



**LEP Strategy Committee
MINUTES (DRAFT)**

Meeting Held: Friday 12th February 2021
Via Microsoft Teams

Present:

Robert Mee (Chair)
Philip Cox
Steve Park

Nicola Dunbar
Charlie Seward
Andy Hulme

Robert Davis
Peter Skates
Norbert Magos

Apologies:

John Downes

Connor Diskin

Attending:

Jim Rouquette (AI 3 only)
Joe Morris (AI 3 only)
Roy Newton (AI 6 only)

Agenda Item 1: Welcome, Introductions & Apologies

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and in particular Norbert Magos who has joined the LEP as Policy and Performance Officer.

Apologies were received from John Downes and Connor Diskin.

Agenda Item 2: Declarations of Interest

Steve Park, Charlie Seward and Peter Skates declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 6.

Robert Davis declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 8.

Agenda Item 3: Presentation – Natural Capital Audit and Investment Plan

Jim Rouquette (Natural Capital Solutions) and Joe Morris (Morris Resource Economics) provided an update on progress with the Natural Capital Audit and Investment Plan since their initial presentation in August 2020.

The work is now nearing completion. The baseline mapping has been used to identify locations where investment in natural capital can achieve a range of environmental and wider policy benefits. The project team is currently assessing financing options and developing a strategic framework to support investment decision making.

The Committee members expressed thanks for the comprehensive update. There was a discussion about the relative priority of carbon sequestration against some of the other priorities included in the presentation. In response, it was highlighted that carbon sequestration opportunities are generally less dependent upon specific locations (unlike, for instance water quality improvements).

Work is still needed to agree who will host the baseline data and scenario mapping and how this will be made available (and at what cost). Natural capital investment is likely to become central to wider sustainable growth investment decisions, given the requirement for bio-diversity net gain through the planning system – this project will position Cheshire and Warrington well to respond to this.

It was agreed that once some of the outstanding issues have been resolved, including the future use model, a presentation should be given to the main LEP Board.

Agenda Item 4: Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

The Committee approved the Minutes of the meeting held on 12th December 2020.

Matters Arising

AI 5 – Cross Border Investment –

AI 8 – Digital Board – It was confirmed that the LEP is establishing a Digital Board which will provide governance and oversight to the Digital Strategy and Digital Infrastructure Plan.

AI 8 – Science and Innovation – Further discussion required. The LEP is currently looking at options utilising a sector-based approach, with an initial focus on Life Sciences.

Agenda Item 5: Public Speaking Time

No members of the meeting were present at the meeting.

Agenda Item 6: Business Case Development Fund

The contents of the report were noted.

Roy Newton, Director of Transport and Infrastructure at the LEP, provided an overview of the process that has been followed in launching the call for projects for the Business Case Development Fund. 2021-22 is the third year of the Fund and again up to £400,000 is available to support relevant projects get to a good state of readiness in anticipation of national funding opportunities.

It was noted that whilst traditionally the Fund has been heavily subscribed by transport projects, the LEP is keen to broaden the range of projects funded this year in preparation for the Levelling Up Fund. As part of the process this includes ongoing conversations with our local MPs.

The Committee noted the bids to date, totalling £900k plus a number of un-costed Expressions of Interest.

Given the likely level of demand and the need to stimulate activity to support recovery, the Committee was keen to understand whether there is any scope to increase the level of funding available for next year above the current £400k.

Action: Philip Cox to discuss with Ian Brooks the scope for increasing the Fund allocation

Action: Robert Mee and Philip Cox to discuss ideas for accelerating fund deployment.

The Strategy Committee supported a recommendation that relevant LEP sub-committees have an active role in reviewing projects within their area of interest in order to filter and prioritise them for consideration by the Strategy Committee. A review of criteria will be undertaken prior to this exercise to ensure a focus on alignment with priorities and on deliverability.

It was suggested that in reviewing criteria there was an opportunity to link funding to LEP priorities on decarbonisation and skills.

The following three bids which require local contributions to match government funding, were approved: -

- **£20,000 contribution to the Middlewich Railway Line Reopening Strategic Outline Business Case Development** (total estimated cost £110,000 - DfT funding of £50k to be bid for before deadline of 3 March 2021);
- **£5,556 contribution to Beeston Station Feasibility Study** (total estimated cost £66,667 - DfT funding of £50k already secured subject to local contributions);
- **£50,000 contribution to Bank Quay Gateway Housing Pathfinder** - Initial Due Diligence, Scoping and Feasibility Work (total estimated cost £170,000 – Homes England funding of £70,000 already secured but their grant needs to be spent by 31 March 2021)

Agenda Item 7: Draft Plan for Recovery

The contents of the draft plan were noted.

Andy Hulme outlined the structure of the plan and its purpose which is to (i) set out the LEP's role in delivering the new sub-regional vision as we enter the post-Covid recovery phase and (ii) fulfil the requirement for the LEP to produce an annual delivery plan. As such the plan contains a mix of long-term strategic vision, medium-term pathways and short-term deliverables.

The intention is to finalise the plan by the end of February and use it to support an engagement programme with stakeholders to test whether these are the right objectives and priorities.

The plan identifies three objectives aligned to the strategic vision and four priorities which underpin the objectives –

Objectives

Supporting the wider public sector and civil society as they lead the **recovery in the health and wellbeing of our communities**, including the mental wellbeing of workers and business owners.

Demonstrating that **Cheshire and Warrington is at the heart of the Green Industrial Revolution**, we are ready to deliver the government's 10-Point Plan with clear proposals for decarbonising our economy and creating green jobs.

Unlocking investment to provide **opportunity and growth for all our communities**, levelling up economic disparities, supporting those sectors hardest hit by the Covid-19 pandemic to recover, and boosting our town centres and high streets.

Priorities

Skills and labour markets. Equipping our existing and emerging workforce with the **skills** needed to thrive in a changing economy and helping those who face particular challenges to get back into employment and **connected with opportunities**.

Innovation and ideas. Capitalising on the amazing **innovation** assets in our area, including our world-class energy, life sciences and manufacturing sectors and building stronger links with other places in the UK and beyond so that **new ideas** can be supported and brought to market.

Business growth. Supporting business to grow and successfully adapt to change. This includes recovering from the impact of Covid19, adapting to our new trading arrangements with the world, and **making sure that our economy remains outward-facing and an exporting powerhouse**.

Connectivity and infrastructure. Making sure that we stay **connected, physically and digitally**, and that we have clear plans for investment in the infrastructure that we need for a successful, growing, inclusive economy.

The Committee was supportive of the plan, feeling that it reads well and covers the right areas. It was confirmed that whilst focussed on the LEP at this stage, the final version of the plan will also aim to reflect key local authority priorities too and link to their recovery planning.

Agenda Item 8 – Taking Forward the LEP's Energy Priorities

The contents of the report were noted.

The Committee was reminded that the paper follows on from the December LEP Board Discussion Forum presentation on the Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution. During that discussion it was agreed that initial focus should be on opportunities linked to: -

- i. Driving growth of low carbon hydrogen
- ii. Delivering new and advanced nuclear power
- iii. Investing in Carbon Capture Use and Storage
- iv. Protecting our Natural Environment

The paper highlighted current activity that the LEP is engaged in to advance the energy agenda and set out a series of proposed steps for taking this further.

Step 1: Work with industry and business to highlight and champion specific opportunities to quickly deliver against the priorities.

Step 2: Work with business, government and other partners to identify routes to market for these opportunities.

Step 3: Work with local and regional partners to develop a set of sharper, more coherent messages about our energy and clean growth credentials.

These steps are intended to maximise the chances of success for those projects that are developing strong business cases for investment, by highlighting the readiness of the sub-region to deliver tangible benefits to the UK's efforts to decarbonise and in doing so generate economic opportunities from clean growth technologies.

The activities outlined in the paper were supported, although there was a discussion over whether there should also be an explicit activity around housing retrofit and the domestic energy agenda.

Charlie Seward informed Committee members that Metro Mayors Steve Rotherham and Andy Burnham were holding a press conference w/c 15th February on the subject of COP26 and have invited Cllr Gittins to join them.

Agenda Item 9 – Freeports

Philip Cox confirmed that the Liverpool City Region Freeport proposal was submitted on 5th February and includes Ellesmere Port as an 'area of future opportunity'.

Agenda Item 10 – Non-public items.

There were no items for discussion under this agenda item.

Agenda Item 11 – Any Other Business

The recent reduction in funding and responsibilities for Transport for the North were noted.

It was noted that today was Andy Hulme's last meeting as he leaves the LEP at the end of February after seven years, to take up a new role with North West Business Leadership Team. The Committee expressed their sincere thanks to Andy for his contribution and wished him success in his new role.

Agenda Item 12 – Date and Time of Next Meeting

Next meeting: Friday 9th April 2021, 9:00am, via MS Teams.