



Attendees	<p>David Andrews – VisitWiltshire Paddy Bradley (PB) - SWLEP Becky Butland (BB) – NFU, representing Andrea Witcombe Phil Clement (PC) – SWLEP Kathryn Crosweller (KC) – Chippenham Chamber Stephen Tulip - Make UK Ruth Lambert (RL) – Federation of Small Business Robin McGowan (RMcG)- Salisbury BID Tim Major (TM) - Thames Valley Chamber Swindon Andrew Mercer (AM) – Business West, SWLEP Growth Hub Mandy Paterson (MP) - Inspire by Wessex Chamber Chris Stevens (CS) – SWLEP Growth Hub Dee Temple-Multon (DT-M)- Business West Peter Wragg (PW) – SWLEP Deputy Chair Mark Rogers (MR) - InSwindon BID Beverley Waters – ICAEW</p>
Apologies	<p>Claire Alexander and Colette Mallon – SWLEP Ian Larrard - Business West Andy Rhind-Tutt (AR-T) and Robin Trevett (RT) - Salisbury & District Chamber of Commerce Philippa Venables (PV) – Swindon Borough Council</p>
Guest(s)	Russell Frith (RF) / Paul Moorby (PJM) / Julia Stuckey (JS)
Chair	Alison North (AN)
Minutes	Deborah House (DKH)
Venue	Via video / teleconference call
Start time	1pm
Finish Time	2.30pm

1.0	Welcome and Introductions	Date
	The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting and apologies were noted.	
2.0	Minutes of meeting on 10 June 2020 and matters arising	
	<p>The minutes of the meeting held on 10 June 2020 were read and approved.</p> <p>Matters Arising: All were completed after the last meeting.</p>	
3.0	NFU	
	<p>South West NFU's recovery plan: <i>Growing a resilient, strong and profitable SW agricultural sector post Covid 19.</i></p> <p>BB presented to the meeting on the recovery plans for the agricultural sector in the South West. The presentation can be accessed using the link below:</p>	



	<p>https://static.swlep.co.uk/swlep/docs/default-source/sub-groups/business-development/brog/sw-nfu---growing-a-resilient-profitable-and-strong-sw-agricultural-sector-post-c19-june-2020.pdf?sfvrsn=c9e3ed79_4</p> <p>RF asked whether any contact had been made with the South West Agri Tech Group as this would be a way to engage with all LEPs across the south west.</p> <p>Action: BB and RF agreed to discuss outside the meeting.</p> <p>PB added that there was some surprise that the NetZero issue was not higher up the list of priorities as this was becoming a significant item with Government.</p> <p>Action: BB would feed the comment back to region.</p> <p>Technology and innovation had been included in the aims of the report. The question was raised as to how willing farmers were to embrace technical farming. Were we aiming for an improvement on what we already had? Or were we really thinking of alternatives, such as vertical farming etc? Food producers, who had no knowledge of agriculture, could produce food for the nation in urban settings because the technology allows them to. Disruption technology should be embraced across all sectors.</p> <p>BW advised of ICAEW members who worked in practices with farming and rural businesses, some with large farming conglomerates. ICAEW was trying to get them all together across the South West and asked whether NFU would be interested in giving this presentation to that group.</p> <p>Action: BB and BW agreed to discuss further outside the meeting.</p> <p>The Chair asked whether other members of the Group could present 10-minute slots so that each would learn of other sectors.</p> <p>Action: members to contact the Chair or DKH if they wanted to be the next to present.</p>	<p>July 2020</p> <p>July 2020</p> <p>July 2020</p> <p>July 2020</p> <p>July 2020</p>
4.0	BROG – responses to the questions from 10 June meeting re future format of BROG meetings	
	The Chair requested that the forms issued in the packs be completed and returned to DKH for collation.	
5.0	Update from BROG members	
	<p>BROG members gave an update on their individual organisations during the current circumstances.</p> <p>NFU BB advised that the NFU was holding virtual meetings for members. NFU had reached agreement on the Trading Standards Commission after huge support from the public within UK. Now it needed to ensure this was implemented and had impact in trade deals.</p> <p>ICAEW</p>	

BW advised that members were reporting high levels of work from businesses, particularly from the SME market, where some not taken professional accountancy advice before. Many were surviving with a few exceptions, such as pubs and small restaurants and smaller boutiques on High Streets. ICAEW was continuing to hold resources on its website for members of the public to access too and it had just launched a Redundancy Hub. Information held there for employment rights etc. The Economic Outlook Report, the link to which was circulated after the last meeting, was also holding a webinar. A series of regional roundtables were being held to gain further input about the report. The information gathered would then be fed back into Central Government.

SWLEP

PB updated the meeting on the various schemes which had been affected by Covid-19 using the Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) as a basis and deciding which should be given priority. SWLEP had been awarded an additional £9.7m towards new projects which would be allocated between a limited number of the new proposed projects. This was a great opportunity to kick start some major projects of the LIS. After the board discussion in July this would be in the public domain. Government wanted to see viable finished projects by January 2022.

POST MEETING NOTE: *there had been a change in expectations, money was to be spent by **March 2022** and the majority of any project completed by **March 2022**.*

SWLEP had put forward six projects to be considered which looked at thriving future sectors:

- Business Cyber Centre (BCC)
- Sustainable energy
- Life Sciences Park
- Innovation Centre for the Circular Economy (ICCE) with Research and development facilities and innovation incubator space
- Hydrogen technology infrastructure
- Supporting a scheme for opening the streets in a major city focussing on pedestrians and cyclists and managing the traffic flow

The Skills Plan was being developing across Swindon and Wiltshire with stakeholders, with a need to include a response to Covid-19. We were anticipating increased redundancies, so we needed to be agile to re-train and upskill the workforce to different jobs, ascertain the sectors going under and put young people to apprenticeships, possibly at a lower level for the whole workforce.

We had been using Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) dating back to 2012 to produce the evidence base for jobs advertised, salaries, skills, business advertising, and comparing SWLEP to different areas. The LMI could be presented to this group at a future meeting.



Action: LMI to be a subject for a future meeting.

PB advised the meeting that SWLEP was on Swindon Borough Council's and Wiltshire Council's recovery groups. At present, SWLEP was not looking to progress the projects for the tourism and hospitality sectors within the LIS as most of these businesses were focusing on their survival in the current climate, so changes within these sectors were not yet appropriate. Skills remained SWLEP's main focus.

CS updated the meeting on the work of the Growth Hub Triage Plus service which had directly supported 700 businesses with 350 as caseloads for navigators. There had been a reduction in contact volume and a feeling of Business as Usual with businesses looking ahead to what funding they were able to access.

A press release on the SME Competitiveness Programme worth £2.4m from European Rural Development Fund (ERDF) was issued on 6 July. The pre-inception meeting had taken place on 16 June and the Growth Hub was in the recruitment process for three navigators and one programme co-ordinator. There was now no grant element within this support package. Delivery was recorded against the number of hours of individual support to businesses.

The Growth Hub was also in receipt of additional BEIS funding which would go towards some Covid-19 recovery-type support and it was in the process of shaping that service. The Hub was looking to provide webinars on leadership, digital and finance and was in the process of recruiting for more specialist support staff.

We would be undergoing a website restructure as the retained Higher Futures brand was moved across and would be retaining a full-time Skills & Enterprise Advisor.

PC advised the meeting that the Growing Places Infrastructure Fund (GPIF) had awarded three loans recently:

- a food manufacturer in Marlborough;
- a mental health service provider in South Wiltshire; and
- a company for additional floor space in Salisbury.

PC also advised that there was a pipeline of three other projects which would appear over the next few board meetings.

VisitWiltshire

DA updated the meeting on attractions and hotels etc which would be opening.

- A survey last week received 100 responses which would be fed back to DCMS.



- Rural campsites, glamping and rural venues were almost full for August, although the urban venues were doing less well with no forward bookings.
- Only 40% responded that they would be able to re-open on a profitable basis.
- 75% reported fewer bookings than last year.
- The cost of adaption, lack of forward bookings, and less capacity.
- There was very little business tourism, no international visitors, nor group bookings.
- July and August were the main months for the tourist season and the above list underpins the need for longer term support.
- Website traffic had been 74% down in April, 54% down in May and 37% in June. The traffic was now increasing as people were getting more interested in tourism, although they were looking a long way ahead.
 - Traffic was up for Outdoor Events pages
 - Traffic was down for the What's On section
 - Food & Drink traffic was still down
 - Traffic to Accommodation pages was still down; about half where it was last year but expected to recover.

BusinessWest

AM updated the meeting and advised that there had been some changes in the business support now being offered as businesses were returning to BAU. There had been some interest in start-up and growth loans, particularly regarding start-ups around food businesses. A recruitment company had advised that its books had no permanent vacancies and temporary vacancies were down by 50%. Accountants were very busy dealing with end of year. There had been two interests from out of town regarding property; a freeholder leasing property to national food franchise closing two out of four of the outlets and a business looking to innovate. Overall, a mixed bag.

DT-M advised that BusinessWest was still very busy supporting companies through Covid-19. Finance was a strong theme, with late payments to SMEs having a massive affect. Some businesses were diversifying, looking at new markets, redesigning new processes and looking at recruiting staff. Manufacturing businesses were looking at acquiring other businesses.

The Swindon & Wiltshire Initiative had held several webinars around survival and recovery and been well-attended. Businesses were wanting to move forward.

Wiltshire Council

RF advised that there was a winding down of applications for the Small Business grants with 7,320 companies now paid. There had been 720 applications for the Discretionary grant which were starting to be paid. Grants being made were slightly larger than anticipated and 240 businesses were on a further pay



run today. There were not many who had missed the deadline. There was interest in TEN centres and commercial larger spaces in north and south of the county. New developments would be coming on stream over the next few years.

RL asked how long it would be before Wiltshire Council got back to people about the Discretionary grant and was informed that it would be within the next couple of weeks.

A list of all the businesses which had ceased trading was requested.

Action: RF to provide list to DKH for circulation

July 2020

Swindon Borough Council (SBC)

JS updated the meeting regarding SBC and its handling of the Government grant schemes. SBC had processed 2,230 grants amounting to £29m and Round 2 had closed over week ago. SBC had been disappointed with the uptake of the Discretionary grants with 90 grants being processed so far and 10 more to work with. Applicants had struggled with the data and attachments. Back out again next week for Round 2. The criteria had now changed with a much higher property cost threshold above £51k, now to any business working from home up to £102k property cost. SBC was reassessing the previously rejected applications. AM asked whether there had been any change in the amount distributed for the discretionary grant of between £2,000-£5,000. JS commented that there had been a set formula for calculating the grant which considered such things as employee numbers and property costs, but the award had been higher than originally thought and was between £3,000-£10,000.

SBC was now focussed on:

- offering support to open the high street
- public health teams were working with large manufacturers to avoid flare ups of the infection
- compiling a Risk Register of those businesses that had closed or were at high risk of doing so
- ascertain key growth sectors and how we could capitalise on those in Swindon
- only a year away from the Honda's closure and work was ongoing.

Chippenham Chamber of Commerce

KC advised the meeting that Chamber members had gone quiet of late. She ascertained that either the businesses were back operating fully or were absolutely exhausted by Covid-19 and wanted to return to normal. The Chamber had held successful back to work events with a Healthy & Safety perspective. Overall, there was a sense of recovery.

Inspire by Wessex Chamber



MP advised that the Chamber was moving toward business as usual, although using a virtual model, and was feeding back business intelligence to BEIS. Finance was a priority theme, although there was a general feeling of optimism with some businesses looking six, 12 and 18 months ahead. There was an underlying concern of a second wave of infection and how that would impact on cash flow. Many businesses were restructuring, with consequent staffing changes, so unemployment figures would go up especially as the furlough grants were tapering off. Businesses were surviving adapting and sometimes re-inventing. Extra support for mental health would be needed as all the stresses and strains of the changing employment situation arose. Serco was offering help for employers and employees regarding redundancies.

InSwindon

MR advised the meeting that social distancing signage in the Town Centre had gone up according to plan. InSwindon was communicating information from Government to the Town Centre businesses as soon as possible. Non-essential retail shops were able to open on 15 June and pubs last weekend. A new campaign called Shine on Swindon was being used to raise the profile as businesses came back displaying stars as windows stickers. Street Ambassadors were welcoming back businesses that opened and being used in photo opportunities. The campaign had been well received and would evolve over the next few months.

Salisbury BID

RMcG reported to the meeting. There had been a lot of preparation behind the scenes to ascertain what businesses would be opening on 4 July. Salisbury had no incidents of bad behaviour over that weekend. More hospitality venues were opening throughout this week. Although footfall was 60% down Year on Year, this was roughly the same as the UK average. Within retail the national companies were not re-opening. The situation would be challenging to fill units in the Town Centre and a vacancy rate survey was due out soon. The national average would also increase. It would be interesting to ascertain why some of these stores had not re-opened. Salisbury was now anticipating the issue of pavement licences for venues wishing to operate with more outside space. The process had been simplified by Wiltshire Council and at no fee.

A pilot scheme for a People Friendly Streets Project would take place over 18 months from the Autumn. What would Christmas look like for Town Centres this year?

FSB

RL reported that there had been a recent increase in calls to its legal helpline, mainly about redundancies. FSB was issuing a Confidence Survey this week.

The FSB nationally had produced two reports of late:

- impact of Covid-19 on payment terms; and
- impact of Covid-19 on ethnic minority entrepreneurs.



The announcement of the delay in the A303 project raised some concerns and the FSB suggested it would be worth inviting Highways England back for an update at a future meeting.

Somerset County Council was promoting “buy local” initiatives as was the NFU. To support this, Somerset Council was preparing a directory of small businesses. RL suggested a similar directory for Wiltshire would be a good idea.

MakeUK

ST updated the meeting. 9 out of 10 manufacturers had remained open during the crisis and were now looking ahead with increased investment in automation and digitalisation, taking advantage of onshoring. Many believed that flexible working was here to stay as it had increased productivity and were looking at the cultural shift to make that last. The cultural environment to come back into work would be dependent on whether staff members had been furloughed, in office throughout or were experiencing the threat of redundancy. More than half of members thought they would be making redundancies and that number was set to rise. There was a need to instil overall confidence as South West members were experiencing a drop in orders. MakeUK would be continuing to run virtual events and ST advised of a Make UK Output Report produced which he would share.

Action: ST to supply to DKH for circulation.

Swindon TV Chamber

TM advised the meeting that there was a feeling of optimism amongst the members. Some recovery work but mainly working towards business as usual. Members were looking at their supply chains and not importing as much from overseas. Interest in commercial property in the Swindon area was high. Events companies were slowly recovering and returning to work. With regard to International trade documentation, the Chamber was helping out on foreign exchange rates and zero fee payments for global transfers.

Paul Moorby, SWLEP Chair

PJM spoke to the meeting about the two initiatives of regional development.

- Work on The Western Gateway was gathering pace. PJM asked the members of the group whether they had any thoughts about The Western Gateway which could be taken back to Government and to get in touch.
- England's Economic Heartland (EEH) was looking at the region's strategic transport options. This particularly affects Swindon and EEH was interested in routes from the south coast.

Devolution White Paper would be coming in a few months focussed on recovery and devolution.



	None.	
7.0	Date and time of next meeting	
	<p>Regular quarterly meetings: Was previously Wednesday, 5 August, now been rescheduled to Wednesday, 19 August To be held virtually via video/telephone conference</p> <p>Future Meetings Wednesday, 4 November Chemring Countermeasures, High Post, Salisbury SP4 6AS</p>	
	Meeting closed at 2.35pm	

Alison North

Alison North - Chair

19 August 2020

Membership	<p>Alison North – SWLEP Director, Chair of BROG</p> <p>Business Improvement Districts (BIDs):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Salisbury – Robin McGowan, (RMc) Swindon – Mark Rogers, (MR) <p>BusinessWest – Ian Larrard (IL) OR Dee Temple-Multon (DT-M)</p> <p>Chambers of Commerce:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chippenham – Kathryn Crosweller (KC) Inspire by Wessex Chamber – Rob Perks (RP) OR Mandy Paterson (MP) Salisbury – Andy Rhind-Tutt, (AR-T) Thames Valley Swindon – Tim Major, (TM) <p>CLA – name to be advised</p> <p>Federation of Small Business – Ruth Lambert (RL)</p> <p>ICAEW – Beverley Waters</p> <p>MakeUK – Stephen Tulip (ST)</p> <p>NFU – Andrea Witcombe (AW) – maternity leave</p> <p>SWLEP – Claire Alexander (CA) / Paddy Bradley, (PB) / Phil Clement, (PC), / Colette Mallon, (CM) / Amanda Peach (AP), South Chris Stevens (CS), North / Debby Skellern (DS)</p> <p>VisitWiltshire – David Andrews (DA) OR Peter Wragg (PW)</p>
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