

The latest in a very popular series of quarterly BA13+ Community Area Partnership meetings took place at Leighton Rec on the evening of Thursday 16th February and had an economic theme.



Those present, who included the town's Mayor as well as the Chair of Heywood Parish Council, heard keynote presentations from Tim Martienssen, the Head of Economic Development and Planning, Wiltshire Council, and Chris Wordsworth from Hawke Ridge Business Park.

Tim Martienssen spoke first. He explained that one of the most important issues is a shortage of Skills and Talent and retaining the ones we do have. There is a particular shortage of high tech skills especially. Transport infrastructure is also a major issue. We have the M4 running through our area, the A350 is a strategic route, and Westbury is a strategically significant rail junction - but other towns south of us would like trains to travel non-stop to them, by-passing Westbury altogether.

Tim went on to explain that we have a very low unemployment rate here in Wiltshire. Interestingly this means there aren't enough unemployed people to attract companies willing to invest. A common complaint is that youngsters leaving school know a lot but aren't always job-ready.

There are a number of prospects for growth. As well as high-tech, health and engineering, land based industries is transforming rapidly. With a growing population we need to make the land work harder. We are starting to see growth in the visitor economy, adult health and social care, in low carbon technologies and in the construction industries.

We need to work out how we can make more of what's here in Westbury. The town centre doesn't work at the moment. We are getting a growing population here and we need to try and prevent people from going elsewhere to shop. Retail has changed. We need to find creative new ways of changing the High Street. Maybe we should think about where the town centre actually is. The risk is that Westbury will get left behind otherwise.

Chris Wordsworth from HPH then followed with a focus on Hawke Ridge Business Park. Hawkeridge was selected because it's equidistant between Westbury and Trowbridge in terms of employment growth. It's a 35 acre site in total. There is consent for 500,000 sq. feet of employment space. The acre of land which is liable to flood (although it never has) is to remain undeveloped and will be their ecology zone. So far they have put around £2m into developing a roundabout and the infrastructure and services. There is a potential for £50m of investment into the local economy.

Chris went on to explain that the A350, with the towns along it, is vitally important to Wiltshire. Westbury is right in the middle of this "powerhouse". It's a fantastic location from a distribution point of view. There could be over a thousand jobs created. They have invested in perimeter landscaping so that screening is growing which would mitigate the impact of any development. They have put £70,000 of planting into the site already. They are trying to make it as easy as possible for companies to move in. They are getting planning consents ready to go so that when an occupier says, for example, they want 2,000 sq. ft. they can accelerate the process.

Both speakers were warmly thanked. Carole King went on to mention that the BA13+ Community Area Partnership is working closely with Alzheimers Support and the Area Board in order to help Westbury join the Dementia Action Alliance, and we are very keen to hear from anyone who would like to get involved, either by lending a hand or a voice, even just contributing ideas from the comfort of their own home. Ideally we'd like around 20 local people from the whole BA13 area to come forward so we can draw on as much of a representation from across the community as possible.

The next Partnership meeting, which takes place on **18th May 2017 at the Laverton** in Westbury, will have a Children and Young People theme. In keeping with this, we are pleased to announce that the keynote presentation will be from TV presenter, international skateboard champion and the face of the 'Animal' sports brand, **James Threlfall**

Everyone is welcome to attend – especially the young people of Westbury!

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