

Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce Maidstone Economic Development Group

Minutes of Meeting held on Tuesday 9th July 2013
The Gatehouse, Archbishops Palace, Mill Street, Maidstone, ME15 6YE

Present: John Taylor(JMT, Chair); Nick Rowell(NR), John Foster(JF) Bill Lash(BL), Keith Grimley(KG), Cllr Malcolm Greer(MG), Colin Davies(CD).

1.	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE Rob Edwards(RE), Bill Moss(BM), Jo James(JJ), Steve Goulette(SG), Chris Blundell(CB), Anna Bloomfield(AB), Heather Nowak(HN), Victoria Wallace(VW), Steve Goulette(SG), Mandy Bearne(MB), Allis Beasley(ABE).	
2.	MINUTES OF LAST MEETING Approved.	
3.	MATTERS ARISING Nil.	
4.	LEP UPDATE <p>Ross Gill (RG) of KCC gave a presentation outlining KCC's input to the LEP. A copy of the presentation can be found in Appendix A.</p> <p>In 2009 KCC had produced a strategy document "Unlocking the Potential" and this had been created under the previous Government as the recession was just starting and when there was more Public Sector money available. The Strategy required refreshing and this resulted in the document as presented. He noted that the South East faced a challenge due to the size of the LEP and the fact that it involved three Counties. Medway is undertaking a similar evaluation and both this and the KCC Strategy should dovetail into the broader LEP strategy. Consultation on the KCC Strategy will take place in October and will involve organisations such as The Chamber.</p> <p>NR said that Kent was comprised largely of small businesses; the smallest of these were now struggling despite the recent economic upturn and they were under the radar of the Public Sector. Actions such as the proposed MBC Business Hub were a welcome development.</p> <p>NR highlighted the fact that Creative and Media businesses are a major growth area in Maidstone but these businesses tended to subcontract work out rather than take on employees. He believed that this would be a continuing pattern. CD agreed that businesses were using Associates to an increasing degree. BL said that this highlighted the issues of Employment Regulation and Legislation as well as the need for Apprenticeships.</p> <p>NR stressed that exporting is important to local businesses although he would include doing business with the UK market outside of Kent. In the June Survey 95% of respondents are involved in exporting using this definition.</p> <p>MG said that MBC has to take on additional housing and it is crucial to have the necessary infrastructure so KCC need to spend money in this regard within Maidstone. He commented that the growth of Creative and Media businesses at Maidstone Studios was largely down to the provision of high-speed broadband and further provision was needed urgently. With regard to Apprenticeships then Germany was the example to follow.</p> <p>KF said that there needed to be recognition of the small business sector within any strategy. JMT noted that the small business issue was a recurrent theme and that there was a danger of Maidstone flatlining in the future. Infrastructure development should be top priority and is required immediately otherwise</p>	

	<p>businesses could be lost to the area due to lack of expansion capability and new businesses will not be attracted.</p> <p>JMT said that the second important issue is how the views of businesses are to be incorporated into local plans. RG said that a rough draft of the proposed Strategy would be produced in August and a full draft would be presented to KCC on September 24th. He said that he would be happy to attend a future MEDG Meeting.</p>	
5.	<p>PROPOSED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AT M20 J8</p> <p>JMT noted that there had already been much discussion of this issue in the local Press. He had already met with one of the Companies involved; this Company needs to relocate from Marden due to lack of expansion capability and the options are either a development at J8 or a move away from The Borough. JMT restated that The Chamber supports economic development along the Motorways, especially at junctions, but agreed that there were major transport issues relating to these developments.</p> <p>BL said that Leeds Castle was severely impacted by J8 issues and it was unclear what the overall plan for J8 actually was. JMT said that this would be addressed in the Local Plan.</p> <p>MG observed that these were two successful local Businesses looking to expand and both were now owned by foreign Companies. 500 jobs would be on the line if they were unable to expand within Maidstone as their only alternative would be to move away. Retaining these Businesses in the area would result in additional jobs and apprenticeships.</p> <p>KG added that there were companies interested in moving to the Motorway Junctions in the Maidstone area.</p>	
6.	<p>THAMES LOWER THIRD CROSSING</p> <p>JMT said that the only response to the proposal circulated to MEDG Members was from VW who had expressed concerns regarding Option 3B. JMT said that this was the Option favoured by The Chamber albeit subject to handling of the issues around J8.</p>	
7.	<p>LOCAL PLAN</p> <p>This is under review with Consultation likely to take place in September. The major issue is to resolve the Housing numbers.</p>	
8.	<p>MAIDSTONE INTEGRATED TRANSPORT STRATEGY</p> <p>KF said that this was also under review and was likely to go to The Cabinet in September followed by Consultation in October. JMT asked how this would integrate with the Local Plan and KF responded that the two were being worked on together.</p> <p>JMT asked if the Strategy would have the backing of KCC as the Highways Authority. MG said that this was being worked on.</p>	
9.	<p>TOWN CENTRE FUTURE</p> <p>The Report from DTZ was due shortly and will be sent for Consultation.</p>	
10.	<p>LOCAL ECONOMY UPDATE</p> <p>NR said that he was still working on the results from the June Survey and circulated copies of an Article to be published in August, see Appendix B. He commented that overall there was a generally improving trend.</p>	
11.	<p>ROADWORKS/ROAD CLOSURES WITHIN MAIDSTONE</p> <p>Now complete and will no longer be an Agenda item.</p>	
12.	<p>LOCALITY BOARD UPDATE</p> <p>JMT said that this was in abeyance awaiting future developments.</p>	

13.	ARMED FORCES COVENANT JMT said that redundancies had taken place and work was under way regarding housing, jobs and skills.	
14.	LOW CARBON ZONE No report.	
15.	BUSINESS INCUBATION CENTRES KF said that KCC had approved the MBC proposal.	
16.	CHAMBER UPDATE CD said that he had attended the Armed Forces Event and that The Gurkhas in particular seemed very aware of what they wished to do in the future. CD drew attention to the fact that The Chamber now offers free Business Advice in all areas covered by The Chamber. He noted that there was an increase in Membership approaches from businesses outside the Kent area who wished to join the Chamber. Finally he said that there was now an increased awareness of what MBC is doing with regard to Business.	
17.	AOB <u>King Street Car Park</u> – JMT said that demolition had now begun. <u>Business Start-up Bus</u> – KF said that this would be coming to Maidstone on July 17 th . <u>Earl Street</u> – MG said that he would like to see the top end pedestrianised and also to take the High Street granite down Gabriels Hill.	
	The meeting closed at 16:28.	

Date of Next Meeting: Tuesday 10th September 2013.