



Membership

Name of Member	Organisation	Attendance
Rory Bowen (RB) and / or Rachel Finlay (RFi)	Wiltshire Council	✓✓
Richard Bell (RBe) and / or Dave Dewart (DD)	Swindon Borough Council	✓ (DD)
Tom Harrison (TH)	SWLEP Board	✓ - arrived 3.15pm
Victoria Moloney (VM)	Wiltshire Council	Apologies
Tom Marshall (TM)	SWLEP	✓
Alison North (AN) - Chair	SWLEP Board	✓
Debby Skellern (DS)	SWLEP CEO	✓
Chris Stevens (CS)	SWLEP	✓
Prof Ian White (IW)	SWLEP Board	✓
Suzanne Wigmore (SW)	SWLEP Board	✓

Guest(s)	SWLEP Comms Tim Burghes (TB) ✓ James Cooke (JC) – The Western Gateway ✓ Russell Frith (RF) – Wiltshire Council ✓ Chris Parsons (CP) ✓ and Owen Walters (OW) ✓ – Department of Levelling Up Housing & Communities (DLUHC)
Chair	Alison North (AN)
Minutes	Deborah House (DKH)
Venue	Via video / teleconference call
Start time	2pm
Finish Time	3.40pm

1.0	Welcome, Introductions and Conflicts of Interest	Date
	<p>The meeting opened at 2.04pm. The Chair welcomed attendees and particular welcome was extended to the newly appointed representatives from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC), Chris Parsons as Area Lead and Owen Walters as Deputy Lead. CP had worked previously for SWLEP's Higher Futures Programme and Swindon Borough Council, so had knowledge about the area. Apologies were noted.</p> <p>No Conflicts of Interest were declared.</p>	



2.0	Minutes and Matters Arising	
	<p>The Minutes from the meeting of 13 November 2023 were approved.</p> <p>The Matter Arising was on the agenda and would be discussed at Item 4.0.</p>	
3.0	The Western Gateway	
	<p>JC presented an update on the progress of projects being undertaken by the pan-regional partnership of South Wales and Western England.</p> <p>The presentation can be accessed by following the link below.</p> <p>https://static.swlep.co.uk/swlep/docs/default-source/sub-groups/business-development/business-environment-subgroup---main-meeting/2024/9-january-2024/swlep-jan-2024-western-gateway.pdf?sfvrsn=8a3ca14_3</p> <p>The Western Gateway was looking to formalise the involvement of two other Local Authorities to the Partnership, Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire, which would bring the area covered up to the corner of West Wales and increase population numbers from 4.4m to 4.6m people.</p> <p>Strategic Rail Vision</p> <p>The strategic Rail Vision had been launched in 2023. Phase 2 of the project was about a Rail Deal ahead of the General Election with Transport for Wales (TFW) and WECA to join and be the governance and delivery route with a priority for rolling electrification of 428kms across the region. Meetings had been held with the Minister of State for Rail and a debate was taking place in Parliament this afternoon, that is 9 January, concerning the GWR rail line. DfT would like to meet and discuss next steps. Engagement events were being held with stakeholders on the opportunities around rail, for example, a meeting was held in October 2023 in the iCAST building in Swindon to outline a hub station model, with attendees from industry and the housing sector, the housing sector more used to the modular build model.</p> <p>Severn Edge</p> <p>The sites at Oldbury and Berkeley had been proposed for the Step Fusion project. The proposal had not been successful, but the Working Group was still engaging with MPs and industry and there had been significant interest in the sites both national and internationally. The UK Government's nuclear road map was to be launched soon. Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) siting programme to be announced for which Oldbury would be a good candidate. There had been a lot of interest in investment in the area with a potential hydrogen pipeline to Bristol Port from Sea Bank Power Station. In addition, there were further opportunities to market sites and there had been some investment interest including the opportuning for the UTC at Berkeley to develop a science and technology park and an announcement was due soon on the UTC's new lead owners.</p> <p>Hydrogen</p>	



Hydrogen had been the focus of the previous year which had culminated in the conference at the ICC. There had been significant interest, and it was very well attended with 500 delegates, initiating many buyer-supplier conversations. The University of Bath's GW-SHIFT (Great Western Supercluster of Hydrogen Impact for Future technologies) programme had received £2.5m from the Engineering & Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC). This would be important in terms of engaging industrial partners, communities and other partners to take forward hydrogen with a focus on industry leading the way as part of the energy system work. The Western Gateway had set the strategic context for hydrogen, which enabled the route for industry and any remaining gaps could be taken forward to government to cover.

Discussions on grid connectivity were ongoing and several councils in the Western Gateway had, or were, developing Local Area Energy Plans (LAEPs). Local authorities in Wales were somewhat more progressed in developing LAEPs because they had received the funding to do so earlier.

Innovation and investment

A high priority for 2024, was the establishment of a cyber and tech supercluster across the geography. Plexal had been appointed to undertake a mapping exercise bringing together cyber assets with the wider tech sector on an interactive platform to demonstrate the extent of the supercluster in the area. This would help support start-ups in these fields and SME growth, as well as link big projects with potential investors. The recommendation was to build on the engagement with Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, Bristol and Bath and out to Chippenham and to support the start-up community.

The Severn Estuary Independent Commission

The tidal power of the Severn Estuary had massive potential for energy production. The Commission was being formalised for this project and the chair would be announced shortly. The estuary was an internationally important site for wildlife habitats as well as being a busy shipping lane with the potential to generate 50% of tidal energy in Europe and meet 10% of the UK's energy demand. There would be environmental sensitivities on delivery of a project on this scale and the independent committee would review the evidence base. Considerations included grid stability, funding, the environment, socio-economic benefit, supply chains and climate change.

International investment

An International Strategy was being developed about the role Western Gateway could play on the international investment and engagement stage. Henham had been appointed to undertake the work with interviews across a range of partners. Discussions were ongoing with strong international interest in the work across all workstreams which could link investors on a global scale to opportunities for the region. The interviews had established that the Western Gateway had a role to play in raising the profile of the area to investors but not in handling enquiries which arose from the work; a clear route to pass on investment leads needed to be established.



Comments made:

SWLEP was keen to be active members of the Cyber Super Cluster as it operated the Swindon and Wiltshire Cyber Cluster as well as the BCC. The online interactive map, like the one for hydrogen, would also be informative. Details on Unlock Cyber were shared by TM which including activity planned for February and March working with the Police, Military Careers, engagement with Space West and the delivery of the Cyber ICE 3 conference in May 2024.

SWLEP asked the question on the progress of the Local Industrial Decarbonisation Plan bid which would link in local projects as spokes to the Bristol Cluster. Further information was awaited.

RB advised that Wiltshire Council had a Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) and had held meetings with SSEN and the National Grid. It appeared that the Local Authorities in Wales had joined together for the best outcome and Wiltshire Council wished to engage and tap into some of the best practice. DS informed the group that the Western Gateway’s Low Carbon Energy Working Group’s next meeting was being held on 18 January and Wiltshire Council had a representative on the group who was engaged.

The Defence Cluster ‘DASA’ was led by the National Composite Centre (NCC). Future skills around hydrogen and nuclear led into the defence sector. The Cluster was waiting on confirmation of WECA’s involvement. There had been significant attendance from both the public and private sectors and. TM advised that four workshops were being planned in February coordinated by the NCC.

The question was raised as to whether there was any interest in hydrogen for the domestic market as an alternative heating solution, or was it being viewed for a mainly industrial application. Industrial hydrogen and pipelines across South Wales had been discussed. The future of the Port Talbot Industry Task force was being watched with interest. The Western Gateway was staying close to that narrative for the opportunities and domestic hydrogen was an interesting area. Also of interest was the alternative routes to storage. Wales & West Utilities had been working on this, and the Western Gateway would like to become involved.

SWLEP requested to be kept informed of activity, to ensure that its connections with developments in South Wales were lost.

4.1 The Swindon and Wiltshire Cyber Cluster and BCC update

TM presented the latest update on the status of the Business Cyber Centre and the Swindon and Wiltshire Cyber Cluster. The presentation can be accessed by following the link below.



https://static.swlep.co.uk/swlep/docs/default-source/sub-groups/business-development/business-environment-subgroup---main-meeting/2024/9-january-2024/20240109-swlep-bcc-bes-update.pdf?sfvrsn=66715d4a_3

Business Cyber Centre (BCC)

A large prime company was due to occupy the building in February which meant that the BCC would then be at full occupancy. The focus now would be more use of the event space.

Swindon and Wiltshire Cyber Cluster

Brea Woods had left the organisation in December and TM was currently picking up her activity. UKC3 funding ran until May 2023, with a funding reduction of 50% from June. The last BIP Subgroup meeting had requested a list of upcoming events, and these are given below, with the proviso that the size and scope may be compromised because of the funding available.

Unlock Cyber

Held at the Institute of Technology (IoT) in Swindon, this was a hugely successful event which had been reported at a previous meeting. Ten employers had attended, many with their apprentices delivering the activities to the 289 students who attended on the day. SWLEP was hoping to replicate this event again this year.

Cyber ConneXion

Increase the awareness of the importance of cyber to businesses through a series of events with Periculo and Wiltshire Police using Cyber Essentials etc.

Military careers fair

Before her departure, Brea Woods had been trying to establish an event for military leavers to access cyber careers. FrontFoot, an organisation led by ex-serving personnel, was earmarked to have been the charity partner. However, the charity had pulled out of the event owing to reduced capacity; SWLEP was working with other military organisations identified through the Rural Economy Sector Group and the BCC.

RF advised that Wiltshire Council used to run a military careers fair in the leisure centre at Tidworth with Wiltshire employers and there was a list of employers who would be interested in such an event which he would be willing to share.

Action: TM and RF to speak offline.

Cyber ICE 3.0

The event held in May last year (Cyber ICE 2.0) had been very successful. SWLEP was looking to replicate again this year. However, with the building now fully occupied, there would be less space now to use.

SpaceWest

The BCC was a partner on the eastern edge of its geography. Events would be held throughout this financial year, for example, at the National Composite Centre



	<p>in Bristol and more across the region. The bid had been in partnership with Space Wales and was wider than the Western Gateway geography reaching into secure communications in Swindon, Shrivenham and Oxford and their space programmes.</p>	
<p>4.2</p>	<p>Business support</p>	
	<p>CS presented to the meeting on the business support landscape.</p> <p>The presentation can be accessed by following the link below.</p> <p>https://static.swlep.co.uk/swlep/docs/default-source/sub-groups/business-development/business-environment-subgroup---main-meeting/2024/9-january-2024/business-ideas-place-buisness-support-update-jan-24.pdf?sfvrsn=8f053749_3</p> <p>Growth Hub summary (slide 2) Key points were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enquiries regarding cost-of-living crises had decreased; • enquiries on start-up provision and access-to-finance were most common; and • employee start-up in-person delivery at Cooper Tires had been very successful with 19 staff attending. <p>Inward Investment (slide 3) The Growth Hub continued to liaise with Department for Business & Trade (DBT) on requests for information about the area for potential relocation of businesses. The SWLEP had been approached by a third party to assist Jet Ghana Export Mission to promote automotive supply chain opportunities with the Ghanaian Government on investment into the country and potentially pharmaceuticals. (Example attached.) SWLEP had made connections into the Western Gateway for other sectors of interest including steel and cloth and fabric but did not know if this had been progressed.</p> <p>GPIF loans summary (slide 4) A summary of the numbers of loans out to businesses and the amount remaining in the fund was shared.</p> <p>Other CP commented on how complimentary everyone in the DLUHC office had been about the work the Swindon & Wiltshire Growth Hub was doing in the area. The question was raised on whether there was any feedback from businesses about the supply chain issues and risks with events around the Red Sea area.</p> <p>Action: Any feedback to be supplied to CP at DLUHC.</p> <p>A video was played showing the impact of the Growth Hub over the past eight years with the numbers of face-to-face meetings, telephone calls and businesses engaged.</p>	



	The Business, Ideas & Place Subgroup: NOTED the contents of the report.	
5.0	Items for the next meeting and AOB	
	<p>Bring forward:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Industrial Decarbonisation Plan bid update if available. England's Economic Heartland <p>BING update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> members to propose a workshop theme; and how to re-engage past membership. <p>As a starter, Growth Hub stated that businesses which were sole traders or micros were mostly enquiring about start-up, skills and access to finance. Business Navigators had a Grant Finder licence, and there was a dedicated Skills Advisor, and Growth Hub had its own course for start-up provision.</p> <p>Open forum session: how do we re-engage our past members??</p> <p>What types of finance were local businesses struggling to access? What was already available and where were the gaps? Which organisations were missing? And what was the cost of finance? Wiltshire Council advised that subjects were already available on Wiltshire Towns Programme and UKSPF's Business Fit for Future funding. SWLEP was aiming for more of a workshop approach around this theme. Suggestions were competitive advantages of Swindon and Wiltshire; start-up, skills, access to finance, cost of finance. Wiltshire Council colleagues should be able to assist.</p>	
	Date and time of next meeting	
	<p>Next meeting: Friday, 8 March – 1pm to 3pm</p> <p>All meetings held online unless otherwise specified.</p>	
	Meeting closed at 3.21pm	

Suzanne Wigmore
Deputy Chair, BIP
19 March 2024