

KENT INVICTA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
MINUTES OF ASHFORD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GROUP

HELD AT ASHFORD BUSINESS POINT

ON
THURSDAY 17th May 2012

Present:	Richard Lavender (Chairman) Andrew Osborne (AO) Viv Kenny (VK)	Geoffrey Hilton (GH) Heather Grigson (HG) Paul Rickards (PR)
Guest	Tim Allen	
Apologies:	Richard Stafford (RS) Christopher Calcutt (CC) Linda Marsh Bill Fox	David Maddison (DM) Hugh Summerfield (HS) Terry Botfield

1 Minutes of the last meeting

Minutes of the meeting held on the 19th April 2012 were agreed and passed.

2 Actions from Minutes and Matters Arising.

- Paul Rickards was present at the meeting and minutes amended accordingly.
- Terry Botfield Apprenticeship Briefing on Chamber website
- Andrew Osborne not published TB's briefing on ABC website, but will discuss with TB at Members Business Task Group meeting next week.
- Geoffrey Hilton not heard from TB regarding discussed alternative briefings.
- KCFG will be briefed directly by KCC said PR.

3 Action List Review

Nothing to report on Action List.

4. Chairman's Report

RL asked for views on the recently reported Dungeness Underground Nuclear Storage Facility.

- ABC aware but have not yet discussed
- Could be negative impact on jobs and business if investment declines due to considered risks.
- Transit route through London and Channel corridor appears to be very vulnerable
- Would this effect current County and International rail routes due to safety envelope
- Possibility of large work force to construct but not long term high employment could possibly run with only a handful of workers.
- If Kent cannot have a new nuclear power station why should we have a nuclear dump and accept others waste, especially as reason given against Station C were Sea levels and geological fault line.
- Dungeness C will bring long term jobs, give us Station C and we could support underground dump.

General view was not a positive contribution to the South East business community.

5. Presentation by Tim Allen on the Freight Traffic Flow through Kent.

Ashford has major issues with Freight traffic parking which it is accepted ABC are doing their best to address, however there is a bigger challenge whereby the Political machine does not fully understand the Freight Industry machine regarding the basic issues.

Large European operators have excellent arrangements with lorry parking facilities throughout the UK and it is their interest to secure their transit loads in a well run and organised lorry park. However there is an ever increasing use of owner drivers being used from the main eastern European countries and it is this element that appears to be causing the major problems. They see overnight and transit parks as expensive and therefore stick together on industrial estates and laybys'.

There is also the tacho challenge where lorries have to take breaks at required driving times and these do not always correspond to parking areas. However it has been proved that very few incidents have occurred where lorries park in public areas, they prefer the quieter industrial sites and the like.

As was mentioned the Truck Stop is not the complete answer due to cost. Capacity is not a problem and a number of well-maintained lorry parks are never at full capacity.

AO interjected with the ABC view which was the increased use of yellow lines, increased cleansing and enforcing officers. Ticketing of lorries is carried out but the follow-up regarding the unpaid fine hits a brick wall on the other side of the channel. Another issue is the simple maths, how many times can they park free of charge before getting a fine and it appears the odds are on their side. The other issue is that good policing by ABC could move the Lorries to another area as someone else's problem. It was felt that our main problem was the fact that lorries cannot travel through France over the weekend and public holidays.

It was generally agreed that the Vignette was the ultimate answer and with modern technology, the use of traffic cameras at the ports to alert the authorities of those evading the procedure together with the necessary enforcement officers to impound the vehicle.

Operation Stack was also discussed especially the proposed lorry park at Aldington. The view was that the location was on the wrong side of the motorway and would require the crossing of traffic. Plus the wording of a lorry park which should read reservoir as there should be in and out of traffic. Which as mentioned will need to cross each others path going In and Out of the area?

Other points raised were:-

- Make more use of reservoir space at the Tunnel and Dover Docks.
- National Government to assist with Planning Applications for both above services
- Look at High Speed corridor when several areas of the M20 southbound could be utilised as additional lorry parks.
- Use of Aldington Lorry Park would inevitable cause a back log of lorries to J10.
- Junction congestion during Operation Stack can cause Emergency vehicle delays to William Harvey Hospital which is the main A&E hospital in South East Kent

RL thanked everyone for the views and comments and said his report on the Kent Freight Action Plan would reflect the concerns shown.

Group Reports

6.1 Planning (CC)

CC was not available but AO discussed the various Planning Applications

Developers to the Kent Wool Growers area had submitted a "Screening Opinion" prior to full Planning Application, this was a normal procedure.

A new development included a "Metal Recycling" site on the Cobbs Wood Industrial Site. Although this development would demolish a reasonably modern building which appeared unnecessary, the group agreed that keeping all the "Dirty Use" developments in the same area did have its own benefits. AO said that a developing town the size of Ashford unfortunately demands this type of development.

6.2 Local Authority (AO)

AO announced the 1st level agreement between ABC and Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce had been agreed and signed. This was the partnership for "Start-Up Businesses, Marketing Support, and Procurement assistance. ABC has also agreed to support the KICC Business Awards.

6.3 Town Centre (VK)

VK said that the Highways Agency had completed the ring road signage to the Town Centre. The Lower High Street surface repairs have been scheduled for completion before the Olympic Torch arrives. VK said we could expect 20 to 30k more people in the Town during the Olympic Torch event. It is known that there will be considerable traffic congestion during the event, but it is hoped all businesses will join in the spirit of the occasion. The Torch should arrive in the High Street at approximately 11:10 am.

There was to be a Jubilee Event in the Town Centre which is being advertised.

VK also said they were working on a database for Town Centre Companies

6.4 Construction (PR)

PR said that the last Ashford KCFG had 90 attendees and was held at Brands Hatch. JJ had met with the KCFG and agreement was reached to align all publicity within the same Chamber Branding. There were no barometers, but GH had some National details which he would give.

6.5 SME's (GH)

GH said that there were still concerns regarding very slow payments terms, and Bank lending. Stop Press Item from the National SME Barometer.

Growth was not good although there were gains in some areas
Business Support Staff levels 60% stayed the same, 25% had less staff, and 15% increased staff.
Turn Over, 30% stayed the same, 30% had reduced turnover, and 33% had increased turnover.
As this was a National poll it did not necessarily reflect what was happening in our area.

6.6 Environment (LM)

No report

6.7 Tourism Marketing (DM)

No report available

6.8 Commercial Property (RS)

No report available

6.9 Transport & Infrastructure (HG)

As per Tim Allen's comprehensive briefing

7. Actions from meeting

8. AOB

RL to submit report to Kent Freight Action Plan via CEO

Meeting closed at 5:30 pm