Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on the activities of the LEP since the start of the year: Following the introduction of the latest lockdown, Chancellor Rishi Sunak has announced one off top up grants available to Retail, hospitality and leisure businesses. These businesses will be eligible to receive grants of up to £9,000 and we will be working with partners to do everything we can to support businesses and individuals during the next few tough months - and making the case for the right support to protect our Gloucestershire economy.

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- Philippa Lowe gave an overview of the work within planning teams and the construction & infrastructure business group in relation to 'breaking down the barriers' to speed up the planning process. The group raised concerns surround the dis-connect between planners and the rural environment, with a lack of consistency between planning procedures within the county. Emphasis should be made on the future development of rural areas and the holistic approach required of planners, developers and businesses alike. Judith Norris explained the main causes of delays that she has experienced are: sustainability, digital connectivity and housing restrictions. A more streamlined, inclusive approach is required, which is simpler to navigate, and where landowners can be more engaged with the process. This way a behavioral shift is more likely to occur, where communities are involved in the developments from the start.
- The group will be developing a workshop-style online event to showcase the main concerns, with real case studies, and planners involved. This is likely to be in Spring 2021 to coincide with the ELM announcements.
- Increasing concern over farmer wellbeing and isolation especially at the moment. 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 1st April 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



Banking & Finance

- **The Banking & Finance Business group** met 'virtually' on Tuesday 1st 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 - 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: euexit@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 9th February 2021**, 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 2020. 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 24th February 2021.***

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.***

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

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Cyber-tech

- **The Cyber-tech Business group** met virtually on Monday 11th January 2021. Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on the activities of the LEP since the start of the year: Following the introduction of the latest lockdown, Chancellor Rishi Sunak has announced one off top up grants available to Retail, hospitality and leisure businesses. These businesses will be eligible to receive grants of up to £9,000 and we will be working with partners to do everything we can to support businesses and individuals during the next few tough months - and making the case for the right support to protect our Gloucestershire economy.

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- In response to some concerns raised by the Agri Food & Rural business group, members of this group will share and develop the work on keeping cyber safe in the food and farming industry together with work already done by NCSC. Farms vary from being very high-tec to very little cyber security in place.
- NCSC representative discussed the 'Cyber First' initiative and are currently looking at what point individuals and businesses would need to be cyber aware. Currently working on inclusion and diversity with NCEE and Institute of Coding to embed cyber awareness within schools, as currently up to 95% of girls don't choose to study cyber / computing at GCSE level. Cyber is not currently seen as a core subject so is unlikely to be a curriculum standard for the next 5 years. The aim is to encourage students from all backgrounds to understand the wide diversity of industries that cyber exists in and to move away from the stigma of 'cyber geeks' and coding etc. to develop new narratives. A huge number of business who never had an online presence pre COVID have had to develop one to survive, and we are encouraging the cyber community to talk to other industries to emphasise the importance of being cyber secure.
- Other industry update issues included the establishment of the South West Cyber Resilience (SWCRC) Forum into Gloucestershire businesses. Being able to focus on the mental health and wellbeing of colleagues is getting harder the longer we work remotely, and talent spotting and recruitment is harder when having to be done remotely. Whilst the industry is still seeing an interest in secure spaces for hire, such as C11, lateral communication is required to consistently engage with businesses. The University launch their 'Digital and Technology Solutions' Degree Apprenticeship on 19th January.
- Cyber Central Golden Valley update: currently down to 3 bidders for the procurement process. The Digital Strategy is relying heavily on cyber businesses within the county so it would add value to the offering if we cast the net wider and get the SWCRC involved in this to share ideas and information from the wider South West region.

*The next meeting of the Cyber Security Business Group is on **Monday 19th April 2021.***

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



Construction and Infrastructure

- **The Construction & Infrastructure Business group** met virtually on Wednesday 2nd 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 - 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: euexit@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 8th 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 3rd February 2021.

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



Energy

- The **Energy Business group** met virtually on Wednesday 20th January 2021. Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on the activities of the LEP since the start of the year: Following the introduction of the latest lockdown, Chancellor Rishi Sunak has announced one off top up grants available to Retail, hospitality and leisure businesses. These businesses will be eligible to receive grants of up to £9,000 and we will be working with partners to do everything we can to support businesses and individuals during the next few tough months - and making the case for the right support to protect our Gloucestershire economy.

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- Business updates from the group:
 - There have been several SALIX applications made by members of the group, and it was suggested to coordinate the applications and review them at a workshop, to ensure they carry similar themes for the county, in line with the [Energy Strategy](#).
 - Sustainable PR: Climate change is still a major concern to a lot of businesses after COVID, however many are not sure what strategies to adopt to get them on the carbon zero journey. Gloucestershire climate Commitment are developing a website, which will help to support local action.
 - Sustainability clauses are starting to be weaved into large contracts, although there is no standard wording nor is it compulsory.
 - Lots of spend on renewable infrastructure from foreign investors (British seem to be reluctant to invest). The high cost of land in Gloucestershire seems to be having an impact.
 - Several farmers both here and abroad are struggling to grow certain crops due to temperature rises. There are opportunities for Agri-tech sustainable solutions and for farmers looking to diversify, in the renewable energy and carbon zero sector.
 - There is a need to investigate the behavioural change aspect of becoming greener. Businesses need to understand the need to change before they will invest in it.
 - There is movement on hydrogen as an alternative fuel in the aviation industry. COP26 is still in the planning, but likely to include research around this.
 - 500 retrofit ready modular houses will soon be delivered into Gloucestershire, however the large developers are still not on board to the scales they work to.
 - The [Gloucestershire Climate Change Strategy](#) was approved by Cabinet in December 2020. EV Infrastructure procurement planned to include provision of up to £500k for districts to procure their own requirements using GCC appointed provider.
- **South West Energy Hub** update: deadline for the next round of funding for the Rural Community Energy Fund is 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.

Phase 2 of the Green Homes Grant scheme (Local Authority Delivery) is going through sign off process due for launch in April 2021 together with a large scheme around retrofit for vulnerable customers. The next South West Energy Hub Board meeting takes place on 26th January and the group will be updated on progress at the next meeting.

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 27th April 2021.

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 Thursday 14th January 2021. **Since this meeting took place the group learnt of the sad passing of Kevan Blackadder. He was a highly regarded member of this group. It was minuted after the meeting of the Group's collective appreciation for Kevan's contributions over the years and thoughts for his wife Liz and family.*

- Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on the activities of the LEP since the start of the year: Following the introduction of the latest lockdown, Chancellor Rishi Sunak has announced one off top up grants available to Retail, hospitality and leisure businesses. These businesses will be eligible to receive grants of up to £9,000 and we will be working with partners to do everything we can to support businesses and individuals during the next few tough months - and making the case for the right support to protect our Gloucestershire economy.

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- Members shared their thoughts and plans for moving forward and the uncertainty of when lockdown #3 will end:
 - **John Lewis / Waitrose Cheltenham:** Unlikely there will be any face to face trading before the end of March 2021. Waitrose have set up a testing centre for members, and have a lot of support here. A lot of JL staff are currently working at Waitrose stores. We have a huge marketing plan however this year is more of a 'profit recovery' year.
 - **Federation of Small Businesses (FSB):** Up to ¼ of a million small businesses are set to cease trading nationally this year. Local Authorities have been able to get grants out efficiently which has helped some stay afloat. Trading with Northern Ireland has become difficult following EU Exit so businesses affected by this will be referred to Growth Hub EU Exit support. Will be sending out a South West survey to gather positive news stories about those businesses that are doing well.
 - **Retail property consultants:** Price per square foot of retail space is now between £20 and £50 whereas three years ago it was between £12 and £19 so there is still demand there especially for purpose built office space. The Reef Development in Gloucester is taking shape and will support Golden Valley Development. Focus is on reinvigorating the property world and repurposing of present stock.
 - **Forest of Dean DC:** Retailers have been working hard to stay open where they can. FoD are supporting businesses with their grant applications which open w/c 18th January.
 - **Cheltenham BID:** 13 new businesses since the start of the year, with 7 existing businesses taking up further space to expand. Prime sites are emptying but there is a high demand for smaller sites. There is a need to educate all businesses to have some sort of an online presence, as during lockdown, its important that they keep in touch with their customers (even if they do not have a selling platform).
 - **Gloucester Quays:** Half of the Food & Beverage outlets are offering takeaway options however December was quieter than forecast. Some tenants are stockpiling due to concern over supply chain issues with EU Exit. Many shops are using their floor space as storage for stock whilst trading online, so the unit is still relevant despite it not being open to the public. The next 3 months will be decisive in how we move forward with events and associated marketing activity.
 - **Tewkesbury BC:** Tier system caused confusion and now the majority of the high street businesses are closed. Focusing on recovery moving forward and small business support into the future. Heritage Zone Action Project has gone live. We are looking at how we can encourage footfall into the Town centre on the back of the Junction 9 Garden Town and retail development.

The date of the next meeting is Thursday 29th April 2021.

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 Monday 7th 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 - 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: euexit@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 is now live consisting of kingfisher sculptures created by local artists along the routes. Celebrating the Cotswolds Way's 50th 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 11th February 2021.

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