



Federation of Small Businesses – Forest of Dean Branch
Notes of meeting with Mark Harper, MP on 23rd May 2008 at Speech House 19:00h.

Present: Mark Harper, Keith Gray, Don Burgess, Anne King, Laurie Moseley, Peter King, Guy Bodger

1. Email from Tim Perrin to Branch: (copy handed to Mark Harper)
 - a. Car Parking - Mark Harper was trying to prevent this:
 - i none of data justifies parking charges
 - ii not financially viable – costs would exceed income
 - iii on street parking – civil enforcement now in place
 - b. Coalfields Money
 - i FSB concern about FODDC ignoring input and failing to use money properly
 - ii need to use money wisely for long-term sustainable development in area – especially to encourage tourists who will stay in the area and spend money
 - c. LABGI
 - i Mark Harper said FODDC had appointed 2 new officers and FSB should get to know them.
 - ii Patrick Molyneux is FODDC Cabinet Member responsible for business – and FODDC needs input of business-focussed arguments
 - d. Roadworks – A40, etc.
 - i Mark Harper concerned about impact – especially when contraflow comes into force in June.
 - ii Mark Harper keeping tabs on availability of public transport, parking facilities at Lydney, etc. so people can travel by bus or train
 - iii Concern about site selection for car parks for park & ride system.
 - e. Tesco, Cinderford
 - i From TP's email, looked like Tesco dictating FODDC policy
 - ii FSB very concerned about weight of traffic – 25 lorry movement per day over roads – whether lorries come through Littledean or from Nailbridge, additional lorry movements will cause problems both to traffic and infrastructure. County Council Traffic Officer also worried.
 - iii FSB also concerned about number of brown outs – and additional strain of Tesco's .
 - iv Concerns also expressed about water and drainage – rugby ground site allows water to soak away – where will it go when Tesco's is built?
 - v Concern that – apart from aspects of competition – Tesco's will impact very adversely on the infrastructure for business and people in Cinderford.
2. FODDC interface with other bodies:
 - i FSB very concerned that FODDC officers and Councillors fail to speak out for Forest at meetings at Regional and Sub-Regional level – and hence do not get funding or recognition for Forest.
 - ii FODDC not good at including business people on groups looking at regeneration, etc. where business input and perspectives probably essential to sustainability of projects.
3. Education & Skills
 - a. FSB concerned that Apprentice Events, etc. being held by bodies supported by public funding – but which do not involve **small businesses**.



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- b.** Many very small businesses – especially in engineering and other skilled crafts – very keen to pass on skills to young people – but barriers
 - i** insurance (one and two person & family businesses may not already have ELI) + business insurance will not allow employment of young people in, for example, workshops
 - ii** CRB, Industrial Safeguarding Agency, Child Protection, Health & Safety, etc. etc.
make it very difficult for small/micro businesses to take on young people on Work Experience or as apprentices or trainees. One and two person & family businesses will not already have ELI.)
 - c.** Concern that small/micro businesses are left out – rather than government/agencies trying to solve problems and make things possible.
 - d.** Failure to pass on skills will lose significant job prospects in FOD over next 10 years
 - e.** Employer engagement with schools is virtually impossible for small/micro businesses – lack of common ground or purpose between teachers/schools and business people. EBPs funded and operate to fulfil educational not business agenda.
- 4.** Sub-National Review
- a.** Agreed more local autonomy would be helpful
 - b.** RDA – not accountable (esp. with removal of Regional Assembly)
 - i** but spend vast sums of money
 - ii** local issues get swallowed up in Regional and National imperatives and tick boxes
 - iii** lack of drive in FOD to be effective in putting its case forward
 - c.** Concern that LAAs and MAAs will mean more money is spent through large contracts with large suppliers.
- 5.** Local Supply
- a.** need to protect local employment and skills
 - b.** local authorities and local operating units of large organizations need to place contracts/sub-contracts locally for goods and services
 - c.** need for websites to publicise local contracts available to businesses
 - d.** agreed local suppliers – more accessible, less mileage + local spend benefits local people
 - e.** problems with organizations trusting small local suppliers
- 6.** Infrastructure
- a.** Broadband
 - i** very slow across FOD – bandwidth poor
 - ii** more people use broadband in rural areas – but service (and investment) significantly worse
 - iii** trees are a problem – cables have to go overground
 - iv** BT stretching existing cables to limits, rather than invest in new
 - v** Mark Harper to follow up Mariana Robinson’s problems with Broadband (handed him correspondence with David Davies & MR).



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- vi can Mark Harper follow up with BT and others possibility of putting satellite dishes - e.g. in main towns - to give better access to Broadband

7. Severn Barrage

- a. current situation – government review – out to consultancy. Concerns about cost and efficiency
- b. FSB concerned about costs of building & long-term effects (financial and environmental)
- c. Agreed need to look at range of solutions, particularly energy efficiency, local/micro generation systems
- d. Concern about FODDC's lack of concern for energy conservation, insulation, etc.
- e. government framework very heavily weighted in favour of wind power which is skewing investment and narrowing – rather than widening – possibilities.
- f. Digital – satellite dishes in main towns could be multipurpose – delivering TV, radio, broadband

8. Business Crime

- a. Don Burgess reported that new police task force led by Danny Andreason was tackling business crime in FOD

9. Evidence Base for FODDC

- a. Laurie Moseley questioned data sets used by FODDC – and their unwillingness to address the issue. FODDC quoted as example of how not to use statistics.
- b. Mark Harper recommended taking this up with Peter Amos (FODDC Cabinet) and Peter Williams (Planning)

Agreed Mark Harper to Action:

1. Discuss with LEA issue of schools' engagement with local small business
2. Contact BT on broadband issues, focussing on:
 - focussing on **rural** needs
 - focussing on **solutions**
3. Contact DBERR/DCFS on apprenticeship issues for small businesses, especially:
 - regulatory matters – child protection, health & safety, industrial safeguarding agency, bureaucracy
 - business insurance issues re employment of young people/work experience (Keith Gray reported quote of £1200 to cover work experience placements – FSB's experience suggests this is fairly typical)
 - insurance issues related to employment – e.g. temporary ELI, LEA/Trident, etc. providing insurance, etc.