

**KENT INVICTA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**  
**MINUTES OF ASHFORD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GROUP**

**HELD AT ASHFORD BUSINESS POINT**

**ON**  
**THURSDAY 21<sup>st</sup> June 2012**

**Present:** Richard Lavender (Chairman)  
Andrew Osborne (AO) Christopher Calcutt (CC)  
Viv Kenny (VK) Paul Rickards (PR)  
David Maddison (DM)

**Apologies:** Richard Stafford (RS) Graham Galpin (GG)  
Hugh Summerfield (HS) Linda Marsh  
Terry Botfield

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**1 Minutes of the last meeting**

Minutes of the meeting held on the 17<sup>th</sup> May 2012 were agreed and passed, with the following amendment para 6.3 should read VK also said that they were **working** on a data base for Town Centre Companies.

**2 Actions from Minutes and Matters Arising.**  
Nil

**3 Action List Review**

Action No 5 AO is complete, there are no outstanding actions.

**4. Chairman's Report**

- All EDG Chair's would be visiting their opposite groups to give an update on local issues effecting County wide business issues.
- Ashford recruiting is improving with fewer losses, JJ said it was a couple of good months on the complete recruiting front.
- RL represented the Chamber at a forum of approximately 10 businesses called by Lord Heseltine at Greenwich University. Topics brought up by the Chamber included:-
  - Banks still not lending to businesses
  - Issues on procurement, large contracts could be split to smaller tranches so that smaller companies had an opportunity to bid.
  - HSE issues still presenting a problem to small businesses.
  - Lord Heseltine said that possibly the wrong people were attending the meeting as those present were successful and could afford the time, what about those who are struggling. RL said to him that this was why the Chamber of Commerce was here to represent all businesses, large, small, successful and struggling. Lord Heseltine also suggested that the Chambers of Commerce should join with the CBI to give a larger representation of businesses and possible be more effective for passing down Government policy. This does not fit well with BCC policy of business independence. RL informed him that the Chambers represented more than just members and has a wide influence within the business world.
- AO said that the number attending was a very manageable number and was pleased to see the topics of finance and procurement raised.
- On the subject of smaller businesses not being able to attend such meetings the following discussion was pursued:-
  - VK, suggested that larger businesses could be asked for a subsidised bursary to help smaller businesses, regarding membership fees.
  - VK, how can we raise money to allow smaller struggling businesses to attend such meetings
  - CC, to get the views of a larger number of businesses had we considered Associate Membership. If we made all Kent Businesses Associate Members we would certainly be representing their sort of numbers that Lord Heseltine was mentioning.
  - VK, can and how do we seek business views from members who cannot afford to join the Chamber of Commerce.

- CC, at present we do not get the views of struggling businesses who cannot afford to be members.
- AO, suggested that struggling companies should be able to call ABC and the Chamber enterprise centre to ask for advice and this could lead to the Chamber/ABC start-up business as being conducted in International House.
- AO Jobs & Economy Survey carried out by ABC could be made available to KICC for large representation needs.
- RL mentioned that some Companies were struggling paying the high rates in Ashford, what help can be offered to them?
- AO reminded us that Rates are a direct reflection of the Rents and if Businesses could get their rates rents reduced then thje rates should reduce as well, however there are small business rate relief schemes that are available. However if a business is needs to be in the centre of town to provide that business then the rents and associated rates are going to be higher than in an urban area.
- AO said that there is a rate re-evaluation being carried out to businesses affected by large scale development works in Ashford. He also mentioned the works in the lower high street being carried out by KCC, saying that the trip hazards had to be removed and it was possibly better to have the works completed in one hit as opposed to phased working.
- VK, said the work was now more than half completed and [possibly the Market Traders were more than happy with their temporary position in the Upper High Street.

## **5. Group Reports**

### **5.1 Planning (CC)**

CC said that Planning Applications had slowed down considerably. AO said that the Evegate development had been approved. AO also said that there was no application from KWG as that would be expected once the Urban Review had been completed and accepted regarding Sevington.

CC said that he was not made aware of Application once they had been submitted, AO said he would look at getting CC on the distribution list.

### **5.2 Local Authority (AO)**

AO had covered most points in general discussion and during specific portfolio's, but mentioned that K College were still trying get the best financial deal possible for the new college in Elwick Road and expected a delay in starting going into 2014

The South side of Elwick Road is still looking for a large retailer to take up an interest.

### **5.3 Town Centre (VK)**

VK said that most areas were covered in previous points under discussion, but mentioned the weekly breakfast meetings were going well.

### **5.4 Construction (PR)**

PR said that he had questioned the KCFG regarding the barometer saying that the AEDG had become very interested in the past results and would like to have continued access. The Barometer was now displayed on-line, but PR would ensure that copies were given to the AEDG at future meetings if possible. The current barometer showed good signs of improvement with more positives towards development especially in the public sector, however there are a lot of estimates out there waiting to be turned into contracts.

PR asked about TW Services taking over the GSE lorry fleet. AO said that yes Thanet Waste Services under the name of TP Services had taken over the GSE lorry fleet and he had discussions with a member of TP Services was not aware of the location of our Chamber, (just down the road) or the AEDG and perhaps we should get a Membership Manager to call at the depot at the end of Watergate Avenue to get them on board.

PR mentioned that it appears there are still issues regarding Planning issues within ABC and will these be answered in the new Government Directive.

AO answered that as far as ABC are concerned they are more ahead of most Councils in that they have a Core Strategy Document, Urban Sites Strategy, Rural Sites Strategy, Town Centre Strategy and are now reviewing the Core Strategy, add to this that developers and businesses can get their first planning meeting free of any charges, Ashford were in a very healthy state.

### **5.5 SME's (GH)**

**No report**

### **5.6 Environment (LM)**

**No report**

**5.7 Tourism Marketing (DM)**

DM said that the Designer Outlet Centre was very well with business improving all the time. There were many new major brands that were knocking on the door to get space. They were not however repeating what was in the high Street and both complimented each other. Visitors drawn into the Designer Outlet Centre were visiting the town Centre and vice versa.

Sales have increased by 20% which is tremendous during the current recession.

Marketing for the centre now starts at the Port of Calais and London Catwick to entice visitors to the Town.

HS1 has linked up with the Designer Outlet Centre bringing more foreign visitors.

RL raised the question of the Pedestrian route from the Designer Outlet to the Town Centre via the underpass at the International Station. RL said he considered this a very vulnerable area and would like to see more work carried out to make this a safer route for both the Town Centre and the Designer Outlet Centre.

RL also asked why the cycle and pedestrian sides of the walk had to change side three times in that short distance.

AO said he was not sure who the responsibility for this area lies with, but will try and find out before the next meeting.

**5.8 Commercial Property (RS)**

No report available

**5.9 Transport & Infrastructure (HG)**

No report available

**6. Actions from meeting**

1/ AO to try and find responsibility for underpass

2/ RL to pass information regarding TP Services to Chamber Administration Staff

**7. AOB**

RL was not available for the July meeting, and hoped a member would take the chair and brief RL on his return.

All the necessary paperwork would be left with the Chamber

**Meeting closed at 5:30 pm**

**Next Meeting July 19<sup>th</sup>.**