

KENT INVICTA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
MINUTES OF ASHFORD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GROUP

HELD AT ASHFORD BUSINESS POINT

ON
THURSDAY 15th March 2011

Present: Paul Rickards – Chair (PR) Bill Fox (BF)
Andrew Osborne (AO) Heather Grigson (HG)
David Maddison (DM) Viv Kenny (VK)
Terry Botfield (TB)

Apologies: Richard Stafford (RS) Linda Marsh (LM)
Richard Lavender (RL) Graham Galpin (GG)
Jo James (JJ) Christopher Calcutt (CC)
Geoffrey Hilton (GH) Hugh Summerfield (HS)

1 Minutes of the last meeting

Minutes of the meeting held on the 16th February 2012 were agreed and passed.

2 Actions from Minutes and Matters Arising.

There were no actions or Matters Arising from the minutes

3 Action List Review

There is only one action on the current schedule. RL to organise Business Banking Officials to attend a future AEDG Meeting to discuss current lending policy to businesses. RL has confirmed that this is in hand and will be completed upon his return from leave.

4 Group Reports

4.1 Planning (CC)

There was no planning Report at this meeting.

4.2 Local Government (AO GG)

AO outlined the proposals to be discussed at an open meeting on 16 March 2012 regarding the Portas Pilot Bid. The bid proposed was split into 4 key themed areas:

1. Town Team comprising local MP, Leader of Council, representatives of local businesses etc
2. Core Strategy Review- is the Town Centre Action Plan still relevant or does the Town need a new vision?
3. Critical Impact – increasing the footfall and making Ashford more attractive
4. Thoughts for going forward – Fresh ideas using modern technology etc to promote Ashford.

4.3 Construction (PR)

PR gave a brief update on progress within the KCFG and confirmed that the pilot scheme within Ashford to look into the possibility of improving the accommodation over the shops in the town was progressing with support from Ashford BC and Greenov.

PR & HG reported that the construction industry locally was experiencing a mixed market with some organisations busy and recruiting but with others struggling and making redundancies

4.4 SME's (GH)

There was no Report at this meeting.

4.5 Town Centre (VK)

VK outlined a new scheme within the Town to be ready for the events of 2012 (Olympics and Queens Jubilee Celebrations etc). Support is required to prepare a specification of activities and support already in hand from K College. The scheme seeks to promote 'community engagement'.

VK also highlighted the work of the Ashford Railway Heritage Trust who are looking at preserving the Ashford Railway Heritage & Museum. VK to e-mail further details to the Group.

4.6 Tourism Marketing (DM)

DM outlined an area of recent improvement in Ashford for tourism and marketing. There are now flights from Korea into Gatwick which then links to Ashford offering excellent shopping facilities and reasonably priced accommodation with the added bonus of quick and easy daily travel to London via the high-speed link. The Outlet has seen a significant rise in it's footfall from visitors from further afield and are still recording increased numbers of visits from foreign registered cars etc and coach tours to the outlets are growing.

4.7 Commercial Property (RS)

There was no Report at this meeting.

4.8 Environment (LM)

There was no Report at this meeting

4.9 Transport & Infrastructure (HG)

HG confirmed that her colleague Tim Allen is planning to attend the next meeting regarding an update on the proposals for a 'Truck Stop and solution to 'Operation Stack'

4.10 Education (TB)

TB highlighted that there were bid opportunities and grants etc available to help create employment and business opportunities in the area. Also there is financial help available for employers to develop their training needs further.

TB went on to discuss the so called 'Lost Generation' problem – 16 to 24 year olds who are unable to secure full time employment. There are a growing number of schemes and funds available to provide training, apprenticeships etc to help this age group get into employment. Ashford currently has 178 people in this group

TB will provide for the next meeting a matrix of funds/opportunities available.

5 Actions from meeting

VK to issue e-mail regarding the Ashford Railway Heritage Trust

TB to prepare a matrix regarding funding opportunities available to help both employers and young people/graduates improve employment in the 16 to 24 year group.

6 AOB

It was agreed that the topic for next month could be the progress in respect of the Portas Pilot Bid and associated matters

Meeting closed at 5:30 pm