

## Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce – Ashford Economic Development Group

Minutes of an ordinary meeting of the AEDG Limited held at KICC HQ on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2023 at 8.30am.

PRESENT:	NAME	POSITION
	Nettie Buss	Chair
	Richard Stafford	
	Richard Lavender	
	Hugh Summerfield	
	Dan Sherlock	
	Tim Sheppard	
	Dylan Laing	
	Jason Rainbird	
	Peter Heritage	
	Andrew Osborne	
	Alexandra Syrotiuk	
	Lucy Druesne	Guest - LSIP
[APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE RECEIVED FROM:]	Maria Callow	

### 1. NOTICE AND QUORUM

The chair reported that enough notice of the meeting had been duly given and that a quorum was present. The chair declared that the meeting was open.

### 2. APPROVAL OF PRIOR MINUTES

A draft of the minutes of the board meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2023 was sent prior to the meeting. It was agreed to approve this draft without amendment and the chair was authorised to sign them as a complete record of the relevant meeting.

There were a few matters arising discussed first.

**AO** – as per pt.3.5 in the February meeting – AO advised that there is not a mechanism to know who is buying property and whether they are for investment, there are no conditions attached to the planning. It was confirmed that Victoria Way has a number of BTL's and office buildings are being considered to be bought by ABC and convert to residential, particularly for key worker housing.

**RS** – advised he had not yet written about the rates situation to JJ but would do so shortly.

### 3. BUSINESS OF THE MEETING

1. The Chair asked RL to bring the board up to date with regards to the announcement of JJ retirement. RL commented that the chamber were already starting the process to find a replacement which they are hoping to have in place by October, with a view for them to take over wef 01 December 2023. AO commented the importance of the correct person being selected, due to the excellent job JJ has undertaken on a number of strategic groups.

#### 2. Round Table discussions

**AS** – Thanked those around the room who had helped with the recent Ofsted inspection at Ashford, EKC. She advised that it had gone well and further details would be given in due course.

**RS** – Retail market and Office market coming back, with some local firms looking for smaller premises. Industrial units still in short supply, problems with electricity in rural areas not being reliable. RL noted this for another committee meeting he is attending. AO commented that this is a known issue re the power and there is an infrastructure plan with car charging points being a priority.

**HS** – commented on the recent budget and particularly the changes available with regards to pensions. Also expressed concern with regards to liquidations going up. HS also wanted to bring to AO's attention the problems within the planning department at ABC with regards to staffing.

**JR** – noted that vacancies are dropping and there is still an apparent 30% of roles not filled. Everyone advises they are busy but recruiting quality staff remains a problem.

**TS** – reported construction remains busy and resources are making for some business planning issues. TS will now be attending future KCFG meetings to get input for future AEDG meetings.

**DL** – introduced himself to the group, he is replacing Katie Hodson on the group. DL reiterated HS's comments re the budget – again emphasised the recruitment issue.

**PH** – advised all good at the outlet – only 6% space empty, which they believe will drop to 4% on current projections. New brands interested and footfall has remained good. Advised the appeal for items to be sent to Turkey after the recent earthquake was amazing and showed an impressive community spirit.

**DS** – legal remains strong, particularly commercial property- infrastructure around commercial property needs attention though. Residential work has dropped in 2023. More work coming through regarding insolvencies and investigations – NB commented that HMRC investigations are increasing. Recruitment remains a key issue.

**RL** – recent meeting with Britain Re-Made – 34 people attended, problems highlighted included staff wfh – with no training, also issues with wfh and IT.

Concerns were also raised re the Lower Thames Crossing which they are trying to delay, which affects freight haulage. Dungerness is now on the 'nominate dlist' as an established nuclear site for a portable power unit.

**AO** – Had discussions with SouthEastern regarding ticketing & pricing. The Queens Canopy project has now planted over 107,000 trees with the goal being one tree for everyone in the borough. The council budget is challenging for the next financial year with now a period where nothing changes until the elections in May. Lots going on in town centre including, Unframed, and a couple of EKC projects.

**3. PRESENTATION FROM Lucy from LSIP**

Lucy delivered a presentation on behalf of LSIP, which will be circulated with the minutes, it explained the areas that the budget will be allocated to and how LSIP works. Lucy reiterated that she needs the short survey completed that she showed on the screen, all attendees committed to completing the survey and sharing it with others. Discussions around the room with regards to skills gaps encountered and a focus was made on 'professional services' and the problems they are encountering. AS from the college noted the importance of working together on this and it was agreed that AS and / or SB from EKC would present to the AEDG at April's meeting regarding the college offering to support.

A list of items to action was then produced as follows:

Action Items	Owner(s)	Deadline	Status
Bios and Headshots	All members	NB will email all those O/S	Pending
LinkedIn	NB to speak with KiCC	Before next AEDG meeting	Pending
Rates	Richard Stafford	asap	Completed
Purchase of Properties	NB to speak with AO	Before next meeting	Completed

**4. NEXT MEETING**

20th April 2023 @ 8.30am @ KiCC

**5. CLOSE**

There was no further business and therefore the chair declared that the meeting was closed.

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Chair – Nettie Buss - Date