

KENT INVICTA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Canterbury District Economic Development Group (CDEDG)

Thursday 17th January 2013
Canterbury Innovation Centre

MINUTES

Present:

Carole Barron (CB)	University of Kent - Chair
Mark Hill (MH)	Canterbury College
Des McLeish (DM)	Jacksons Fencing
Pat Mills (PM)	Clague, Urban designers & historic building consultants
Heather Nowak (HN)	Nova IT Solutions
Roland Nowak (RN)	Nova IT Solutions
Malcombe Pollett (MP)	Pollett Marketing
Natalia Pizzo (NP)	University of Kent - Secretary
Paul Wood (PW)	Reeves Neylan Chartered Accountants & Business Advisers

1) Welcome and apologies

CB welcomed HN & RN to their first CDEDG meeting – a forum to be the voice of your sector and a business network to bring topics for discussion & debate. Present members briefly introduced themselves. CB explained that this group has one representative per company in various fields and business sectors in the region.

Apologies were received:

Paul Gardiner (PG)	BFS Consulting Engineers
Andy Harris (AH)	A1 Webstats
Peter Hawkes (PH)	Furley Page Solicitors
Dawn Hudd (DH)	Canterbury City Council
Jo James (JJ)	Kent Invicta Chamber
Donna Pearson (DP)	Foxwood Maclean Estate Agents
Michael Stannard (MS)	Cardy Construction Ltd
Martin Tanner (MT)	ADM Computing Ltd
Sezen Zeki (SZ)	Kent Invicta Chamber

2) Minutes of previous meeting

- Previous minutes were agreed and actioned. Action re inviting Susan Priest to a CDEDG meeting, it was agreed that this would be postponed until we have a joint meeting of all the Economic Development groups in the region.

3) Employer Ownership of Skills Pilot - MH

- Department for Business, Innovation & Skills want to put skills training into hands of employers rather than external providers, and have re-launched this initiative whereby SMEs can bid for up to £250K towards training. Currently 125 pilots are proceeding from the initial launch in October 2012, and there is now a second round which is open for bids until 11th February [NB from UKCES website: the deadline for bidders to register their interest has been extended to Monday 11 March]. Up to £1 million is available for larger companies or consortia to allow employers to create the training they need rather than 'off the shelf' solutions, especially as the qualifications provided by external suppliers are often of little or no importance to the employer.
- Canterbury College has approached retailers and other businesses who have a link/shared interest to see if they would like to apply as the business must be the one to submit the bid rather than the training facility.
- Bob Jones of Canterbury City Partnership is keen to develop the city as a centre of excellence for customer service, and could lead a consortium with help from Canterbury

College to put the bid together. Meetings will follow with Alison King [Business Development Manager at Canterbury College] and Jo James [Chief Executive of Kent Invicta Chamber] as funding in Kent SMEs could be transformative for the district.

- PM commented that the scale is difficult, eg Clague train 3 or 4 people per year through Canterbury College, would have to be part of a consortium to bid for large amounts as an SME, which is why the big retailers often offer more training & apprenticeships – they have the time & resource to bid. A consortium led by Canterbury City Partnership is easier to take forward as it already exists as an entity. CB commented customer service project is a good idea for Canterbury, there are elements to improve, MH added that unless High Street shops create a good environment, they are less likely to survive as a viable alternative to internet shopping.
- A series of short qualifications comprise 'World Host' and as Canterbury College is a National Skills Academy in Retail, they could provide this course, making Canterbury a World Host site as well as a World Heritage site, positive for tourism and business.
- MH concluded that the group could take this forward to contacts saying that Canterbury College is there to help steer ideas and work together create bids for them to carry forward, DM commented that this could be applicable to a wide array of contacts as every business has a customer service element, not just retail.

4) Chamber Membership Update

- SZ and JJ had to cancel attendance at the last minute, but a written report was circulated and commented by CB:
- CB highlighted that Chamber is trying to extend the 2 seas trade project (para 2 of document)
- Membership is always a challenge, businesses attempting to reduce costs and if they do not perceive the added value of the Chamber, may see it as a cost-saving cut. Hoping for more and better events with a new co-ordinator now in post, should help to find out and deliver what businesses want, eg The Sixth Annual Herne Bay Projects and Business Showcase on 6 March 2013, sponsored by East Kent College and Vattenfall.
- Autumn statement from government commits to devolving more money and power to the LEPs.
- Chamber and KEiBA awards open, if submit to Chamber awards, automatic submission to KEiBA, and if successful go through to National BCC competition.

Action 1: NP to circulate Chamber Membership update from SZ & JJ, together with BCC response to Lord Heseltine Review

5) Group Member Updates/ Any other business

- CB suggested that Reeves could bring as an item information on the 'patent box' which lots of businesses may be interested in [from Reeves website: From 1 April 2013, the government will roll out the so-called 'patent box'. The arrangement allows for the rate of corporation tax to be cut to 10 per cent for income which stems from patents in the UK. This is another incentive that 'spin-out' companies could be in a position to exploit.]
- PW mentioned recent news on import duties and indirect taxation schemes, suggested a Chamber member could come in and talk to the group.
- CB updated from CIC Steering committee - a lot of tenants left CIC before Christmas, moving on because of growth, and new tenants coming in. HN & RN gave their experience of starting up at CIC and outgrowing the services, discussed difficulty of finding good office space in the city. Locate in Kent gave an update about Discovery Park, attractive rental.
- CB to meet with the BIS in London to get feedback on last unsuccessful RGF bid in order to apply again as it re-launches, £5 million requested for 2015 to build a new facility for all businesses, people from colleges and HEs in Kent, armed forces etc.
- DM – Gave update on event attended in London on Future role of Enterprise Zones. Discovery Park figures: 14 companies, 1000 employees, of which 600 are Pfizer. Aim to employ 3000 and demolish some buildings due to very high empty building business rates. (CB The LEP had suggest some universities may want to become science parks in order to become an enterprise zone, but this would conflict with the Discovery Park.)
- HN & RN – Update from Nova IT is that existing businesses seem to be growing and hiring, others interested in development but have cashflow issues. January 2013 has been busier than January 2012, particularly sectors of accounting and construction, building new buildings and buying equipment.

- MH – City Council are signing Armed Forces Covenant on 28th January, service personnel in barracks to find out where they are going in May, some will want to stay in Canterbury, have been here for 10 years so would like to find employment here. Next week functional skills programme starting with topics such as English, maths, employability, to prepare necessary skills for leaving the army. This could have an impact on businesses as we see lots of employable ex-army personnel looking for work in the district.
- PM – Prison built in 1808 is closing, with subsequent job loss. Christ Church (which has a tunnel linked to it) or the Kings School may want to buy the building. PM suggested Chamber could organise a workshop on how to apply for RGF, what you can invest in, what the benefits are and what sort of proposals are being accepted. CB commented that the focus is job creation by the next election, either projects to create employment or protect existing. CB clarified that Expansion East Kent is an interestfree or low rate loan, whereas RGF is a national grant, Chamber already running workshops for people who intend to bid. PM commented a Station Road West development update from Dawn Hudd would be interesting, and agreed more office space would be beneficial. New businesses looking for accommodation in the city are surprised by difficulty of finding premises, need somewhere similar to CIC, but where you can pick and choose services rather than adopt a wholesale model. CCC could reduce land value to allow good quality office space to be built, thus attracting businesses, many of whom are locating to Kent from overseas. Currently limited offering such as Lakesview – industrial, manufacturing, poorly serviced by public transport and have to traverse Canterbury to access.
- CB updated the group that it had been announced at the end of the trial on Westgate closure, the traffic zone will go back to how it was previously allowing traffic to pass through the Westgate Towers.
- PM updated on Planning Application CA//12/02140, Land at Rhodaus Town on Peugeot site – would mean loss of employment there but application is for 400 student bedrooms so people would be employed to run it. This would also release some 'dead land' owned by Peugeot behind Canterbury Christ Church at St Augustines House, interesting to see what planning permission applications will be received, could have light pollution issues as with other Canterbury Christ Church buildings. Hotel in construction on Blockbuster site – Premier Inn style.
- PW – commented it's interesting that service industries are doing ok, business closures such as Jessops etc, are not having a massive impact on local economy.
- Pensions was suggested as a possible topic for next CDEDG Meeting.
- CB asked the group to bring agenda items for future meetings, find topics of interest within networks and suggest via Natalia.

Action 2: Group to send topic suggestions to NP ahead of next meeting

6) Next Meeting

Thursday 21st March at 5.00 pm – Canterbury Innovation Centre

Abbreviations:

KCC	Kent County Council
CCC	Canterbury City Council
CIC	Canterbury Innovation Centre
UoK	University of Kent
C4B	Canterbury for Business
RGF	Regional Growth Fund
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership