**MINUTES OF THE ASHFORD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GROUP**

**HELD ON THURDSAY 19 JANUARY 2017**

**AT ASHFORD BUSINESS POINT**

**Present:** Richard Lavender (Chair), Paul Nixon, Annette Bunn, Richard Lloyd, Malcolm Vint, Peter Corr, Hugh Summerfield, Heather Grigson, Jane Burtenshaw, Richard Stafford, Andrew Osborne, Julie Anderson

**Apologies:** Graham Galpin

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|  |  | **ACTIONS** |
| **1.** | **Minutes of the last meeting**  The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as being a true record and signed by RL |  |
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| **1.1** | **Matters Arising**  Re parking charges – RL said Jo Fox gave an indepth presentation of the paper that is going to the Cabinet. Jo Fox and the team will give a presentation to the AEDG at the February meeting and RL will invite Duncan Murray.  HS asked if something could be put in the Chamber magazine about the parking – RL said that once the paper has gone through we can comment.  RL asked RS if it would be possible to send a copy of his EPC presentation to LH to send to the group. | **RS/LH** |
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| **2.**  **3.** | **Chairman’s Report**  RL reported that he is going to London with JJ on the 7 February regarding the Lower Thames Crossing. Option C is still the preferred option. He also went to London to listen to the Euro Tunnel briefing where it was reported that £92b of goods goes through the tunnel each year.  RL spoke about the strategy of the group for this year and asked if HS could look to see what is happening in and around Ashford that is of interest. HS suggested the an update on:-  Recruitment and apprenticeships  Planning within the area  Rural rate relief  AO said he knows someone from the Jobs Cub in Ashford that would like to come to the group to share information on what the ‘Jobs Club’ does. RL is to speak with AO  **Round Table Discussion**  **Transport and Infrastructure**  HG asked if Victoria School in Victoria Way is staying or if it was due to close as the traffic at school times on that road is horrendous. As far as everyone in the group was aware the school is staying.  Work on the first office block in the Commercial Quarter has started and the old cow shed in Victoria Way has been demolished.  South Eastern has refurbished one third of its rolling stock. | **RL/AO** |
|  | **Business Finance**  PN reported that banks are coming back in to lending – nothing too major for customers.  Venture capitol – there is a lot of money available and there is the need to lend. Everything is looking positive at the moment. Growing businesses are going to access funds. |  |
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|  | **Commercial Property**  RS reported that the market is quite strong at the moment. The industrial demand is strong across all sizes. It is the lack of supply that is driving the rent price up not the great demand. There is quite a demand for commercial with residential above. The demand for office space is not great. |  |
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|  | **Construction**  JA reported that the construction industry seems busy but people still have concerns around how Brexit is going to affect them. Rates may increase.  Groups are going into schools to give talks and explain that there are more jobs in the construction industry other that out on sites.  Kent women in construction is being launched in March. |  |
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|  | **Environment**  RLl said the market is changing constantly and gave the example that in December the brick and block vehicles in his company were flat out in December and now the work has dried up. |  |
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|  | **Voice of SME**  AB confirmed the lack of small sheds is still an on-going issue. There is still a lack of skills out there.  It was brought up that there seemed to be a problem with the traffic lights at J10 resulting in long queues waiting to come of the motorway from Maidstone direction.  The regional growth funds are back again with 0% matched funding for small businesses.  RL will ask if this problem has been highlighted with ABC. | **RL/ABC** |
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|  | **Local Authority**  AO said that the Barry Road junction was discussed at the meeting last week. There is an increase in the amount of traffic coming onto the 2070. Highways England and KCC presented on their findings. They were concerned re the number of minor accidents that have occurred but it is not considered a black spot. There are a range of options for this juncton which will be discussed before a decision is reached |  |
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|  | **Planning**  MV reported that a lot of planning was coming through in the lead up to Christmas but it was taking a long time to get the planning through the local authority due to the lack of planning officers. |  |
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|  | **Retail**  PC reported a very good year for the Designer Outlet but said 2017 may result in some casualties depending on what happens. Every unit in the centre is let which is a good sign.  PC had some concerns over the state of the area from the station to the centre. RL said he would approach ABC on this issue. | **RL/ABC** |
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|  | The meeting closed at 5.40pm  **Date of next meeting – Thursday 16 February at 4pm** |  |