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# St Albans District Business Summit

11 November 2020 Online via Microsoft Teams

## REPORT

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In partnership with:



## Summary of event

Around 70 local businesses attended the St Albans District Business Summit held online on 11 November 2020. The aim of the event, organised by St Albans City & District Council, was to bring together businesses of all types with organisations that can help inform and build resilience in response to the current challenging circumstances.

Among the information imparted to businesses was guidance on grants available, and updates on the business support organisations and networks that are available.

## Summary of presentation: Public Health Hertfordshire

*Jim McManus – Director of Public Health, Hertfordshire*

Jim McManus discussed the following:

### **PROGRESSION OF COVID-19 IN HERTFORDSHIRE**

- There was a spike in COVID–19 infections in the 18 - 24-year-old age group. This was followed by spikes in all age groups, showing the transmission of the disease across generations.
- The three most common exposure settings have been recorded as education, care and shopping.
- With regards to shops as an area of exposure: most shops are compliant with COVID -19 safety procedures, it is the behaviour of customers disregarding health measures (e.g. not wearing a facemask) that is causing incidence of transmission.

### **EFFECTS OF COVID-19 IN HERTFORDSHIRE**

- This is not a pandemic but a syndemic. We should not think of the current situation solely in terms of the COVID-19 disease, but rather a range of different impacts that will peak at different moments in time.
- There are multiple waves; the disease, the delayed treatment of other illnesses due to treating COVID-19, the economic impact, and the mental health impact.

### **EXIT WITH SUPPRESSION**

- We cannot abandon restrictions completely until a vaccine has reached the population. It will take until at least Spring 2021 for the recently announced vaccine to be rolled out to the general population.
- There are two options for leaving current national restrictions.

- (1) Exit with loose restrictions; there is a rush back to shops and restaurants at Christmas; a return to strict national restrictions in February following a spike in infections.
  - (2) Follow all measures now (social distancing, face masks etc.); have some socialising in Christmas; in January move to loosen restrictions with lower case numbers. The second option is the one that is best for the economy and people's health.
- Exiting suppression means focusing on the following priorities:
    - (1) Test, trace and isolate is working optimally.
    - (2) Organisations have the right intelligence.
    - (3) Combination of preventative measures are used to suppress the virus.
    - (4) 'Hearts and minds' and high morale of population.
    - (5) Enforcement where absolutely necessary.
  - Jim described a 'swiss cheese model' of preventative measures. Each preventative measure (layer) has imperfections (holes), but all the measures put together are successful.
  - A new supermarkets cell has been created to help support supermarkets to adhere to social distancing.
  - A new covid-safe accreditation for business is being created to help boost customer confidence.

## **Q & A**

- **Q:** What information is there regarding the impact of COVID-19 on Black, Asian and Minority ethnic (BAME) communities?
- **A:** BAME communities are more represented in those people getting COVID-19 because they tend to be more exposed to the virus. The national data on this need further detailed analysis. Research is currently being commissioned with BAME communities.
- **Q:** What information is there regarding "Long COVID"?
- **A:** Between 5 -15% of people who have the virus continue to have symptoms up to 3 months afterwards. These symptoms range from mild (e.g. slight fatigue) to very severe (e.g. heart muscle weakening, neurological damage). This particularly effects younger people. The worst-case scenario for Hertfordshire is around 100,000 residents with Long COVID.
- **Q:** What information is there regarding lateral flow tests?
- **A:** The week of 16 Nov – 22 Nov) we are expecting an initial batch of 10,000 tests. They will be prioritised to those who need to be transferred within care. The number of tests could potentially be increased to 120,000 which would allow the testing of care home visitors, school staff, and a variety of populations.

## Summary of presentations: Local Partners

### **CLLR MANDY McNEIL, PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR BUSINESS, CULTURE AND TOURISM**

*CLLR Mandy McNeil discussed support for businesses and other business-related issues important to the District.*

#### **SUPPORT FOR BUSINESS**

- Details and application form for the **Coronavirus National Lockdown Grant** are available on the St. Albans City & District Council (SADC) Website.  
<https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/business-and-licensing>
- The Additional Restrictions Grant discretionary grant scheme has been made available for Local Authorities to administer. £20 per head of population totalling £2,969,040. This funding is to cover until end of March 2022. Decisions are yet to be made on how this will be allocated.
- St Albans City and District Council (SADC) was allocated £130,464 through the UK Government's Reopening High Streets Safely Fund. This project is funded by European Regional Development Fund monies. Successful claims to the Fund will be reimbursed in arrears, providing that all the Government's conditions are met. The Fund will support a range of safety measures in high streets including new signage, street markings and temporary barriers. The Council also intends to use this money to advise local business and to develop local marketing campaigns that aim to inform and reassure the public.

#### **GUIDANCE ON CURRENT RESTRICTIONS**

- Essential Businesses can continue to operate. To see what counts as an essential business, please see:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-businesses-and-premises-to-close/closing-certain-businesses-and-venues-in-england>
- Hospitality venues are closed but can still provide takeaway and delivery services.
- Takeaway and non-alcoholic drinks can be ordered on premises by customers between 5am – 10pm.
- Pubs and restaurants will be able to sell takeaway alcohol during this month's lockdown, if it is pre-ordered by phone or online.
- Between 5am – 10pm, all orders must be by click and collect and delivery only.
- There are very strict criteria for a closed business that wishes to reopen as a shop selling 'essential items'.

#### **INVESTMENT IN OUR HIGH STREET**

- The acquisition of Lockey House in St Peters Street enables the Council to manage the area more effectively and shape the economic mix of uses for shoppers, businesses and residents.
- City Centre Opportunity Site (CCOS) South is in progress. The Council is creating a steering group to guide development in CCOS North Development.

**MARKETS**

- St Albans City and District Council has established regular market trader meetings.
- St Albans City and District Council is exploring ways to facilitate more opportunities for our traders and our independent retail and hospitality association for takeaway and click and deliver options for our markets/partner markets during this time.

**ALISON BERNEYE****UPDATE ON DESTINATION MANAGEMENT**

*Alison Berneye (Chair of St Albans Visitor Partnership and St Albans BID) discussed the future of the destination management plan.*

- The Destination management plan aims to increase footfall for the District over the next five years. The plan does this by making the District an area that residents are proud of and attractive to visitors.
- In April 2020 Planning Solutions Consulting was selected to write the destination management plan. It identified several stakeholder groups – local businesses, the District Council, the Civic Society, professional services, Town and Parish Councils and the local residents.
- Going forward there will be research starting with local businesses. A survey from St Albans BID will be issued to local businesses looking specifically at two sectors key to tourism – retail and hospitality.
- Further details contact the BID office: [info@stalbandsbid.com](mailto:info@stalbandsbid.com) or 01727 251310

**LAUREN DOVEY****BETTER BUSINESS FOR ALL**

*Lauren Dovey discussed the Support for Businesses from Local Authority Regulators.*

- The Better Business for All project aims to build relations between Local Authority Regulators (e.g. Environmental Health) and Businesses. Its partners include: Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), Hertfordshire Growth Hub, Federation of Small Businesses, Herts Chambers of Commerce, ACAS and all of Hertfordshire Local Authority Regulators.

**A list of topic areas was provided and the relevant regulatory teams to contact**

1. Conducting risk assessments and trading safely (COVID -19 secure) – **Environmental Health – [St. Albans District Council](#)**
2. Re-opening safely – **Environmental Health - [St. Albans District Council](#)**
3. Diversifying products or services – **Trading Standards and Licensing – [Hertfordshire County Council](#)**
4. Trading online, via delivery or click and collect – **Trading Standards**
5. Understanding consumer law regarding cancellations and returns – **Trading Standards**
6. Understanding COVID-19 regulations – closures, face coverings, track & trace etc – **Trading Standards and Environmental Health**
7. Fire Safety – **Fire Protection team – [Hertfordshire County Council](#)**

**Lauren gave the following advice on what action businesses should be taking**

1. Explore/use the BBfA COVID-19 toolkit for businesses hosted on the [Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership website](#) contains guides, checklists and templates for Hertfordshire businesses to use for re-opening, diversifying and trading safely: <https://www.hertfordshirelep.com/Better-Regulation>
2. Use the Trading Safely Toolkit
3. Follow the Twitter account for regulatory updates
4. Seek advice from the Local Authority regulatory teams
5. Contact your local authority if you think you're not compliant. They want to help you.
6. Include compliance in your contingency plans
7. Sign-up to your council newsletters & social media accounts for updates
8. Follow [GOV.UK](#)

## **LIZA ARMSTRONG HERTFORDSHIRE GROWTH HUB**

*Liza Armstrong discussed a range of projects that Hertfordshire Growth Hub is running to support Businesses.*

- Hertfordshire Growth Hub is led and delivered on behalf of Herts Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and is free of charge.

### **SUPPORT AVAILABLE**

- [The Business Support Scheme](#) - This is a network of 50 volunteers who support, and mentor businesses impacted by COVID -19. The support offers 12 hours of 1:1 mentoring.
- [Peer Networks](#) - This peer networking programme is for businesses who want to meet with peers in groups of 8 -11. Particularly useful for small businesses who do not have a board.
- [Herts Growth Hub COVID – 19 Resource Page](#) - Latest updates from the Government in terms of different support packages.

### **FUTURE PROJECTS**

- A wellbeing and resilience programme is being created in partnership with Public Health, Hertfordshire County Council. There is also funding from Hertfordshire LEP. This project is about addressing the strain of COVID– 19 on employees well-being. This programme will pull together advice and signposting to local support organisations.
- The Herts Growth Hub have been working with Hertfordshire County Council and University College London to develop a wellbeing manual and toolkit. This will be rolled out very soon. Accompanying the manual will be workshops.

### **OTHER INFORMATION**

- If you are a business support organisation, you can promote information through the Herts Growth Hub website. You can register on the website and post advice and support. <https://hertsgrowthhub.com/partner-info>

## **PHIL CORRIGAN ST ALBANS DISTRICT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

*Phil Corrigan provided an update from St Albans District Chamber of Commerce*

- St Albans and District Chamber of Commerce was formed in 1907 to 'further the interest of businesses in the area ensuring positive growth and



development'. Over one hundred and twenty years later they are still committed to these objectives, providing a forum for business networking in St Albans and aiming to be a voice for our members.

- Even with Government support the Chamber understands that businesses are in a precarious position.
- There has been an increase in the number of start-ups in the District due to the pandemic. This is an area that the Chamber can help and support.
- <http://www.stalbans-chamber.co.uk/>

## **PAM CHARMAN    FEDERATION OF SMALL BUSINESSES (FSB)**

*Pam Charman described the role the FSB in supporting businesses.*

### **ROLE OF THE FSB**

- The FSB is a not for profit organisation that offers members a wider range of business services including – advice, financial expertise, and a powerful voice in government.
- The FSB played an active role by successfully lobbying the Government for a range of business support including cash grants, the job retention scheme, and financial backing for the self-employed.
- Help and advice for businesses is changing daily. The FSB follows updates closely and relays information to members.
- The FSB listens closely to its members and provides a voice for them in Whitehall. They have a policy office based in Westminster that is regularly in conversation with Government and Opposing Parties.
- There will be continued lobbying on Government to support Businesses in adjusting to the EU transition. For support and guidance business can look at their [new transition hub](#).

### **SUPPORT AVAILABLE**

- The FSB is acting as a gateway to the Kickstart scheme. Any small business that wishes to [apply to kickstart](#) can do so through the FSB.
- There are two Hertfordshire networks that are accessible online.
  - (1) [Hertfordshire Business Networking Events](#).
  - (2) [Hertfordshire Women in Business Group](#) .
- There are upskilling and support events for Local Authorities, businesses and MPs. [Please see the link for a list of events](#).



## **PHIL CORRIGAN AND CATHERINE MORRIS    LOCAL SHOPPING CENTRE UPDATES**

*Phil Corrigan and Catherine Morris struck an optimistic note in their update on their shopping centres at The Maltings and Christopher Place.*

- The bounce back of shopping centres during the Summer should be a cause for optimism. Within 2 - 3 weeks of reopening footfall was growing steadily, and businesses were trading at 70% of compared to last year. Business in Hertfordshire is resilient, and a similar recovery should be possible going forward.
- The public are sensible and compliant with social distancing measures in the Shopping Centres.
- The Shopping Centres are going to look attractive for Christmas. Decorations are going up the mid November.
- There have been some independents which have been forced to close. This highlights the need to work together so that confidence can be given to customers to return when restrictions are relaxed.

## **Q & A**

Questions were on the following

**Q:** Can the speakers comment on more support needed for the travel industry?

**A:** Cllr McNeil noted her portfolio includes tourism and that the MP for St Albans has been lobbying the Government on this.

**Q:** What kind of support is there for freelancers and small businesses?

**A:** Cllr McNeil mentioned the new discretionary grant scheme but SADC waiting on the guidance and that should lobby via MP and Federation of Small Businesses for dedicated funding

**Q:** How can businesses support the lobbying?

**A:** Provide data and statistics to your local MP and the FSB etc. on how businesses have suffered to demonstrate the need for support.

## **FEEDBACK**

*“The speakers were all excellent, well prepared with useful presentations and graphics. I also like the eagerness at those jumping in to help and answer questions which often where challenging”*

An online survey was sent round after the event. The response was positive with 84% of responders rating the event as either 'Extremely Useful' or 'Very useful'. Praise was given to the speakers of the event and appreciation for the opportunity to connect with the business community.



## Contact details

For more information or to find out about any future business-related events, contact [Economicdevelopment@stalbens.gov.uk](mailto:Economicdevelopment@stalbens.gov.uk)