

Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce Maidstone Economic Development Group

Minutes of Meeting held on Tuesday 10th September 2013
The Gatehouse, Archbishops Palace, Mill Street, Maidstone, ME15 6YE

Present: John Taylor(JMT, Chair); Nick Rowell(NR), John Foster(JF), Rob Edwards(RE), Mandy Bearne(MB), Cllr Malcolm Greer(MG), Victoria Wallace(VW), Chris Blundell(CB), Colin Davies(CD).

1.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE Bill Moss(BM), Jo James(JJ), Anna Bloomfield(AB), Heather Nowak(HN), Steve Goulette(SG), Allis Beasley(ABE).</p>	
2.	<p>MINUTES OF LAST MEETING In the list of attendees John Foster(JF) should read Karen Franek(KF). Item 4 paragraph 5 the sentence “In the June Survey 95% of respondents are involved in exporting using this definition” should read “In the June Survey a high proportion of respondents are exporters”. Approved.</p>	
3.	<p>MATTERS ARISING Nil.</p>	
4.	<p>LEP UPDATE JMT reminded the Meeting that Ross Gill will be presenting the KCC Growth Plan to interested Members from all EDGs on 16th September at The Chamber HQ in Ashford. MEDG Members have already seen this presentation at the July Meeting: JMT said that he would also be attending the Ashford presentation.</p>	
5.	<p>PROPOSED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AT J8 JF said that a Planning Application was expected within the next few days. JMT said that MEDG Members need to look at the Application as soon as it is validated and he will circulate the Reference Number so that it can be viewed on the MBC Website. CB asked if the two Applicants were currently Chamber Members. The response was that they are not currently Members but may wish to join in the future. One of the Applicants may become an MEDG Member as Export Representative.</p>	
6.	<p>THAMES LOWER THIRD CROSSING JMT that option C2 was the preferred option of all the EDGs; this had received Board approval and had been submitted on behalf of The Chamber. NR asked if this option involved a tunnel or bridge. The response was that it involved a bridge.</p>	
7.	<p>LOCAL PLAN JF said that various elements of the Plan were being worked on with a view to Consultation later in the year. He will arrange for details to be presented at a future MEDG Meeting. CB said that he would like to see the source documents underpinning the Plan. JF said that these would be published along with the Plan. NR said that the 2011 Census had shown that nationally there were more Households than expected. CB said that he was unable to comment but would arrange for a link to the relevant document to be circulated to MEDG Members..</p>	
8	<p>MAIDSTONE INTEGRATED TRANSPORT STRATEGY JF said that this was proceeding in conjunction with Item 7.</p>	

9.	<p>TOWN CENTRE FUTURE</p> <p>JMT said that there had been chatter in the press about potential developments at J7 and the impact on the Town Centre. JF said that land Securities wish to revamp Newnham Court with the redevelopment anchored by a Waitrose and Debenhams. To date there had been no formal Application but discussions had taken place. As the site already had A1 usage then it would be difficult to prevent any development. JMT wondered what the impact would be on the Town Centre; JF said that the DTZ report was still awaited as some appendices had yet to be finalised but publication was expected in 4-6 weeks. JMT asked that the Newnham Court redevelopment be an Agenda Item in the next Meeting.</p> <p>CD noted the impact of the increased area of the site as well as the planned Next across the road. JF said that major infrastructure development would be required to in response to these.</p> <p>MG expressed a fear that businesses could move away from the Town Centre and a full evaluation was required of the overall impact on the Town Centre. He noted the positive impact that the lower High Street redevelopment was having on this area of the Town Centre.</p> <p>JMT said that this development would impact on the Integrated Transport Strategy; JF said that as the ITF was looking at a 20 year strategy then this issue would be covered.</p> <p>JMT said that the issue of the J7 Development generating funds for the Town Centre was a difficult area as Section 106 funding has to have a direct relevance to the development itself. There was some uncertainty about this issue and JF said that he would clarify the situation regarding the availability and usage of Section 106 funding.</p> <p>CB said that there had already been infrastructure work around J7 and any future development would have a major impact on New Cut Road and Bearsted Road. MG said that a bus service to Newnham Court might be appropriate and he also noted the future impact of KIMS Phase 2.</p> <p>NR raised the question of the current status of the Hazlitt Theatre. MG said that MBC were in the final stages of discussion and that information should be available by the end of the month. He emphasized that the Hazlitt was crucial to the success of Earl Street..</p>	
10.	<p>LOCAL ECONOMY UPDATE</p> <p>NR said that there was no formal information since the June Survey. He believes that the improvement in economic activity over the last 6 months is due to an easier borrowing climate for households. The Balance of Trade is actually deteriorating. There is a risk of a re-run of previous problems due to increased household debt. Kent businesses had been insulated from many of the economic problems due to their typically small size.</p> <p>JMT believed that businesses were looking to expand, largely due to increased foreign demand. JF said that unemployment in the 16-24 age range had shown marginal improvement as had the level of claimants in general.</p> <p>MB said that businesses were now taking less time to implement development projects; notably in East Kent to the detriment of the rest of the County. It was too early to assess the impact of the TIGER fund in North Kent.</p>	
11.	<p>ARMED FORCES COVENANT</p> <p>JMT said that further redundancies had taken place and a second Leavers Fair was to be held on 15th October. Many of those being made redundant were seeking to remain in the area and many were very highly skilled. JMT</p>	

	<p>said that the Fair would have attendees from all over Kent, not just the Maidstone area. CD asked if the Chamber would be attending, JMT said that this needed to be chased up.</p> <p>VW highlighted the CTP Website (www.ctp.org.uk) and the fact that most employers seemed to be unaware of it.</p>	
12.	<p>LOW CARBON ZONE Nil.</p>	
13.	<p>BUSINESS INCUBATION CENTRES JMT said that recent information from Chris Garland seemed to suggest that the proposal was simply for a coffee shop. JF said that the Old Post Office was still under consideration along with other sites. The result would be a facility with a mixture of formats and spaces, work was still ongoing in trying to identify demand for the different types of space. He noted that similar approaches were being taken in other parts of the country and that MBC believed that there was a need for this type of facility.</p> <p>JMT wondered how The Chamber would fit into this. CD noted that The Chamber offers business advice but this could conflict with any private Company running the Centre. JF said that no decision had been made regarding the final facility and its management although he had been in discussion with JJ. He noted that the FSB as they were keen to get involved. MBC were bidding for funding from KCC and if the Old Post Office were to be used there could be a bid for Heritage Lottery Funding as it is an historic building.</p>	
14.	<p>CHAMBER UPDATE CD said that August had been quiet from a Membership standpoint. There was increasing interest from companies outside the area in joining the Chamber in Maidstone and using this as a focus for doing business in Kent.</p> <p>NR asked about business loans and CD responded that he should contact Robin Archer for more information.</p> <p>JMT outlined a situation where a Company, not Maidstone based, had sought Chamber support for a Planning Application. Due to a potential growth in export activity it was felt that The Chamber could support this and had produced a letter of general support. He will raise this principle with the Chamber Board so that future similar applications could also be given generic support. NR said that it would be of interest to know what the impact of Chamber support will be. JMT and CD said that they would attempt to get some feedback.</p>	
17.	<p>AOB <u>Kent Property Market Report</u> – It was commented that the section covering Maidstone was very thin. JF said that MBC had been offered only a single paragraph in the report. It was too early for any mention of the Next development to be included but there was still time to update the entry.</p> <p><u>MBC Survey</u> – JF said that MBC had commissioned Consultants to review how The Council was meeting its commitments. The MEDG may be approached for feedback from businesses.</p> <p><u>Tourism</u> – MG said that he had attended the lunch with Eric Pickles and that the Indian Restaurant hosting the lunch had experienced a significant increase in business since the opening of the new Premier Inn in London Road. Many of the new customers were tourists. He also noted that a new coach setting-down point outside the Museum had resulted in an increase in visitors to the Museum. VW said that the impact of tourism on the Maidstone economy</p>	

	<p>should not be underestimated. CD said that the TIC was inadequate as it was unable to make accommodation bookings and was not really a proper TIC. MG said that a satellite TIC will be opened in the Town Hall.</p> <p><u>Permitted Development</u> – JMT highlighted that fact that the Government had expanded Permitted Development Rights notably for residential development above shops. On 26th August a Consultation document was published that expands on this. JMT will arrange to circulate a precis of this document and would like feedback from MEDG Members. He also noted that the potential re-use of agricultural buildings for residential purposes could impact on the availability of businesses premises. The current Consultation runs until 15th October and the proposals do not appear to include a provision to enforce notification to the Local Authority. JF said that buildings converted to residential use without notifying the Local Authority could be problematic when any such property was offered for sale..</p>	
	<p>The meeting closed at 16:33.</p>	

Date of Next Meeting: Tuesday 12th November 2013.