



**Notes from the Online Business Support Meeting
Thursday 26 November 2020**

Present from VisitWiltshire & Great West Way – David Andrews, Fiona Errington, Billy Grimes, Tristan Holland and Gavin Worrall

Guest Speakers – Dave Battrick, Business West; Chris Stevens & Rob Creer, SWLEP; Rory Bowen, Wiltshire Council; Ross Calladine, VisitEngland/VisitBritain

Welcome and Introduction

David Andrews welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the guest speakers.

He gave a brief update on the news that Wiltshire will be entering Tier 2 from the 2 December. He went on to give an update on the national tourism recovery plan and how Wiltshire and Great West Way are featuring in it; the latest business impacts, marketing support available through VisitWiltshire and a reminded everyone that the best way to keep up to date with all the latest news is through or regular partner newsletter. If you don't receive these, you can sign up [here](#).

Dave Battrick, Manager of Swindon and Wiltshire Initiative at Business West

Dave started by introducing [Business West](#) and what they do. Business West are one of the largest the largest Chambers of Commerce in the UK with over 20k businesses. Over the past two years they have helped create 4,400 jobs in our region, supporting more than 1,400 businesses to start-up and scale-up. They are non-profit and non-party political organisation who works with all sectors of the economy.

They work closely with the local LEP's and run special focus groups, focussed on place shaping. They work with local colleges and run a number of events and training to share knowledge, experiences and best practice.

The benefits of an affiliation with Business West include;

- A raised profile online, through the press and among peers
- Seek opportunities to create new business
- Network with local and experienced business leaders in the local area
- Have views represented at local and national level
- Preferential access to training, advice and support services
- Access to advice panel
- Local access to government funding

Business West provides a wide range of business support opportunities including;

- Helping to grow businesses through their Scale Up Hub
- Provide Courses on Leadership Skills
- Advice and support on how to access talent & recruitment
- Access to markets

- Finance & Grant funding finder
- Overseas technology visits
- How to get stories in the media
- Provide help to innovate business, through funding innovation specialists. They can help develop vision and strategy, evaluate growth models, and how to fund this
- Export Support Service – the second biggest export documentation service in the UK
- Up to the minute guidance on the COVID-19 situation, through their ‘ever evolving’ [Trading Through Coronavirus Portal](#).
- Working closely with the DWP on the Government funded [Kickstart Scheme](#), for which they are an accredited broker
- Policy team keeping on top of the situation with [Brexit](#) and are providing insights into the situation as it develops. Expertise into international trade and export documentation will ideally place them to provide the best support available

You can see more information on the work that Business West does and find out to access the support it provides through their website - <https://www.businesswest.co.uk/> . There is a wealth of information for all types of product.

If you would like to contact Dave directly with any questions or concerns, you can email him - dave.batrick@businesswest.co.uk

Swindon and Wiltshire LEP and Growth Hub – Chris Steven, Growth Hub Manager

You can see the slides for the presentation included with these notes [here](#).

[SWLEP](#) are one of the 38 LEP’s formed under a government directive seven years ago, with the purpose to bid, pull down and lobby for public money into the region to invest into various projects sustain local economic growth. To date they have bought in around £500million into the region

[The Growth Hub](#) is one of these projects, funded directly by BEIS. They provide a fully funded businesses support service from start-ups to SME’s.

In March 2020 was primarily a digital enterprise. Businesses go on to the portal and become a community growth hub member, which is still available to join free of charge, and post articles, access news and events and promote your business activities.

This expanded to a more direct and face-to-face delivery support, resulting in the formation of triage plus business support service. This meant they had advisors on hand to signpost businesses to the support and grants available. 3 core staff has now increased to 13 core staff and have provided support to over 1000 business to date.

The growth Hub has been working closely with VisitWiltshire on the ERDF Recovery Grant which has had over 550 applications. These applications are now being processed and communications to successful businesses are being finalised. Successful applicants should hear back on this in the next couple of weeks

The This Way Up series of webinars were launched in September in businesses recovers and adapt to the current situation. These came under 3 main headlines of Leadership, Digital and Finance. All of

the Webinars are available to watch for free [here](#). There is also 1to1 help available for businesses that are looking for help on the Digital side of this.

A new Specialist Skills and Enterprise Advisor can provide support on businesses looking to upskill their workforce or introduce apprenticeships.

Swindon and Wiltshire LEP and Growth Hub – Rob Creer, Business Navigation Team Leader

Rob went through the other programmes of support that the Growth Hub Offer;

SME Competitiveness Programme

This is basically a programme in which a Business Navigator will have a conversation with you to understand the needs of your business, signpost you and do a diagnostic to highlight what you can do to achieve your goals and grow your business. Work with two delivery partners on this programme; YTKO who provide support to anyone who is looking to set up new business, and SETsquared at the University of Bath who work with existing businesses who are looking to develop and innovate.

The programme is funded by the ERDF and is funded up until 2022.

If you would like to access this support and gain the advice and support you can contact the team directly at smecompetitiveness@swlep.co.uk

Peer Networks

A pilot programme to get businesses in similar cohorts to communicate and work together on common business problems. A team of mentors are in place to help deliver the programme. It's going to be an interactive learning opportunity of 9 2-hour fortnightly sessions with around 10-11 businesses on each cohort.

They are hoping this will be a useful tool to develop your network, work with people who understand the issues in your sector and take your business to the next step.

There is a Tourism cohort, and there are still spaces for businesses to join this. You can contact the project lead Brea Woods if you are interested - brea.woods@swlep.co.uk

Other Services

- Skills and Apprenticeships (formerly Higher Futures)
- Kickstart Scheme – 130 placements already in progress
- Website – one stop shop for business news
- EU Transition – support on how to prepare for the transition out the EU in the New Year, dedicated area on the website. Believe there will be grant funding available.

All **free** to businesses in Wiltshire and Swindon

You can get in contact with the details on the final side.

Wiltshire Council – Rory Bowen, Head of Economic Development

Currently have a programme which looks after client management of the larger businesses in Wiltshire, Inward Investment Programme, Incubation Programme, the 10 Centres Enterprise Network and a Town Centre Regeneration Agenda.

Deliver a lot of work through the LEP, mainly big infrastructure, building and transport projects.

Currently have a strong Employment and Skills offer through the LEP.

Climate Change Agenda back amongst the priorities for the council, with some ambitious targets to achieve by 2030 and the strategy is being written at the moment. Clean Tourism, is a big part of this agenda.

Question was raised on whether there was any grant funding available for Electric Car Charging Points.

Answer; there may be some funding in the near future, and details will be provided by VisitWiltshire when we have them. However, Rory believes that there are private companies who install them for free or heavily discounted for the visitor economy for example;

<https://electricchargersuk.co.uk/home/our-services/free-ev-chargers/>

They have been working closely with other organisations such as VisitWiltshire, Federation of Small Businesses, SWLEP and Business West. This is working really well since March to help with signposting to business support.

The Council mobilised quickly in March to respond to the crisis, especially in regards to providing business support and economic help. The economic response phase lasted until August when moves were made towards planning for recovery, until the second lockdown was announced and put them back into the response phase. However, there is more of an eye on recovery this time round.

Had a team of 130 people working on getting the grants out to businesses in a timely manner. Around £60 million out as part of the Small Business Rates Relief Scheme between March and August and an additional £31 million went out to businesses associated with the retail and hospitality sector. Around 8000 business supported directly.

The contact centre is still active and can be contacted via Covid-19BusinessSupport@wiltshire.gov.uk

Current Grants Available;

Local Restrictions Support Grant

This new scheme is aimed at those businesses required to close due to the national restrictions which started on 5 November 2020. One-off grants will be awarded to eligible businesses to support them during the four-week closure and help them with the ongoing challenges presented by coronavirus. This grant is available to businesses who pay business rates and the amount they get is

determined by their rateable value. You can check your eligibility and apply with Wiltshire Council [here](#) For our partners who fall under Swindon Borough Council you can check your eligibility and apply for both of the above grants [here](#)

Additional Restrictions Grant

This discretionary grant scheme will support those businesses required to close or have been severely affected by the national restrictions, but which do not pay business rates. Check if you are eligible [here](#). Wiltshire Council are currently developing this scheme and will publish details in due course, which we will keep you updated on. For our partners who fall under Swindon Borough Council you can check your eligibility and apply for both of the above grants [here](#)

Wiltshire Council has been impacted by the pandemic as well with loss of revenue and increased demand. There is a challenging period ahead and expects the council to operate significantly differently in the future.

Wiltshire Council is in the process of developing place based and sectoral based recovery plans, starting early 2021. Feel there is a huge amount of potential to do things differently and to reset.

Thoughts and requests are always welcome, and Rory can be contacted directly Rory.Bowen@wiltshire.gov.uk

VisitEngland/VisitBritain – Ross Calladine, Head of Business Support

You can see the slides for the presentation included with these notes [here](#).

Ross started by highlighting how important the Tourism industry is to economy and how it will be one of the key sectors when it comes to recover after the pandemic has passed. Tourism contributed £126.9 billion to the UK economy

The priorities for VisitBritain have shifted through the crisis, from ensuring their own staff welfare, to advising government and supporting the industry, to planning for recovery and ensuring businesses can continue to perform and deliver in the future.

During the pandemic VE/VB have been running TIER (Tourism Emergency Response Group) which is currently meeting every two weeks. The Tourism Minister attends most of these meeting, so this is where concerns and priorities for the industry are put forward to the government and in return clarification on measures, guidance and support is received from the government.

Impact on Tourism

Inbound tourism spending forecast to drop 79% and the domestic tourism spend in England forecast to drop 49%. You can see the more detailed forecast [here](#).

VE/VB has been producing a regular domestic consumer sentiment tracker to show domestic intent to take a short break in both UK and Abroad and to gain a sense of the main concerns potential travellers have. One of the key takeaways from this research is confidence in taking overnight trips remains low until April 2021. You can see the latest report [here](#).

Industry Support

DMO Resilient Scheme – helped DMO's maintain crucial business support communications with their partners. VisitWiltshire benefited from this scheme

DMO Emergency Fund – to help keep DMO's who are close to closure operating and helping local businesses

Business Advice Hub - dedicated COVID-19 support pages, www.visitengland.org/business-advice

- Helps businesses to navigate various support schemes
- 'We're Good to Go' Industry Standard
- Easy link and access to Gov.uk financial support finder
- Constantly updated with latest guidance and initiatives to make sure you can operate during effectively and safely during the pandemic

Accessibility

VE/VB found that during the first lockdown, some of the actions businesses were taking to ensure they were COVID safe were impacting on consumers who were disabled and had mobility issues. There is a section on the Business Advice Hub, called [Inclusive Re-opening](#) which will provide guidance on this.

Business Recovery Webinars

Have been taking place over the last few months to help prepare businesses for recovery and to rebuild, with advice from industry experts. You can register for upcoming sessions and view previous ones [here](#).

'We're Good To Go' Industry Standard

This was requested by the industry, and was a set in hope that it would give people the confidence to travel again and feel safe

There has been over 41k application so far. You can still sign up for free [here](#).

The scheme is currently being reviewed and you can give your feedback in the survey [here](#).

TXGB

A B2B platform, with the objective of connecting tourism suppliers with a wide range of sales channels all in one place. This will in turn help distributors access England's diverse range of bookable product and allows destinations to become distributors. You can find out more about TXGB and its benefits [here](#) or if you have any question contact our Head of Travel Trade, [Flo](#).

'Escape the Everyday' Campaign

This is a £5million domestic marketing campaign launched in September to encourage consumers to take short UK break, initially for Autumn/Winter 2020. Campaign toolkit is still available to download and use [here](#).

The message has now changed to be less time sensitive and moved to encourage people to plan a UK stay in the future. All paid media has been paused and have been running 'Escape the Everyday at Home' themed around Festive Fun. Local Flavour and Learn More. VE/VB is planning a 'burst' of activity to the domestic market from January to March. If you would like to share anything you think fits in with the campaign please send it through to [Helen](#) at VisitWiltshire and press@visitengland.org

You can sign up to the VisitBritain E-Bulletin to keep up to date [here](#).

You can contact Ross directly at Ross.Calladine@visitengland.org