

North Kent Economic Development Group meeting minutes – Tuesday 26th February 2013

Medway Innovation Centre

Attended

Suzanne Wood, Chairman (SW) Medway Fibreglass
Richard Lavender (RL) Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce
Carlo Gargiulo (CG) Swale Borough Council
Chris Inwood (CI) Gravesham Borough Council
Clem Smith (CS) Medway Council
Phil Matthews (PM) North West Kent College / SUSCON
Peter Cooper (PC) Penshurst Planning
Stacey Driver (SD) Stickleback Manufacturing
Gareth Edwards (GE) Gem Merchandising
Janet Robinson (JR) Springfield Education & Training

Carole Black (CB) Best Business Events for Kent Invicta Chamber- guest

Louisa Felstead (LF) Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce- in attendance

Apologies:

Alastair Gale, Port of London Authority
Robert Goodman, Bluewater (Lendlease)
Steven Boxall, Regeneration X
Stephen Parker, Willmott Dixon
Jo James, Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce
Lewis Kirnon, Dartford Borough Council
David Liston-Jones, Thames Gateway Kent Partnership

Opening and welcome by SW. Apologies given and introduction by each delegate

CG – **Kent Science Park** planning to grow and are working hard on attracting the right kind of occupant. Swale council are of the opinion that the growth of the Park will be impeded without another junction serving it off the M20. However, any such junction is time-wise a long way off and is subject to government funding

TIGER Fund- CI- launches 21st March in Thames Gateway area -wait to find out criteria which will probably be affected by the East Kent RGF experience. Focus will probably be on larger projects.

“Growth Accelerator” available to businesses locally- SD commented that She had used this opportunity for coaching in strategic management of both herself and her business. She reported that the application process is rather long winded but worth the effort. RL asked if there was funding via the England fund and GE asked if this kind of funding is sector specific

SW reported on the recent Kent Invicta Chamber **Skanska “Meet the buyer”** event re KCC Facilities Management contract which she and SD had attended. It was a good opportunity for SME businesses to become part of a supply chain that they might not otherwise have access to.

CB introduced by SW. CB invited all the Councils to become actively involved in the Chambers **North Kent B2B exhibition** which is to be held in Gravesend in October. CB is looking to build on the original 2012 event and stressed that it is for all North Kent business not just those in Gravesend. The 2013 event will be more than just an exhibition and will include access to business advisors, advice on SEO, speed networking and some quality speakers. CB has been working with the Thames Gateway Partnership to grow the event so that it will, in time, fit into the Glow exhibition space at Bluewater. SW asked what CB needed immediately on this. RL reported that with the Chambers Ashford exhibition, the local Council work very closely with the organisers and regularly exhibit at the event. CS confirmed that Medway Council will participate. JP offered to take a stand and provide a suitable speaker for the event regarding the Digital Youth Academy. CG- Swale Council had distributed event detail for 2102 and will do so again in 2013. CB- Vital that all four authorities are covered and included.

CB stated that the final planning work is being undertaken as regards an engineering and manufacturing exhibition in the Chatham Historic Dockyard in July 2013 (probably 9th, 10th or 11th) This will include a meet the buyer element with the probable launch of the BAE Innovation Project included. 387 engineering apprenticeships being created via BAE- JR . SD- is trying to include the Bloodhound project into this event also. SD commented that the intention is to provide a new format for this sector exhibition wise by providing a large demonstration area to display innovative technology. CS commented upon the importance of connecting with schools to encourage engineers of the future. CB explained that there will be construction exhibition in November in Maidstone.

SD to report back re manufacturing

GE raised the issue of **local procurement** as a benefit to Kent. RL to contact the other Kent Economic Development groups to formulate a Kent response. Perhaps a collective change of mindset to encourage buying locally is required? CS- Swale have revamped their procurement policies to strategically look at local level activity. CI- GBC has just set up a Corporate Procurement Working Group. As part of this group local considerations and weighting for local businesses is being explored. RL questioned how this should best be brought forward and suggested that local council web sites might be used to put this out for comment? CG- Swale do provide a business bulletin for 600 local businesses and are working on a Eurolink directory. SD stressed the importance of recommendations and testimonials when choosing contractors. Perhaps the Chamber web site could be used in a similar way to "Kent- keep it local". RL- there are conflicting difficulties between globalisation and localisation. CI-would appreciate feedback on how other Kent authorities have managed a local policy

GE- agreed to report back to the group on this issue.

SW introduced projects of current significance to North Kent for future possible action/comment:

1. TIGER Fund
2. Thames Lower Crossing
3. Maritime Industries
4. Paramount
5. Gravesend Heritage Quarter

6. Eastern Quarry/Lodge Hill

7. Chatham Waters

8. Fort Amhurst

PM to report back on maritime industries as N.W.Kent College have recently commissioned a sector specific networking and collaboration group for these industries also looking at awareness and training

LF reported that she had recently attended a meeting where Jeremy Kite, Leader of DBC stated that Paramount had agreed that 50% of all procurement for the site would be sourced from within a 50 mile radius. SW- looks forward to their “meet the buyer” event.

CI- reported that planning application for the Heritage Quarter should be completed by the end of March

CS- at Lodge Hill there have been wildlife concerns regarding the protection of Nightingales on the site

CS- **Chatham Waters** owned by Peel Ports, is a 26 acre mixed use site next to the River Medway. The detailed application for phase one will be submitted soon. SW asked that the group be kept updated. CS- Peel Ports do need to engage with the local business community- perhaps they might present to the N.K Economic Development Group?

CS- Fort Amhurst has recently secured lottery funding for regeneration. Improving access to the site is key

SW forwarded a question from SB (sent apologies) re the **Vestas site at Sheerness**. What has happened to the task force that had been brought in to look after the site? CG explained that is also owned by Peel Ports and any further planning applications are subject to information from central government on funding subsidies. Similarly, the Thames Steel site on Sheppey is also stationary. It is possible that quite drastic movement might be achieved if a body is found who are capable of taking on such a large site.

RL commented that it would appear that only two forms of power generation are seen as viable for the Country's immediate/near immediate power needs- wind and nuclear.

PC asked about the possibility of an **airport within North Kent/Kent**. RL- The Chamber has attended various meetings on this issue but has yet to take a stance. Perhaps the group should take a "watching brief" on this? Highways and infrastructure are seen as key issues – the freeflow of traffic at Dartford and a third crossing. CS- Medway are against an airport as it would be seen as damaging to both the environment and local economy and it is thought better to look for opportunities elsewhere. A lower Thames Crossing will bring benefits via Shellhaven. SW commented that one significant figure whom one might think would be in favour of an airport has already commented that such an airport would lead to a significant concreting over of North Kent. It was also stated that in terms of the Thames Gateway Partnership, the remit is only to look at certainties not possibilities. CG commented that the Swale Regeneration Partnerships findings have stressed the need to keep pace with competition in Europe- Heathrow is at 90% capacity. A recent presentation by Transport for London on the issue was very convincing. RL- all views expressed should be from a business

perspective, not personal. PC- the UK economy is dependent upon air travel- this is freight, not passengers. GE commented that his own business now has 50% international business as opposed to 10/15% only a few years ago- without air passengers, the cost of transport for his business would increase significantly.

C.S- Rochester Airport are due to sign off a swathe of land for development soon-perhaps the consultants could liaise with the group?

C.I asked if any rural businesses in North Kent are reporting particular issues. RL to refer back to the Maidstone EDG as they have experience in this area

SW proposed action plans for the future:

To set an agenda for the next meeting and forward dates for 2013

Appointment of portfolio holders:

JR to take up education, assisted by PM

PC- Highways and infrastructure

SD- Manufacturing

GE- Retail

Louisa Felstead 05/03/13