

BROMLEY ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP

Minutes of the meeting held at 4.00 pm on 21 April 2021

Present:

Councillor Peter Morgan (Chairman)
Katy Woolcott, London Biggin Hill Airport (Vice-Chairman)
Christopher Evans, Community Links Bromley
Frances Forrest, Your Bromley BID Company
Lesley Holland, LBB Operations Manager, Bromley Education
Business Partnership
Michael Humphries, Handelsbanken
Mike Lewis, Michael Rogers LLP
Donald Mars, Jobcentre Plus
Helen McIntosh FCIPR, South East London Chamber of
Commerce
Lorraine McQuillan, LBB Town Centres & BID Development
Manager
Chandra Sharma, Federation of Small Businesses
Lee Thomas, Fairlight Group

Also Present:

Councillor Yvonne Bear
Councillor Julian Benington
Russell Clarke, Sundridge Investments Limited
Elena Diaconescu, Bromley Adult Education College
Chris Glover, Churchill Theatre
Gary Hillman, N. Hillman & Sons
Ben Johnson, LBB Head of Planning Policy and Strategy
Alicia Munday, LBB Interim Assistant Director of Culture and
Regeneration
Emma Santer, Bromley FC
Louise Wolsey, London South East Colleges

18 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Councillor Vanessa Allen, Sharon Baldwin – Orpington 1st BID Company, Robert Buckley – LBB Head of Renewal, Zoe Carr – Beckenham Together BID Company & Penge SE20 BID Company, Dave Freeborn – Proctors, Mark Haynes – The Glades, Robert Sargent – Acorn Group and Caroline Tatchell – Splash Damage.

Apologies for absence were also received from Carol Arnfield – LBB Head of Service for Early Years, School Standards and Adult Education and Sam Parrett – London South East Colleges, and Elena Diaconescu – Bromley

Adult Education College and Louise Wolsey – London South East Colleges attended as their respective substitutes.

19 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 26TH JANUARY 2021 AND MATTERS ARISING

The Chairman noted that any matters arising would be addressed during the meeting.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 26th January 2021 be agreed.

20 DRAFT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY UPDATE

Alicia Munday, LBB Interim Assistant Director of Culture and Regeneration attended the meeting to provide an update on the draft Economic Development Strategy.

The Local Authority's Regeneration Strategy had been adopted in 2020 and set out the importance of the local economy. The timing of the draft Economic Development Strategy was beneficial as it would provide support to the economy and assist in its recovery following the pandemic.

The LBB Interim Assistant Director of Culture and Regeneration informed Members that there were several reasons why an Economic Development Strategy was needed:

- The Borough's population was growing, and Bromley also had one of the largest older populations in London. This put pressure on health and social care services and there was a lower active workforce compared to other London boroughs.
- There were several advancements in technology taking place and the team had been supporting the roll out of the Digital Infrastructure Work Plan to ensure that the Borough had optimum connectivity.
- The Borough had always had a strong retail offer, with Bromley's main high street being in the top 50 high streets in the country. However, this retail offer was likely to change at a much faster pace than previously imagined.
- Consideration should also be given to whether the right skills and expertise were being developed for future generations to ensure that residents had the best opportunities to be employed, or retrain and diversify.
- The Borough also needed to make every effort to ensure that land was zoned for employment uses, sufficient to accommodate the premises which we hoped would be needed.

The core purposes of the Strategy were to ensure that Bromley was "open for business" – ready to promote growth; be innovative; allocate the right resources; and support recovery.

The LBB Interim Assistant Director of Culture and Regeneration noted that pre-pandemic, the local economy had been in a strong position – typically seeing a 5% annual growth in GDP, 78% employment rate (7th highest in outer London boroughs), and low unemployment rate (3.7% - 2nd lowest in outer London boroughs). The intention was to return to this position as soon as possible and maintain these benchmarks. With this in mind, the Strategy was seen as facilitating and supporting the local economy to recover and grow through seven key aspirations – Education and Skills; Employment Spaces; Thriving and Investing; High Streets for the Future; Connectivity and Mobility; Promoting Tourism and Culture; and A Green Economy. Overarching these was what they wanted Bromley to be – a Borough where businesses thrived; new businesses wanted to invest; and residents had good skills and benefitted from high levels of investment and employment.

Education and Skills

- Extending and enhancing services in the Borough's libraries, so they became information and learning hubs of the future.
- Promoting the lifelong learning offer, from good rated schools to a vibrant Further Education and active adult education offer that responded to the changing needs in skills, qualifications, and experience.
- Improving the relationship with Jobcentre Plus and the DWP to ensure that opportunities were promoted for people to contribute to the economy wherever possible. This could include the appointment of liaison officers to assist young people and connect people with the right businesses.
- The local economy would be an inclusive economy, promoting schemes to support businesses to be disability confident as employers and supporting care leavers.

Employment Spaces

- Implementing the economic policies set out in the Local Plan to prevent loss of employment space was a key target.
- Developing supplementary planning documents for Bromley and Orpington to provide guidance to help inform planning applications, and support and facilitate adaptive working spaces that better reflected the new ways of working. Outer London boroughs were considered to be well placed to boost the local economy due to the number of people expected to remain working from home.

Thriving and Investing

- Developing an online portal of advice and services relating to employment and business opportunities.
- The first business lounges, located in libraries, would be launched to assist start-up businesses during the coming months.
- Promoting new enterprises.
- Working with BIDs to support and enhance town centres.
- Creating a productive place for new businesses and positive networking opportunities.

High Streets for the Future

- Ensuring that the Borough's high streets were well prepared for the changes in consumer behaviour that had been accelerated as a result of the pandemic. Whilst the current focus was heavily on the safe reopening of the high streets, the team was also working with developers to ensure that high streets had a place in the future that was about living, working and entertaining, as much as it was about consumption.
- Work was being undertaken with developers in relation to Orpington to bring about substantial changes, including a new leisure offer, improved public realm, residential offer, community facilities and a new retail offer that would be both vibrant and versatile.
- Work was also being undertaken with the GLA on the 'High Streets for All' mission. A further update regarding this programme could be provided at a future meeting of the Partnership.
(ACTION: LBB Interim Assistant Director of Culture and Regeneration)

Connectivity and Mobility

- For Bromley to be a well-connected borough, both physically and digitally, and ensuring that the transport infrastructure adequately supported the projected growth. The Borough was ideally located – just minutes from the M25, and a short train ride into central London, which was an attractive offer for businesses. This reflected the economic opportunities, and a prosperous Borough served everyone well to develop an inclusive economy.
- Championing and leveraging an improved Digital Infrastructure.

Tourism and Culture

- It was widely recognised that a rich cultural offer attracted tourism and had a positive impact on the local economy. The Churchill Theatre alone was credited with attracting circa £4m per year of additional spend into the local economy through associated hospitality offers.
- Work was undertaken with, and support provided to, a number of cultural venues – either through the provision of facilities as a landlord, or through supporting regeneration programmes such as annual open house events.
- The Local Authority managed a popular film service contract, that over recent years had seen films including the Freddie Mercury story, and highly regarded advertisements such as the John Lewis advert being filmed in the Borough. A high-profile documentary recording was currently being hosted and they wished to further grow and develop Bromley's film service to raise the cultural profile of the Borough.
- Promoting historic and cultural assets, including the Roman Villa, Crystal Palace Park and the Crystal Palace Subway.

A Green Economy

- Ensuring that Capital Schemes were designed to promote a green economy – using modular methods of construction to mitigate the impact on the environment and, wherever possible, sourcing resources from the local area.

- The use of eco-friendly designs, sustainability, promoting green wall spaces and new buildings that reduced energy consumption.

The LBB Interim Assistant Director of Culture and Regeneration highlighted that there was an ambitious timescale for adopting the Strategy, with the aim for the Strategy to be adopted by July 2021, and engagement had been taking place over recent weeks. Members of the Partnership were asked to submit any comments, suggestions, or feedback by Friday 14th May 2021.

The Chairman thanked the LBB Interim Assistant Director of Culture and Regeneration for her presentation and congratulated the team for their work on the Strategy. It was noted that sport in the Borough should also be referenced in the document, as this was an important part of the economy.

In response to a question from Councillor Benington, the LBB Interim Assistant Director of Culture and Regeneration confirmed that the Strategy had been shared with London South East Colleges and input had been received from the LBB Director of Education. The document had also been shared with Adult Education as they would be offering opportunities for people to retrain and upskill. The Local Authority had the links and support mechanisms in place with partners which aligned to the Strategy.

Lee Thomas, Fairlight Group noted his admiration of the work being undertaken at London Biggin Hill Airport in terms of the “macro picture”. The new hangar, education facilities and hotel were schemes that had taken several years to establish but would benefit the whole community.

Christopher Evans, Community Links Bromley highlighted that the green element of the Strategy was welcomed. However, it was noted that it currently sat as a standalone aspiration whereas it was considered that this should in fact underpin and crosscut the whole approach of the Strategy. It was further noted that the impact of the pandemic had been uneven, particularly with young people having been adversely affected, and therefore an equalities aspect may also need to be incorporated within the Strategy.

RESOLVED that the Draft Economic Development Strategy Update be noted.

21 BROMLEY ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP - NEW MEETING FORMAT PROPOSALS

The Chairman informed Members that the proposals for a new meeting format had arisen from the draft Economic Development Strategy. The formal arrangements would be finalised over the coming weeks and a further update would be provided after Annual Council in May.

RESOLVED that the Bromley Economic Partnership - new meeting format proposals be noted.

22 UPDATES ON MAIN PARTNERSHIP THEMES AND OTHER RELEVANT COUNCIL INITIATIVES:

Members of the Partnership gave an update around progress across the main themes of the Partnership.

a TOWN CENTRES AND COVID GRANTS UPDATE

The LBB Interim Assistant Director of Culture and Regeneration provided an update:

With regards to business grants, the LBB Interim Assistant Director of Culture and Regeneration advised that these were divided into two categories – mandatory grants, with criteria set by the government; and discretionary grants, for which the Local Authority set the criteria within a national framework. Mandatory grants were administered directly by the Council's Exchequer Services, who were currently distributing payments under the 'Restart Grant' to support and remobilise businesses, whereas the discretionary grants were co-ordinated by the Business Support Team, the majority of which had been the Additional Restrictions Grants (ARG).

There were various grant schemes within the ARG that were 'live', including the 'Hardship Grant' for which circa £2.5m had been distributed to date. The application period for the 'Innovation Fund' (£1m) had recently closed and the team were now assessing around 130 submissions, with capacity to award payments to 100. It was hoped that the first 50 of these grant payments would be made the following week. Two further schemes supported by the Council were 'Special Treatment Licenses' and the 'Home Based Business Grant'. 'Special Treatment Licenses' were predominately for those delivering one on one services, such as beauty treatments, to which payments of £1k were being awarded to assist with COVID-19 measures. Businesses that applied for pavement licenses, to allow outdoor trading, were also being given a grant of £1k to use towards keeping the streets and pavements clean and tidy. The 'Home Based Business Grant' would be launched within the next few weeks. It was aimed at those that are not registered for business rates and a payment of £2k could be awarded if they had any fixed business costs.

The LBB Interim Assistant Director of Culture and Regeneration informed Members that a 'BID Business Booster Grant', which it was hoped would go live within the next couple of months, would provide support to small, independent businesses within the BID areas. It was highlighted that the team should have distributed the initial ARG by 30th June 2021 – if this was completed successfully, a further £2.6m would be awarded by the government, and the team would be engaging with businesses as to the best way for this grant to be deployed. It was considered that this additional sum could be used to support recovery, such as autumnal events once restrictions were fully lifted and the night-time economy, but further thoughts and suggestions would be welcomed.

It was noted that the ARG had also been used to support the cultural and leisure sectors, with discretionary payments having been made to venues and facilities within the Borough. The LBB Interim Assistant Director of Culture and Regeneration highlighted that the ARG had been stretched as far as it could be, and thanks were extended to the team who had worked exceptionally hard to ensure that these payments were awarded. These thanks were echoed by the Chairman who acknowledged that it had been a complex and difficult job, which they had done extremely well.

The Chairman welcomed the thoughts of those Members that represented a number of businesses in terms of the feedback they had received relating to the grants. Helen McIntosh, South East London Chamber of Commerce (SELCC) advised that they had contacted all of their members, across all boroughs, to encourage them to apply for the grants. Chandra Sharma, representing the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), said that those business that had not received grants the first time round had been happy to have received them during the next phase. Frances Forrest, Your Bromley BID Company said that businesses within the district were getting on well since the reopening of the high street – the atmosphere was good natured, and queues had been well organised. The BID had brought in a market, with rides and a food stall which had put people in good spirits. With regards to the business grants, she was aware that a number of businesses in the town centre had received them, although it was noted that they could do more in terms of publicising them.

Chandra Sharma, representing the FSB, asked for further information regarding the criteria for the new 'Home Based Business Grant'. The LBB Interim Assistant Director of Culture and Regeneration advised that it was a £2k payment for those who applied and were eligible. The criteria was that those applying had to demonstrate ongoing fixed business costs (which could include vehicle hire or software license) and were trading or actively trying to support their business to recover. Those applying would be asked to submit documentation to demonstrate their fixed cost and a bank statement from within the last three months.

In response to questions from Lee Thomas, Fairlight Group the LBB Interim Assistant Director of Culture and Regeneration advised that the pavement license fees were not being waived by the Local Authority and highlighted that it was not within the remit of her team to be able to do so. With regards to the definition of 'accommodation', the LBB Interim Assistant Director of Culture and Regeneration noted that the Hardship Grants had not been made solely to those businesses with accommodation costs.

The Chairman suggested that any further detailed questions relating to business grants could be emailed to the LBB Interim Assistant Director of Culture and Regeneration following the meeting.

(ACTION: Members of the Bromley Economic Partnership)

RESOLVED that the Town Centre and COVID Grants update be noted.

b PLANNING POLICY UPDATE

Ben Johnson, LBB Head of Planning Policy and Strategy provided an update in relation to planning policy.

The LBB Head of Planning Policy and Strategy advised Members that the London Plan had been formally adopted in early March 2021 – the document now formed part of the Bromley development plan and, in addition to the Local Plan, was being used to assess planning applications in the Borough.

At the previous meeting of the Partnership, it had been highlighted that a government consultation was underway regarding permitted development rights. This had been completed swiftly and new regulations had now been published. These would be brought into force from August 2021 and would broadly allow the majority of units in class E (such as retail, offices and restaurants) to be converted to residential use. It was noted that, as the Local Authority's planning policy did not directly apply, there were some concerns and further Article 4 directions were likely to be required and this would be discussed at the next meeting of the Council's Development Control Committee.

In response to a question from the Chairman, the LBB Head of Planning Policy and Strategy advised that following the adoption of the London Plan, the Local Plan would be kept under review to ensure general conformity. Katy Woolcott, London Biggin Hill Airport enquired if the zoning process previously mentioned would be taken forward as part of this review. The LBB Head of Planning Policy and Strategy responded that the zoning proposals were being taken forward by the government, but no further information had been provided recently. It was anticipated that more news may be heard later in the year, however the Local Plan would be reviewed under the current system as it may take several years for these proposals to come into force. It was highlighted that a full review of the Local Plan would be undertaken, giving regard to the relevant policies within the London Plan, as well as national policies, to ensure it was up to date.

Mike Lewis, Michael Rogers LLP enquired if the existing Article 4 directions in the Borough would be affected. The LBB Head of Planning Policy and Strategy responded that the government had given Local Authorities a year, to August 2022, to replace any existing Article 4 directions and they would not automatically be extended beyond this period. Mr Lewis said that this was a concern as if any further commercial space was lost it would have a seriously detrimental effect on the economic progress of the town as a business centre. The Chairman highlighted that the draft Economic Development Strategy discussed earlier in the meeting included a target for new jobs and space in the town centre to provide them would be required – a review of the Local Plan would therefore take this into account.

In response to a question from Katy Woolcott, the LBB Head of Planning Policy and Strategy said that units previously classed as B1 were now categorised in class E, so in theory they could be converted to residential.

This was something that would be considered as part of the review of where Article 4 directions may be required.

With regards to business improvement areas within the London Plan, Lee Thomas, Fairlight Group noted the statement that office spaces within them needed to be fully retained for the purposes of employment and queried if this would be a disparity with the Local Plan. The LBB Head of Planning Policy and Strategy responded that the Local Authority was broadly in line with the London Plan as the principles of it were to protect employment spaces and intensify them wherever possible. It was highlighted that if a space were put forward with a proposed mixed-use development, if there was a significant amount of office space already there, they would look to replace it, and if it was within a business improvement area, look to increase it. This may be something that would be looked at in further detail as part of the SPD to emphasise the importance of commercial use in these areas. Mr Lewis highlighted that a mixed-use building may work well in terms of the residential element, but they tended not to work from the aspect of the office element. These schemes often had small office occupiers and in order to attract more businesses into the town centre proper, purpose-built office buildings were required.

RESOLVED that the Planning Policy update be noted.

c BUSINESS SUPPORT UPDATE

Lorraine McQuillan, LBB Town Centres and BID Development Manager provided an update relating to business support.

In addition to the work being undertaken in relation to the distribution of business grants, the team had been establishing further business support measures. The first of these was working with libraries on an initiative to provide support to start-up businesses. The 'Start Up Bromley' project would launch the following month, providing business lounge facilities at Central Library and Orpington Library. This was a dedicated business space which could be used by entrepreneurs to work and hold meetings. There would also be a Business Support Manager who would host one-to-one business advice sessions at any of the borough's libraries – there would be access to a range of business webinars; a business support network; and the opportunity provided to promote and sell products via business showcase events. Once the scheme was launched, further details could be circulated to Members of the Partnership for onward distribution.

(ACTION: LBB Town Centres and BID Development Manager)

The second project being undertaken with businesses was to ensure that they had been ready for reopening on the 12th April 2021. This had included a package of support and advice being provided on how businesses could open safely, as well as ensuring that the high streets were kept clean and safe for customers. A copy of this advice was available online and could be accessed via the following link:

https://www.bromley.gov.uk/info/200013/business_support_and_advice/1540/open_bromley_business_support_programme

It was noted that this work would be continuing as the country moved through the next stages of the government roadmap for the full reopening of businesses. Work with the Business Support Taskforce would also continue to take place with regards to projects and the identification of funding opportunities to support businesses and the recovery of the local economy. Updates on these projects could be provided to the Partnership as they moved forward.

(ACTION: LBB Town Centres and BID Development Manager)

The team would also disseminate information to businesses relating to the financial support available, and more general support would be provided via the website and e-newsletter.

Louise Wolsey, London South East Colleges informed Members that the Business Support Team had been working with her colleague, Neil Coates, on employer incentives. It was highlighted that there were still some grants and funding available for businesses who were wishing to bring back, or invest in, their workforce – £1k for a young person on a traineeship and up to £4k for an apprenticeship. Any Members who would like more information were encouraged to get in contact, and their details would be passed on to the team.

RESOLVED that the Business Support update be noted.

23 PARTNER UPDATES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR JOINT WORKING

Members of the Partnership had undertaken a range of activities since the last meeting.

Elena Diaconescu – Bromley Adult Education College advised Members that they had been working in partnership with Jobcentre Plus to offer employment and training support. These programmes were referral based and the workshops were not readily available elsewhere – examples included a series of onsite, and online, workshops being provided to those clients who wished to set up a new business or become self-employed. The College was working with clients of Jobcentre Plus to review and improve their skills in the job market. These workshops focussed on skills that could be acquired immediately and put to good use, such as the skills needed to perform well in an online job interview.

Digital drop-in sessions were also held for residents within the Borough who would like to update their CV's, or start them from scratch, and improve their job search skills. Courses on basic skills for English, Maths and language (specifically English for Speakers of Other Languages) were also held and provided a route to improving skills and becoming ready for employment. Further information on these courses could be accessed via the following link:

<https://baec.ac.uk/index.php/employment-support/>

Chandra Sharma attended the meeting representing the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB). The FSB had been working closely with the Rotary Clubs in the Borough to deliver workshops to help people with writing CVs and interview techniques. A round table discussion with Sir Bob Neill MP was being arranged for 21st May 2021 – any Members wishing to attend were asked to contact Mr Sharma directly. An online webinar would be held the following day on ‘How is Brexit Impacting Your Business?’, and two virtual networking events were held each month for Orpington and Bromley.

Mr Sharma highlighted that he considered that all communications issued by the Local Authority, including rates bills and newsletters, reference should be made to business, with residents encouraged to support their local businesses.

Donald Mars – Jobcentre Plus informed Members that the criteria of the Kickstart scheme had changed, whereby employers could have a smaller number of people aiming to start. The scheme was aimed at those aged 18-24 years and for employers in the Borough who were looking to take on one or two young people to work in their organisation, the government would pay their wages for the first six months.

Helen McIntosh – South East London Chamber of Commerce (SELCC) advised Members that, at the request of the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the SELCC had been officially asked to form a new Chamber in Croydon.

Katy Woolcott – London Biggin Hill Airport (LBHA) highlighted that legally only essential travel was currently permitted. LBHA had recruited five new apprentices; a Customer Sustainability Manager; a Head of Technical Services; an Assistant for HR, PR and Business Development. Bombardier had also recruited 16 new apprentices in January 2021. The Bombardier development, which was just under 250,000 sq. ft., was continuing well and it was anticipated that it would be completed ahead of target (April 2022). Essential repairs and investment were being made into the infrastructure of the airport’s taxiway and planning consent had been implemented for the 56-bed hotel development which would create additional jobs in the future.

The policy of LBHA, during the pandemic and going forward, was to protect the business, jobs, and each other. The airport’s turnover had been reduced by the impact of the pandemic, however they were “keeping their head above water”. There had been disappointment as LBHA had been excluded from claiming business rates relief, as a requirement had been to have at least 12 scheduled aircraft movements during the previous year. LBHA was currently making preparations for 17th May 2021 to ensure the correct staffing levels were in place for the business that would hopefully be coming their way.

Mike Lewis – Michael Rogers LLP was pleased to advise Members that the commercial property market was now back to normal levels with enquiries

being received and inspections being undertaken. An occupier would shortly be signing a contract for 20,000 sq. ft. of space at Threadneedle – T Building (formerly Wren Court) and there was also interest in the other two large floors. As a result, the quoting rent had been increased to £35 per sq. ft., which was a record-breaking figure. A big marketing push was also about to commence for the new scheme on Elmfield Road, and discussions were already taking place with a couple of potential tenants.

Louise Wolsey – London South East Colleges extended her thanks to both the Local Authority and Community Links Bromley for their phenomenal effort in assisting the College at the beginning of term to establish the testing procedures for the safe return to campus. The Chairman echoed this and extended his thanks to all the volunteers who had provided assistance throughout the pandemic.

Lee Thomas – Fairlight Group said that enquiries for flexible workspace had increased dramatically and spaces were relatively full. A number of businesses were still struggling; however, they were feeling positive for the future.

Sharon Baldwin – Orpington 1st BID Company was unable to attend the meeting, but provided the following written update:

'In Orpington, the reopening of non-essential retail and outdoor hospitality has begun well with businesses providing COVID-secure services and customers responding positively to the guidance and coming out in increasing numbers to support local businesses.'

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

24 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The LBB Interim Assistant Director of Culture and Regeneration highlighted that there had not been many charities applying for the 'Hardship Grant'. Charities were eligible, if they met the other criteria, and Members were therefore encouraged to publicise this where they could.

The LBB Interim Assistant Director of Culture and Regeneration advised Members that a webinar would be held on 7th May 2021 to provide information relating to the business grants and the mechanisms of support available. The invite would be circulated to Members shortly, and they could then forward on to their wider networks.

(ACTION: LBB Interim Assistant Director of Culture and Regeneration)

The Chairman and Members extended their congratulations to Frances Forrest, Your Bromley BID Company, and her team for the success in securing their second 5-year term.

RESOLVED that the issues raised be noted.

25 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

4.00pm, Thursday 15th July 2021
4.00pm, Tuesday 12th October 2021
4.00pm, Tuesday 11th January 2022
4.00pm, Tuesday 29th March 2022

The Meeting ended at 5.14 pm

Chairman