

BROMLEY ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP

Minutes of the meeting held at 4.00 pm on 15 July 2021

Present:

Councillor Peter Morgan (Chairman)
Katy Woolcott, London Biggin Hill Airport (Vice-Chairman)
Sharon Baldwin, Orpington 1st BID Company
Zoe Carr, Beckenham Together BID Company & Penge SE20 BID Company
Andrew Cox, London South East Colleges
Elena Diaconescu, Bromley Adult Education College
Christopher Evans, Community Links Bromley
Councillor Hannah Gray, Executive Assistant for Renewal, Recreation and Housing/Small Business Champion
Zoe Griffiths, Your Bromley BID Company
Gary Hillman, N. Hillman & Sons
Lesley Holland, LBB Operations Manager, Bromley Education Business Partnership
Michael Humphries, Handelsbanken
Mike Lewis, Michael Rogers LLP
Donald Mars, Jobcentre Plus
Lorraine McQuillan, LBB Place Shaping & Local Economy Manager
Chandra Sharma, Federation of Small Businesses
Lee Thomas, Fairlight Group

Also Present:

Councillor Vanessa Allen
Councillor Yvonne Bear
Ben Johnson, Housing, Planning and Regeneration
Nigel Masson, London Biggin Hill Airport
Councillor Melanie Stevens

1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Dave Freeborn – Proctors, Chris Glover – Churchill Theatre, Mark Haynes – The Glades, Marg Mayne – Mytime Active, Helen McIntosh – South East London Chamber of Commerce and Robert Sargent – Acorn Group.

Apologies had also been received from Carol Arnfield – LBB Head of Service for Early Years, School Standards and Adult Education, Frances Forrest – Your Bromley BID Company and Sam Parrett – London South East Colleges, and Elena Diaconescu – Bromley Adult Education College, Zoe Griffiths – Your Bromley BID Company and Andrew Cox – London South East Colleges attended as their respective substitutes.

2 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED that Katy Woolcott, London Biggin Hill Airport be appointed Vice-Chairman for the 2021/22 municipal year.

3 QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS AND MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ATTENDING THE MEETING

No questions had been received.

4 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21ST APRIL 2021 AND MATTERS OUTSTANDING

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

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 21st April 2021 be agreed.

5 TERMS OF REFERENCE

Members considered the revised Terms of Reference and membership of the Bromley Economic Partnership.

The LBB Place Shaping and Local Economy Manager advised Members that the Terms of Reference had been updated to reflect the more formal structure of the Partnership. The main change was that the Partnership would report into the Renewal, Recreation and Housing Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee on a bi-annual basis, including an update on the work programme associated with the Economic Development Plan and data trends related to the local economy of the borough. It was noted that the Bromley Economic Partnership's Terms of Reference and associated membership would be reviewed on at least an annual basis. A copy of the Bromley Economic Partnership Terms of Reference can be found at Appendix A.

RESOLVED that the revised Terms of Reference for the Bromley Economic Partnership be agreed.

6 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY UPDATE

The LBB Place Shaping and Local Economy Manager informed Members that the Economic Development Strategy had been formally adopted at the meeting of the Council's Executive on 30th June 2021. The final version of the document, and the associated press release, would be circulated to Members following the meeting.

(ACTION: LBB Place Shaping and Local Economy Manager / Clerk)

RESOLVED that the Economic Development Strategy update be noted.

7 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 at the previous meeting of the Partnership, it had been noted that Article 4 directions were being prepared in light of the government introducing new regulations from August 2021, which would broadly allow the majority of units in class E (such as retail, offices and restaurants) to be converted to residential use through permitted development rights. The LBB Head of Planning Policy and Strategy highlighted that it would be extremely damaging for town centres and industrial areas if development were unrestricted as it could lead to a significant loss of economic floor space, particularly retail and office space. The Article 4 directions had since been presented to the May 2021 meeting of the Council's Development Control Committee, and subsequently to the Renewal, Recreation and Housing Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee for Portfolio Holder sign-off, and the legal process was now underway. As the government had given Local Authorities a year to replace any existing Article 4 directions, these would come into force in August 2022.

In response to a question from Sharon Baldwin, Orpington 1st BID Company, the LBB Head of Planning Policy and Strategy said the Article 4 directions related to designations within the Local Plan. Areas that they were looking to protect included all town centres in the borough; all office clusters; and Strategic Industrial Locations (SIL) and Locally Significant Industrial Sites (LSIS).

Members were advised that the team were at the very early stages of a Local Plan review. The first action would be a 'Call for Sites' consultation exercise which would be launched in the coming weeks. It was noted that these tended to focus on housing sites, however the Local Authority would be keen to look at any potential sites for economic development or any other uses.

Work was also underway to produce Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) for Bromley and Orpington town centres. Draft documents were currently being prepared and it was anticipated that the consultation process would be launched before the end of the year. In response to a question from the Chairman, the LBB Head of Planning Policy and Strategy advised that the SPDs provided further guidance regarding Local Plan policies and details on how they should be implemented. In response to questions from the Vice-Chairman, the LBB Head of Planning Policy and Strategy said that Members of the Partnership would be notified when the 'Call for Sites' was issued, and this could be circulated to wider network groups to ensure as much coverage as possible. *(ACTION: LBB Head of Planning Policy and Strategy / Clerk)*

With regards to the proposed zoning process mentioned at previous meetings, the LBB Head of Planning Policy and Strategy advised that no further information had been provided by the government. It was anticipated that a government response to the issues raised in the previous consultation would be received in the autumn.

RESOLVED that the Planning Policy update be noted.

8 TOWN CENTRES AND BUSINESS SUPPORT UPDATE

Lorraine McQuillan, LBB Place Shaping and Local Economy Manager provided an update on Town Centres and Business Support.

Members were advised that since the last meeting, the Local Authority had been successful in its bid, and awarded £295k from the 'Welcome Back Fund'. This was for use in welcoming customers back to the high streets – ideas for activities and installations were currently being worked through and some elements would be implemented the following month. It was noted that the outcome of a 'High Streets for All' funding bid was also imminent. The Chairman asked for the thoughts of the BID Managers regarding the use of the 'Welcome Back Fund'. Zoe Carr, Beckenham Together BID Company & Penge SE20 BID Company said that a few ideas had been discussed with the LBB Place Shaping and Local Economy Manager at a recent meeting. Zoe Griffiths, Your Bromley BID Company advised that ideas were being progressed with the LBB Place Shaping and Local Economy Manager and a 'wish list' had been submitted. Sharon Baldwin, Orpington 1st BID Company noted that this fund provided the opportunity to make the town centres more interesting and welcoming for customers. The 'High Street for All' funding would be the most significant in terms of the projects put forward in Orpington, as the team were working to gain a greater understanding of meanwhile space whilst major transformation was taking place. Connections had been made with a community group, owners and landlords and the Local Authority to look at a blended offer and trialling it before creating the units and premises – five premises were currently being worked on, including a bike shop.

With regards to the 'Welcome Back Fund', Mike Humphries, Handelsbanken suggested that in order to bring people back onto the high streets the Local Authority could consider utilising part of the fund to allow free parking over certain weekends, particularly as people were still reticent about using public transport. The Chairman said that this had previously been discussed, and it was considered that the car parking prices were reasonable – it was not the cost of parking that deterred people from coming into the town centre, but it may be the quality of the parking and this was something they were looking to address in the redevelopment of The Hill Car Park.

The LBB Place Shaping and Local Economy Manager informed Members that the 'Start-Up Bromley' programme had been launched, providing support to start-up businesses and entrepreneurs. As part of this scheme, business lounge facilities were available in Bromley Central Library and Orpington

Library – this was a dedicated business space which could be used to work and hold meetings. In response to a question from the Chairman, the LBB Place Shaping and Local Economy Manager said that the business lounge in Bromley featured a large space for up to six entrepreneurs – there were individual desk spaces; a shared area in the middle; meeting rooms; and a workshop space. A similar offer was also available in Orpington. The business lounge in Bromley Central Library was launched on 24th June 2021 – a press release was currently awaited, which could be circulated to Members for them to distribute to their wider networks.

(ACTION: LBB Place Shaping and Local Economy Manager / Clerk)

The business lounge in Orpington Library would be launched on 21st July 2021. In response to a further question from Councillor Vanessa Allen, the LBB Place Shaping and Local Economy Manager confirmed that there were connections available in the lounges, people could bring in their own laptops but there were also computers available as well. There was Wi-Fi available and additional facilities in the meeting rooms, such as interactive whiteboards.

Lee Thomas, Fairlight Group stressed the need for the borough to promote itself as being a great place in which to work and highlight the good transport connections. Mike Lewis, Michael Rogers LLP advised that they were about to undertake a major promotion to encourage businesses to come to Bromley. With the Bromley Park Group, they would be promoting a development of just under 100,000 sq. ft. in Elmfield Road. This was on a pre-let basis, which was never easy, but Bromley was an excellent location in terms of access from central London and being close to the motorway. A brochure, videos and fly throughs would be produced, aimed at commercial agents based in central London, and a targeted campaign for major companies in the UK would also be created.

Work had also been undertaken with the Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) on the 'Business Boost' grant scheme. This was aimed at helping small independent businesses located in BID areas and would be launched by 1st August 2021.

With regards to the digital infrastructure work plan, the LBB Place Shaping and Local Economy Manager advised that a Memorandum of Understanding had been signed with BT Openreach for the roll out of full fibre broadband across the borough, which would be completed by 2024. In response to a question from the Chairman, Councillor Hannah Gray, Executive Assistant for Renewal, Recreation and Housing/Small Business Champion advised that BT Openreach would be providing quarterly updates on their progress. A map had also been requested for use on social media, allowing the Local Authority to show residents where the fast fibre broadband would be installed. This installation had started in Orpington and, from different exchanges, would be rolled out across the whole borough. It was noted that the first report was expected shortly and could be circulated to Members of the Partnership.

(ACTION: LBB Place Shaping and Local Economy Manager / Clerk)

A digital toolkit charter had also been established, and published on the Council's website, which set out the processes for boosting mobile network

capacity. The first installations in the borough were anticipated before the end of the year. In response to a question from Christopher Evans, Community Links Bromley, the LBB Place Shaping and Local Economy Manager said that other projects were run alongside the digital infrastructure project and, through the Community and Learning Shops in Mottingham and Cotmandene Crescent, IT courses were held to upskill local residents. Elena Diaconescu, Bromley Adult Education College advised that the London Recovery Programme mission was high on the government's agenda and there were a number of courses available to improve digital skills. The College ran some employability programmes, such as 'How to Start Your Own Business', and it was recognised that these needed to have as many digital skills elements included in them as possible. The College's offer from September 2021 was now live on their website and further information could be provided following the meeting.
(ACTION: Elena Diaconescu / Clerk)

All of the Business Grant schemes that the team had been co-ordinating had now closed, and they were now completing the final processes and payments. As mentioned at the last meeting, if the team had successfully distributed the initial ARG allocation by end of July 2021 a further £2.6m would be awarded by the government. The LBB Place Shaping and Local Economy Manager advised that they were on track to do so, and therefore further funding to support businesses was anticipated. Consideration had been given as to how this additional sum could be spent – some discussions had already taken place with Members of the Partnership, but any further thoughts and suggestions would be welcomed.

The LBB Place Shaping and Local Economy Manager informed Members that a new Enterprise Hub would be launched in the autumn, offering online support for business and acting as a vehicle to attract inward investment into the borough.

RESOLVED that the Town Centres and Business Support update be noted.

9 WORK PROGRAMME 2021-22

The LBB Place Shaping and Local Economy Manager informed Members that following the adoption of the Economic Development Strategy, a work programme had been developed based on the seven key aspirations within the document: Education and Skills; Employment Spaces; Helping Businesses Thrive; High Streets for the Future; Connectivity and Mobility; Enhancement of Tourism and Culture Industries; and Working Towards a Green Economy.

A template was being prepared to populate the document with areas of work that were in to be started, in progress or completed – the document set out the objectives for each economic aspiration and a list of actions associated with it. The document would be used to monitor progress in achieving the objectives of the Strategy and set clear priorities on a quarterly basis. It was

noted that discussions had taken place earlier in the meeting regarding employment spaces and upskilling courses – work in these areas was being undertaken by partners and the Local Authority, but this needed to be combined into one cohesive plan.

The LBB Place Shaping and Local Economy Manager advised that this would be an ongoing process, and over the next few weeks meetings would be scheduled with Members of the Partnership to look at ways of working collaboratively on some of the actions listed in the document. The work undertaken would be monitored on a quarterly basis and it was proposed that the document be shared at each meeting of the Partnership – to demonstrate what had been achieved during the last quarter and identify areas of focus for the next. It was noted that the document would be amended as work took place and evidence the tangible achievements. Christopher Evans, Community Links Bromley noted that a lot of the measures appeared to be based on outputs and suggested that consideration may also need to be given to outcomes.

Lee Thomas, Fairlight Group said that he had been surprised to see there were only 45 employers in the borough that had over 250 employees. It was considered that addressing this was something that should be included in the plan. The Vice-Chairman highlighted that London Biggin Hill Airport was a unique selling point for the borough, and an asset that could help maximise jobs and employment in the area. Mike Lewis, Michael Rogers LLP advised that when brochures were produced to market any space in the borough, he ensured that London Biggin Hill Airport was labelled on the maps included within it. Mike Humphries, Handelsbanken noted that discussions had also previously taken place regarding the inclusion of leisure and social opportunities in the borough.

The LBB Place Shaping and Local Economy Manager informed Members that another piece of work being undertaken was an Economic Data Report, a copy of which would be circulated to Members following the meeting.

(ACTION: LBB Place Shaping and Local Economy Manager / Clerk)

The report provided key statistics on how the town centres and borough as a whole was performing, including information on the number of business start-ups; claimant counts; jobs on furlough; apprenticeships; and in town centres footfall rates, vacancy rates and spend data. It was noted that this document would be produced on a quarterly basis and circulated to Members. The data would be used to help guide the recovery of the local economy, and Members were asked to notify the LBB Place Shaping and Local Economy Manager if they held any additional data that could be fed into future reports.

(ACTION: Members of the Partnership)

Councillor Yvonne Bear, Chairman of the Renewal, Recreation and Housing Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee noted that she had met with the LBB Assistant Director for Culture and Regeneration to discuss what information she would like provided to the Committee, and tracking of some additional data had been requested. As the work programme would also need

to be presented to the Committee, Councillor Bear asked that a copy be sent to her for further comment.

(ACTION: LBB Place Shaping and Local Economy Manager)

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

10 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Zoe Griffiths – Your Bromley BID Company informed Members that the town centre had a successful start to the summer and lifting of restrictions – lots of events had taken place, and even more were planned. Over the last few weeks the Floral Fest Competition had taken place, which saw 30 primary schools having their planters displayed on Bromley High Street. Celebrity gardener, Charlie Dimmock, had helped judge the competition entries and over 4,000 votes were registered from the public. A large screen had also been installed to broadcast the two weeks of Wimbledon. In response to a question from the Chairman, Zoe Griffiths said that footfall in Bromley town centre for June 2021 was at a similar level to the same period in 2019, with some days being even higher – they hoped to sustain this and increase footfall even further.

An event would be run at the weekend which was aimed at reducing single-use plastic, which Your Bromley BID Company had made a commitment to in its Business Plan. Businesses would be encouraged to sign up to Refill London, and in turn this would be promoted, and children's workshops would also be held. Meetings were taking place with key stakeholders regarding Christmas to ensure that the messages were consistent – a successful Christmas period was needed more than ever, and contingency planning was also being considered to prepare for any future periods of lockdown.

Longer term work was also being undertaken in relation to rebranding Your Bromley BID Company and creating a new website. Market research had been commissioned to look at what people thought about Bromley town centre – feedback received so far indicated that shopping was key, and other positive comments related to green spaces and connectivity. Further work relating to this would be undertaken in the coming months. Your Bromley BID Company had also commissioned 10 book benches, which looked like open books, and would be located in the town centre for eight weeks. Three of these benches would be bespoke to Bromley – Charles Darwin, Enid Blyton and David Bowie. In response to questions from Lee Thomas, Zoe Griffiths said that Your Bromley BID Company had collaborated with the Acorn Book Club, promoting drop off and collection points to residents. It was noted that other themes had been considered for the book benches, but only three could be selected.

Sharon Baldwin – Orpington 1st BID Company said that Orpington High Street was performing well. Vacancy rates were the lowest they had been in a long time and they had a list of prospective tenants for when properties became available. A central London office had recently relocated to the town centre

and as a commuter town it was anticipated that this trend would continue. Footfall continued to bounce back well due to the strong hospitality offer in the town centre.

With regards to the Walnuts Shopping Centre, as properties were becoming vacant ahead of the redevelopment, these were units that were being used for the project on meanwhile spaces. The London in Bloom judges had recently visited the town centre and had been impressed with the large collaborative business and community scheme on display. The first literacy festival, Ways With Words, had also been held, both online and face to face over a two-week period, and the Food Festival would be launched with BR6 in September 2021.

Zoe Carr – Beckenham Together BID Company & Penge SE20 BID Company noted that Penge town centre had performed well throughout the periods of lockdown as it was where local residents went to shop. A couple of new hospitality / take away businesses had recently opened and were doing well. Planning was underway for 'Pengefest' which would take place at the end of the summer and work was also being undertaken to map out locations for electric charging points in both Penge and Beckenham. Members were advised that adverts for McDonald's and Renault had recently been filmed in Penge and Beckenham, and a contribution from this would be received by the BIDs.

With regards to Beckenham town centre, which had a large hospitality and leisure offer, Zoe Carr noted that there had been a number of issues as restrictions lifted with premises "stepping over the line". They had been working in collaboration with the police and street rangers had been put in place on Friday and Saturday evenings to offer advice and guidance. Vacancy rates in the town centre were low, and anything that became available was quickly taken. A couple of new businesses had recently opened; however a few businesses were still suffering from the impact of the pandemic. A screen had been installed on the green, which had broadcast the Wimbledon tennis championships, and a number a future events were planned.

Mike Lewis – Michael Rogers LLP advised Members that the commercial property market was continually improving. Since the last meeting, three of the four floors at Threadneedle – T Building (formerly Wren Court) had now been let in record time. Good rents were being received, with the latest letting having been agreed at £35 per sq. ft. It was noted that the ground floor of the smaller building was also under offer. Around £150 per sq. ft. had been spent on the refurbishment of the building, which was proving the right thing to do – office space usually remained empty when it was not of the right quality. With regards to the industrial property market, it was highlighted that they had experienced their best ever year in terms of acquisitions and disposals.

Katy Woolcott – London Biggin Hill Airport (LBHA) said that for the year to date, the airport was performing better than the previous year, however they were significantly behind their 2019 budget, This was mainly due to the airport not receiving the larger, heavier American air traffic.

Significant investment had been made to the airport's infrastructure, including upgrading the taxiway system in support of becoming London's preeminent business aviation airport. With regards to the hotel, the final planning consent had been received and contactors for the build would soon be formally appointed.

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). LBHA had recruited 5 new apprentices and Bombardier had recruited 16 new apprentices – it was noted that their employment figures would increase further once the new development was complete. Two Air Traffic Controllers were being upskilled to become Air Traffic Control Officers, a firefighter had been promoted to Watch Manager and the General Manager for the hotel had been appointed.

Chandra Sharma attended the meeting representing the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB). The FSB had been working closely with businesses to help them prepare for reopening from 19th July 2021. A number of webinars would be held in the coming weeks, including Kick-start Your Year and Pay As You Grow. It was considered that the winding down of furlough and business grants would be a 'flash point' for which support would be provided to businesses. An e-newsletter had been circulated to all London boroughs outlining the work undertaken by the FSB and the FSB had also requested to be notified of any consultations regarding major planning applications.

The previous week, a walkaround of Beckenham had been undertaken to see how businesses were fairing – they had met with around 15 businesses, which had been extremely useful. A walkaround of Shortlands was planned for the following week. Members were reminded that the FSB held two networking events per month in the borough. It was noted that proposals had been provided in relation to the use of the additional grants funding to support small businesses, and the FSB were pleased to see that Enterprise Hubs would be introduced from the autumn.

Donald Mars – Jobcentre Plus informed Members that their claimant figures had improved slightly as more people moved into employment, and they wanted to increase this further. There was still an opportunity for employers to participate in the Kickstart scheme, which was aimed at helping those aged 18-24 years into employment. It was noted that it was now easier for smaller organisations to participate in the scheme.

Lee Thomas – Fairlight Group said that following a quick pick-up, enquiries for flexible workspace had now gone flat. It was anticipated that once people returned to working in their offices these spaces would fill up quickly.

Gary Hillman – N. Hillman & Sons informed Members that the restoration of the front of the Royal Bell building had been completed. A garden bar had been created at the rear of the property, which had been a huge success. Between 1,200-1,500 people were coming through the doors on a Friday and Saturday, and children's events would be held on the following Sunday

between 12.00pm-4.00pm. The venue would be open 12.00pm-12.00am on Thursday's, Friday's and Saturday's and 12.00pm-11.00pm the rest of the week.

RESOLVED that the updates be noted.

11 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

4.00pm, Tuesday 12th October 2021

4.00pm, Tuesday 11th January 2022

4.00pm, Tuesday 29th March 2022

The Meeting ended at 5.29 pm

Chairman