

KENT INVICTA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
MINUTES OF ASHFORD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GROUP

HELD AT ASHFORD BUSINESS POINT

ON
THURSDAY 16th February 2011

Present:	Richard Lavender - Chair (RL)	Bill Fox (BF)
	Andrew Osborne (AO)	Paul Rickards
	Graham Galpin (GG)	Linda Marsh
	Hugh Summerfield	Geoffrey Hilton

Apologies:	Richard Stafford (RS)	Terry Botfield (TB)
	Viv Kenny (VK)	David Maddison (DM)
	Jo James (JJ)	Heather Grigson (HG)
	Christopher Calcutt	

1) Minutes of the last meeting.

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

2) Actions from Minutes.

There were no actions from the minutes

3) Chairman's Report

The Chairman had nothing extra to report to the meeting and as some members had to leave early hoped we could have a quick and successful meeting.

HS informed the group that he thought the Chamber was losing its identity and also losing touch with its members.

RL told the group that in his opinion the AEDG was there to represent the business community within the development and economic future of Ashford. In doing that a close working relationship must be maintained between members, the business community and the Local Authority of Ashford Borough Council.

Membership and the direction of the Chamber was the responsibility of CEO and the Board. Without recording any other comments RL said that the AEDG could be assured that he was an active member of the Board of Directors and together with the CEO was confident of the Chambers future.

AO and GG both agreed of the importance of this group as a direct sounding board of the business community needs.

RL closed the discussion and moved onto other business. He would bring the concerns of certain members to the attention of the CEO.

4 Group Reports

4.1 Planning (CC)

There were no planning issues to discuss at this meeting.

4.2 Local Government

GG explained the issues around the Henwood Industrial Estate parking, saying roads and pavements were being obstructed by workers private vehicles. As a temporary and experimental solution the Council car park on the estate is reducing its daily parking fees to try and combat the situation.

AO said that ABC had put in a bid for Central Government Funding for Town Centre Developments the fund of £m1 will be split between 10 Town Centres giving Ashford £100k if successful. A Leadership and Business Plan need to be submitted for the 5 week programme. One of the features discussed was a permanent market in the Town Centre.

AO spoke of the LA's help with local start-up businesses with an easy in/out office space together with a full business support network. AO also announced that the Chamber of Commerce would be a partner taking over part of International House in running and support of the project.

AO also said that other areas of business support were based around Local Planning issues whereby more help would be given to start-up businesses. The 1st pre-planning application meeting with Officers would be free of charge. The ABC web-site is being reviewed to make navigation for information easier. And lastly a priority in processing Planning Applications would be given to those producing jobs.

4.3 Construction

PR gave a brief view of progress within the KCFG and mentioned the "Growing Places Fund & Infrastructure Programme", this included proposals for the A2070 and A28 highway infrastructure, together with a proposal to rejuvenate units above shop units.

PR has since sent a more detailed report which now follows:- **(for full report please contact PR)**

The high level initiative that will not be this year's major focus, is to look into the deliverability of a project bring back to life unused living space above High Street shops. The project we have in mind is based on some of the conclusions of the Mary Portas review issued to Government at the end of last year.

Proposed Schedule

Carry out two feasibility studies one in Ashford and one in Maidstone, to seek out some properties where we feel a small scale showcase project could be done. The feasibility will be to carry out the following tasks.

Seek out a likely site in each town and carry out research to discover who owns the title to the various properties involved.

Provide outline architectural solutions to open up the space above the shops for occupation and determine likely levels of tenancies that would become available.

Provide outline budgets for the architectural solutions

Carry out feasibility on the cost recovery from the eventual tenancies and property value enhancement from the completed projects to test the business case.

If the above proves to have a positive result we would then;

Carry out some initial discussions with the owners to gauge interest

Carry out initial discussions with Housing Associations and Developers to gain their interest and an understanding of the likely funding options and also to determine what the level of gap funding might be required.

Coordinate all research and summarise our findings into a publishable document

Carry out a presentation to Maidstone, Ashford and Kent County Councils to gauge their interest.

Coordinate the views of all parties, revise the documentation and presentation to suit and then present final proposals to all possible stakeholders with the view to move the project into reality

Assist in the development of a collaborative team to manage and build out the projects if they are found to be viable.

This is of course a very ambitious programme of work and will require a great deal of effort on behalf of our members (who will put their time in on a voluntary basis for the feasibility stage).

4.4 SME's

JH reported that the FSB Survey was not good regarding the past month and there was still a lack of Bank Lending. It appears that small companies are reluctant to go to the Bank regarding future loans in case their existing arrangements are jeopardised. Several businesses have discussed the problems in their particular case are when asked if we can use this information to take to the Banks they do not wished to be named.

RL asked if it would be a good time to ask the Banks to attend a future meeting and explain to the Group exactly what their position is. This was agreed and RL will organise if possible for the April meeting.

4.4 Environment

RL ask LM to be patient regarding this portfolio as we have no issues at the present, but with several large developments coming up, plus any Dungeness Power Station developments it will be necessary to be ready for future activity

5 Actions from meeting

1/ RL to arrange Bank presentation for April meeting

6 AOB

RL gave apologies for March meeting

RL requested PR to take the Chair for the March meeting

Meeting closed at 5:30 pm