

North Kent Economic Development Group Meeting
Tuesday December 2013
Medway Innovation Centre
Minutes

Attended:

Richard Lavender – Chair (RLC) Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce

Richard Longman (RL) Thames Gateway (Kent) Partnership

Janet Robinson (JR) SET Training

Steve Gerring (SG) UK HSE

John Austin-Brooks (JAB) Vector Resources

Peter Cooper (PC) Penshurst Planning

Emma Harraden (EH) Hatten Wyatt

Leslie Fernandez (LF) North West Kent College

Suzanne Wood (SW) Medway Fibreglass

Kieran Nayer (KN) Shumi Group

In attendance-Louisa Felstead (LAF) Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce

Apologies:

Jo James Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce

Chris Inwood Gravesham Borough Council

Fran Toomey Medway Council

Lewis Kirnon Dartford Borough Council

Carlo Gargiulo Swale Borough Council

David Liston-Jones Thames Gateway (Kent) Partnership

Martin Garside Port of London Authority

Alastair Gale Port of London Authority

Stephen Parker Willmott Dixon

Robert Goodman Bluewater/Lendlease

Stacey Driver Stickleback Manufacturing

Steve Boxall Regeneration X

1. Minutes

1.1 Minutes of previous meeting- approved

1.2 Matters arising- none

2. Action List Review

- 3.** RLC-The joint EDG notes have been circulated to all; the intention is that there will be further regular future joint EDG meetings.

RLC emphasised in response to JR's point about business engagement with schools that the Chamber is working very hard on this via Young Chamber and would like to further roll out the offering. The beauty of Young Chamber is that it is accessible to schools 365 days a year; not just for the odd week or two.

RLC has investigated SB's request that empty shops be explored as a forum for showcasing businesses and perhaps education. RLC reported that insurance for such privately owned premises has been hugely problematic and that perhaps Council owned properties should be looked at?

Medway and Dartford UTCs- no further detail on these at present but RLC will look for further information

EH- will e mail regular legal updates to fellow group members as the speed of change in some areas is too quick for bi-monthly meetings

EH-Sadly, the Town Centre Manager for Gravesham is unable to participate in the group- CI and LK will fill this remit (CI)

4. Chairman's Update

- **Update on KICC**

The proposed Lodge Hill development in Medway is not going ahead as Nightingales have been known for a while to be living on the site and Natural England have stamped an SSSI on the proposal. Due to concerns re development blighting, the Chamber has decided to form an internal group to offer Medway Council representation support as regards helping to get the proposals through. SW- if housing is not to go here then will it have to go on current green belt land? The Group is to be led by John Taylor of Page and Wells. PC offered to take a place on this group. RLC pointed out that this group had already stated, via SB, that such wildlife and environmental concerns can and should be built into development plans in the very earliest stages.

- **NKEDG Recruitment**

ACTION- LAF to look at areas and sectors needed to balance the group

- **Dartford Thames Crossing (Security)**

The Chamber sits on the Kent police security committee. The Crossing has now been recognised as the highest ranked potential target security wise and emergency warning levels have been raised accordingly. It has also been noted that there has been a large increase in the number of rogue businesses taking out short term warehouse leases and then leaving these premises full of waste.

- **Hub Airport Update**

The Chamber has met with Transport for London and KICC has not gone out on a limb to support the Thames Estuary proposal. The Davis report is now out and makes its own recommendations. As far as the Chamber is concerned, opinions have been wide ranging with no over-all consensus. The closing date has passed and without carrying out a survey amongst members we have maintained the LEP and KCC line at present. SW- concerned that there has, in many cases, been a knee jerk reaction to say "No" without any real debate or information. She is also concerned about the use of council tax payers' money to support such campaigns without representation. RLC- said that during the recent TFL meeting it was said that Schiphol Airport welcomed the delay as they continue to build on their own European Hub, there is obviously a real danger that if an airport is deemed to be necessary, a delay might mean that the UK ends up missing out. PC has agreed to keep a watching brief on this issue.

- **Presentations for 2014**

RLC suggested Chattenden/ Lodge Hill and the SSSI- support for Medway Council?

SG- suggested Paramount. RL confirmed potential for 27,000 new jobs. Paramount have not committed to any other site. But that the deals to buy the required land are still under negotiation. The removal of option B at Swanscombe for any Lower Thames Crossing is good news for those in favour of the Park. JR- could Paramount present to the group. Perhaps Tony Sefton who is the Paramount project manager?

JR- concerned about the changes to training funding; especially as far as SME and micro businesses are concerned.

ACTION- RLC confirmed that he will ask KCC to present at the next meeting on this.

4 Group Reports

- **Environment**

Portfolio holder not present

- **Education and Training**

JR- reported changes in apprenticeship funding and consultation frameworks. LF agreed that the speed of change is rapid. JR is concerned that employer engagement is vital but that for smaller businesses the sheer scale of change and complexity is an issue. There is almost too much choice in training but possibly no clear overall vision of what is available. LF- too much red tape and regulation for small businesses to steer around when accessing training provision. SW- employers

want clarity in training offerings and easy access to information on what is relevant to their sector; not what is not. RLC asked LF how the College are coping with the increase of form offerings from schools. LF stated that colleges have to be far more pro-active but also that they are able to supply sectors and areas such as maritime which schools cannot.

- **Transport and Infrastructure**

PC- With the potential for a Lower Thames Crossing, now that option B has been ruled out, options A and C are still pending further environmental studies. However, only 30% of people surveyed considered another crossing to be needed. Any decision will not be before 2014 yet he wonders if any government would go ahead if public opinion is that it is not necessary. Better use of the Port of Felixstowe, for instance, would change usage patterns regarding freight traffic from the Channel ports travelling North.

- **Planning**

No portfolio holder appointed. Detail of report by CI read out which included comment on a high number of permitted development applications from B1 office to residential which may lead to a real shortage of commercial premises in Gravesham. KN commented that his company had submitted a number of these elsewhere in Kent but only in areas where the commercial property could not be let and there had been a positive impact by keeping premises in use.

- **Commercial Property**

No portfolio holder yet appointment. EH made some suggestions

- **Business Legal**

ACTION- EH to e mail updates to group members

- **Business Finance**

RLC- Claire Clark from Facts and Figures will be joining the EDG as a member; perhaps she might take this portfolio?

- **Retail and Tourism**

KN to take this portfolio

ACTION- LAF and EH to contact local hotels/leisure establishments re participation in EDG

- **Membership**

LAF- as of late November 2013, the Thames Gateway area became the largest single division within Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce. Thank you to all who have supported the Chambers growth in North Kent

- **Local Authority update**

Update from CI read out re Gravesham

TIGER- No updates other than that there are some applications in the pipeline

GBC Core strategy is currently under consultation

£19million investment in Gravesends town station. Planning application received for the former Tollgate Hotel site on the A2 coastbound. The Council has had a good number of very well received Christmas events

No representation for other authorities

5 Members issues raised

Already covered in previous points

6 Actions from Meeting

Funding opportunities struck a chord:

RLC- TIGER briefings set for February and March 2014. KICC are also working with Medway on a meet the buyer event.

JAB- TIGER needs to be pushed- possibly still a lack of awareness. SG agreed and said that the same applies to schemes such as Growth Accelerator. JR- The Design Council also have a similar match funded scheme. SW- Manufacturing Advisory service also . EH agreed that there appears to be a lack

of awareness of these schemes but equally that businesses do have a responsibility to look out for the information which is freely available.

[ACTION-RLC to investigate if the Chamber has a definitive guide to all such schemes](#)

KN commented that his business had been very impressed by the advice given on funding opportunities and how quickly the turnaround had been. Equally, when going to his bank, the business planning involved in the application process stood his business in very good stead.

LF asked about the purpose of Young Chamber. RLC responded that the purpose is to build business skills and awareness within schools.

LAF explained that there is currently free face to face HR support available through the Chamber for businesses in Medway and Swale.

7 AOB

Update from Thames Gateway (Kent) Partnership

RL- The South East LEP board met last week with ways of working and the draft strategic economic plan as the main agenda items. The board agreed a federated model with four main geographical areas being recognised (East Sussex, Kent & Medway, Essex and Thames Gateway South East). Ultimately, TGKP's concern is to ensure that the Thames Gateway area is properly prioritised within the LEP's strategy.

Good progress was reported re TIGER. However, Mark Dance (as Chair of the North Kent TIGER appraisal panel) has emphasised that, approximately £1 million of funding must be awarded at each meeting to keep to target for funds committed in 2013-14. There is a need to continue pushing the publicity on this, including the intermediaries such as the banks. From October 2013, the eligible categories have been extended and a "new" time limited category for Innovation Centres (private or non-profit making) launches in February 2014. KN asked about a timescale for application: RL advised that once people have gone through the pre-application "gateway", they have 3 months to complete the full application.

Date of next meeting Tuesday February 2014, Medway Innovation Centre, Darwin Room 10.00 am-12.00 noon