



FOREST ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP

Delivering a thriving economy

Forest Economic Partnership (FEP) Glos2050 consultation response

The Forest Economic Partnership (FEP) was launched in 2018 by the Forest of Dean District Council. Its mission is to deliver a thriving economy in the Forest of Dean District by connecting business, Councils, people, ideas and resources. Already over 150 organisations/individuals participate in its quarterly steering group or four sub-group meetings. The four sub-groups focus on areas of particular challenge to the District and are shown with their individual missions below:

- **Education & Skills.** Within a lifelong learning context, how do we get the workforce we need for the District now and in the future to power and sustain economic growth by removing barriers and raising aspirations.
- **Transport & Infrastructure.** The District Plan guides future development that gives us the space to work, live and play. Once those uses are known we can consider the transport routes in the District to enable them become fit for purpose. What is the practical new vision that defines the Forest we want to be and the balance between the use of space?
- **Digital Connectivity.** We are told we live in a digital world. What practical steps can we take to get the speed, reliability and connectivity to support the ways we increasingly work, live, study and play now and in the future.
- **Bridges & Borders.** The Severn and Wye have preserved the Forest. The best future protection is connection with all those around us to ensure a mutual understanding of economic needs. Looking outwards, what do we need and want to trade for bridges; participation in the South Wales-West of England economic powerhouse; and neighbours' plans.

FEP has only recently been convened with new connections being made within and outside the District at our meetings. Work is ongoing to shape a new economic plan so that in 2050 the District is an attractive, vibrant and dynamic destination to live, work and do business. Although at an early stage we are able to share some initial thoughts on Glos 2050's ambitions and ideas. We are committed to longer term engagement with Glos 2050 as the ambitions and ideas get further developed to ensure they are robust.

Ambitions

The Glos 2050 Eight Ambitions are broadly supported, if currently lacking in detail. What is clear from FEP's work is that a balance needs to be struck between competing ambitions in a way that

true benefits happen without throwing away the essence of what makes the area unique and attractive now and in 2050.

FEP is focusing at this stage in discussing problems and issues across the District in order to achieve balanced, but potentially radical solutions. It recognises that detail can derail the ambition or have unintended consequences across the 8 Ambitions. For example:

- Is superfast broadband and complete mobile coverage a realistic opportunity for every single square metre of the District given the very real geographic barriers, or is there an opportunity for agreed not-spots with potential work-life balance benefits and if so where? Our ambition to be connected must be realistic.
- How we live, work, play and study has a massive impact on the transport infrastructure required yet all are significantly changing with the impact of technology and aging population.
- If we focus primarily on high skills and high skilled and high pay jobs, what does this do to the aspirations of all? A big challenge is to appropriately skill and educate young people for jobs and careers that have not yet been thought about. But this also applies to the older workforce on their second and third career change. Skills are a lifelong challenge in which success creates the needed workforce doing the jobs they want. It requires closer connection between business and education providers acting as collaborators.
- Could poor social mobility in the Forest of Dean be a basis for prioritising infrastructure development that creates equality of opportunity across an inclusive and healthy, happy County? Or is this ambition assumed to be subordinate to other ambitions?
- Does the creation of a Super City magnet, position the Forest of Dean as an area of leisure and not as a sustainable working community in its own right? Thereby creating an unintended impact of reinforcing a 'them and us' division among young people in the Forest of Dean, with knock on effects on health and well-being.

Ideas

Regional Parks

1. **It is difficult to understand what is meant by a Regional Park.** This is because from our research to date, there is no defined model as to what a Regional Park might be. The supporting paper suggests increased leisure and tourism opportunities, access from the Super City, overcoming lack of awareness of opportunities and creating employment. All these require balancing within a hierarchy of aims. For example are we looking for a balanced landscape or a people's park where people's use comes first? Given the major landowner The Forestry Commission, already tries to balance wood production, bio-diversity and leisure access, the choice of aim will have a significant impact.
2. **The proposed area is undefined.** Already in the District, we have many interpretations of the physical boundaries of the Forest in the Forest of Dean – is this the Forest National Park, Statutory Forest, Forestry Commission owned/managed land, AONBs (Wye Valley approved and Forest under consideration), the Hundreds of St Briavels or the whole District? Without definition it is impossible to determine its capacity to cope and manage its role.

3. **How much of the intended Forest Park is working Forest?** There is a need to map out the employment sites within any proposed Forest Park boundary and to recognise the changing nature of employment and local work-life balance. For example a quarter of District full-time employees are engaged in manufacturing. Tourism covers 7% of all employment. Agriculture & forestry; professional, scientific & technical; and construction account for 40% of individual businesses. Each has more than 10% of the whole. Reconciling the Regional Park with some of the Glos 2050 Ambitions is therefore not easy.
4. **Is the Forest Park idea being thought of as a way to offset green infrastructure requirements for housing and employment growth to be provided elsewhere in Gloucestershire?** The prospect of the Forest being required to support the recreation and leisure needs of a significantly larger population would need careful thought particularly as many sites are already at full capacity over the weekend.
5. **Other Economic and Environmental Drivers.** Essential principles should include: sustainable development, affordable housing, employment space, local area defined boundaries, green infrastructure, community facilities including healthcare provision.

Lydney Sharpness

1. **Crossing Infrastructure.** The FEP Bridges & Borders Sub-Group is looking for new infrastructure links across the River Severn and River Wye that contribute towards the growth of the local economy in the District of the Forest of Dean. As such we support the concept of a crossing re-connecting Lydney and Sharpness and appreciate the work that must be done to ensure a suitable structure is built to connect with the existing transport network at the earliest opportunity fit for the transport needs of the future.
2. **Crossing impact an opportunity and threat** A Severn crossing could provide significant opportunities for the District but at the same time could create additional problems and threats. FEP recognises that the effects and choice of crossing would impact on a very wide area and at the same time on very specific areas. Forest goods might reach export ports easier, but certain leisure facilities already at capacity would not cope to meet increased demands. The impact on local housing will also need more consideration – increasing the size of the Forest towns or creating a new town may present an economic opportunity for some and present a major threat for others who may be priced out of the market.
3. **Development of Whole Idea.** FEP strongly supports cross-boundary collaboration as means of strategic economic development and forward planning and recognises that the crossing is just one part of this proposal.

Cyber Park

1. **Existing Connections.** The District is already well connected with GCHQ in terms of infrastructure and personnel. It has a number of commercial ventures focused on cyber-security. Newent Community School is one of the national Cyber/GCHQ pilot projects.
2. **Developing Connections.** Our Digital Connectivity Sub-group therefore flag up the need to enable secure connections from the District to the Cyber-Hub and educational provision at Berkeley which recognise:
 - a. The changing patterns of work
 - b. Highly skilled jobs require secure connections
 - c. The need to export/import knowledge from its base in the Forest

- d. The need to link effectively to the Growth Hub Network – the Tier 2 facility at Vantage Point and the Tier 3 facilities/innovation hubs within Forest libraries.