

Draft East Sussex Economy Recovery Plan (ERP)

Feedback to the draft ERP from Hastings Borough Council, Hastings Local Strategic Partnership (representing the statutory, businesses, community and the voluntary sector in the area) and Hastings Town Board (representing the partnership board established to deliver Town Fund programme).

2nd June 2020

General Comments

- The economic recovery needs to be addressed as the motor for recovery on every other front. This needs to be given a sharper focus. The impact of the lockdown on people's health, relationships, housing, jobs, money, and general wellbeing will all effect the economy going forward and we will need to be resilient and be genuinely confident that we will come out the other side of Covid 19 stronger than when we went in. Hastings will need to give particular focus to anti-poverty, and so closing the gap between the better off and poorer residents needs to be central to economic recovery.
- It needs grounding with our population and become 'people centred'. Who will be most impacted over the longer term and how do we enable them to thrive? Jobs, Health, Education, Skills etc.
- The crisis / challenges may have been understated for areas such as Hastings and needs to be distinguished from others. The 'economy impact' likely to be starker in Hastings and reinforce the structural economic challenges in the area.
- The 'Economy' is very narrowly defined in the plan – it needs to include public services, the community and voluntary sector and the health and care service. They are the ones who have responded to the medical pandemic and account for 40% + of the economy in some areas
- Include a clear summary statement of the scale of impact (negatives and positives) locally and what it may mean for the short, medium and long-term local economy. Currently much of it presents a national impact assessment.
- This is a short-term activity plan, but it should clearly look to the 'new reality' and set in motion activities which will support and enable its development
- Explore 'now, soon, later' clustering within the ambitions.
- The role of boroughs and districts understated and to 'feel' any impact from this or any other plan much of it will have to be locally driven.
- The document does not acknowledge the Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise sector as anything more than a provider of services to vulnerable people and misses entirely that the sector employs a significant number of people. In the document the economy is emphatically business.
- The report does not highlight local differences. There is significant data available for a more granular context setting. **This would enable other stakeholders to buy in and 'own' the ERP.**
- The expected levels of unemployment locally are likely to have a huge impact on statutory and VCSE the need for more social and mental health care services etc
- Opportunities and summary activities in each of the districts should be covered in the main report to make links with future ambitions – two examples below.

- Local initiatives have not been considered in developing the ambitions – actions need to focus down to the local level from the outset. – consider inclusion or passing reference to Opportunity Areas, Towns Fund Areas, Community Led Local Development Areas etc. These are all agents for leveraging and delivering actions.
- Need to heighten impact of plan making and policy – this is key to bring in developers, investors and infrastructure organisations. UKPN, BT etc BT was integral to the commencement of academies in Hastings, this isn't just a method to deliver heightened connectivity but could link with skills and jobs.
- Local important partnerships and structures, apart from those facilitated by the County need to be identified and their work enabled - e.g. Town Boards, LSP, Task Force, Community Networks and hubs, Cultural Networks etc
- No engagement with public health or clinical commissioning groups. These are key funding and delivery stakeholders who need to feel ownership of this action plan to enable a circular economy recovery.
- Needs to take into consideration the LEP prospectus on Social enterprise, creative sector, coastal economy and energy strategy to inform the ambitions and actions within.

General Comments on the presentation of document

- Actions should be breakdown between existing and new (will be resourced) and future. It needs to state what we will be doing immediately / mid / long-term. See above bullet
- An expected impact of the actions in supporting the recovery needs to be stated – what is the scale and likely impact of proposed action.
- Activities led by ESCC, boroughs and partners need to be clearly shown
- Too many actions – need to be short sharp and have sub actions if needed. Some of the actions are repetitive throughout the 8 themes
- What is the vision we want to achieve? And how are these ambitions going to get us there?
 - Are the ambitions; ambitions or statements? Are they relevant to the audience?

Comments on the headline ambitions

1. Capitalise on digital connectivity

- The ambition here clearly should be establishing the area as the digital and creative destination
- Action 2,3, and 5 very similar (need for higher speeds, fibre network etc)
- Action 4 – digital exclusion issues also includes broadband affordability as well as training etc. Action to source cheaper alternatives and better packages important.
- Action 6& 7 very similar
- Need to separate between immediate and future actions
- Action – open discussion with service providers on their 'ambitions'
- Need to invest in developing policies and projects ready for funding bids

2. Attract new inward investment

- Focus on survival in most business support activities
- Review inward investment activity
- Focus on attracting investment on redundant and empty commercial and retail buildings. To fill them becomes one of Locates objective working with commercial agents.
- Promote specifically to cultural sector for possible meanwhile use (enable this with boroughs and districts with some funding).
- Need to focus on certain sectors / clusters encouraging the circular economy.

3. Re-start the visitor economy

- The importance of this to the coastal economies needs to be emphasised as an area of action
- Item 1 and 2 could be merged
- Existing recognised brands (Visit 1066) should be strengthened and not submerged into a new brand
- Greater emphasises on re-starting all the cultural events in East Sussex Towns safely asap - funding logistics, training and equipment as much as possible
- Culture is more than the visitor economy but about improving health, life chances and connectivity within communities.

4. Expand low carbon transport and energy infrastructure

- Several the actions repetitive and could be merged
- Need to restore public transport services to normal asap – confidence in this mode of transport likely to be low for a while.
- Energy production and saving technologies should be promoted together. Initiatives to promote both could create jobs and reduce carbon emissions.
- Need to invest in developing policies and projects ready for funding bids
- Promoting local rail transport is only mentioned in the decarbonising section. There is massive potential to increase local rail travel. Improved connectivity to the eastern part of the county (A21, HS1) is omitted

5. Help local businesses adapt, recover and grow

- This should be broader than the survival of just private businesses – it should include public services, care services and the community and voluntary sector (if not here than elsewhere)
- Boroughs and Districts role in supporting business maintenance to date needs to be recognised and built on – many have EDO teams and have established supporting forums
- Business adaptations to the new reality should be encouraged – including planning for a second wave where the government likely to be less generous
- Some business sectors likely to be hit harder than others - collapse of the retail sector hugely understated – in Hastings, Eastbourne and parts of Bexhill – the national retailers provide good jobs, pay and opportunities for local people which will be lost (with some exceptions).

6. Retain our skills infrastructure, support employment, build workforce resilience – re skilling and promote entrepreneurial ambitions

- Government likely to announce growth types of investments – be prepared to bid and link with skills programmes
- Skills programmes linked to the new need and reality – IT, working from home, use of smart devices in customer services etc
- Establish local employment support and job match activities – beyond DWP
- We need to add in something about embracing, enhancing and recognising new skills developed through the crisis, either in realigned/redeployed roles or from volunteering.

7. Local supplier and procurement opportunities

- This is not a short-term strategy and it will take time to change public procurement policies as we come out of the EU.
- Some of the actions could be merged
- Adopt a living wage and good employment standards on all procurement
- Follow through main contractors supply chain
- In Ambition 7, the biggest barrier to local suppliers providing goods and services though the East Sussex Procurement Hub is the onerous application process, and some of the requirements around insurance, for example. An action in this ambition should be to ask local businesses what they think the barriers are, and simplify the procurement process to allow smaller, local businesses to participate more easily.

8. Adapt and improve place making

- Place making agenda needs to encompass a broader agenda – of people, economy, public service, community empowerment and activism. Action to enable and join up these activities will improve resilience and confidence in the recovery.
- This ambition needs greater time to develop and further consultation
- Culture is more than the visitor economy but about improving health, life chances and connectivity within communities.

Gaps in the ERP proposal

- Suggest a new ambition / action – Economic Boost / Job Creation Programme. This is responding to the social and economic crisis through actions to boost demand for short term labour; boost construction, green energy, housing development (consider all such publicly funded activities), re-purpose empty buildings, boost business start up grants and enable skills development.
- Maintaining community cohesion (could fit into place making ambition) – with expected high levels of unemployment and Brexit in the background tensions may increase. Funding for community cohesion programmes should start asap rather than after any event.
- Collapse of the retail sector hugely understated – in Hastings, Eastbourne and parts Bexhill – they provide good jobs, pay and opportunities for local people
- Impact of Brexit – not considered – will be having impact in 6 months
- Improve working relationship with districts and boroughs – ESCC should recognise the need and demands vary / and work with districts to support and build their plans.

- There is an important issue missing in the actions: The approach is premised on the basis that economic growth will meet the needs of local people. In many cases this will not be the case. In these cases, more intervention is needed to create jobs and not simply create the conditions via which jobs *might* be created.
- The link between growing unemployment and public works schemes is significant here.

Also attached as part of our response are independent submissions by our local partners. The timescales for the responses have not enabled us to coalesce these together but should be regarded as constructive contributions to the development of the recovery plan.

2nd June 2020

HBC