

## MINUTES OF THE ASHFORD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GROUP

HELD ON THURSDAY 16 NOVEMBER 2017

### AT ASHFORD BUSINESS POINT

**Present:** Richard Lavender (Chair), Malcolm Vint, Peter Corr, Julie Anderson, Jo Rossi, Richard Lloyd, Heather Grigson, Paul Nixon, Graham Galpin, Andrew Osborne, Richard Stafford

Apologies: Annette Bunn, Hugh Summerfield, Philip Carter

	Actions
<p><b>1. Minutes of the last meeting</b> The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as being a true record and were signed by the Chairman</p>	
<p><b>1.1 Matters Arising</b> There were no matters arising</p>	
<p><b>1.2 Action List Review</b> RL apologised to PC for having not yet contacted him but will arrange a meeting shortly. Newtown works – Kier have pulled out and there are some issues over ownership of the ground. GG said he still must arrange for the Crime Commissioner to present at the AEDG and it was suggested that February may be a good month Scale up Ashford – RL said he attended a meeting recently where it was said that ABC is a case study for ‘Scale up’ ABC discretionary rate relief – RL confirmed he has written a letter and filled in the questionnaire favourably as per the members vote. London overspill Trafalgar House – GG said he had alerted the police regarding the issue and HG confirmed that things seem to have quietened down in the area. However, this was not a matter that ABC could interfere with as the LA responsible for the renting was Croydon Council. However, this has put a red light up for future developments owned by ABC. Investor breakfast – RL confirmed he had attended the breakfast and it was very successful. AO said they are hoping to hold something similar every six months. A2070 – ABC have looked to see how successful the speed limit has been on the A2070 but it seems that traffic is not sticking to the reduced speed and we all know that unless enforcement is taken is only a token gesture. This is going to the joint transport board in December. AO said that A2070 will possibly be subjected to an enforced speed limit when works commence next year.</p>	

## 2. Chairmans Report

RL said he had nothing to report apart from the Chamber held the AGM at the end of October and it was very successful.

### 2.1 Lorry Park

HG handed out a report regarding the lorry park

The group discussed this at length saying that two years ago when operation stack was in place for three weeks businesses nearly got to the point where they had to close because of the severe disruption to the local area. AO said there were three elements to the problem: -

- Operation stack
- Overnight lorry parking
- Financial Compensation for Companies severely affected by Stack.

What is going to happen in two years - is the problem going to become worse with Brexit?

It was felt by the group that we do not need to comment on the current Government announcement that the scheme has been dropped.

However, it was felt essential that the Government and the Chamber is challenging Highways England to look at alternatives.

RL commented that with the throughput of freight vehicles today and the expected increase over the coming years would still require the M20 for stack in an emergency situation, no lorry park will be large enough to accommodate the current daily flow. The M26 was suggested many years ago, but never given any credit, perhaps this could be reconsidered.

## 3. Round table

**RS** – commercial property is buoyant but still very little property available causing rent to go up, however, there are various schemes coming up so rents may then have to drop.

Retail in the town centre – this tends to be for business that deal in things that cannot be purchased over the internet. Vacancy rate in the town centre is now less than 8%.

**RLI** - construction related there seems to be plenty of work for tippers – mainly muck away but work for brick lorries is again very slow. There is obvious hope that what comes out of the ground now will need to build on in the near future.

**MV** – previous updates tie in with his side of the business. Houses £600,000 and under are selling very quickly whilst the higher priced properties are very slow to move. Letting demand is high but landlords are selling up leaving a shortage of property to let.

**JR** – nothing to report. There is a Kent Business Summit on the 12 January

**JA** – The Kent Construction Expo at Detling was very good with lots of businesses attending. Taster days are being looked at to encourage students to take a look at what is available within the construction industry, RL said we will look forward to hearing how this develops at the next meeting

**GG** – ABC has been nominated for two awards – the best Council in the county and the best entrepreneurial council in the country. The draft local plan is going in at the end of December – and means will not then have to adopt the numbers that were issued recently by Government.

ABC Corporate property – fair size of one floor of International House is being let and the property is already 75% full

Elwick Place is progressing with tenancies shaping up.

Jo Wincanton who has been managing the town centre, is leaving. GG said she has done a remarkable job in the town centre. RL agreed with the difference she has made at ABC.

Big 8 – all underway or already completed. The brewery is due to start December/January. There has been some interest for the corner of Beaver Road/Victoria Road

**PC** – things have been quiet through November and October this year was quieter than October 2016. Year to date is 6% up on last year.

**PN** – businesses that got through the earlier recession are now starting to consider selling up and retiring with exiting partly due to the exchange rate. (However, the sale of motorhomes has increased).

**HG** – nothing to add

**HG/JA** would work together to look into the KCFG proposal for construction/student work availability scheme.