



Notes of The Economy and Skills Strategic Partnership

Tuesday, 10 June 2008

PLEASE NOTE THIS WAS AN INQUORATE MEETING

Present: Councillor Howard Gawler (South Gloucestershire Council), Councillor John Godwin (South Gloucestershire Council), Councillor Pat Rooney (South Gloucestershire Council), Steve Birch (Federation of Small Businesses), Katie Harwood (Connexions West of England), Sarah Morris (Confederation of British Industry), Nicky Sutton (Jobcentre Plus - West of England District Office), Emma Collier (CVS South Gloucestershire).

Also present: Council Officers – Steve Evans (Director of Community Services), Antony Merritt (Economic Development Co-ordinator), Stephanie Kruse (Strategic Partnership Officer), Nidaa Abbas (Quintain Estates).

Apologies for Absence: Stephen Hagen (University of the West of England), Nigel Hutchings (GWE Business West), Liz Potter (West of England Coalition for Inclusive Living), Asher Craig (West of England Learning and Skills Council).

1 ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE- CHAIR (Agenda Items 1 and 2)

The meeting was inquorate and it was not possible to elect a Chair and Vice Chair for the coming year. This item and Item 2 (Election of Vice-Chair) were therefore deferred to the next meeting of the Partnership. Councillor John Godwin was elected Chair for this meeting.

2 THE ECONOMY AND SKILLS STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP RISK REGISTER (Agenda Item 13)

Antony Merritt (Economic Development Co-ordinator) introduced the report and concentrated on high risk matters. In particular he highlighted R6, concerning organizational change, which scored a maximum of 9.

Councillor Howard Gawler noted that, given the low attendance at the last two meetings of the partnership, R9 (unproductive meetings, loss of credibility) and R7 (Partnership working not well co-ordinated) were also of concern and should perhaps be scored as high rather than low risk.

Steve Evans, Director of Community Services, acknowledged that the recent inquorate meetings of the partnership were disappointing. In his view the Economic Development Strategy to be discussed as a later item provided a long term vision, which would focus partners' minds and give the Partnership a better sense of direction. He advised the meeting that the University of the West of England (UWE) had offered to stage the next meeting and to include a tour of their Robotics Department. It was hoped further meetings might be staged by partners and include items of their choosing.

Emma Collier, CVS South Gloucestershire, suggested that earlier start times for partnership meetings might improve attendance.

Action Point – That the suggested amendments to the risk register be made by Antony Merritt and that he investigate changing the meeting's start time with other partners. It was

also recommended that the next quorate meeting accept the report and the amended risk register.

3 LOCAL BUSINESS AND THE 2012 OLYMPIC GAMES (Item 14)

A DVD made by Team South West was shown. Team South West is a regionally based structure created by the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) and its partners. They have been tasked with maximising the business, sporting, cultural and social opportunities of the London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games to deliver a lasting and discernible legacy for the region.

Steve Evans highlighted the claim made in the film presentation that 30,000 sub-contracts would be available as a result of preparations for the 2012 Olympics. Businesses needed to be able to meet the criteria required by 2012 Olympic organisers. There were going to be longer term benefits and opportunities for social enterprises also. It was therefore necessary to get the message out to businesses in the region to enable them to compete at the earliest opportunity.

Steve Birch, Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) advised that the federation was not involved in Team South West and that a wide distribution of the DVD would be useful for his members.

Councillor Howard Gawler noted that the requirement to meet basic criteria would act as a "wake up call" for many local businesses.

Action Points - Although it was clear that there should be no duplication of anything done on a regional SW basis, it was suggested that Antony Merritt co-ordinate the linking up of partners to fully utilise the opportunities presented by the games.

4 SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2008 – 2015 (Agenda item 15)

Steve Evans introduced the report. He went through the strategy document and outlined the core objectives, noting that this strategy was complimentary to the South West of England Regional Economic Strategy and the West of England Economic Strategy and was able to focus more closely on the local South Gloucestershire economy.

He advised that Antony Merritt will be talking to partners about delivery of the strategy and the possibility of setting up sub-groups to look at specific issues. He hoped to bring regular reports and action plans back to Partnership meetings. It was also his intention to undertake gap analysis to plug the holes in our understanding of what was happening economically in the South Gloucestershire area.

Councillor Howard Gawler queried the annual figure of 10% turnover of small businesses given in the document but was assured it was correct. He also queried whether 4.32 in Strategic Objective 5 needed amending to take account of the effects of recent economic circumstances and farmers improved fortunes as a result of rises in the wholesale cost of foodstuffs. Steve Birch added that increased production by farmers might lead to a reduction in workspace units.

Steve Evans agreed that 4.32 might need amendment in the light of recent economic events.

Action Points – As the meeting was inquorate John Godwin suggested that those present approve the strategy and the agreement of other partners be sought by e-mail, prior to the strategy going before Cabinet. The strategy was approved by those present.

(Katie Harwood left the meeting at 10.55am)

5 THE CORE STRATEGY – ISSUES AND OPTIONS FOR CONTINUED ECONOMIC PROSPERITY AND LOCAL PLANWORK PROGRAMME (Agenda item 16)

Barbara Maksymiw, Head of Planning and Environment, gave a presentation on the Core Strategy, Issues and Options document, looking at the way in which the proposed 30,800 new dwellings outlined in the draft Regional Spatial Strategy Panel Report are to be accommodated in South Gloucestershire. She also considered the question of how the region's Employment Land needs can be met.

She noted that the 30,800 homes to be provided up to 2026, included between 11,000 and 12,000 homes which are already in the pipeline either through the existing South Gloucestershire Local Plan or existing planning permissions.

Councillor John Godwin queried whether there was any way to avoid land loss to residential use on the closure of small businesses.

Barabara Maksymiw advised that one needed to look at the Local Plan to see which areas were currently protected. She suggested that this was an area which needed reviewing and updating, to see which areas needed to be so retained and whether new vulnerable areas needed to be included. To do this the Authority needed to commission an Employment Land study. To date resources had not been available. However she hoped to commission a study shortly as this baseline info would be critical for the Core Strategy.

Several partners voiced their concerns over the decline in Employment Land and the need to safeguard existing employment land resources.

Councillor Pat Rooney queried whether there was any bar on retail parks extending their land coverage. Barabara Maksymiw advised that there was a general presumption against new retail parks. Extensions to existing retail parks did not tend to be supported by policy, but each proposal had to be considered on its merits. Steve Birch noted that his federation were keen to keep businesses local and a reduction in available Employment Land did not assist in this.

Councillor John Godwin noted that a regular update from the FSB outlining their needs would be useful for partners. Also perhaps an open meeting for FSB members to take part in a 2 way debate Barbara Maksymiw agreed that it would be useful to understand the pressures of small businesses, to know the type of land they were looking for, and to have their perspective on the difficulties and problems in finding such land. Steve Birch advised that small businesses needed appropriate office facilities as well as small workshops and storage facilities.

6 SCIENCE PARK UPDATE (Item 17)

Nidae Abbas from Quintain Estates gave a presentation on the Science Park (a copy of which has been placed on the Minute Book) showing the planned development for the area.

Partners were shown scale models of the site. She confirmed that the first building, SPark 1, will be generating power on site and it was hoped that as the development grew new developments in energy production would be investigated and incorporated into the site.

Councillors Howard Gawler was assured that the proposed wind turbines were safe despite their proximity to the public.

The need to raise aspirations through a successful link up with local schools was stressed by a number of partners. Nidaa Abbas assured the meeting that they intended to involve schools and use the Science Park as a springboard for educational success in science. They would be visiting local schools to stimulate interest.

In response to a query about the use of local businesses she also assured partners that although the main contract was out to general tender, she expected the successful contractor to sub-contract locally.

Steve Evans queried what long term local employment opportunities she envisaged. It was her view that as businesses were to be clustered together they would in turn generate business and become a hub for Research and Development in the South West. This would attract skilled people into the area, which in turn would create many unskilled and semi-skilled jobs for the local population. She stressed that the development was designed to be open and inclusive and to form part of the community.

The question of transport to the site was raised and it was noted that Quintain were to fund a bus route for 2 years. Councillor Howard Gawler queried what happened after that as the development would need good transport connections to be successful. Nidaa Abbas advised that the agreement to pay for the first two years was to ensure that there were good transport links. It was envisaged that after 2 years the needs of the development to the East of the Science Park would provide transport links.

7 WORK PROGRAMME (Item 18)

Action Points:

It was agreed that the following should form part of the agenda for future meetings:

- ◆ An examination of the work done by Business West and other business organizations.
- ◆ The contribution of the Voluntary Sector to the local economy.
- ◆ An update on Benefit changes from Nicky Sutton – Job Centre
- ◆ An examination of the economy of Rural Areas

It was noted that partners needed to be regularly engaged in the Performance and Monitoring process. It would also be necessary to examine the way in which partners would implement their responsibilities under the Local Area Agreement (LAA).

It was noted that the Partnership had not yet reported on its performance against the previous LAA targets. The Partnership's Annual Report also needed to be discussed and approved.

Meeting ended:12.15pm