

KENT INVICTA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
MINUTES OF ASHFORD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GROUP

HELD AT ASHFORD BUSINESS POINT

ON
THURSDAY 21st March 2013

Present:

Richard Lavender (RL)	Paul Rickards (PR)
Richard Stafford (RS)	Kate North (KN)
Terry Botfield (TB)	Richard Lloyd (RLL)

Apologies:

Christopher Calcutt (CC)	Sezen Zeki (SZ)
Jo James (JJ)	
Heather Grigson (HG)	Andrew Osborne (AO)
Hugh Summerfield (HS)	Geoffrey Hilton (GH)
Graham Galpin (GG)	Nick Dowling (ND)

1.1 Minutes of last meeting:-

The minutes of the 21st February 2013 were passed.

1.2 Matters Arising:-

There were no matters arising from previous minutes

2. Actions:-

RL had still not been able to firm up a date for the Shepway Council Development presentation.

3. Chairman's Report:-

RL reported that the integration of North Kent into the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce was going well. RL had attended two North Kent Economic Development Group, (NKEDG), meetings where it was confirmed that this area would be known as North Kent from now on. RL reported that the meetings were unique in as much as there are four Local Authorities sitting on the NKEDG. However to date, even with a wide difference of opinion and objectives, the group is working well with a very heavy North Kent development programme. RL will endeavour to bring the minutes of the last NKEDG meeting to the next AEDG meeting to get a feel of the issues raised.

4. RL presented a power point presentation of the Paramount Project in North Kent with mixed comments from members. The overriding feeling was, "really great if it happens", Full support was given by the group for this development, but we felt that current financial restraints may play a big part in delaying or even cancelling the project.

5. Group Reports:-

Commercial Property

RS gave a brief report on the state of the Commercial Property market which appeared to be more upbeat than previously reported. He reinstated his concern relating to the Austin Road Development which should remain commercial and not mixed development. This was agreed by all members. Still worried about empty properties in the High Street, but there was progress on several which hopefully should be filled shortly. All agreed that the ex Pizza Hut property looks terrible boarded up and KN commented that ABC were discussing this with the Landlord. RL suggested that School Art and Technology Departments should be given an opportunity to design window art designs to cover all empty shop windows and give a better impression of the Town Centre to visitors. RL said that we sometimes underestimate and do not involve our youth in having a say regarding their Town Centre.

Parking was once again raised, but all agreed that free parking was not an option, but possibly cheaper short term would help. RL thought that 80p for two hours parking was good and a possible review would increase this in line with other town centres. The town centre car park is privately run and unless drivers voted with their vehicles parking else-where this would not be reduced.

Construction

PR gave an overview of the KCFG Market Indicator which appears to be turning the corner these are the results of the March 2013 Market Indicator:-

Level of Client Tender Enquiries (Private Sector):-

2% Decreasing 33% Constant 64% Increasing

Level of Client Tender Enquiries (Public Sector)

21% Decreasing 47% Constant 32% Increasing

Level of newly secured Projects (Private Sector)

10% Decreasing 38% Constant 52% Increasing

Level of Newly Secured Projects (Public Sector)

14% Decreasing 49% Constant 38% Increasing

Perception of Future Trading Opportunities

0% Decreasing 22% Constant 78% Increasing

Opportunities for collaborative working with KCFG members in the last month

61% Yes 39% No

A very interesting indicator which we hope to keep you updated with every month.

Education & Training

TB gave a report on current issues regarding Education and Training with a special mention to the K College development in Ashford. It appears that current financial backing for K College has collapsed with a possibility of the four colleges in the group being broken up into individual units.

Prospects of a new college in Ashford were still on the cards, but it was hoped that the equity of the land holdings were not realised to pay off the existing debt.

TB said that a high profile manager has been recruited, but little will be known until his first report.

Environment

RLI had no particular feedback regarding environmental issues, but would be maintaining a watch and reporting when necessary. RLI did however give a brief in site to his Companies business at Thanet and this was received with interest from the members. RLI went on to offer a conducted visit of the site to any member who wished to see first-hand how waste products are handled, sorted and dispatched on the site. RL will see if a visit during the summer could be arranged and possible hold one of our meetings on the premises at the same time.

Local Authority

KN had been contributing to the earlier reports and due to the shortage of time had nothing further to add at the meeting. RL thanked KN for attending on behalf of AO and requested our good wishes and thoughts be passed on to Andrew and his family.

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AOB

The group requested the presence of the CEO Jo James at a future meeting to give the group an update on the LEP. RL to arrange

7.

Actions from meeting.

RL to arrange JJ to attend future meeting

8.

Meeting closed at 5:45 pm. Next meeting 16th May 2013