

GFirst LEP Business Groups Update: February 2021

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

**Construction & Infrastructure | Banking & Finance
Tourism & Visitor Economy | Business Membership**

- **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 Centers 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 centers 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 9th February 2021, which was preceded by a banking and finance clinic.
- Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on activities from GFirst and the Growth Hub over the last month: one off top up grants are 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 and to make the case for the right support to protect our Gloucestershire economy. The Growth Deal funding and the Getting Building funds have all been allocated now, and we are waiting for an update from central Government on two new pots of funding – Levelling Up Fund and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
- The Growth Hub have three EU Exit advisers that have been in place since December. Working alongside the specialist sector advisers, they are tailoring support based on feedback/ issues that are of most concern. Online events, workshops and blogs are in place to share this knowledge further. Government aim is to contact 150,000 businesses nationally before end of March, and we report back to BEIS each week on these issues.
Growth Hubs themselves are all closed, except Cirencester, which is only open by appointment for those who cannot work from home. All guides and navigators are working remotely.
Cheltenham Growth Hub is progressing as part of the Minster Exchange Project. Virtual business support will be in place on 1st March 2021, although the physical building will not be open until December 2021. Again this is due to delay issues caused by Covid on the modular build of the units.
The Peer to Peer networks run until end of March, however a 12 month extension is expected due to excellent national feedback. We have 8 cohorts up and running with 3 more in the pipeline.
- The group discussed the idea of putting on a virtual Access2Finance event. The original plan for these sessions was to educate the bank sector as to other funding options available should they not be able to help a client. As the opportunities to network before and after the event are what have made these events successful in the past, it was decided to wait until government guidelines permit larger events before arranging another.
- It was decided to review the make up of the group to include a higher representation from High Street banks before the next meeting.
- Business updates included:
 - Growth Hub EU Exit support is helping businesses although there are still concerns and questions coming through. A lot of business stock-piled beforehand so delays have not affected them yet.
 - Large investments are non-existent at the moment. Foreign investment will return once confidence with EU Exit has developed, and the economy moves forward again following COVID.
 - Concern over ability for business to pay back CBILS loans after some have taken out multiple loans.
 - There is positive investment from farming businesses with several customers sharing best practice with farming businesses overseas.

*The next Banking & Finance meeting will take place on **Tuesday 11th May 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 **Tuesday 16th March 2021.***

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



Business Membership Groups

- **The Business Membership group** met ‘virtually’ on Wednesday 17th February 2021. Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on activities from GFirst and the Growth Hub over the last month: one off top up grants are 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 and to make the case for the right support to protect our Gloucestershire economy. The Growth Deal funding and the Getting Building funds have all been allocated now, and we are waiting for an update from central Government on two new pots of funding – Levelling Up Fund and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
- The Growth Hub have three EU Exit advisers that have been in place since December. Working alongside the specialist sector advisers, they are tailoring support based on feedback/ issues that are of most concern. Online events, workshops and blogs are in place to share this knowledge further. Government aim is to contact 150,000 businesses nationally before end of March, and we report back to BEIS each week on these issues.
Growth Hubs themselves are all closed, except Cirencester, which is only open by appointment for those who cannot work from home. All guides and navigators are working remotely.
Cheltenham Growth Hub is progressing as part of the Minster Exchange Project. Virtual business support will be in place on 1st March 2021, although the physical building will not be open until December 2021. Again this is due to delay issues caused by Covid on the modular build of the units.
The Peer to Peer networks run until end of March, however a 12 month extension is expected due to excellent national feedback. We have 8 cohorts up and running with 3 more in the pipeline.
- Roundtable reviews:
 - **University of Gloucestershire:** There is a strong demand for degree apprenticeships – we have a dedicated employability team and are running a factory webinar. There are several hundreds of students who require work experience. The demand will only increase following redundancies as people look to re-train into a new career.
 - **CLA:** It’s important that we come out of current lockdown slowly, and with a plan in place. Top-up grants have been a lifeline for many, however health & wellbeing continues to be of concern especially in more rural areas.
 - **NFU:** Business planning is very difficult at the moment, with uncertainty of bounce back from COVID, as well as questions around ELMS. The NFU plan to run networking events to share thoughts on this and to help with farmers’ health & wellbeing; loneliness and isolation has been a particular concern over the last year.
 - **FSB:** We are hearing of short term and longer term issues with EU Exit however the cyber and construction industries seem to be doing especially well currently. Gloucestershire is ahead with their vaccination targets which is promising for getting businesses back up and running.
 - **Business West,** with Nuclear South West is supporting the STEP Project joint bid with Oldbury and Berkeley. Due for completion in 2040, Expressions of Interest are being collated and £222 million has been allocated to begin the STEP design work. The overall project will attract investment in the region of £3 billion to £4 billion. <https://step.ukaea.uk/>.

*The next meeting will take place on **Wednesday 26th May 2021.***

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



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@gfirstlep.com



Construction and Infrastructure

- **The Construction & Infrastructure Business group** met virtually on Wednesday 3rd February 2021. Chair, Stephen Limbrick welcomed guest Nicola Bird from KW Bell Construction to give an update on the AccXel Centre which was awarded funds as part of the government's Getting Building fund.
- The AccXel Centre is a purpose built multi use construction industry training centre, developed to inspire, connect and train. Working in partnership with the University of Gloucestershire, Gloucestershire College and industry stakeholders, it plans to train individuals in specialist skills which are in demand from the construction industry and will connect up students with industry through guaranteed work placements. The building is set to be completed by November 2021 ready for a student intake in January 2022.
- Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on activities from GFirst and the Growth Hub over the last month: one off top up grants are 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 and to make the case for the right support to protect our Gloucestershire economy. The Growth Deal funding and the Getting Building funds have all been allocated now, and we are waiting for an update from central Government on two new pots of funding – Levelling Up Fund and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
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Cheltenham Growth Hub is progressing as part of the Minster Exchange Project. Virtual business support will be in place on 1st March 2021, although the physical building will not be open until December 2021. Again this is due to delay issues caused by Covid on the modular build of the units.
The Peer to Peer networks run until end of March, however a 12 month extension is expected due to excellent national feedback. We have 8 cohorts up and running with 3 more in the pipeline.
- The group discussed a recent successful appeal with planning permission granted to build 50 homes in Gotherington. The group are concerned that a 'Planning by appeal' pattern may follow, contrary to the JCS plan-lead system. The JCS was adopted with a shortfall, which was to be remedied by an immediate review on the plan. It is now 3 years later and there is little progress towards this. The group will look at ways to speed up the review of the JCS with questions for discussion at the next meeting.
- The draft Statement of Common ground was presented to the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Joint Committee (GEGJC) in January. Once this has had approval, an action plan will be developed to respond to the 'agreements', with a likely question that a spatial plan be developed for Gloucestershire. With authorities and highways etc working together on developments this will help the county grow collectively and avoid costly holdups from partners and strengthen planning strategically.
- Philippa Lowe gave an update on the Barriers to Development work: Tewkesbury's Sandra Ford is keen to get involved with this work. Philippa will be attending the next DM Managers meeting date to be confirmed.
- Following the response to the JCS sustainable transport review, Stephen Limbrick has been asked to attend a follow up workshop on behalf of the group.

The next meeting of the C&I group is Tuesday 23rd February to discuss the infrastructure recovery response, thereafter the group meets on Wednesday 12th May 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 framers 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 Thursday 11th February 2021. Chair Steve Collins welcomed guests Richard Dickinson & Rebecca Armstrong (Tomorrow's Tourism), and Philippa Lowe (Publica) to the meeting.
- Elizabeth Weaver gave an update on activities from GFirst and the Growth Hub over the last month: one off top up grants are 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 and to make the case for the right support to protect our Gloucestershire economy. The Growth Deal funding and the Getting Building funds have all been allocated now, and we are waiting for an update from central Government on two new pots of funding – Levelling Up Fund and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
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The Peer to Peer networks run until end of March, however a 12 month extension is expected due to excellent national feedback. We have 8 cohorts up and running with 3 more in the pipeline.
- Business roundtable reviews:
- **Cheltenham:** Following a successful online Christmas campaign, we now have a really comprehensive online shopping guide showcasing independent businesses within the Town. Reinforcing the message that it is safe to shop and to encourage the shop locally messaging. Leading on the 're-opening the High Streets safely' campaign. Now at the business end of the 'Uncover the Cotswolds' campaign, holding virtual showcase events to international buyers. There is an increasing appetite for building back business in 2022 from the corporate (events) sector.
- **Cotswolds:** working on 'Real Cotswolds' campaign to generate interest in less well-known areas and to try to reduce visitor traffic to more popular areas. Uncover the Cotswolds work has been repurposed to be more digital (80% reduction in printing). Domestic holiday demand has increased for lets that accommodate dogs, following the increase with working from home and people getting pets.
- **Tewkesbury:** Creating itineraries to line up with Growth Hub and shop local campaigns. Have issued several grants to local businesses which has kept them from going under.
- **Gloucester:** Commissioning new imagery for marketing collateral and the website. Have appointed a new marketing Steering Board and have launched a new marketing strategy. Using time to research further the Canadian market as well as US and domestic markets for preparation after COVID. Finalising a new City branding project.
- **Cotswolds National Landscape:** Kingfisher trail will open in May until October, with a preview of the kingfishers at the Pump rooms. The trails will cross county and AONB boundaries with good linkages into these areas. Cross county walks and cycle routes will launch at the end of March.
- **Canals Trust:** Concern over delays to the £23m lottery fund investment project as volunteers are locked down. Stroud DC will help to maximise the investment. Gloucestershire Community Rail Partnership will be working with cycle routes. Due to the narrowness of the canal paths, socially distanced work here is not feasible for now.
- Richard Dickinson and Rebecca Armstrong gave an overview of the work undertaken on the Gloucestershire Tourism Strategy. There will be workshops taking place on 25th Feb and 11th March to discuss further.

The date of next meeting is Thursday 20th May 2021.

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