
St Albans City & District Council Business Summit 2023

1 February 2023

Council Chamber, District Council Offices

REPORT

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Acknowledgements

St Albans City and District Council wish to thank all partners and attendees of the Business Summit 2023 for their attendance and participation at this event.

Summary of Event

St Albans District Business Summit brought together around 60 local businesses owners and managers plus business support organisations. Discussions focused on how the local economy can be supported especially in terms of the circular economy (employ local, live local, spend local).

The audience heard from Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce who gave an update on the Local Skills Improvement Plan, plus lead councillors and senior officers from the Council.

Breakout sessions focused on business culture, skills and employment, and Corporate Social Responsibility.

Councillor Chris White, Leader of St Albans City & District Council, chaired the summit.

1. Welcome and Introduction

By Councillor Chris White, Leader, St Albans City and District Council.

Cllr White welcomed and introduced the Business Summit 2023.

2. Economic Development

Presentation: The Council's Economic Development Work

By Dale Philipson, Strategic Director and Deputy Chief Executive, St Albans City and District Council.

Dale Phillipson gave an update to the Business Summit on Challenges and Opportunities facing the Local Economy:

CURRENT CHALLENGES

- Challenges the Council are facing are shared with many businesses. Post Covid-19, high interest rates, costs of borrowing and increasing cost of utilities in an unpredictable economic climate.
- The economy is still adapting from Covid-19. Changes to spending habits with more people working from home and how services are run have been impacted. Changes to supply chains, cost of materials and the exit of the European Union.
- Workforce supply issues including the fact that physical place is no longer a key factor in where people live and work. People therefore are not necessarily living and working in the same place.

OUR DISTRICT

- Low unemployment and local property values are relatively stable. The District has the highest number of business enterprises compared to other Districts/Boroughs in Hertfordshire.
- 11% of the local population are self-employed, higher than the national average (9%). The Creative sector is growing which is showing opportunities in the District.
- The developing Local Plan is being prepared – the Regulation 18 public consultation is due in July 2023.

LABOUR SUPPLY

- St Albans District have a slow population growth overall. There is 20 – 39-year-old group and is the only District that has seen this.
- Oaklands College key to retain young people working and living in the area.
- Local circular economy – live locally, work locally and spend locally – we want to make business transactions easier with Council.

Please contact Dale Phillipson dale.phillipson@stalbans.gov.uk to hear observations of working with Council.

Presentation:



Dale Phillipson
Presentation.pdf

3. Local Skills Improvement Plan

Presentation: Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce update

By Mary Sykes, Corporate Relations, Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce

Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce gave an update on the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) 2022-2025 for the County:

- Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce is taking the lead on a Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) 2022 – 2025 to encourage businesses to become involved in identifying the areas where talent is needed now and in the future.
- The LSIP will set out the skills employers are looking for and the changes required to help ensure post-16 technical education addresses these requirements.
- It will set out priorities, bringing together employers and providers to understand local skills needs and provision.

Presentation:



Herts Chamber of
Commerce Presentati

4. Support Available to Local Businesses

Presentation: Hertfordshire Growth Hub

By Liza Armstrong - Head of Service, Hertfordshire Growth Hub

Due to unforeseen circumstances, the representative from the Hertfordshire Growth Hub could not attend.

- Hertfordshire Growth Hub is led by and delivered on behalf of Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership.
- Hertfordshire Growth Hub: support is free to access to all businesses in Hertfordshire.

- The HGH website brings together the latest info on boosting business resilience, support available from gov through the rising cost of living <https://www.hertsgrowthhub.com/>
- Herts Growth Hub have a series of welling in the workplace webinars. To book your free place visit <http://www.hertsgrowthhub.com/events/>
- 'All the help event' www.hertsgrowthhub.com/events/03-2023/all-the-help-you-can-get/

Presentation:

Hertfordshire Growth
Hub.pdf

5. Empowering Business and Culture in the District

Presentation: Cllr Danny Clare

By: Cllr Danny Clare.

Cllr Danny Clare – Lead Councillor for Business, St Albans City & District Council on Empowering Business and Culture in the District:

BUSINESS TODAY

- Hard to be successful in this rate of enormous change.
- Census data showed that St Albans District has the high percentage of people working from home, managers professionals-opportunity for the local economy. High number of CEOs living in the District – how we engage and connect locally.
- Glocalization – thinking global, acting local – number of corporates in St Albans.
- Future of City – what does it look like – our opportunities in developing business community great workforce, developing business community.
- A lot of initiatives where business can get involved and connect and collaborate locally.

COMMUNITY & COLLABORATION

- Being part of community and to contribute is a key focus – thinking globally and acting locally.
- Sponsorship is another way to support the District and collaborate with the business community. Sponsorship - connect with business community – providing platform for good value for money – potential sponsorship opportunities with the Council.

- Looking at how to use local assets for conferences such as the Museum and Gallery and sport for example Saracens, St Albans City Football Club. This would help promote local business and culture. The market is a good example of how we can promote local business and for the benefit of the wider business community.
- Collaboration with Oaklands College.

Presentation:

Cllr Clare
Presentation.pdf

6. Q&A

Cllr White, Cllr Clare, Dale Phillipson, and Mary Sykes were the panel for the Q&A:

Q1. In regard to collaboration with sports teams that are situated in the District, could other teams get involved in the work in the District, other than Saracens?

Answer: Cllr Clare agreed. Saracens are a big presence in the District. However, Watford FC are very Watford based. It would be hard to change the community's views on who they support. We hope we can work more with other sports teams in the future.

Q2. Engagement with the community is vitally important and the Council is St Albans centric. Can work be done to encourage the wider local communities? Also, the Mayors Pride Awards are not going ahead this year, which is concerning.

Answer: Cllr White noted that due to the budget crisis, with a lack of Government funds, the Council cannot afford to fund the Mayors Pride Awards this year. The event could go ahead if it is funded privately.

Cllr Clare noted that the Council wants to make it easier for local business to hold and sponsor events.

[St Albans City & District Council Regeneration and Business Committee Report](#)

Q3. In 2019 the Climate Emergency was declared with a new net zero target. There has been no mention of this tonight, including from a business perspective.

Answer: Cllr White shared that this will be the first point on the new Council Plan, and in the new draft Local Plan.

Cllr Clare agreed that there was more we could have put in today on the matter. We will take note for future events, but this is still a key focus of the Council.

Q4. A manufacturing business in Sandridge, as new larger premises were hard to find, has had to move to Welwyn. Worried due to the rising costs and the hinderances to growth.

Answer: Cllr White shared that he is also concerned about the situation. It is important to support and protect industrial sites and not just offices. The changes to the business landscape have a social and environmental impact.

Q5. Business rates are changing, putting pressure on us. What can be done to help?

Answer: Cllr White suggested that they speak to their MP.

Cllr Clare noted that 'Save St Albans Pubs' is a good group to talk to on this matter also.

Q6. I run a small group of businesses. Rent is now less than business rates and energy. This was never the case in the past. Can the Council do more?

Answer: Cllr White shared that the Council are in a similar place to many businesses currently. The key is to contact MPs and go through Government.

7. Breakout Sessions and Feedback

As part of the Business Summit the Council, with Partners organised four breakout groups to discuss. When the groups reconvened, the breakout groups each were shared two key points from their discussions:

- **Business Identity – what is St Albans District known for?** – Facilitator, Cllr Danny Clare, Lead Councillor for Business, St Albans City & District Council
 1. Become a future working habits hub, encourage home workers to connect with St Albans business.
 2. A centre of local collaboration in supplies, venues and services.
- **Changing business culture, changing and future habits** – Facilitator Pat Strods – President of St Albans District Chamber of Commerce
 1. Change tends to be circular and whilst there are so many changes going on at the moment businesses adapt to combat these challenges.
 2. Employees no longer expect to have one career through their working lives – they may change them as many as 5 times during that time and as a result employers need to recognise that and set strategies accordingly. Staff will not stay with them for a long time – a job for life or a career for life is a thing of the past.

- **Role of businesses in skills & employment** – Facilitator Claire Dolan
Deputy Principal Strategy, Partnership and Business Development
Oaklands College
 1. Progression steps within organisations need to be further clarified, especially for young people starting out. Discussion on how businesses can support the development of that knowledge by coming in to do industry insight sessions into their world, the opportunities that exist and the different roles in the organisation. Discussion also talked about what brand awareness means that when recruiting, students often have their company in mind to apply.
 2. The access that employers and businesses can have to Government funding to upskill staff. Colleges hold pots on Government money which can be accessed for Continuing Professional Development (CPD).
- **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)** – Facilitator Robert Varney
Assistant Manager – Volunteer Centre & Enterprise Development,
Communities 1st
 1. Sometimes businesses wrongly assume that an employer supported volunteering day is what a charity will need. It may be more of a drain on resources than a help, so take the time to research what the charity does and be prepared to be flexible around the support you offer.
 2. Try and engage over a period of time, rather than a one-off activity (i.e., 4 visits in a calendar year). Focus on skill-share, as this is often lacking in small community groups.

8. Summary and Close

By: Councillor Chris White, Leader, St Albans City and District Council.

Cllr Chris White thanked all speakers and attendees for their participation and closed the Business Summit.

The Business Summit 2023 Survey was sent to all participating businesses.

Key business concerns from the survey were:

- Rising energy costs and inflation.
- General economic uncertainty.

For more information or to find out about any future business-related events, please contact: EconomicDevelopment@stalbens.gov.uk