



**FOREST**

ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP

Delivering a thriving economy

CIC Number: 12262533

## Stakeholder Meeting Notes (Online)

18 September 2020

***“The Forest Economic Partnership (FEP) is bringing together business, education, public sector, people, ideas and resources to give the Forest of Dean a voice and to help deliver a thriving and sustainable economy”***

### Notes:

Due to the COVID-19 the stakeholder meeting was held via Zoom on 18 September 2020. Presentation are available at <https://fep2050.co.uk/papers/>

#### **1. Forest Economic Partnership and Community Interest Company (CIC) Update**

The presentation by Wendy Jackson advises that FEP currently has 210 subscribed members along with 6 Directors, 3 Sub-Groups and 7 Active Projects.

She paid thanks to board member Paul James for his kind offer to host all online meetings via Zoom.

#### **2. Project Updates**

Andrew Callard informed the stakeholders on the 7 active projects:

##### Inspiring Forest (IF):

Andrew advised that a decision will need to be made at the next education and skills meeting to see how the IF project moves forward in the current climate.

Mark Jones advised that Dean Radio is looking to work with the schools on a similar project and was invited to the next education & skills meeting to look at possible overlaps with these projects.

##### Mobility as a Service (MaaS):

Andrew advised that a bid was submitted to Innovate UK for the MaaS project with a collaboration from FEP, Local SMEs, University of Gloucestershire's CCRI and Warwick University. The bid scored well, unfortunately, the bid was unsuccessful.

Hartpury pledged their support for any future bidding opportunities.

##### Biosphere Reserve:

Andrew advised that the Biosphere Reserve Action Group were currently looking for alternative means of funding the first phase of the project, community engagement. The group are currently preparing a bid to Arts Council England for funding for a media-based communication project.

### Tech Nations:

Andrew advised that this project is still a watching brief that will evolve with the strides the district is making in digital evolution.

### Smart Rural:

Andrew advised that this project is still a watching brief, however works currently underway within FEP and the district has moved the project forward.

### Future Transport Study:

Andrew advised that following the unsuccessful bid for MaaS the project has also lost a funding opportunity, however the transport, infrastructure, bridges and borders sub-group are looking at means to move this project forward and are currently gathering raw data.

### How Fast; How Good?:

Andrew advised the second part of How Fast; How Good? survey has now closed and the digital connectivity group will be looking to analyse the data shortly.

## **3. Hartpury College & University**

Stuart Emmerson, Director of Business Development at Hartpury gave a presentation on Hartpury and its potential within the District.

He explained that Hartpury was the only facility in the country that homed a college and university and currently had over 2000 businesses partnered with them. They expressed a desire to expand this network within the district.

In 2020 they saw a successful bid to the local enterprise partnership for the development of their Digital Innovation Farm, which will support SMEs and Agri-tech companies, not only across the district but the country.

Hartpury through their Innovation Careers Enterprise and Simon Spooner, who sits on the Education and Skills sub-group for the FEP are looking to attract students into local businesses and have a suite of offers available to both students and business.

## **4. FoDDC Business Support**

### Forest Recovery Action Group and Recovery Group

Bernie O'Neill advised that Forest of Dean District Council (FoDCC) are currently looking at what they need to do and achieve if there is another lockdown.

There are three main strands for their thinking:

- Community
- Economy
- Council

They have reviewed the works carried out by members and officers in the initial lockdown in March and are learning where changes need to be made.

They initially found that there was a lot of repetition across service and government organisations, with the same people, businesses and vulnerable groups.

The Forest of Dean, and the rest of the county have seen a high level of unemployment and with the furlough scheme set to end on 31st October, there is an expectation that the numbers claiming universal credit will increase.

Across the country there has been a raise in concerns regarding rural testing and access to these testing sites, FoDDC are looking at options to improve this within the district.

Through government and discretionary grant payments during lockdown they distributed over £22M to local businesses and are looking to continue supporting the local economy by supporting the Growth Hubs SME recovery and Kick Start Tourism Grants.

Wendy Jackson added that the council, with their tourism partners, Wyedean Tourism are looking to promote the Forest of Dean as a destination for staycations with a new campaign #findyourfitness with safety being a key message in this campaign.

FoDDC have also formed partnerships with the Federation of Small Businesses and Folk2Folk to offer the district unique opportunities and are launching a new business grant in September.

### Business Start Up Grant

Wendy Jackson advised that FoDDC are launching a new business start-up grant on 21st September 2020.

The Grant funding can be used towards a variety of business and social enterprise start-up activities including: research and development, installing clean technologies, premises, equipment and product/service launch.

There will be a maximum of £1,000 per application. Allocation will be agreed on projects at an appropriate scale and the ability to proceed to the implementation stage.

Applications will be assessed over 3 rounds in 2020/21 with the closing dates for all applications being:

- 23rd October 2020
- 18th December 2020
- 26th February 2021

Successful applications must deliver three, or more, of the following 6 desired outcomes:

- New business or social enterprise registrations
- Job creation
- Demonstration of innovation including the design and delivery of new products/equipment/services
- Demonstration of decarbonisation activity, renewable energy use or the introduction of clean technologies
- Occupation or creation of new commercial floorspace for business us
- Increased footfall / visitor numbers/ visitor spend / turnover for individual business, town or village centre

Application forms can be downloaded from the FoDDC [Website](#).

### Growth Hub Update:

Kevan Spencer informed that due to Covid-19 they saw a disruption in building works at the Mitcheldean Growth Hub due to a combination of safety concerns, tendered business going into administration and a backlog in manufacturing, however, works are still underway. The end of October will see a majority of the fit out completed and are hoping to host the December Stakeholder meeting of the FEP.

Kevan advised that the Growth Hub network is slowly reopening physical centres across the county and that a virtual growth hub idea is in the pipeline.

### Federation of Small Business:

Alistair Downham presented the benefits of membership with the FSB. He advised that they currently have a new membership campaign in conjunction with FoDDC which offers discounts to businesses in the 4 towns and 5 major villages.

Member testimonials from the stakeholder group confirmed the benefit received with the membership outweighed the membership fee.

## **5. Electing a New Chair**

Andrew Callard announced that after 2 ½ years as chair of FEP, he will be stepping down at the end of September due pursue other opportunities for his own business.

Tim Gwilliam, Leader of the Forest of Dean District Council and Cabinet Member for Overall Strategy, by proxy of Bernie O'Neill passed the following words to Andrew:

*"No one was more surprised than me and my closest colleagues, when I became leader of the district Council in July 2017. We sort of knew the things we wanted to do, but frankly didn't know how we would get there. One of those early decisions we made was that we wanted to set up a non-political group of professionals who would have the interests of the Forests infrastructure and business future at their very core. Once we were gone again in a couple of months this group would be there to carry on looking after the long deprived business strategies of the Forest of Dean, that was the thinking anyway*

*I recall the first meeting we held, not sure who if anyone would turn up. They did and the rest as they say is history. But a great deal of that drive and history is down to the man who today steps down from his position of chairman.*

*When my colleague at the time Roger James and I were first introduced to Andrew Callard when we were seeking someone to lead this new economic partnership, within minutes we both knew we had found our man.*

*He got what we wanted, he knew where we needed to go and he shared many of the same frustrations and issues that we and many others had felt about the Forest's uncapped potential for so long.*

*I am so glad he agreed to become the first chair of the FEP. He has been a complete success. He is the reason the FEP is held in the esteem it is, and that it has the future it does.*

*The formation of the FEP will be something I shall look back on with enormous pride. For that I owe my sincere thanks to Andrew, as does the Forest business community. I wish you well in all you go on to do, I know it will be successful.*

*Good luck and thank you to a friend of the Council and a true friend of the Forest of Dean”*

Bernie O’Neill added:

*“I’d like to thank Andrew for his invaluable contribution to the FEP since April 2018. He has been Chair of the Stakeholder Group, CIC Board from October 2019, the many sub-group meetings in between the main stakeholder meetings and his tireless work helping to co-ordinate and inform consultation responses and funding applications on behalf of the FEP.*

*Andrew, when everything is back to something like the old norm we shall be giving you a more formal presentation, which we would have done today but unfortunately circumstances prevented it.*

*Thank you very much for all your hard work which has enabled the FEP to reach the stature and position which we see today.”*

The nominations for a new chair of the Forest Economic Partnership are open until 30 September 2020.

Andrew Callard informed that he will remain as a Director of FEP CIC.

**6. AOB:**

None

**7. Next Meeting:**

17 December 2020, 9:30 to 11:30 Venue TBC