

Chairman's Report

Chairman, Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce Annual General Meeting: Friday 22nd January 2021

Good afternoon and a very warm welcome to what I believe is the first ever virtual AGM.

Whilst we have all come out the other side of a 'virtual' year I personally hope that at the next AGM, in the words of the inimitable Vera Lyn, 'We'll **Meet** Again.'

My mention of Vera resonates; as many of you will be aware, she passed away in June 2020 at the grand age of 103. She is one of a generation who saw so much trauma and struggle in the world, with both World Wars figuring large. Her personal efforts to support so many for so long earned her the title of the Briton who best exemplified the spirit of the 20th century.

And it struck me as I was crafting this report that her drive, verve, dedication and sheer determination in her field are all qualities that we have seen running through the Kent business community. In the toughest, changeable, most challenging and for the most part, a distressing year, we have seen you all adapt, innovate, battle and bounce through into 2021. For some, that has not been possible, and I would ask you all to seek those businesspeople out where you able and support and encourage them towards new ventures. On behalf of the board of directors and our CEO I would like to take this moment to salute you all.

In turn, I am incredibly proud to be able to report that the spirit seen amongst our business community runs as a rich seam throughout our Chamber. As with all organisations, we have a strategy, we have a well- run operation, we have talented people and we are financially prudent; all facets that enabled us to rapidly react as the Covid-19 virus disrupted our work and personal lives. But it's the spirit of the team that carried us through. Again, I would like to take this moment to thank each and every member of the team for the days, the nights and the weekends that they spent looking after our county businesses.

Whilst we have a robust direct channel of communication with our members (under the strong leadership of Neil Vanstone) being seen and heard in the media during 2020 became ever more important; especially in light of the ever-changing advice and guidance for business. Always being 'on' can take a toll on even the most seasoned communications professionals, but week in week out Jo has been on national, regional and local airwaves and in digital and traditional media. I must at this point mention Andrew Metcalf who has equally advised and guided Jo so ably in making sure the Chamber stands strong in the media on behalf of you, our members.

As you can hear, your Chamber has been at the front of the Coronavirus pandemic and will continue to take the same approach as we move into the resilience and recovery period. I would like thank you all for your continued support as members of this outstanding Chamber, to encourage you to continue to share your business journeys with us, to implore you to look at our website every week at the array of support available and to engage, collaborate and encourage each other, because together we are stronger.

I would now like to welcome Jo James, CEO, Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, who will take you through an operational update.....