#### Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce

**Maidstone Economic Development Group**

Minutes of Meeting held on Tuesday 10th March 2015

##### at Page & Wells, 52-54 King Street, Maidstone, Kent. ME14 1DB

**Present:** John Taylor (JMT, Chair), John Foster (JF), Nick Rowell (NR), Colin Davies (CD), Chris Blundell (CB), Keith Grimley (KG), Jason Lewis (JL).

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| 1. | APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCEJo James (JJ), Bill Lash (BL), Allis Beasley (AB), Mandy Bearne (MB), Cllr Malcolm Greer (MG), Nick Baster (NB), David Ing (DI). |  |
| 2. | MINUTES OF LAST MEETINGApproved.New member JL from DHA Transport introduced himself to the Group. He will be on Group as a member in his own right and also as a liaison with Kent Construction Group. |  |
| 3. | MATTERS ARISINGJF reported as MG was not in attendance – Proposed development at J8 – members overturned this and they are fighting an appeal in May. |  |
| 4. | **NEWNHAM COURT REDEVELOPMENT UPDATE** JL updated the Group on this -1. Medical Campus – Jones Lang were appointed to market the site.1/8th occupancy will go to altzeimers/dementia clinic.2. Proposal from Land Securities (LS) did not get planning permission, LS decided not to appeal as they found MBC not to be receptive at the time.JT said that it is disappointing when a developer of that caliber appears to turn their back on the town.JF responded that he had met with LS to try to find a way to work together and regular meetings were offered. Also MBC had promoted a bid to the LEP for related highways funding but LS did not respond to this initiative.NR also attempted to get further information from LS after a presentation at the Town Hall but just received an email from Nick Green (LS Advisor) referring him to the Planning Application documentation.It was hoped that LS will in time form a better view of Maidstone as a place to do business.JL indicated that the landowner now looking at other options for the Newnham Court site.CD asked about the 2 new roundabouts at KIMS and putting a dual carriageway in between them. JL replied that there would be no justification for this if the Medical Campus and Notcutts stay as they are. |  |
| 5. | LOCAL PLAN – HOUSING ISSUES/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTJF confirmed schemes MBC have funding for:-- Widening of the bridge gyratory – 4.6 million- Riverside improvements – 2 million- Funding for future developments – 8.9 million- Maidstone East station – 1 million.JF discussed timescales for Local Plan.CD asked about business centres going over to residential and how that will effect Maidstone.JF replied that a ¼ million sq foot is notified to go. The Government have indicated that they like it. So it may continue.Eventually Maidstone will get to a point where office space is in demand and rents will rise. Companies are at present struggling to find good quality office space.Locate in Maidstone’s website will give you access to all available local property.Housing issues were discussed. The Chamber will look at the housing development South of the Borough when it gets to EIP. Chamber has already stated that they are worried about this.Affordable housing was discussed. It was felt that open market housing in the southern part of the Borough is being promoted to people coming out of London rather than local people and consequently how will this help resolve local housing need.JT advised that this group, setting aside JF, will need to comment on this as the Chamber Board is looking for a lead from this Group on where the Chamber should stand on the Maidstone housing debate issue which has been and continues to be the subject of considerable public debate. |  |
| 6. | TOWN CENTRE FUTURE – GABRIEL’S HILL UPGRADEJF reported that nothing was happening at present.MBC have identified 3 areas – Gabriel’s Hill, Earl Street and north end of Week Street that could benefit from upgrading.MBC need to look at the impact of Phase 1 and 2 of the High Street upgrade and once all this information has been gathered MBC will look at getting designs to the planning permission stage. Looking at a couple of years for this process to complete. Once consents obtained there will then be the matter of finding the necessary funding. |  |
| 7. | **LOCAL ECONOMY UPDATE – NICK ROWELL**NR went through his report. He reported that the Federation of Small Businesses abolished its Branch structure last November. |  |
| 8. | ARMED FORCES COVENANTJT reported that the Ministry of Defence did reach an agreement with a privately funded company to assist with rented housing –- paying deposit- underwriting the tenancy for the landlord.Unfortunately a week after this went live the company concerned went into liquidation.JF to speak with Mid-Kent College on their pilot scheme to help people find work after leaving the forces.JT to get contact for the 36 Regiment to JL. **Action JT** |  |
| 9. | **BUSINESS INCUBATION CENTRES**JT reported that the Enterprise Hub will be opening in Business Terrace in the Summer.Mid Kent College will be opening a Business Centre at Oakwood Park.Not much in the way of Incubation Space available. |  |
| 10. | **CHAMBER UPDATE**CD reported the Chamber vacated their Office at the Gate House over the Christmas shut-down period and have re-located to the Medway Innovation Centre. He now works from home.New members - 5 in January, 12 in February. This includes KIMS Hospital and Golding Homes. General trend across KICC is a gradual increase in membership.Parkwood Trading Estate – more work needs to be done in this area.JT reported that the national trend across the Country has been reported as being in a gradual decline in Chamber membership (so KICC looks to be bucking the trend). He will find out what this is in the South East and report to the Group. **Action JT**Why members stay/go was discussed and JF asked if there was anything they could do as a Group to help promote the Chamber? **Action ALL** |  |
| 11. | **AOB**KG asked what was involved with Enterprise Hub. JF replied that this was small business space/desk rent a space area and a meeting area. The Kent Foundation and University of Kent are looking to use it.Discussions took place on the Engineering feature in Downs Mail.JT reported on a Developers Forum on 20th May at Oakwood House.JF reported that it has just been confirmed that the Leader Programme will cover for the first time the whole of Kent and rural areas of Maidstone. It will offer grants to help companies diversify/create jobs and to help plan rural communities. The sum of 250/300k a year for 6 years. Minimum grant is £2,500.A copy of this will be sent out with the Minutes. **Action JT**The Home Quality Mark was discussed. Details on this can be found on-line.JT reported on CIL. Kent Police currently have a policy of objecting to any residential development in Maidstone. JT has had a meeting with the Police Commissioner’s Office regarding this. The problem is that new housing development brings with it the need not just for funding for day to day increased policing, but also a requirement for new capital funding for increased policing infrastructure requirements. At present many Kent Local Authority CIL proposals do not include any funding for such capital infrastructure requirement. Day to day increased expenditure is supposed to be allowed for through the Council Tax precept system. The issue having now been raised with the Commissioner’s Office will be the subject of further work through that office to try to get appropriate additional funding through CIL. |  |
|  | The meeting closed at 5pm. |  |

**Date of Next Meeting: Tuesday 12th May, 2015, 3pm at Maidstone Borough Council’s Offices – Maidstone House, King Street, Maidstone, Kent. ME15 6JQ**