

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

**HELD AT ASHFORD BUSINESS POINT**

**ON**  
**THURSDAY 15<sup>th</sup> April 2011**

**Present:**

Richard Lavender (Chairman)	Bill Fox (BF)
Andrew Osborne (AO)	Heather Grigson (HG)
David Maddison (DM)	Viv Kenny (VK)
Terry Botfield (TB)	Linda Marsh (LM)
Geoffrey Hilton (GH)	Graham Galpin (GG)
Christopher Calcutt (CC)	Hugh Summerfield (HS)

**Apologies:** Richard Stafford (RS) David Maddison (DM)

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**1 Minutes of the last meeting**

Minutes of the meeting held on the 15<sup>th</sup> March 2012 were agreed and passed.

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

There were no actions or Matters Arising from the minutes

**3 Action List Review**

RL said that Jo James CEO was arranging a Chamber meeting with the Banks and had requested we wait for that meeting to take place. This item will be closed.

TB will be discussing the Apprenticeship Matrix tonight. This item will be closed.

**4. Chairman's Report**

RL said he wished to ask the group for their view regarding a possible change to the area that the AEDG could be responsible for. We could be asked to take control of the larger area of East Kent.

The immediate reaction was that this would not be sanctioned by any member.

RL said that he could not support the move and felt we should be concentrating on Ashford and the immediate area businesses only.

GH said that he felt we lost members when the Ashford Chamber became the KICC, however he agreed the circumstances of that change were necessary at the time. GH continued that it was now considered that the AEDG was the Ashford representative of the Chamber and we should concentrate even more on localisation and become more representative of Ashford.

HS agreed totally with GH and agreed that we should have more involvement in Ashford as the business voice.

HS continued to say that we need to be made aware of all business needs and initiatives across Kent, but that can be carried out by cross fertilisation between the other EDG Chairs.

AO added that all EDG's should brief the Board regarding individual events in each area. This would then be fed back to all groups.

RL thanked the group for their views and said the cross fertilisation was an excellent idea and would initiate a visit from the other group Chair's to brief the AEDG on matters effecting more Kent global issues.

RL informed the group that copies of the BCC Planning review response was now available and made interesting reading.

**5. Mary Portas Review**

AO and VK gave an update of the Mary Portas bid. The bid was submitted on the 30<sup>th</sup> March. A video of the proposal has been placed on the ABC website and had so far had 1307 hits. AO gave a special vote of thanks to the Town Centre Team and Kate North from ABC for the work they carried out in accessing businesses in the Town for information to facilitating the report. AO also wanted to thank Ashford businesses for their cooperation throughout the process.

It was reported that Ashford has qualified to go through to the second round.

The bid submitted is for £85k and together with the £100k from the Sainsbury's donation should go along way to many of the projects required. Elements of the bid in brief were:-

- Town centre Market
- Virtual tour of the town centre
- Covered area in the lower High Street
- Managing the Town centre
- Links between businesses

HS said he was confused as to what the phrase "Town Centre" actually covered, his view was the TC was from Highworth to Norton Knatchbull and Stanhays to Chambers Garage.

GG said that he defined the TC as High street and Bank Street which include most of the retail businesses.

AO said that HS was roughly right with the need to include the Civic Centre and Victoria Way.

It was said that even if we did not make the final 24 there was a commitment to still go ahead, and was possible some activity could take place even before the results were known.

HS thought that this may not be good idea especially if smaller sums were used now and there may be an opportunity to complete one larger project for the benefit of Ashford should the full £185k be available.

GG felt that should the grant not be forthcoming he felt sure the majority of the schemes would still go ahead.

AO finalised by saying that there was an Option A and Option B being drawn up at the Council.

AO also informed the group of three Kent towns being granted a £100k from the High Street Innovation Fund to which they never applied and were only aware when the funds arrived. So there are funds out there it's just a case of tracking them down.

## **Group Reports**

### **6.1 Town Centre. (VK)**

VK announced a TC Networking meeting to be held this evening where they will be discussing the following :-

- Olympic Torch through the town
- Jubilee Celebrations
- Welcome to Kent training

VK also commented that there had been 285 applications for the Mary Portas funding.

### **6.2 Local Authority (AO GG)**

HS asked about the future of Business Rates which would be collected and retained by ABC.

AO said that at present the Council collected all business rates and forwarded to Central Government and then a proportion is returned. The Council are looking very carefully at the future proposals to see what the risk implications were. More businesses would mean more income, but the reverse was also a case where a decrease in the number of businesses would be a reduction in revenue.

Other local Authority matters were covered in the earlier reports.

HG asked if AO was aware of the removing of the separation barriers used for Operation Stack between J11 & J12. It appears that their removal was due to lack of use and the cost of leasing the equipment. HG continued to say that Operation Stack still has a very large impact on Ashford and very little appears to be happening as far as contingency plans are concerned.

RL said that he had not been able to arrange a meeting with GSE as yet regarding an alternative possibility involving Waterbrook, but hoped to pursue this as soon as possible.

AO said he had no further information regarding this matter.

### **6.3 Education & Skills**

TB gave a very good overview of the Apprenticeship Scheme being introduced by Government and the KCC. The complete report was too large to print in full and it was agreed that this would be published on the Chamber and ABC website.

The important points have been highlighted and all members were advised to read the report fully when published.

- How can we use the benefits of employing young apprentices
- Not about money but the benefit of engaging young people as apprentices
- There are many benefits in taking on a young person
- Reduced recruiting costs as the provider is carrying out all the suitability checks and ready for the employer.
- You can grow your apprentice to the requirements of your business and the up to date skills and standards you require.
- Outside trainers and providers who are conversant with up to date methods and skills

KCC have announced a £2m big society fund to introduce young apprentices to the work place and it can cost the employer as little as £52 dependent upon the apprentices age.

Businesses of less than 250 staff could be eligible for a £2k grant for taking on an apprentice

There is also a graduate scheme and employers could receive up to £3k for entering into this scheme.

KCC would like to work with the Chamber of Commerce and local authorities to deliver this project

GG said that he was saddened by the daily increase in the number of young people unable to gain employment and full supported this initiative.

GH asked if TB could deliver this presentation to other business organisations. TB said this could be arranged and he would discuss with GH after the meeting.

RL thanked TB for the presentation and said he would assist in ensuring it was placed on the Chamber website.

Before departing GG reminded everyone of the importance of supporting the "Get Kent Moving Faster" with web speed. Information on the ABC website.

#### **6.4 Construction (PR)**

PR said he had little to present this month apart from he had not received the KCFG barometer this month, but managed to see some of the input which indicated an Average to Good with a little picking up of contracts and optimism.

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

GH gave a very firm statement that Natwest were not the Bank lending to businesses, reports had been received that indicated that Natwest were using any excuse to claw back overdrafts and business credit cards when and where ever possible. It would appear that HSBC were listening a lot more than others.

GH continued to say that businesses were not expanding or growing and were at present happy to sit, consolidate and wait out the recovery. Most austerity measures had been taken and businesses were getting into a state of readiness to move forward when things got better.

One comment was that there is NO encouragement from the present Government just a series of bad news daily basis.

#### **6.6 Environment (LM)**

LM had met with the Shepway Green Party but nothing was happening that could be important or controversial. There still no information or progress regarding the new nuclear plant at Dungeness, and the wind turbines are continuing to turn. LM hoped to receive Environment files from RL soon.

#### **6.7 Tourism Marketing (DM)**

No report available

#### **6.8 Commercial Property (RS)**

No report available

#### **6.9 Transport & Infrastructure (HG)**

HG said that as of the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012 the community Infrastructure Levy was introduced. This is using the 106 route to raise funds to carry out infrastructure projects. As yet it appears ABC have not made a statement supporting this initiative.

Chilmington development was proceeding as per the ABC Framework Policy.

The National Planning Policy framework was shortly coming in any further briefings will be given at a future meeting.

The South East Enterprise Partnership has awarded £3.6m towards the A28 improvement works from the Matelan round about to the tank round about.

#### **6.10 General (BF)**

BF said that there was an increase in funding between businesses. Some businesses that have become cash rich and this method of business cooperation appears to be on the increase and could only be encouraged.

### **7. Actions from meeting**

RL to ensure TB report is published on Chamber website

### **8. AOB**

RL will update the Chamber AEDG website

**Meeting closed at 5:30 pm**