

**Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce**  
**Ashford Economic Development Group Meeting**  
**19 November 2015 at 4pm**  
**Ashford Business Point, Sevington**

**Present:** Terry Botfield (Chair), Heather Grigson, Richard Lloyd, Graham Galpin, Andrew Osbourne, Malcolm Vint, Mandy Bearne, Clare Clifford, Linda Marsh

**Apologies:** Annette Bunn, Hugh Summerfield, Richard Stafford, Kate North, Bryan Hall, Jo Fowler, Michael Koelnberger

		Action
1.	<p><b>Minutes</b></p> <p>There were no formal minutes from the previous meeting</p>	
2.	<p><b>Chairman's Comments</b></p> <p><b>Brewery</b> – topped 1million and now going for 3.65 million  The Chamber has won the contract for the Growth Hub – this is for giving advice to the public. The staff are in place to run it and there is an official launch mid-December. At the moment there is funding for twelve months with the possibility of a new bid being available for further funding.</p> <p><b>Damien Green Breakfast Meeting</b> – Operation Stack was discussed again with the plans now being in but the project needs to be funded primarily by central government. The question was raised as to whether or not the route causes were being dealt with – it was felt that nothing could be done about the French going on strike and traffic etc however the migrant problem is a big issue.</p> <p><b>Incubator space</b> – it was agreed that there was insufficient space available for new companies and the question asked was would companies welcome a 'newby' in a spare desk in their office and it was felt that this was not an option. AO said that Kent Space in Wootten Road has delivered out half a building with the possibility of the rest at the end of the year. The old Chart House building will offer serviced office space of approximately 10,000 sq metres. ABC is looking to create space in the commercial quarter.</p> <p>It was said that it is not just office space that is short, there is a desperate need for light industrial space. TB said that RS had told him they are very short of stock.</p> <p><b>Power supply issues</b> - need to use external power supply to supplement local supply at Lympne Industrial Estate and also at Cobbs Wood Industrial Estate. There are also serious issues with utilities in the area</p>	
3.	<p><b>Portfolio Reports</b></p> <p><b>MB</b> – reported that everything is going well and that they are on target for jobs. Retention has been good this year (people staying in Kent).  There has been a reduction in vacant premises over the last year – new buildings need to be going up as soon as possible. The availability reduced in one year from 2,400 to 1,100</p> <p><b>Membership</b> – LM reported that this is going well.  The Chamber has got funding from the BCC to work with schools on</p>	

employability skills. The number of companies that do work with young people is very low in the area. There are currently 7 schools in the area that need companies to give them an hour to set up challenges – it is a national initiative.

**MV** – reported that there are not enough planning officers and too much work for the ones we already have. There is a severe shortage of domestic property available. The letting market is doing OK but rent is becoming ridiculously high. The long term fixed rate is out at 1.65%.

**CS** – the construction industry is very busy and very positive at the moment but there is currently a lack of the required skills.

**HG** – it is very busy out there with several companies having opened offices in Kent. It is felt that Kent is a good area to be building more homes.

**RL** - in recent years we have been exporting RDF but Europe no longer has the capacity to deal with RDF. Because the UK has not prepared for this by building plants to take RDF it may shortly have to start going into landfill.

**GG/AO** – There is to be a family fun day in Park Mall on Saturday with music in the band stand and rides for the children.

It is hopeful that Park Mall may be full again by May and ABC is feeling more confident about this area.

The CEO of ABC is leaving and before he goes the council want to get started on some of the things that he initiated – Conningbrook, the cinema etc

Aldi store is interested in coming to Ashford.

All in all there is a lot going on in and around Ashford and things are moving forward in general.

#### **4. December Meeting**

It was agreed that as everyone is so busy during December there would not be a meeting and the next meeting will be on Wednesday 13 January 2016