Economic and Skills Development Partnership
Tuesday, 22 October 2019
9.00 - 11.00 am
Fujitsu, Lovelace Road, Bracknell, RG12 8SN

Present: Bob Collis, Chair of the ESDP
                  Councillor Ankur Shiv Bhandari
                  Councillor Bob Wade, Small Business Champion
                  Simon Cridland, Bracknell Forest Council
                  Simon Fryer, Fryer Commercial
                  Lisa Harvey, Department of Work and Pensions
                  Nick Kirby, Pegasus
                  Stuart Matthews, Academy Representative
                  Peter Reynolds, Activate Learning
                  Peter Smith, Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce
                  Colin Willman, Federation of Small Businesses
                  Anneken Priesack, Bracknell Forest Council
                  Ben Alexander, Bracknell Forest Council

In attendance: Nick Cooper, representing Highways England
                  Abbey Reid, Balfour Beatty Vinci

Apologies: Stephen Chown, Bracknell Forest Council
                  Andrew Hunter
                  Stuart Jefferies
                  Nancy Lalor, Learning to Work
                  Kashif Nawaz
                  Julie Rees, Wellington College

Action Points

Minute	Item
8	**Presentation on M4 Junction 3 - 12 Smart Motorway Project**
	Nick Cooper, Engagement and Communications Manager representing Highways England and Abbey Reid, Communications Manager at Balfour Beatty Vinci attended the meeting to us update on the smart motorway project on the M4.
	Nick and Abbey had been engaging with the business community along the M4 for the past year and offered to meet with any business to update them on the development.
	The smart motorways programme was a national government initiative to develop the most congested roads in England. A smart motorway was a technology driven approach to improve capacity and reduce congestion to cope with the continually increasing traffic. The main features of the smart motorway were the conversion of the hard shoulder in to a fourth running lane to increase capacity by 33%, and lots of new signage to smooth the flow of traffic at busy times. To address the lack of hard shoulder, lay-by emergency areas would be established. A 'stopped vehicle detection system' would be implemented to alert the control system and close lanes as required in an emergency.
	The benefits of the development were an increase in capacity, more reliable

journey times facilitated by technology, and limiting congestion facilitated economic growth.

Nick explained that creating smart motorways was less disruptive and more cost effective than widening existing motorways.

Nick explained that the public needed to be better educated on the dangers of the hard shoulder to mitigate against fears of its removal, and on the use of the left lane as a running lane.

The M4 smart motorway scheme was the largest and longest project of its kind, and had been implemented under a Development Consent Order under the Planning Act. This granted permission to the scheme as a whole, rather than applications to each Local Authority which the M4 ran through.

The project had begun in July 2018 and was scheduled for completion in March 2022. The project covered 32 miles and included the replacement of 11 bridges and one bridge widening over the river Thames at Bray. In comparison, Nick explained that other smart motorway projects only had one or two bridge demolitions to complete.

In order to complete the bridge demolitions and complete other building work, further motorway closures were planned. The Partnership commented that there had been good publicity to explain past closures to the public, and it was noted that further communications for future closures had been planned. If anyone knew anyone to add to the list for email correspondence on closures, they could forward details to Anneken to pass on.

It was noted that the next M4 weekend closures had been planned for 15 - 18 November and 29 November – 2 December.

Nick provided further information on the scheme, and gave the following key facts:
- The M4 was used by 130k vehicles per day
- The budget of the scheme was £848m
- 1.8sq miles of new road surfacing was being placed to make the road quieter
- At its peak, the project employed 1200 staff over a range of jobs, not including those working for businesses in the supply chain.

The project was based at the compound at Twyford. The land for the compound had been leased from Reading University as farmland and would be returned to farmland at the conclusion of the project.

Abbey Reid updated on the plans of the project to leave a skills legacy and to provide education in the engineering sector. Since July 2019, Abbey and colleagues had visited 6 schools, colleges and universities. It was noted that while the project could not meet the demands of all schools along the M4, if any partner knew of a school who would benefit from some STEM support from the project's ambassadors, they should contact Abbey.

The main labour suppliers to the project were Hercules, VGC, Zone, Fortel and Danny Sullivan. Partners were encouraged to promote vacancies locally, and to contact Abbey if this could be done.

Of all the Balfour Beatty/Vinci employees working on the project, 22% of people

		lived within 12 miles of the scheme, some of whom had moved into the area for their work. In 2019, the project had employed 31 graduates, 7 Year in Industry placements and 3 trainees. The placements for 2020 were being identified. Work experience placements were available to give experience in the construction industry.

Arising from questions, the following points were noted:
- The technology being implemented had been modelled for the next 20 years and was the latest technology available to the industry. All communications links had been installed at the side of the road, so could be updated without resurfacing.
- The M4 control centre would be based at South Mimms.
- The National Traffic Operation Centre (NTOC) in Birmingham could amend the traffic flow on a national scale in the case of major issues on the motorways.
- The stopped vehicle detection system was automated, but intervention would be required from workers. Recovery teams were based up and down the motorway.
- The emergency breakdown areas were spaced 1.1 to 1.6 miles apart.
- There were 7/8 areas along the site which had been identified as requiring air quality monitoring. It was understood that the reduction in congestion in these areas would improve air quality.
- The government had a vision for Digital Roads with autonomous vehicles, and it was recognised that in time, motorways would work differently.
- Vegetation had been removed from the side of the motorway to allow for technology to be installed. The roads would be replanted with young trees and shrubs. The noise barriers at the side of the road would also be upgraded in certain places.
- The ESDP noted concerns that the next phase of the project may be scrutinised differently when applying for planning permission and may find it difficult to prove its support of new habitat regulations and environmental net gain.
- It was noted that road surfaces generally had an 8-year lifespan, so maintenance on the road surface would be light touch only.
- Year 11 work experience was available for office experience but not construction.
- Abbey commented on the industry-wide concern around the skills shortage, and that lots of workers went for agency roles which afforded greater freedom.
- 3 years of data was required to ascertain the success of the M3 smart motorway which was now complete, although anecdotal evidence suggested an improvement since the development.
- It was noted that, although long stretches of lane closures had not been preferred by Highways England, long stretches of roadworks were cost effective and protected workers and drivers.
- It was expected that Junction 8/9 to 12 would be finished in 2020, although the motorway would not be a smart motorway until the completion of works at Junction 4 to 8/9.

The ESDP thanked Nick and Abbey for an informative presentation. |
| 9 | **Action Points from Last Meeting** | |

	The minutes from the meeting held on 16 July 2019 were approved. It was noted that Pam Sharman had shared agile working information from Regus with Bob Collis.
10	**ESDP 2-Year Plan Update** Bob Collis presented the ESDP 2 Year Plan update. The majority of tasks on the Plan had been achieved or progressed. The workstreams for both subgroups had been revised in recent months. Membership and attendance at subgroups and the Partnership had improved. Bob proposed to extend the plan period to March 2020, and for it to be reviewed following the proposed ESDP Event in April/May, which was supported.
11	**Sub-group Updates** In Nancy's absence, other representatives from the Employment & Skills subgroup updated on recent work. It was asked if there may be an opportunity to co-locate information for job-seekers. It was noted that this had been tried in the past with the Elevate programme but was difficult to achieve due to the number of organisations involved in supporting job seekers. The Lexicon management had agreed to make their job vacancies more visible and accessible. Sue Boor had held a meeting with retailers to support their recruitment, but partners were not clear if anything had come from this. The subgroup had discussed a rise in universal credit claims from 18-24 year olds, and the fact that it was not known how many young people were NEET as they did not have to claim benefits. Peter Reynolds advised that Activate Learning had done a self-assessment survey across their colleges on attributed, and 'feeling positive' had scored the lowest across all young people. It was agreed that Peter would present the survey results at the next Partnership Board meeting on 21 January 2019 and that this should be followed with a broad discussion on the topic area. **(Action: Peter Reynolds)** Peter also offered to cover the implications of T-Levels, which had been established by businesses to address the disparity between A-Levels and vocational qualifications. Each T-Level split down into specialisms under broad topics and included a 45 days placement with an employer. **(Action: Peter Reynolds)** Bob updated on the Infrastructure subgroup. Lots of work had been done to support consultations, but the subgroup had found it difficult to make progress in other areas of the workstream. It was thought that the BFC Business Surveys would provide new ideas for the Workstream.

	The Infrastructure subgroup planned to respond to the [Transport Strategy for South East consultation](), and the draft response would be shared with the wider Partnership before submission in December. It was noted that part of the plan was to address slow journey times on the Reading to Waterloo train line, and to improve connectivity down the line. **(Action: Bob Collis)**
12	**Proposed ESDP Spring Event 2020** Bob advised that the, following the offer from Julie Rees at the previous meeting, the Spring event was likely to be held at Wellington College in May/June 2020, and would include the results of BFC's forthcoming business surveys (see below), with the overall aim of understanding blockages to business growth in Bracknell Forest.
13	**Bracknell Forest Business Surveys** Bracknell Forest Council would be repeating the business survey from 2015 on Infrastructure and Skills. The survey would take place by a professional survey provider using telephone interview techniques. The survey will aim to interview around 350 businesses. Questions would be similar to the initial survey in 2015, and would address business growth, wellbeing programmes and transport requirements. Additional questions would address Employment and Skills and Infrastructure. It had not yet been decided whether Brexit should be addressed in the survey as it was proving problematic to form questions around this, given the current uncertainty. Ankur agreed to work with Anneken at exploring options. **(Action: Ankur/Anneken)** The results of the survey would be used by Chris Mansfield, Town Centre Project Consultant and Anneken to form a new strategy for Bracknell Forest businesses. The strategy would include a short statement of the Council's intention to support businesses based on the Conservative manifesto. The ESDP Plan and workstreams would be drawn from this strategy. The results of the survey would also be shared with the LEP. The survey may include a few in-depth interviews with selected companies, depending on whether this was within the remit. Anneken also agreed to ask whether online submissions would be possible. It was reiterated that focus groups were not in the remit due to costs. ESDP members and Councillors would be briefed on the survey questions prior to survey commencing. Bob advised that he and Peter Smith were not clear on next steps with Ocean Consulting as an update had not been received. Bob and Peter would confirm progress at the next meeting. **(Action: Bob Collis/Peter Smith)**
14	**BID Update** Bob advised that the BID ballot period had begun, with all returns due by 31 October 2019 for a result on 1 November 2019. It was anticipated that the BID would be supported, in which case the company and Steering Group would be

	established by 1 April 2020. Notification of the result would come to the ballot holder (the council) from the ballot administrator (ERS) via a statement. The council would publish the result on the council website and the BID steering group will publish a press release in response. The result would be communicated widely on partners' social media and in the press.
15	**Dates of Future Meetings** 21 January 2020 21 April 2020