

MINUTES OF THE ASHFORD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GROUP

HELD ON THURSDAY 16 FEBRUARY 2017

AT ASHFORD BUSINESS POINT

Present: Richard Lavender (Chair), Paul Nixon, Richard Lloyd, Heather Grigson, Andrew Osborne, David Jackson, Malcolm Vint, Richard Stafford, Hugh Summerfield, Jane Burtenshaw, Mike Cook (Guest)

Apologies: Graham Galpin, Annette Bunn, Gareth Scott, Julie Anderson

	Actions
<p>1. Minutes of the last meeting The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as being a true record apart from no. 3 – it was another member of the group that asked if Victoria school was closing not HG. HG was only commenting on the chaos caused on the road by the school traffic in the mornings and afternoons. The minutes were signed by RL</p>	
<p>1.1 Matters Arising There were no matters arising</p>	
<p>1.2 Action List Review RL asked if everyone had received a copy of RS's EPC presentation – everyone confirmed receipt Representation from the Job Club – RL still needs to speak to AO regarding this item. Backlog of traffic at lights on J10 – this is a highways issue not the council The state of the area between the railway station and the outlet centre – a programme is being looked at by ABC to improve this area.</p>	RL/AO
<p>2. Chairman's Report RL said there had not been a board meeting since the last AEDG and he had nothing to report.</p>	
<p>3. Discussion on KCC Freight Action Plan The following points were raised regarding the KCC Freight Action Plan and RL said that he would be submitting a response and these items would be included. The location of the proposed rail terminal being south of the Thames at Bexley was considered by RL to be wrongly placed and would only cause additional traffic issues. However HG put a more convincing argument in favour as the location was very close to J1 of M25 and would therefore be closer to the crossing and not further congest approach routes through Kent. The AEDG would therefore be forwarding a formal letter of support to KCC for the Draft Strategy. RL introduced Mike Cook, (MC), from Ashford Borough Council Enforcement Team who gave a very good briefing on his role as an Enforcement Officer and the progress that had been made. MC said that there were still issues that need to be resolved but in general the lorry situation on most Industrial</p>	

sites is now under control. The Cobbs Wood site is still proving a difficult area together with traceability of foreign lorry ownership. It would appear that owner drivers are not displaying any logo's or company details which obviously prevents traceability back in originating countries.

ABC were in agreement of smaller lorry parks being set up to prevent the current situation. It was pointed out that Eurotunnel, Port of Dover and STOP 24 were all increasing facilities, but obviously more needs to be done, and it is hoped that the KCC strategy document takes note and looks to licence smaller parking areas close to the channel ports.

RL thanked Mike Cook and asked if he would return in six months with a further update.

4. Round Table Discussion

HG – Infrastructure improvements, soft landscaping to improve area around the two junctions

PN – nothing further to report from the last meeting

RS – still a steady demand but supply is abysmal. Cobbs Wood had an open day last week.

HS – the amount of money collected from rates this year will equal last years. Many businesses related to the leisure industry will find that the rates have doubled and in some cases tripled. It appears that no rate payers in this area will benefit from rural rate relief.

JA – although she sent her apologies Julie sent the statement below to be added on her behalf: -

'Ebbsfleet is well underway with £275m input agreed from the Government to establish the Garden City. I am now Chair of the Construction Guild for career development in schools and working closer with Education Business Partnership team to try and get schools to know they can contact me or EBP and request a careers talk from people in business. Kent Choices for our event is now re badged and will be in March. A new thing called the CHARTER MARK will become a requirement for local council procurement which companies can obtain if they prove they offer and deliver 4 work experience placements per year and potentially 2 apprentice opportunities.'

RLI – recently attended a seminar about soil testing given by the Environment Agency and the University of Greenwich. RLI pointed out that there were not any developers at the seminar and it was their lack of knowledge that was causing much concern among haulage companies regarding the category of waste that needs to be disposed and basically leaving it to the haulage company to see what is loaded and where it needs to go. RLI will keep the group informed of progress regarding regulations and responsibilities.

AO – RL asked AO how long the local plan is likely to be delayed for following the governments increase housing request. AO said summer is the target date. The local growth fund is funding 19 schemes across the region, one of these schemes to benefit the Ashford Spur which now has full funding. Unfortunately Ashford Town Centre was not included in the 19 so did not get any funding.

There is now movement on the Chilmington site and the Commercial Quarter is progressing.

Elwick Place – still waiting for a date for getting on the site. This will hopefully be Spring.

Earth is being moved from Victoria Way site and Aldi's are already advertising for staff.

MV – had a meeting last week with the housing minister to discuss ways of dealing with the housing shortage. There needs to be a focus around planning departments so that plans are turned around more quickly. The time taken in agreeing 106's needs to be shorter.

People are now signing longer tenancy contracts. The aim is to do away with letting fees by the end of the year. There were concerns regarding the Property to Let market as to let is becoming unaffordable to local people. It would appear that letting agents now want to see salary income 30 times the monthly rent figure.

DJ – January was a good month for the Outlet Centre with a 2% increase in footfall and a 4% growth in sales. The centre has moved forward in terms of guests from London and foreign trade moved forward in 2016 with 3.5% of trade coming from Europe. There is a nervousness around signing leases as companies are worried as to whether or not they will be able to afford the rent and the rates.

The centre is committed to phase 2 and already have the required number of lets.

JB – latest report is attached. Recruitment is up 66% in the first quarter of the year. There are 123 NETE students starting next month (at Jemmett Road site for now).

HS – People are still hesitant.

RL – Proposed that it may be necessary to split the portfolio presentations in the future to ensure that full attention can be given to all areas of concern.

RL will keep the team posted on his thoughts.

Date of next meeting – Thursday 16 March at 4pm
Please let Lynda know if you are unable to attend