

**MINUTES OF THE ASHFORD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GROUP
HELD ON
WEDNESDAY 13 JANUARY 2016
AT
ASHFORD BUSINESS POINT**

Present: Terry Botfield, Richard Lloyd, Richard Lavender (Guest), Tudor Price (Guest), Hugh Summerfield, Richard Stafford, Heather Grigson, Graham Galpin, Annette Bunn, Bryan Hall, Clare Clifford, Paul Nixon, Michael Koelnberger, Chris Hare (Guest), T A Barker

Apologies: Andrew Osborne, Malcolm Vint, Linda Marsh, Joanne Fowler, Mandy Bearne

1. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed to be a true record with two minor amendments:-

Damian was spelt incorrectly

Growth Hub – this should read ‘giving advice to businesses’

1.1 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

2. Chairman’s Comments and Report

Damian Green – following on from his breakfast meeting and a request from TB, DG wrote to Anna Soubry, minister for small business, and the reply back confirmed that there was no replacement for the Business Growth Service which end 31/3/16, SME’s should look to Growth Hubs for support, the government is still backing small firms.

Planning updates – Full planning permission has been approved for Elwick Road and this is going ahead.

A revised application has been submitted for Sevington. TB asked if everyone was in agreement of him writing to give support of this application, support was given.

The Railway Exhibition – the application for this has been submitted and the group were in agreement of supporting this.

Junction 10a – a community consultation is open and may be worth visiting , the group voted to support this application.

TB is to send out the link to the group for ‘Ashford for an exciting 2016 ahead’

Flexible office accommodation – there is 10,000 sq. ft. of flexible office space in the Panorama Building which will be managed by Regus.

Operation Stack – Richard Lavender, who is co-ordinating the Chamber’s views on operation stack, gave an update on the proposed site for the new lorry park. The Chamber has given support to the Stanford West option, however we do not consider this to be the final solution. It is necessary to look at the cause and to look at the wider infrastructure issues. We hope to be at the table as progress is made to give a business perspective to the options and wider issues.

Business Growth Hub – TP gave the group an overview of the work done by the Business Growth Hub (briefing attached).

3. Portfolio Reports

HS – Business Finance – the general feeling is mixed with some saying everything is fine whilst others are saying things are not so good. Banks are still keen to lend at fixed rates

BH – Membership – Bryan said membership is still going well. There are a number of Young Chamber events over the next few months and eight businesses are needed at each event. Bryan said if anyone is interested in supporting these events to please contact Angela at the office.

AB – SME – reported that it is either all good or all bad depending on who you speak to. Space is still an issue as is the lack of skills especially in the construction industry. Clare Clifford confirmed this saying that at January’s KCFG breakfast everyone said they were working at full capacity because of the lack of skilled people.

RS – Commercial Property – there is still a shortage of stock across the board – shops, offices and sheds and confidence is up and down. Rents are creeping up. TB reported on behalf of MV that there is a shortage of domestic properties

TB

available.

HG – Transport and Infrastructure – everything is very busy but there is a design shortage.

HG mentioned about the reported 2.6M that has not been paid on the Dartford Crossing and this is mainly foreign registered vehicles.

Heather said she had a paper about people's attitude to infrastructure which she will pass to TB to email out to the group.

TB

RL – Environment – reported that the climate must be changing as waste wood is normally used in Scandinavia for heat and power but it has not been as cold as usual there so there is an excess of waste wood.

Tracey Barker – Education and Training – There have not been any real cuts but there has been a shift in what is being funded.

MK – Tourism and Retail – the reports were all positive on the numbers at the Outlet Centre and the amounts being spent with the only problem being the amount of available parking.

GG – Local Authority – everything seems positive with happy, busy people. The footfall in Ashford was up by 3% in October with a 2.5% average increase across the year.

4. A.O.B

Future meetings:-

Linda Marsh will update on Young Chamber in February

Broadband update in March

Richard Alderton to update in April

Date of next meeting – Thursday 18 February 2016

Kent & Medway Growth Hub

The Hub is one of 39 Hubs across the UK and is part of the Governments new approach to devolved Business support.

It is a free to access point of information, guidance and signposting for the business community of Kent

The aim is to assist businesses to navigate and access local, regional and national publicly funded business support programmes.

The service consists of a team of Navigators based at our Ashford office who can answer your questions over the phone, face to face or by email. They will find let you know what support is available and how you can access it.

With a rapidly changing business support landscape, this personal localised service has been needed for several years and the Chamber are delighted to see this initiative finally arrive in Kent

The attached presentation explains in more detail how the service operates.

Finally; some new initiatives planned for the future to keep an eye out for

- Locase – a green grant and loan scheme
- Keep+ - an innovation support programme with grants and assistance
- SEBusiness Boost – Grant scheme and extended support through the Growth Hubs