

Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce Maidstone Economic Development Group

Minutes of Meeting held on Tuesday 13th March 2012
The Gatehouse, Archbishops Palace, Mill Street, Maidstone, ME15 6YE

Present: John Taylor(JT) (Chair); John Foster(JF), Victoria Wallace(VW), Anna Bloomfield(AB), Bill Moss(BM), Allis Beasley(ABe), Chris Blundell(CB), Rob Edwards(RE), Nick Rowell(NR).

1.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</p> <p>Jo James(JJ), Colin Davies(CD), Dave Powling(DP), Keith Grimley(KG), Cllr Malcolm Greer(MG), Mandy Bearne(MB), Alan Reading(AR).</p>	
2.	<p>MINUTES OF LAST MEETING</p> <p>Approved.</p>	
3.	<p>MATTERS ARISING</p> <p>DP had advised that due to a change of role that he would no longer be able to attend MEDG meetings. JT asked that suggestions for a replacement be sent to himself.</p>	
4.	<p>2012 OLYMPICS</p> <p>VW said that the Torch would arrive at Leeds Castle via the A20 at the Broomfield end. At 4pm there would be a two hour event, provided mainly by the Sponsors, with an expected audience of 8,000. This would be preceded by a schools event. The ticket allocation method had yet to be determined and it was expected that everything would be finished by 8pm. In parallel there would be a televised event in Mote Park.</p> <p>Early the following morning the Torch will proceed thorough the Town Centre to the Archbishops Palace where it will embark onto a boat. It will disembark at the rowing club and continue to Medway by road.</p> <p>There will be no rolling road block on the A20 although there will be some closures. Full details are still awaited so it is difficult to advise the business community at this point.</p> <p>BM said that there would only be a small entourage accompanying the Torch and it would only take 10-15 minutes to pass through the town centre. It is anticipated that there will be lots of schoolchildren in the town for this event. He hoped that local cafes would be offering an “Olympic Breakfast”. MB also said that the frontage to the Town Hall will be officially named “Jubilee Square” on 1st June and commented that Queen Victoria’s Monument was also installed in a Jubilee year. He also noted that there was no “feel” for the Olympics in the Town at present.</p> <p>JF said that KCC will be dressing the town This will be colourful and will follow LOCOG guidelines. The dressing will be in place from the end of June until the end of September. JT said that The Chamber had offered to circulate details and JF responded that final details were yet to be finalised.</p> <p>ABe asked if it was known who would be carrying the Torch. VW said that this was currently unknown and that the overall situation was difficult to exploit for Corporate Events.</p> <p>CB commented that the Olympics was a festival of sport and asked if anything was being done to engage young people. JF referred to Maidstone’s Dream</p>	

	<p>which identifies talented local sports people who can be sponsored by local businesses, the most noteworthy being Martin Brockman.</p>	
5.	<p>2012 & BEYOND ROAD WORKS/CLOSURES WITHIN MAIDSTONE</p> <p>JT said that the replacement of Gas Mains in the Town Centre was a legal requirement and that the work had to be carried out. From April 10th Knightrider Street would be closed for 10 weeks. Following this, one lane will be closed in Lower Stone Street for 20 weeks then one lane in Upper Stone Street for 20 weeks. Due to the complexity of other services involved it will be necessary to excavate under the Wren's Cross junction by hand.</p> <p>BM said that disruption to the Town Centre must be minimised. He said that work was scheduled to be carried out between 8am & 7pm on Monday to Friday and between 9am & 2pm on Saturdays & Sundays. He wondered if these hours could be extended, particularly at weekends?</p> <p>It is planned that there will be no other roadworks in the Town during this period and that MBC will immediately tow away any vehicles parked within the area where work is being undertaken.</p> <p>There is a concern that businesses such as Lashings could suffer from the impact of the works They could appeal for Rate Relief in a similar way to the current High Street regeneration. Cllr Denise Joy is the local point of contact with the Valuation Officer who had indicated that a reduction of 10%-20% would be possible.</p> <p>JT said that some businesses, including his own, might temporarily move staff to outlying offices.</p> <p>Southern Gas Networks, who are carrying out the work, will use TCM as the focus for distribution of information. Work will be temporarily suspended in July during the Olympics and also at Christmas. It is expected that KCC will utilise the road closures to carry out other work.</p>	
6.	<p>MAIDSTONE CORE STRATEGY</p> <p>JT expressed concern about the Core Strategy and the divergence of opinion within the Council. There had also been changes in personnel and JT would be meeting the new person responsible for the Strategy. It was not expected that a document would emerge in the very near future.</p> <p>JT had attended a meeting concerned with Transport issues and had been appalled at the way in which consultation had been handled. There appears to be desire not to spend money on transport infrastructure in Maidstone and that there had been a poor turnout by the Business Community. VW commented that the process was a vicious circle and essentially a waste of time. BM said that KCC do not seem to take account of the views of stakeholders.</p> <p>JT said that on the previous day that he had attended a meeting relating to employment issues and that there was no presence from the Business Community. There was a need for a process enabling businesses to project their views. A meeting is scheduled in May under the Locality Board to pursue this issue and The Chamber needs to be involved.</p> <p>VW said that business people cannot be expected to plough through Public Sector documents and that there were too many meetings all of which took too long.</p> <p>JT felt that there was no shortage of jobs in the area but rather it was more of</p>	

	<p>an attitude problem with many young people There was a forthcoming problem with extension of learning with schools being responsible for education to the age of 17 and eventually 18.</p> <p>There was a generally held view within the meeting that there was no real belief that any feedback would be responded to and that everything was simply a process. NR questioned whether Maidstone had Councillors who were prepared to stand up to Officers in order to get their views across and JT added that businesses in Kent were SMEs and it was difficult to obtain their views.</p>	
7.	<p>LSP UPDATE</p> <p>The LSP no longer exists and is now the Locality Board which has a heavy political involvement. The economic group is now project based and is currently involved with the Worklessness Project. The Locality Board will have a substantial budget for specific projects.</p>	
8.	<p>LEP UPDATE</p> <p>JT said that there was little to say. With regard to the Regional Growth Fund he felt that MBC had been very slow and had only made a single proposal and that was for a project that was already known to be viable. JT had written to JJ stating that the project was not appropriate.</p>	
9.	<p>CHAMBER UPDATE</p> <p>In the absence of CD there was no formal update but JT noted the integration of the former Thames Gateway Chamber area into KICC.</p> <p>JT said that the MEDG did not really reflect the Maidstone economic area and the Chamber Board had asked him to recommend economic groupings. He felt that MEDG would probably cover the Maidstone and Malling areas in future. There was a question over Paddock Wood and which area it belonged to economically. JT asked that any comments on economic grouping be emailed to himself.</p>	
10.	<p>AOB</p> <p><u>KCFG Breakfast</u> – RE said that there would be a Breakfast in Maidstone on 17th April following the highly successful Breakfast in October</p> <p><u>Footfall</u> – BM provided the footfall figures for 2011 which showed an overall increase of 2.45% over the previous year.</p> <p><u>Vacancy Rates</u> – BM also supplied details of the Town Centre vacancy rates. Currently 10% of shops in the Town Centre are vacant compared to a national average of 14.5%. He said that a bid would be made some of the £1M that the Government had made available for town centre regeneration. It was expected that there would be 12 successful applications from 600/700 towns that could be expected to apply. The deadline for applications is 30th March.</p> <p>BM felt that the Portas report was mostly sound common sense and that shops which close cannot always be expected to be replaced by another. Many locations were now “over-retailed”. He had recently visited the former Army & Navy Store which was still sound and watertight and noted that attempts were still being made to let the ground floor for retail.</p>	
	The meeting closed at 16:50.	
	Date of Next Meeting: Tuesday 8th May 2012.	