

SHROPSHIRE BUSINESS BOARD

Meeting of 4th August 2008

MINUTES

1. Attendance and apologies

In attendance

(SBA = Shropshire Business Ambassador)

Mr Geoffrey Davies OBE	McConnel Limited (Chair) (SBA)
Mr Andrew Corbett	Perfect Arc Ltd (SBA)
Mr Arthur Hill	CH Hill & Sons (SBA)
Mr Corin Crane	Learning and Skills Council
Mr David Ledbury	Business Link West Midlands
Ms Fay Easton	Shropshire Enterprise Partnership
Mr Nick Graham	Shropshire Chamber of Commerce & Enterprise Ltd
Mr Robert Bickerton	Shrewsbury Town Football Club (Shropshire Partnership Leadership Board)
Mr Robin Morris	Morris Property (SBA)
Mr Roger Belham	CS Contract Furniture Limited (SBA)
Mr Trevor Benyon	Muller Dairy (UK) Ltd (SBA)
Mr William Jones	Greyhound Plant Services (SBA)

Advisors

Ms Amanda Cunningham	Advantage West Midlands
Ms Sam Hine	Shropshire County Council
Mr Nick Taylor	Shropshire County Council
Mr Graham Biggs	South Shropshire District Council
Ms Jane Lycett	Shropshire County Council (Minutes)

Apologies were received from

Mr Colin Spicer	Shropshire Newspapers Ltd (SBA)
Ms Judith Kirkland	Business Enterprise Support Limited
Ms Karen Davies MBE	Heart of England Fine Foods (SBA)
Ms Gill Edmunds	Women in Rural Enterprise
Ms Kairen Francis	Jobcentre Plus
Mr Tony Bywater	Salop Leisure Limited (SBA)
Cllr John Hurst-Knight	Shropshire County Council
Ms Ann Johnson	Federation of Small Business (SBA)

1. Welcome and apologies

Geoffrey Davies (GD) welcomed everyone and invited members of the Board to introduce themselves.

Robert Bickerton was introduced as a new member of the Board. Rob has been selected as the business representative on Shropshire Partnership's Leadership Board and has joined the Business Board to ensure cross linkages.

GD announced that Shropshire Business Board Member and Ambassador, Ann Johnson, has been appointed as a non-executive Board Member of Business Link West Midlands. The Board offered their congratulations.

2. Minutes of meeting held 23rd June 2008 and Matters Arising

The minutes were agreed as a correct record. There were no matters arising.

3. Business Plan Next Steps and Working Group Update

GD explained that, as the Business Board meets just four times per year, this was not sufficient time to set an economic strategy for the county, therefore a working group was to be established to progress strategy development between meetings.

The group would include three representatives from each of the following:

- Business Ambassadors
- Agencies
- Local Authority

GD reported that, to date, Roger Bellham, Andrew Corbett and Ann Johnson had expressed an interest in being part of the working group to represent the Business Ambassadors. Corin Crane, Nick Graham and Gill Edmunds had come forward to represent the support agencies. GD explained that the involvement of individuals on the working group could be flexible so that time pressure is not too onerous on a just a few members and that he hoped all Business Ambassadors would engage in the process on issues that interest them and that they are knowledgeable on. It was agreed that Board Members would be consulted throughout the process as and when their input was deemed necessary and appropriate.

Work had begun by looking at the Economic Development Strategy for Shropshire (*Shropshire Futures*) to assess which elements were still relevant and to consider new priorities.

Board Members were then asked to split into three groups to consider a number of priorities currently included in the *Shropshire Futures* strategy and to select the top three that they considered to still be relevant and most important to include in the new strategy. These priorities would be used at the platform for the first working group to work on in formulating the forward strategy.

The top 3 priorities selected from each of their lists by the three groups were:

Business Ambassadors

1. Business Competitiveness
2. Skilled pool of labour
3. Workforce development

Support Agencies

1. Enterprise development
2. Key sector support
3. Skills

Local Authority

1. Inward investment
2. Market towns and access to services, including public transport

3. Spatial planning

GD explained that the time commitment required for the working group is currently unclear, however would be better judged after the first meeting. The aim of the working group would be to look in more detail at the top actions put forward by the three groups of Board Members, consider actions to address the priorities, establish timescales and determine indicative budgets to inform a business plan that would be presented to the new Council.

The working group meetings will take place at Shirehall on:
Wednesday 13th August at 4 p.m.
Monday 22nd September at 4 p.m.

ACTION

ALL: Any additional volunteers for the strategy and business plan working group to register their interest with Sam Hine (sam.hine@shropshire.gov.uk Tel: 01743 252591) at any stage throughout the process. All input welcomed.

4. Integrated Networking to Achieve Growth Potential

Andrew Corbett (AC) gave a presentation outlining the benefit that small businesses can derive from networking with and learning from larger companies through mechanisms such as mentoring.

AC expressed his opinion that few of the larger companies in Shropshire engage in the county's business networks to enable this sharing of experience and that business networking events offered by agencies were not coordinated and often were product/initiative/subscription-driven, rather than addressing the needs of companies.

He expressed concern that the lack of quality networking opportunities led to smaller businesses in the county under-achieving. AC thought that the Board should encourage larger companies to help smaller businesses and that networking events should be promoted to relevant businesses, outlining their content and focus.

AC then demonstrated the use of www.shrop.biz, which provides a web-based listing of business networks, events and businesses, by area, in Shropshire.

GD thanked AC for his presentation, welcomed his involvement in the working group and invited questions and comments.

GD summed up the confusion facing small businesses who do not know which agency or network to engage with and suggested that they use their banks, legal and accountancy support professionals as a starting point to engage with business support.

GD explained that larger businesses tend to network on a national and international scale, however there were opportunities for representatives of bigger companies to support and advise smaller businesses through becoming non-executive directors etc. GD offered to meet with AC to discuss this further.

Corin Crane identified points in AC's presentation which matched the priorities identified in the earlier action planning exercise.

Nick Graham commented that Shropshire Chamber events are open and promoted to both large and small companies and are crucial to the success of the Chamber's members.

Fay Easton commented that there is a great deal of intellect within businesses in the county and making the links between the larger and smaller companies to share this wealth of knowledge would be the "quick road" to business success in Shropshire. Disseminating this knowledge to businesses should be a priority looked at by the Board.

5 & 6. LGA Research Update: The Economic Power of Home Based Enterprise in Rural Areas and Business Mentoring with the Home Based Sector

Fay Easton (FE) explained the history and make up of Shropshire Enterprise Partnership and how they connect to wider networks through business groups. FE outlined the focus of the Enterprise HQ project of supporting home-based businesses, which are currently starting up at a rate of 1 per day in Shropshire. 40% of the businesses engaged in the project to date have a turnover of at least £300,000 per annum and, while they do not necessarily create jobs, they outsource work which then has a spin off of supporting the start up and growth of other businesses.

The £750,000 Enterprise HQ project is funded through a grant of £460,000 from the Regional Development Agency, Advantage West Midlands, and subscription from its 400 members. The aim is for the project to be self-financing after a period of three years.

FE expressed the need for suitable commercial property to be available in Shropshire for home-based businesses to grow on to as necessary and announced that the latest directory of Enterprise HQ members will be available in September.

FE then briefly described the Local Government Association national research project that she and Shropshire County Council are involved in to identify "hotspots" of home-based businesses in the county. The mapping of home-based businesses will provide the necessary evidence for locating support services close to areas identified as showing high volume. At present, Enterprise HQ, located in Shrewsbury, is the only dedicated resource established in the UK to support home-based businesses. A further one or two units are planned in the rural West Midlands by the end of 2008.

7. Inter-regional project opportunities

Sam Hine introduced the information item on an inter-regional project (BUREN), details of which had been circulated with the meeting's agenda.

SH explained that the project led on from the previous agenda item by proposing the establishment of small scale "touch down" facilities for home-based businesses and employees to use in rural areas. As an inter-regional bid, the project would be looking to learn from experiences of similar business support from other countries.

SH suggested that the BUREN project officers should be invited to a future Board meeting to discuss the project further.

8. A New University Challenge

Sam Hine alerted members to the information item, details of which were circulated with the agenda.

SH suggested that Board members should be kept up to date with the plans for improved provision of Higher Education in Shropshire and asked that members, particularly the Business Ambassadors provide input into the proposals.

As part of the consultation process, the working group overseeing the development of the HE proposals for Shropshire will be contacting strategic businesses over the next few weeks to provide details of the vision for the local provision of HE and ask for support for their bid to improve the provision of HE in the county.

Members of the Board agreed that they would be happy to be approached.

ACTION: SH to provide further updates at future Board meetings

9. Economy Topic Paper - Local Development Framework

Nick Taylor explained the process being undertaken to prepare a Local Development Framework (LDF) for Unitary Shropshire which will be adopted in March 2011.

As an important first step in the preparation of the new unitary Core Strategy, the Shropshire councils have worked together to produce a series of Topic Papers. The Topic Papers cover a wide range of themes, each of which the Core Strategy will need to address. The themes are:

- Spatial Overview
- Housing
- Economy (circulated with the agenda)
- Environmental Resource Management
- Transport and Accessibility
- Climate Change
- Infrastructure and Implementation
- Monitoring

NT offered to provide further information on the process if any business or community group required it. He encouraged business involvement in the early stages of the process to shape policy which will then influence the outcomes of individual planning decisions. This would, therefore, have a big impact on the economic development of the county.

Graham Biggs added that the policy, strategy and allocation of land should reflect what Shropshire's economy needs and how land-use planning can support this. Bringing the two together was very important.

Consultation on the topic papers will run until 1st September 2008. Details of the process and all the topic papers can be found at:
<http://www.shropshire.gov.uk/onecouncil.nsf/open/9F27FFF920EFF05C802574330056A6D2>

10. Management Information and Economic Statistics

Sam Hine presented a paper (as circulated with agenda) outlining the type of economic statistics that are available to inform the Business Board's priorities with trend information on the state of the Shropshire economy. The statistics will be presented with interpretation and suggestions as to how the Business Board may seek to influence particular issues. The information will be supplemented with local Performance Management data.

Following questions as to the timeliness and comparability of the statistics and availability of trend data, SH explained that some datasets were reported up to a year after the data was collected, but others were more current. Data was available to enable comparison on a county, regional and national basis and also with other counties (e.g. "benchmark" councils, such as Norfolk and Devon).

It was suggested that Skills statistics be included in the data reporting to the Board.

SH circulated the latest Business Link West Midlands data update for information. This would also be presented to the Board on a regular basis.

NT suggested that the Business Board should set targets which could be monitored using the available data. The Business Plan will clarify what needs to be measured.

11. Any Other Business

It was reported that Rob Bickerton had been appointed as the business representative on the Shropshire Partnership Leadership Board.

The Business Board will provide the economic strategic direction to influence the Council's and the Partnership's priorities. Although there were no direct reporting links between the 2 Boards, there was expected to be a relationship to ensure both are working towards shared priorities.

The relationship is explained in the flow chart on the latest Unitary update, which can be viewed via the right hand link of the following webpage:

<http://www.shropshire.gov.uk/onecouncil.nsf/open/6F649E1F4A4C42FC80257410004A4035>

It was agreed that presentations would be given by Shropshire Chamber and the Learning & Skills Council at the next meeting.

12. Date and Time of Next Meeting(s)

The next Board meetings would take place at Shirehall on 3rd November at 4.30pm
2nd March 2009 at 4.30pm.

Working Group meetings have been scheduled for 4 p.m. on August 13th and 22nd September 2008 at Shirehall.