

Meeting with Peter – Gfirst LEP

4pm Tuesday 16th June 2015 Stonehouse Town Hall

Present: - Theresa Watts, Nick Close & John Jeynes

As a lay member of the NLP group the meeting was quite a steep learning curve but what struck me early on was the different types of LEP there is across the country.

GFirst LEP is a not for profit organisation with 9 outward facing staff. There is no transport expertise within the group so GFirst LEP adopts GCC's position as advised by District Councils on transportation. LEP does not have any policies to get people out of cars.

LEP's emergency budgets were initially set to deal with both Revenue and Capital costs of strategic projects that has subsequently been amended to Capital costs only. The Single Local Growth Fund does not really allow for the building up of strategic policies. The autumn budget may see some change to SLGF budgets, size of Enterprise zones etc.

All LEP projects have to meet the Economic Growth creation test, making this case can be quite hard. As an example Peter quoted whilst repairing potholes in roads may lessen a barrier to growth it does not meet the Economic growth test to create growth.

The LEP has had no policy upon the A419 this has all been GCC & SDC influenced decisions, decisions which were made prior to and without consideration of the impacts of the proposed west of Stonehouse development. The £6.3m earmarked for this project is held within the Single Local Growth fund budget of the LEP.

However this is the first stage of A419 road improvement proposal, which is still waiting due diligence checks and could also be influenced by any other future competing strategic priorities. The LEP is trying to influence what skills are needed and not transport. Peter confirmed there were no plans to recommend a bridge over the A4008 at Standish.

The rail strategy is being looked after and reported on by GCC through AMEY. This being promoted at County level by the group that Geoff Wheeler sits on for SDC. LEP has had little input upon this, although Peter was surprised that AMEY had not consulted STC, as their report was imminent. Peter recommended that Theresa Watts might like to liaise with Mike Curran from LEP.

Action Theresa Watt to liaise with Mike Curran and then if beneficial AMEY

LEP has identified Berkeley area for skills development in partnership with SCG College and Berkeley Bridges and Enterprise Zones around the motorway, which includes the Forest Green considerations at junction 13.

The LEP has had no discussion about the development planned for West of Stonehouse.

Peter advised the need for a close relationship between GCC, SDC & Parish Councils to promote priorities of transport, green issues and junction 13. He also advised to us to understand the funding landscape as it is and looking forward to the next round of funding in the autumn, which is key to identify those people, we need to influence. Peter offered to send us a template for bidding. At present there is no money within budgets to allow Parish councils to fund feasibility studies although Peter suggested that such costs could be capitalised within projects. Peter acknowledged this is a problem and a real barrier to accessing funding.

Action: Theresa Watt to have discussion with Geoff Wheeler about how to achieve this.

Government is private sector centric so is unlikely to alter their position in coming budget setting although they are aware of the issues.

Currently using private trainers and SGC and prioritising capital funding of STEM projects.

European funding – Apprenticeships clearing house – similar model to Education Business support and Growth Hubs – Oxstalls University Campus
Resource centres around county – part of their incubator unit strategy. May include a scheme to refurbish existing buildings.
The National programme expected to be signed off in July.
There is also matched funded European money with Big Lottery worth countywide circa £70m, which is skills and employment based.

Peter was queried over LEADER, ESIF. Stonehouse is outside the rural marked area so cannot access money through the DEFRA budget which has been allocated to Stroud & Cotswold AOB and Forest of Dean and Tewkesbury.

We highlighted the problems of infrastructure issues of broadband power, sewage, flooding and transport links already experienced within Stonehouse and how this will be only get worse with the planned west of Stonehouse residential and industrial development, which is 40% of all jobs in SDC.

Peter offered to come back to the group later in the year following the autumn budget settlement.

Peter was thanked for meeting us and his kind offer of a further visit was gratefully accepted.

Meeting ended 5.20pm.

NC: Notes from meeting:

Transport:

There have been issues with transport projects in general with the government moving to a clear mandate for economic development and growth and all transport projects should demonstrate how they will deliver this aspect.

The LEP has a small number of priority actions and will target the available funding accordingly.

The County Council has a transport plan which includes development of the A419 into Stonehouse but the LEP has not yet been able to engage with them on this issue.

With regard to the development of the Bristol Road Station - the LEP have not been approached directly with regard to funding a project. Suggested Stonehouse speaks to County.

The County Council are developing a Rail Strategy for the County but we identified issues with the consultation currently taking place.

Discussed 'Enterprise Zones' and it was suggested that there may be more funding for these in the future. The 'size' criteria may change - may be smaller and there may be changes as to what type of development will fit with the funding.

LEP will provide Stonehouse with the current template for applying for project funding from the Single Local Growth fund. Suggest this is looked at and when the next tranche of funding is released we see if there is scope for a regeneration project.

Jobs/Skills

The approach of the LEP is not geographically specific. However, they have invested in Further Education colleges and trainers to improve the services for education and training in Gloucestershire. They are focusing on the right type of skills i.e. not too many hairdressers.

The LEP meets regularly with the FE colleges and more skills funding will be devolved in the future.

Discussed EU funding in general and how this might be applied for via the LEP or LEADER.

Suggested we talk to James Lloyd at the Cotswold AONB to assess availability of funding and Geoff Wheeler and NC agreed to contact Ivan Annibal who developed the policies for the Cotswold AONB.