

## KENT INVICTA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

### Canterbury District Economic Development Group (CDEDG)

Wednesday, 21<sup>st</sup> November 2012  
Canterbury Innovation Centre

#### MINUTES

##### Present:

Carole Barron (CB)	University of Kent - Chair
Paul Gardiner (PG)	BFS Consulting Engineers
Andy Harris (AH)	A1 Webstats
Peter Hawkes (PH)	Furley Page Solicitors
Dawn Hudd (DH)	Canterbury City Council
Des McLeish (DM)	Jacksons Fencing
Pat Mills (PM)	Clague, Urban designers & historic building consultants
Donna Pearson (DP)	Foxwood Maclean Estate Agents
Malcombe Pollett (MP)	Pollett Marketing
Natalia Pizzo (NP)	University of Kent - Secretary

##### 1) Welcome and apologies

CB welcomed AH, DM & DP 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 been expanded to 'Canterbury District Economic Development Group' with a view to include Whitstable & Herne Bay.

##### Apologies were received:

Mark Hill (MH)	Canterbury College
Jo James (JJ)	Kent Invicta Chamber
Michael Stannard (MS)	Cardy Construction Ltd
Martin Tanner (MT)	ADM Computing Ltd
Paul Wood (PW)	Reeves Neylan Chartered Accountants & Business Advisers
Sezen Zeki (SZ)	Kent Invicta Chamber

##### 2) Minutes of previous meeting

- Previous formal meeting took place in July due to September meeting being held in conjunction with Chamber after-hours club at Abbots Barton Hotel. All minutes actioned.

##### 3) Update on new Board of Director membership - CB

- Simon Webster - Facts & Figures Financial Planners Ltd, Managing Director. (Also appointed Chair of Finance & Audit Committee).
- Clare Flanders - Regional Local Business Manager of HSBC Bank plc; Canterbury
- Suzanne Wood - Commercial Director of Medway Fibreglass Limited, also chair of Thames Gateway Economic Development Group.
- CB noted when all EDG groups established it would be good to gather all groups for one joint meeting – Maidstone, Ashford, Canterbury District & Thames Gateway.

##### 4) Chamber Membership Update – SZ

- SZ had to cancel attendance at last minute, written membership update will be circulated to CDEDG members. However numbers are rising, recruitment has been effective.

##### **Action 1: NP to circulate Chamber Membership update from SZ**

##### 5) Lord Heseltine Report - discussion

- CB met Lord Heseltine (LH) in Medway together with Jo James, confrontational conversation as 97 recommendations given but no funding, policy changes or statute to support them. It was noted that the government has not endorsed the recommendations made by in report.
- Jo James had a follow up meeting with LH. CB outlined the response to LH's report made by the British Chamber of Commerce. The group noted:

- Small businesses are sometimes confused about who does what and the difference between town chambers and accredited chambers.
- Local Enterprise Partnerships were discussed as vehicles for local development set up to support the business community that have replaced SEEDA, but without funds and therefore limited scope. Many LEPs are still writing their strategies.
- SELEP was noted as one of the most proactive with government funds to allocate, Chaired by John Spence and Susan Priest as Director who is re-writing the Business Plan. Funds being allocated across Kent are not to small companies, however it's thought that smaller local businesses can pick it up through the supply chain.
- CB suggested we could debate LEP at CDEDG, inviting Susan Priest to a future meeting.

**Action 2: CB/NP to invite Susan Priest to a future CDEDG meeting and to circulate BCC response to LH's report.**

- Innovation Vouchers (£5K) can be put through chambers/ LEPs. PM noted it can be very complicated to apply for funding, which is then so prescriptive it can be counter-productive (eg an investment grant to boost employment). It was also noted that it's even more difficult to access for smaller businesses as they have to go into a consortium to apply for funding.
- Innovation Voucher should be streamlined for smaller businesses, £5K could be sufficient to purchase equipment/ employ additional staff which could make all the difference.

**Action 3: NP to circulate link to National Innovation Voucher scheme.**

- It was noted that the current recession has had a bigger economic impact than the Great Depression of the 30s, however employment in Kent has held up quite well. Canterbury is unusual because of its reliance on public & education sectors but compared with other regions, it's fairing well.
- DH mentioned she has statistics on the mix of businesses and private sector employment which the group may be interested in.

**Action 4: DH to send statistics on business/private sector mix to NP to circulate to group.**

## **6) Update on Westgate Towers & St Dunstons Consultation - DH**

- As part of an extensive consultation, C4B did a bespoke electronic business survey to find out what local businesses felt about the closure of Westgate Towers, whereas the council has consulted the general public. It was carried out in conjunction with the Chamber, with a high response rate, however it was sent after the council's main survey so some may not have responded due to having already given their opinion as a resident rather than a business.
- DH presented the findings of the survey with comments, also noted findings have not yet been released so reminded the group that the data is confidential.

### **Comments & Conclusions**

- The trial was intended for 1 year & the council will continue it for the full year (until March 2013) to gather data on traffic, air quality, see effects in all seasons. However, businesses and residents have to bear in mind that the conditions of the trial do not equal the permanent solution – traffic control measures would change, the environment between the train station and centre would be greatly improved, station will be enhanced.
- PM commented that it's difficult for people to visualise now but the atmosphere that would be created if the scheme were made permanent would be like that of the Kings Mile, which is very popular.
- PH commented given enough time, people will find alternative routes & traffic flow will improve. DH commented traffic measures (eg lights on Military Road, pedestrian crossing by Sainsbury's which now has increased footfall) could be remedied to aid traffic flow.
- DH also noted that despite people's perception that congestion stops people coming into the city, figures show car-parking income is up, so people are not actually deterred from driving into the city.
- CB noted that a Park & Ride in Harbledown would improve the situation, idea is popular but location is an orchard so there is reluctance to move forward.
- C4B will respond to the council on behalf of businesses with these findings, and Richard Moore will be invited to present at the end of the period to CDEDG.

### Parking & Building development Discussion

- The group enquired as to why the council has not developed the site at Station West – office space and car parking space are required at this end of town. DH responded land is co-owned with Network Rail & Southeastern so difficult to come to decisions. Other factors include people not willing to develop at risk in the current economy, possible conservation area, ugly construction (eg mezzanine floor construction for parking) not in-keeping with architecture of the area.
- PM commented the brief has not yet been released, DH noted that to proceed, a pre-let tenant would be required but that it's a 'check and egg' situation where a decent proposal is required to entice a tenant and a tenant is required to create a feasible proposal.
- It was noted that smaller office space is being used more than larger – Medway Innovation Centre & Canterbury Innovation centre almost full.
- KCC have 3 million capital funding to refurbish existing buildings for incubation units for small media/IT companies, negotiations have started for Bekesbourne Lane site. Slatters site also has a plan for a 65 bed hotel (3/4 star) with a residential until and café/pub. Knock on effect that Tannery site has applied for change of use, no longer planning hotel build.

### **7) Group Member Updates; Any Other Business**

- PM – Planning applications: UoK Templeman library, 700 bed student accommodation; 3 2000sq ft light industrial units in Chartham, Neville House in Northgate (old job centre) to be converted into flats; 60 bed care home in Sturry (will provide employment); extra units at Lakesview business park; Slatters site not yet officially released but definitely something to support when it does for employment opportunities; retirement property on Roper Road (mix of leasehold & freehold).
- PH – positive period, property team is busy, sites that were stuck for some time are finally being developed, underlying economy challenging but our district doing well.
- DM – quietly positive atmosphere in construction, emphasis on ecological and sustainable alternatives which may be interesting for the group, eg solar farm. CB commented photovoltaic system has been considered for University land.

### ***Action 5: DM to gauge opinion from his commercial contacts, bring updates on issues of sustainability for CDEDG group to discuss.***

- DP – people coming into Canterbury for jobs, more activity in last month than previous 3 months, people trying to get into property by Christmas. Lettings going fast, eg Lynden Grove development, 1 bed apartments going as soon as they're renovated. High end relocations have slowed down, but people still moving into the area, overall sales & rentals quite static, realistically priced properties are selling.
- AH – can provide an 'online point of view' as deals nationally via web rather than locally, so has a big database of what's happening – people are searching for goods and services and buying despite economy, internet platform gives smaller companies a chance of competing if they market themselves well, must promote in order to grow. Issues with an unregulated industry, many sharks in web search optimisation so businesses may attempt to raise their profile, lose money & not try again, expensive to have effective online presence.
- PG – no updates, involved in property surveys so this time of year is quiet as nobody looking to move at Christmas.
- MP – business has settled down into the recession, those still trading have adapted and survived, but are worried and therefore not spending, guarding their savings as individuals might. Growing trend in payday loans may also apply to small businesses.
- CB – UoK is investing, some schools still seeing huge interest in certain subject areas therefore plan for a new academic building to house 3 schools. Overseas recruitment drive going well, direct marketing bringing in many Chinese students, economic development study showed the UoK contributes 6 million pounds to local economy. Still trying to apply for funding for a new incubation building to accommodate more start-ups & small businesses on campus as regional growth funding was not granted. However, as infrastructure will now go in for the student accommodation, reduced funding is required for building cost only.
- CB finished by saying we are still looking for people in sectors which aren't represented to join CDEDG, PM mentioned he has some contacts who are interested.

### ***Action 6: PM to give CB contact details of interested possible members, CB to contact.***

**Date of next meeting:** Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> January 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

	<b>ACTION LOG</b>	<b>Action by whom</b>	<b>Action by when</b>
<b>A1:</b>	NP to circulate Chamber Membership update from SZ	NP	03/12/12
<b>A2:</b>	CB/NP to invite Susan Priest to a future CDEDG meeting and circulate BCC LH response.	NP/CB	15/03/13
<b>A3:</b>	NP to circulate link to National Innovation Voucher scheme	NP	28/11/12
<b>A4:</b>	DH to send statistics on business/private sector mix to NP to circulate to group.	DH & NP	05/12/12
<b>A5:</b>	DM to gauge opinion from his commercial contacts, bring updates on issues of sustainability for CDEDG group to discuss.	DM	17/01/13
<b>A6:</b>	PM to give CB contact details of interested possible members, CB to contact.	PM, CB	17/01/13