



Greater Brighton Economic Board

Covid-19 Sustainable Recovery Plan – April 2021 Update

1.0 Introduction

Like other parts of the UK, the Greater Brighton City region continues to be hugely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Sectors such as retail and tourism, including aviation; performing and creative arts, leisure and hospitality have been forced to close through three national lockdowns. In February, the government issued their roadmap out of lockdown, with key dates given around easing of restrictions. Restrictions will be lifted at each stage if the vaccine deployment programme continues at pace; infection rates remain low; no new variants present new risks. The date when the government predict to be in a position to remove all legal limits on social contact is the 21st June 2021. However, we will have to live with Covid-19 whilst other countries roll out their vaccination programmes and the likelihood is that basic measures to keep safe, such as wearing face masks and social distancing, will be in place for some time.

The Greater Brighton Covid-19 Sustainable Recovery Plan was produced for the October 2020 Board Meeting, and contained a number recommendations, chiefly actions, to take forward that were approved by the Board. The recommendations were framed around the Greater Brighton Five-Year Strategic Priorities, which were agreed in January 2019. The purpose of the current paper is to provide an update on progress since the Board last met in January 2021.

2.0 National Picture

At the time of publication all parts of the UK are currently being eased out of national lockdown, in a step by step process, allowing sections of the economy to open at a time. Schools are now open as are further and higher education institutions. Non-essential retail, personal services (e.g. hairdressers, salons), and hospitality sectors (pubs, restaurants and hotels) who can cater to customers in an outdoor space are open. Public buildings, including libraries and community centres, indoor leisure facilities such as gyms are also open as will most outdoor attractions (zoos, theme parks, and drive-in cinemas). Self-contained accommodation such as campsites and holiday lets, where indoor facilities are not shared with other households, can also reopen. Wider social contact rules apply in all these settings to prevent indoor mixing between different households.

According to the Government's roadmap, by 17th May most businesses in all but the highest risk sectors will be able to reopen in some form, but with restrictions. These include likely legal limits on group size and indoor hospitality will reopen with customers having to order, eat and drink while seated.

Other indoor locations yet to open up include indoor entertainment venues such as cinemas and children's play areas; the rest of the accommodation sector, including hotels, hostels and B&Bs; and indoor adult group sports and exercise classes. The government will also allow some larger performances and sporting events in indoor venues with a cap on



numbers. The remaining businesses, including nightclubs, and restrictions on large events and performances will be eased on 21st June 2021 if all goes to plan. The Government have also introduced the concept of “Covid passports,” though at this stage how this would work and in what context has not been worked through.

3.0 Local Dimension

Local Greater Brighton Local Authorities continue to do everything they can to support businesses across the region. Local authority partners have awarded over £200 million in business grants to over 20,000 eligible businesses, and over £6 million in discretionary grants to support other businesses most in need at this critical time.

Crawley has the highest employment vulnerability of any town or city in the UK with 80% of the town’s jobs being impacted or vulnerable. Coast to Capital’s actions in their recovery plan to Build Back Stronger, Smarter and Greener as well as their Skills Strategy and Action Plan support the regional economy to recover. Appendix 2 gives a snapshot of furlough and unemployment statistics across the region.

Whilst the majority of the economic news associated with Covid-19 is sobering, there have been opportunities, and some businesses have prospered through the pandemic. These businesses have been celebrated for showing entrepreneurship, resilience and adaptability in challenging times by being featured in good news stories on Greater Brighton social media accounts, with the widest audiences being reached on LinkedIn.

4.0 Budget

The narrative from government for some time has been around a green recovery as well as levelling up the country. Greater Brighton is well placed to support the Government in achieving its green objectives through its ongoing work on the Greater Brighton Energy and Water Plans, Greater Brighton 10 pledges, and its ambitions around hydrogen. There is an opportunity for Greater Brighton to be a real leader when it comes to decarbonising energy in homes, and around the scaling of hydrogen energy. Plans are in progress to maximise these opportunities.

Key announcements in the budget:

- £5bn restart grant for businesses to help companies get going after lockdown.
- A new loan scheme launched to run until the end of the year. Loans can be between £25,000 and £10m.
- Hospitality and leisure businesses pay no business rates for three months, then rates will be discounted for the remaining nine months of the year by two-thirds, in a £6bn tax cut.
- 5% reduced rate of VAT will be extended until the end of September. Then it will be gradually increased, at 12.5% for six months, before returning to the standard rate from April 2022.
- In April 2023, the rate of corporation tax will increase to 25%. Businesses will only be impacted if they are making profits, and the change will only come in once the Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts the economy will be recovering. Companies with profits of less than £50,000 will remain at 19%.
- A new national infrastructure bank will open in Leeds with £12bn capitalisation.



- Green projects will be supported through a green recovery bond.
- £1bn funding for 45 new “town deals” across the UK.
- Freeports locations announced in England: East Midlands airport, Felixstowe and Harwich, Humber, Liverpool City Region, Plymouth, Solent, Thames and Teesside.

Levelling Up Fund

The Levelling Up Fund will invest in infrastructure that improves everyday life. The £4.8 billion fund will support town centre and high street regeneration, local transport projects, and cultural and heritage assets. The Fund will focus investment in projects that require up to £20m of funding and Members of Parliament are to back one bid that they see as a priority.

The first round of the Fund will focus on three themes:

- smaller transport projects that make a genuine difference to local areas
- town centre and high street regeneration
- support for maintaining and expanding the UK’s world-leading portfolio of cultural and heritage assets

Projects should be aligned to and support Net Zero goals: for instance, be based on low or zero carbon best practice; adopt and support innovative clean tech and/or support the growth of green skills and sustainable supply chains. The assessment process will focus on the following key criteria:

- Characteristics of the place – each local authority will be sorted into category 1, 2 or 3 with category 1 representing the highest level of identified need.
- Deliverability - with bids able to demonstrate investment or which begin delivery on the ground in 2021-22 financial year
- Strategic fit with local and Fund priorities – this should be addressed in the strategic case of submissions and should include support from stakeholders.
- Value for money – an economic case should be submitted to explain the benefits of the bid and how it represents value for money.

Local Authority Area	Priority category
Lewes	1
Adur	2
Arun	2
Brighton and Hove	3
Crawley	3
Mid Sussex	3
Worthing	3



5.0 Greater Brighton Economic Board Vision and Priorities

The Board approved its Five-Year Strategic Priorities in January 2019, with the vision for the region to have a growing, modern economy that is international, creative, connected, talented and resilient.

The actions within the Sustainable Recovery Plan were set against the five themes. Progress updates since January 2021 are highlighted below.

5.1 INTERNATIONAL

- Work on establishing the Inward Investment Desk has been ongoing, with an expression of interest submitted to Coast-to-Capital Local Enterprise Partnership for seed funding to help establish a small, dedicated resource.

5.2 CREATIVE

5.2.1 Business Support

- The Business Hothouse Programme continues to attract excellent interest. As of early March, over 260 businesses/individuals have received start-up coaching support, with around half of those receiving over 12 hours. There have been 119 applications made to the Invest4 Grant Programme, with a number of these approved. The value of the approved grants is around £330,000, and this brings in around £520,000 of match-funding.

5.2.2 Creative Industries and the Visitor Economy

- Local authority partners have continued to distribute Government grants to business adversely affected by the crisis.
- A Recovery Plan for Culture has been prepared which will benefit creative businesses and self-employed people across the Greater Brighton area.
- Emerging from the Sussex Resilience Forum, The Sussex Tourism and Culture Recovery Group is chaired by Nigel Lynn from Arun District Council. This working group is preparing for funding opportunities to support Sussex-wide recovery actions.
- Following approval from the Board in January, work is progressing to establish an Innovation Zone for the region. This work, led by the University of Brighton, had its first Development Group meeting in April.



5.3 CONNECTED

5.3.1 Digital

- City Fibre have confirmed their £80m investment in full fibre for Brighton & Hove, and the roll out of their programme started in February 2021.
- The Converged Fibre Connectivity (CFC) project to build 41km of duct and dark fibre network from Crawley, Manor Royal to Burgess Hill is progressing as planned, it will complete in July 2021. The additional spur to connect the Horsham Enterprise Park will also be completed as planned. Commercialisation conversations for rural and urban parts of the network are now under way led by West Sussex County Council (WSSCC) and Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC).
- The Burgess Hill Fibre ring and dig once programme led by MSDC is also progressing as planned with key elements nearing completion.

5.3.2 Transport

ACTIONS AGREED IN THE SUSTAINABLE RECOVERY PLAN

- Greater Brighton is represented on the Transport for the South East (TfSE) South Central Radial Area Study Forum, which is an opportunity to make clear to TfSE and other regional stakeholders the challenges, priorities and opportunities for transport within the Greater Brighton region.

5.4 TALENTED

ACTIONS AGREED IN THE SUSTAINABLE RECOVERY PLAN

- A paper on developing the skills and supply chains to decarbonise the Greater Brighton housing stock is being prepared for the July Board Meeting.

5.5 RESILIENT

ACTIONS AGREED IN THE SUSTAINABLE RECOVERY PLAN

PROGRESS MADE SINCE JANUARY 2021

- Hydrogen Group established in September to move forwards with the work to place the Greater Brighton Region as a new hub for hydrogen.
- Hydrogen Sussex had a successful launch event with over 200 attendees including Members of Parliament.
- Hydrogen Sussex presented to the Board in January and are again in April.

6.0 Looking ahead

Whilst the region is hard hit, our recent evidence base shows that with support and investment, our towns and cities are well placed to recover, leading to long term economic



growth. The success of our recovery lies in our ability to communicate our shared purpose, being responsive and adapting as new opportunities arise. Resources for delivering projects need to be clearly identified, and where there is a funding requirement forming part of a coherent project pipeline.

Recovery is a long-term process with needs varying in the short, medium and long term. The outlook remains uncertain with the economic impacts varying from place to place across the region. That being said there is a need to collaborate on the big issues. Next steps on this will be focus on the Greater Brighton pipeline of projects to make sure that we are ready with deliverable projects when funding rounds are announced. We must make sure that we are not disadvantaged by our location in the South and close proximity to London and ensure that there is not a 'levelling down' effect.

Our key areas of work for 2021/2022 under the 5 themes all link to recovery:

- The establishment of the Greater Brighton Innovation Zone
- The hydrogen projects to be delivered by Hydrogen Sussex and regional partners
- The regional tourism recovery work taking place
- The collaborative decarbonisation of homes project, and the link to skills and supply chains
- The implementation of the Digital Action Plan
- Our work with C2C LEP and DiT to attract Inward Investment to the region

7.0 Communications

The Covid-19 pandemic and the need for recovery means Greater Brighton can no longer operate on a business as usual footing in terms of communications activity. Communications plays a key role in shaping the narrative around Greater Brighton's recovery while positing the City Region as an attractive place for investment for government and private enterprise.

To reflect the board's increasing role as a regional leader in the locality and support the proposed inward investment strategy, increased emphasis has been placed on messaging to decision makers - be that in government, business or within the Greater Brighton network. More focus has been placed on using LinkedIn as a publishing platform with training provided to Greater Brighton business managers to use it as a way to generate interest in inward investment. There also continues to be increased efforts to build closer relationships with the City Region's MPs, with briefings on key topics being offered to parliamentary representatives.

Messaging continues to compliment the work being done by local authorities (recovery in individual areas), business representatives and Coast to Capital LEP (funding, business support) and educational establishments (R&D, skills) - all of whom are represented on the Greater Brighton Economic Board.



8.0 Conclusion

The Greater Brighton City Region continues to be impacted significantly by the Covid-19 pandemic. Building back a more resilient economy, environment and society is a key focus of the Sustainable Recovery Plan agreed in October, and since then real progress has been made in a number of areas. Other papers on the agenda for the April 2021 Economic Board meeting show the progress that is being made in these areas, and that this work is not just limited to implementing the Recovery Plan.

The Board's energy and water plans demonstrate that the region is seizing the initiative to initiate, support and coordinate projects which will both help the environment and lead a sustainable economic recovery. The region has strong emerging positions in the green sector, particularly around decarbonisation of homes and hydrogen. There is great potential to maximise the knowledge economy technologies and promote the accompanying skills that could have a transformative impact on the city region's offer and fortunes.

The Board will continue to lobby Government for support in our hardest-hit sectors – aviation, the cultural, hospitality and leisure sectors. In particular the Board will make clear that when it comes to levelling-up, the City Region should not be lumped in with London, and as a significant contributor to the UK economy should receive its fair share of any funding aimed at levelling up the regions.

END

