

Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce
North Kent Economic Development Group Meeting
28th April 2015
Medway Innovation Centre

Minutes

Attendees:

Richard Longman (RL) – Thames Gateway (Kent) Partnership
Mark Coxon (MC) - Caxtons
Chris Inwood (CI) - Gravesham BC
Shaun Whyman (SW) – Harlequin Group
Lisa Cranney (LC) - Hatten Wyatt
Jake Gann (JG) – Hatten Wyatt
Louisa Felstead (LF) - Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce
Wayne Saunders (WS) – Medway Council
Philip Painter (PP)
Steve Boxall (SB)- Regeneration X
Rosemary Williams (RW) - RW Coaching
Janet Robinson (JR) – Middleton Murray
Debbie Townrow (DT) – Swale BC
In attendance, Paula Weeks (PW) - Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce

Apologies:

Jo James - Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce
Richard Lavender – Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce (RLC)
Robert Goodman - Bluewater/Lendlease
Stuart Haddow - Xperisoft Ltd
Lewis Kirnon -Dartford BC
Phil Taylor - ArcelorMittal Kent Wire
Lisa Michalowicz – Ramada Encore Chatham
Peter Cooper – Penshurst Planning Ltd
Gavin Coleman - Handelsbanken
Suzanne Wood – Medway Fibreglass

Richard Longman chaired the meeting on this occasion in Richard Lavender's absence.

Minutes

1.1 Minutes of previous meeting

Approved

1.2 Matters Arising

DT - 'Spirit of Sittingbourne':

Planning application was approved last month, work is expected to start on developing the infrastructure in the summer.

The start-up business unit being developed in the High Street is now up to standard to be let out.

2 Action List Review

2.1 Jo James met with local councils in January to discuss ‘What do businesses want from their local authority’. There was an outstanding action (2.2.2 of previous minutes) for Jo James to speak to Chris Inwood regarding KICC consultation with businesses in Gravesham. **Action Jo James.**

3 Chairman’s Report

Although unable to attend the meeting RLC had forwarded the following:

Firstly, I would like to thank Richard Longman for standing in as Chair of today’s meeting. I would also like to welcome in my absence the new members attending today whom I hope will find the meeting informative, constructive and enjoyable.

As some of you will know we have completed the re-structuring of the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, after the “cease trading” of Channel Chamber, and we are now the only Accredited Chamber in Kent and will serve all our members throughout the County. I will be asking the CEO Jo James to address the Group at our future meeting to give you an update on that progress and our strategy for the future.

We have just completed our Accreditation Audit by the British Chamber of Commerce and am pleased to say that we have been given a very clean bill of health and I must thank our administrative team led by Jo for the amount of work put in to this audit to achieve these excellent results.

Our support for the Cathedral Group and Swale District Council regarding the “Spirit of Sittingbourne” has been successful, although I believe a few hoops had to be jumped through, but we stand firmly behind the project and hope this will bring much needed future prosperity to both businesses and residents of Sittingbourne.

The London Paramount workshops were a great success and I must thank all those who attended on behalf of their own companies or the Chamber. It is very important that we should participate in the future planning of projects of this magnitude that will affect all our business and social lives.

It appears by various “People moves” in the County, that the Ebbsfleet Garden City project is moving forward, Richard may have news regarding this in his briefing, but I do hope that I can arrange a presentation by the new management team to our group in the not too distant future.

All is quiet on the Thames Lower Crossing and will remain so until after the General Election, as will the Airport Expansion Plan
Please enjoy your meeting in the capable hands of Richard.

3.1 Ebbsfleet Garden City

RL - Robin Cooper has been named as the new Chief Executive of the UDC. There will be a transition period between establishment of the UDC on 20th April until 1st July when it will be fully resourced to operate a local planning authority.

3.2 Lower Thames Crossing

RL – Stakeholder panel meeting being held June/July. Currently assessing shorter list of options. The Public consultation on short list options will commence later in 2015.

3.3 London Paramount

Workshops finished for the 3rd round consultation stage and report now published. The 4th round starts 29th April.

RL attended 5 workshops in the 3rd round and reported that although each workshop was ‘themed’ the overriding concern from the public was infrastructure and the impact the additional transport will have on the area.

More details also required as soon as possible regarding supply chain and skills opportunities so that local people can access these and provision can then be designed appropriately. For example modules for higher education ideally would already be under development.

RL – companies wishing to be part of the supply chain and be considered for procurement opportunities need to register on the online portal. However, there is an element of scepticism that larger companies are favoured and how much genuine opportunity is there for local and smaller businesses.

Target date for submitting planning application is 12th August 2015.

CI – under a normal local planning route a Section 106 Agreement would be expected, but as this project is NSIP how would this be dealt with? As there has been no central response yet is this something the EDG could take forward? LF – KICC have tried to arrange a joint EDG but nothing confirmed as yet so now probably looking at Sept/Oct time.

PP – there doesn't seem to be a cohesive structure, who has overall control of these projects?

RL – TGKP Chairman has written to the Department of Transport pressing for DfT to look holistically at transport accessibility and capacity across North Kent, taking account of, but also looking beyond, Ebbsfleet Garden City and Paramount; the Lower Thames Crossing is also crucial. In relation to rail capacity this should include looking at extension of Crossrail. RL urged everyone to attend the next round of Paramount public consultations starting the next day (29th April) at venues in N Kent.

The observation was made that if Paramount pays premium rates for the jobs on offer, this may well attract people away from other businesses in N Kent – both a recruitment challenge and opportunity.

4. Group Reports

Environment (SB)

Paramount - Consultants had recommended that the marsh land around the site be passed to a 3rd party for development. Why are the same developers not involved? PP – Perhaps those attending the next round of events could raise this question.

The group was reminded that the Secretary of State had called in the Lodge Hill planning application; a date for the public inquiry was still awaited.

Education & Training (JR)

Apprenticeships: There have been significant changes with new employer led apprenticeships. Trailblazers will develop new apprenticeship standards leading to accreditations for their sector, ranging from level 2 to level 6. So far most frameworks have been changed and improved; about 280 are in place. National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) has an online matching service which benefits employers by giving them one central contact point. Apprenticeship Training Agencies can develop study programmes with schools, but there has to be an employer for an apprenticeship to be put in place.

Schools: have to report on the destination of their school leavers. It is Ofsted's responsibility to inspect 6th forms so it is in the interests of Schools to build strong 6th forms.

Transport & Infrastructure (PC)

Peter Cooper was not in attendance to provide an update.

However, SB raised a question to the group - does anyone know what benefits HS1 had brought to the area? It has proven difficult to find much up to date data on this, reports online are quite old and inconclusive.

CI – Property registers may be a good source showing an increase in property prices.

MC – London surveying firms have bigger research departments which may have reports online. e.g. Jones Lang Lasalle.

The Group felt there was perhaps a role for the Chamber in promoting the N Kent 'story', including the significance of HS1 connectivity.

Commercial Property (MC)

Speculative industrial development is emerging with one of the first forward funded schemes in the South East at Aylesford for 200,000 sq ft for warehousing.

A 260,000sq ft warehousing development is underway at Kingsnorth, expected completion January 2016. There is also interest in a 40 acre site in Rochester.

Slade Green rail freight terminal is being developed (LB Bexley)

Developers are looking for land in Kent which is increasing demand and raising Kent's profile.

London property funds are looking for multi-let schemes.

Rents have been increasing in the last 18 months.

WS – Innovation centres are ideal for start ups and small businesses, as they need the flexibility, the model works very well.

CI – ongoing dialogue with the HCA seeking to secure commitment to commercial development as well as residential at Northfleet Embankment.

Thames Gateway (Kent) Partnership (RL)

A recent visit by the Thames Gateway Minister had shown encouraging signs of commitment to the Thames Gateway. We would be looking to follow that up post-election.

DCLG consulted on proposals that 90% of Brownfield land suitable for housing should have local development orders; this was not supported by TGKP.

Membership (LF)

7.1% growth in membership excluding Channel area.

Today sees the first of KICCs SME Procurement workshops being held in Ashford.

MC asked if he or his colleagues could attend future NK EDG meetings. **LF will forward request.**

Local Authority Update

Medway (WS)

Campaign launched for apprenticeships locally in Construction, Engineering & Design and pays £1,000 top-up per apprentice.

The 31st Medway Business Awards have just been launched. Closing date for entries is 31st July 15.

Gravesham (CI)

The 10th Dartford & Gravesham business awards have just been launched. Would encourage local businesses to enter the awards as every entrant has a free profile in the KM.

In March a High Court Judge ruled in favour of Gravesham Borough Council's planning process, enabling the £120m regeneration for Gravesend Town Centre's Heritage Quarter to go ahead. The developer is looking to start in 9-12 months, the development aims to create more than 900 new jobs and 100 apprenticeships.

Dartford

RL gave a quick update in the absence of a representative from Dartford council.

Tesco has pulled out of the development in the town, but they still own land in the area around Lowfield Street. Discussions are ongoing to try & secure a solution for the site. DBC and HCA are taking the Station Mound site to the market for mixed use development. This would involve relocation of the civic centre; the expectation is that Council offices will go to the old co-op site as part of the mixed use redevelopment.

Swale (DT)

See 'Spirit of Sittingbourne' earlier in minutes.

AOB

RL circulated details of the Kent & Medway Business Games being held on Friday 10th July. Further details can be found at www.workplacechallenge.org.uk/kent

Date of next meeting : Tuesday 30th June. 10am Medway Innovation Centre.