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Hertfordshire Growth Board and COVID-19 economic recovery planning

13/08/2020

With:

- Neil Hayes, CEO, Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership
- Cllr Morris Bright MBE, Leader, Hertsmere Borough Council
- Julie Newlan MBE, Pro-Vice Chancellor, University of Hertfordshire
- Patsy Dell, Director, Hertfordshire Growth, Hertfordshire Growth Board
- Sean Bradley, Managing director - London and Home Counties, Morgan Sindall Construction

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**Hertfordshire
Growth Board**

**MORGAN
SINDALL**
CONSTRUCTION

SUMMARY

The [first webinar](#) in this series looked at the impetus and motivation for the foundation of the Growth Board: this session gave attention to how Hertfordshire has thus far responded to Covid, and the actions that are being taken to prepare the county for a speedy economic recovery. “Hertfordshire has suffered, as with everywhere else,” Neil Hayes of the Hertfordshire LEP told, and the county expects around a 5 billion hit on the economy, and job losses totalling as much as 60,000. As such, the challenge of recovery is going to be one of scale. However, Hayes noted some points for optimism. “We have a number of key sectors that have been powering through the current crisis. We’ve had the advanced manufacturing sector still at full production as this is going on; our life sciences sector, which is hugely strong in Hertfordshire, has been working to address the current challenges along with other areas of the country.” While the creative sector took a dip, it’s quickly bouncing back as studios begin to reopen and production restarts. Hertfordshire is fortunate to have a highly skilled and flexible workforce, a definite asset to have as the county moves into recovery.

I think it’s about looking at an issue, and not necessarily thinking about looking in the rearview mirror for the solution that’s required. That’s where the strengths of the Growth Board are coming to the fore, where we have different perspectives.

- Neil Hayes, CEO, Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership

Cllr Morris Bright was also keen to remind the audience how fortunate the county was to have started putting in work for the foundation of the Growth Board two years ago. “If anything, we will be more resilient coming out of this as a consequence of the work that was done in advance, even though we didn’t know the dangers that were ahead of us.” Cllr Bright also spoke to the importance of the creative industries for Hertfordshire, giving particular mention to Hertsmere’s own Elstree Studios. “There’s huge amounts of jobs, huge amounts of money, huge amounts of training.” Covid might have put a pause on this for the present, but plans are still afoot for expansion. Sky, Comcast and NBC Universal are set to open a new

quarter of a billion pound production facility in Bournewood, delivering 2000 new jobs and set to open in 2022. “I see the future as being an opportunity; we’ve got through the shock of this all now.” While these studios might be located in Hertsmere, they have the ability to bring value for the whole county through all of the ancillary industries needed to support it.

“I think we are working together and we can show very many examples to Government but also to our own people of how the Hertfordshire Growth Board with the LEP can really lead and show a very honest entrepreneurial way of doing things in local government circles.”

- Cllr Morris Bright MBE, Leader, Hertsmere Borough Council

Julie Newlan spoke to the vital role played by the University of Hertfordshire in a number of key areas. Firstly, the university is a source of skilled workers for the county. It also provides business support, business innovation, and enterprise support. Finally, the university contributes in terms of innovation and research. “We are only going to get out of this by delivering tomorrow and inventing tomorrow, not simply efficiently delivering the ‘today’. Whilst that’s vital, absolutely vital... What we have to do is have a great research base where people are actually thinking about tomorrow and inventing tomorrow.” Some of the key sectors in which the University of Hertfordshire are working to deliver ‘tomorrow’ are life sciences, transport, and green technology, all of which will be growth sectors and sectors that can help lift Hertfordshire into economic recovery.

“What’s important is the integration of research areas. So our computer scientists working with our engineers working with our civil engineers. It’s about adding up to be greater than the sum of its parts”

- Julie Newlan MBE, Pro-Vice Chancellor, University of Hertfordshire

Turning to the idea of curating good growth, Patsy Dell echoed a sentiment expressed earlier in the session by Cllr Bright. “It’s that messaging to our residents, to businesses, to our anchor institutions in Hertfordshire, and to Government: we’ve got your back in this.” Dell identified a number of areas in which the Growth Board will be able to benefit the county in terms of good growth and Covid recovery, including identifying growth locations, supporting key sectors, thinking about town center regeneration, and accelerating housing. Importantly for people investing in Hertfordshire, the Growth Board has brought together political, business and civic leadership positions together, which speaks to the strength of how the county is trying to respond and its desire for good growth.

“We're trying to anticipate that and to take the opportunities that arise out of the COVID situation, perhaps for maybe when things settle down a bit more, you know, a world with better air quality, where people will want to work from home but... They might want to work in some of our high streets that might be repurposed to help them for one or two days a week to work from a local employment hub.”

- *Patsy Dell, Director, Hertfordshire Growth, Hertfordshire Growth Board*

Sean Bradley of Morgan Sindall gave some insight then into what it was like during lockdown from the perspective of a major construction company. “Those first few weeks when Boris said ‘stay at home, but construction, don’t stay at home, please go to work’: they were difficult. They were weeks we will never forget.” Management of health and safety was a key priority for Morgan Sindall, and they were able to adapt and maintain operations throughout the period. Bradley explained how closely Morgan Sindall work with their public sector partners in Hertfordshire, citing their work with St. Albans. “We've worked on many initiatives with the district council, one being the construct a career programme, which has a big focus on the unemployed wanting to work in construction, and we've successfully taken on a couple of new staff members.” In terms of

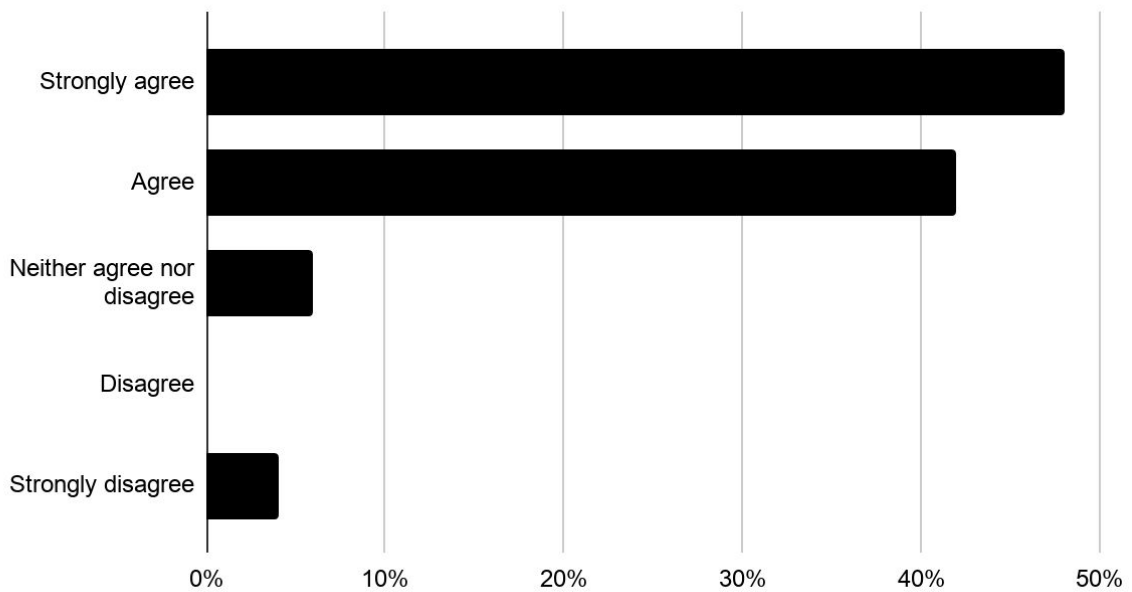
the opportunities offered in Hertfordshire, Bradley spoke about the importance of the University, the opportunities offered by less commuting into London, as well as “the enthusiasm and the heart that’s there to keep Hertfordshire going - it’s good, it’s really good.”

“We're a private sector company but we have a very clear purpose. We're here to create places where people live and learn and work and play.”

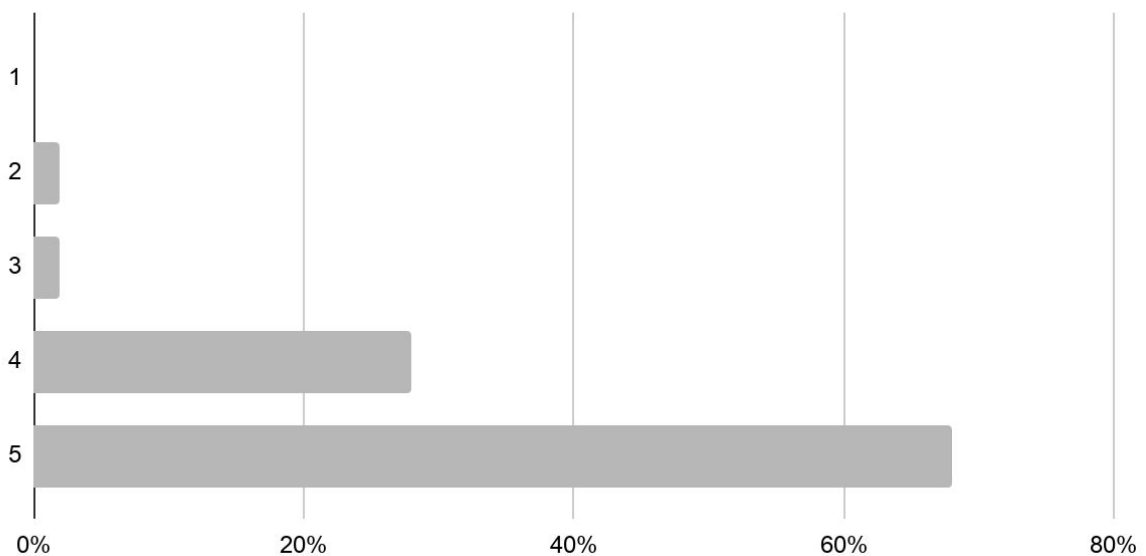
- Sean Bradley, Managing director - London and Home Counties, Morgan Sindall Construction

POLLS AND INSIGHT

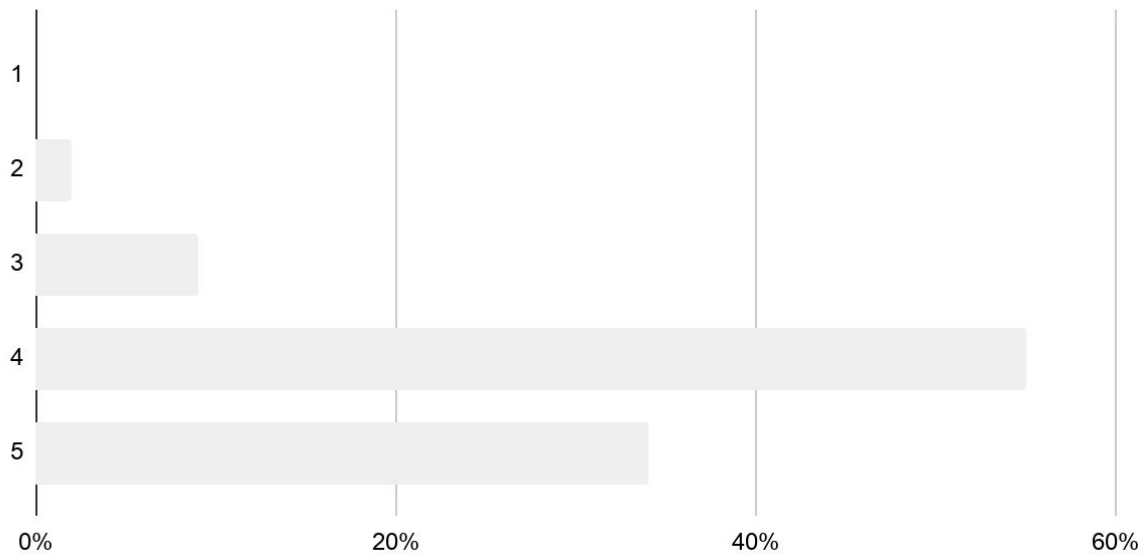
'The Hertfordshire Growth Board will have an important role to play in securing investment for Hertfordshire.' How strongly do you agree with this statement?



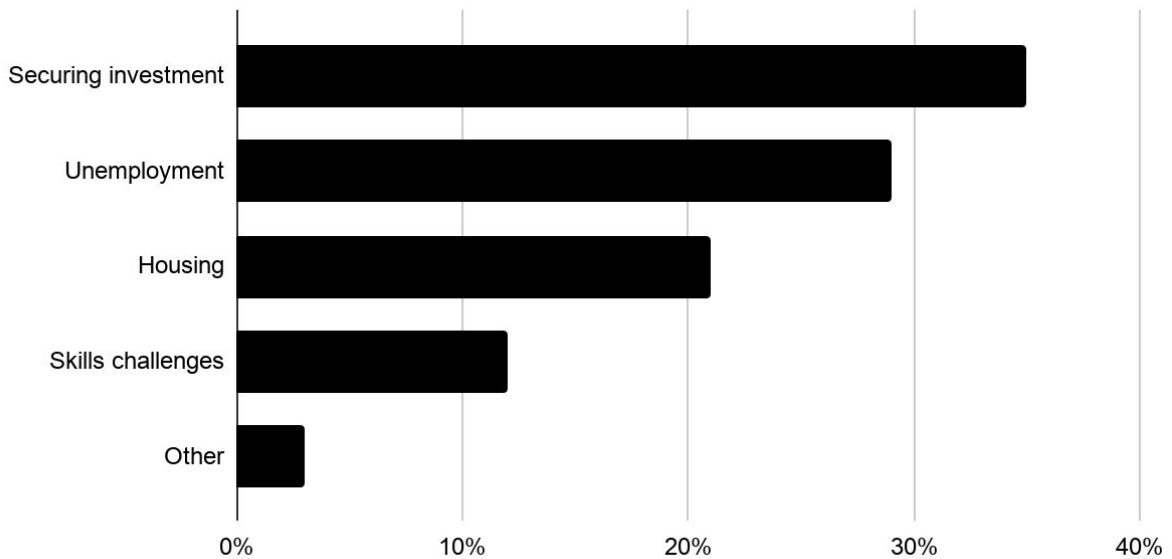
On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is the least important and 5 is the most important, how important is it that Local Enterprise Partnerships and Growth Boards work together to protect the interests of local businesses?



On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is the least important and 5 is the most important, how important will the activities of the Growth Board be to promote skills and education in Hertfordshire?



What is the biggest challenge to be overcome in getting Hertfordshire's ambitions for growth back on track?



Q&A

Questions from the live audience, answered by the panel

Interesting to hear about residents working a few days in London but then locally in town centres. Do you see an increasing role for employment spaces such as co-working/serviced offices to provide business hubs to support the 'new way of working'?

Samruti Patel, Director - Planning, Savills

Yes, we do see that as a potential future solution and places like Stevenage are already providing employment hub space as part of their town centre regeneration plans. Hertfordshire is perfectly placed in proximity to London for this to be a real opportunity and we would also see this as a key transformation for vacant or now available space within town centres.

How will the proposals in the Planning White Paper impact Hertfordshire. How much of the county will be in the 'Growth' category for housing?

Mike De'Ath, Partner, HTA Design

Clearly its early days with the consultation on the white paper but we aren't expecting current growth pressures and challenges in Hertfordshire to be something that will ever be easy to resolve. Much of Hertfordshire is also in the metropolitan green belt so is likely to be afforded protected status.

How would you all like to see Hertfordshire respond to the government's Building Beautiful Building Better Commission report? What needs to happen to ensure this agenda is delivered successfully?

Danny Kaye, Managing director, Sheridan Development Management

We all want to plan for Hertfordshire's future in ways that have a positive impact upon the high quality of life and place that characterises much of Hertfordshire now. We need to continue our joint ambitions and collaborative work to secure and deliver good growth now and in the future, ensure we have the funding for infrastructure to support quality placemaking and focus on securing a sustained recovery for Hertfordshire's economic performance.

Skills are often mentioned at the moment - but there always seems to be a focus on university education, on people who can engage with L3 education and above. What about skills for people with lower level of skills? What about those that have some barriers to engage with education due to low levels of skills (poor education attainment to date). Many also have a lot of potential but are often 'forgotten about'.

Chantal Lommel, Head of service, Hertfordshire Adult and Family Learning Service

To have a successful economy we must ensure we have social inclusion and therefore whilst there is an identified need for higher skills it is equally clear that we also need to address the needs of all residents, those with lower skills and barriers to both sustainable employment and learning opportunities. We have a Hertfordshire Skills Strategy which clearly identifies the need to support those residents who are more disadvantaged. The current skills strategy was due to be revised in the early part of 2020, however due to Covid this has now been delayed to early 2021. The new strategy will in part be based on recent analysis of our skills and labour market and will reflect the impact of Covid on residents and businesses.

The covid restraints may be with society for years to come, how are you working for people to see opportunities to adapt and re-train?

Michael Page, Strategic frameworks manager - North London and the East, Willmott Dixon

As indicated above we intend to revise our current skills strategy to reflect the impact of Covid and will undertake annual analysis of the skills and labour market to ensure skills provision meets the needs of local residents and business

Whilst we must ensure we support the needs of young people transitioning from education to employment, we must as suggested also ensure we have support and provision, both local and national, to address the needs of residents/employees who need to reskill.

Employers in some of our growth sectors such as life science have already identified the need to attract local residents who require upskilling to meet the business needs, equally a construction skills hub is being established in Stevenage to ensure local residents benefit from the

opportunities that the regeneration of the town centre will bring, this will include providing skills training to meet the needs of the sector.

In terms of aims and objectives, what is the fundamental difference between the Growth Board and the LEP?

Cllr Duncan Bell, Deputy leader, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council

The Growth Board and the LEP are working collaboratively so residents, business and investors in Hertfordshire can see coherence in how we are supporting economic recovery and performance as well as curating place based good growth. There are differences in the programme and performance areas that are led by the Growth Board e.g. place-based, recovery and place making, long term strategic planning for Hertfordshire and then by the LEP e.g. sector support, Enterprise zone, skills and innovation – the strength comes in the alignment and coherence in how we are working for the benefit of Hertfordshire the place.

What could we/should we be doing to support people currently employed in declining parts of the economy to move into those sectors that will be growing in the coming years?

Cllr Tim Hutchings, Executive member for public health and prevention, Hertfordshire County Council

Using the annual skills and labour market analysis as our basis we need to continually engage with our business base to understand what their skills needs are both in the current and future to enable us to influence the excellent skills and training solutions provided by our FE/HE and private training providers. The LEP's Skills Advisory Panel members of which include local businesses, College Principals, UH, private training providers, third sector, HCC and other stakeholders commission the annual review and provide the evidence base to our skills providers.

If we are to embrace digital delivery, housing developers will need to consider designing homes with sufficient space to enable digital working technology equipment, especially in apartments.

Cllr Terry Douris, Mayor of Dacorum, Dacorum Borough Council

Agreed. We need new homes that have the internal space and ubiquitous digital enablement to enable new ways of working and living. Digital reconfiguration and place-making are one of the programmes that the LEP ad Growth Board are investigating.



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