

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

Minutes of an ordinary meeting of the AEDG held at Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, Ashford on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2023 at 8.30am.

PRESENT:	NAME	POSITION
	Nettie Buss	Chair
	Richard Stafford	
	Richard Lavender	
	Dan Sherlock	
	Jason Rainbird	
	Peter Heritage	
	Sharon Norman	
	Tom Jenkins	
	Tim Sheppard	
[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 15<sup>th</sup> June 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. RL had previously sent an amendment to the minutes that were circulated which the chair confirmed had been updated in the minutes.

### 3. BUSINESS OF THE MEETING

1. The Chair was asked a general question about our presence as a group on the Chamber www – the chair advised she would chat with Paul / Neil at the Chamber to see if that could be improved.
2. In anticipation of the September meeting which Damian Green will be attending – PH is bringing Lee Collette from McArthur Glen who will be attending the September meeting in his place.
3. RL shared a plan for a new care home application which is yet to go to planning with

the group for their views and consideration. This created a lot of discussion and the group felt that they needed more tangible information before making a decision as to whether or not they would support. RL advised he would contact the applicant to ask if he would attend a future meeting and would follow this up with the Chair.

RL also advised that the same company had made an application for planning in Manston, as this is outside of our area – we did not discuss.

RL also advised with regards to a new runway at Gatwick which has the chambers support.

The Chair advised as had already been emailed to the group that we had confirmation that Damian Green, MP., will attend our September meeting which will be at a different time and date to the usual format – this has already been emailed to all members.

The chair suggested that the meeting in August would be good to use as a planning meeting with regards to the visit by Damian Green and suggested the previously published meeting in September would be cancelled making this the only September meeting – this was agreed by all members.

The Chair asked TJ to follow up with AO regarding the new council leader attending the October meeting – AO has subsequently confirmed.

The Chair suggested that Tudor Price as the new CEO from January 2024 for the Chamber could be invited to the November AEDG – which all members agreed and the Chair will contact Tudor.

### Round Table discussions

**RL** – advised he has been continuing to work with the MOD Military Covenant and looking to sign up more employers to recruit ex-serviceman / reservists.

**TJ** – the new leader of ABC is looking into the Eurostar debacle and that the next review of the local plan will include a review with regards to commercial units which continue to be an issue.

**DS** – commented that legal professional insurances are becoming very difficult to obtain. DS also observed that court services are getting worse, with short notice changes to dates and times becoming commonplace- after long lead times, this is leading to concerns about 'access to justice'

**TS** – advised that construction on the whole remains buoyant, especially with smaller businesses. There remains a shortage of bricklayers, carpenters and plasterers particularly. TS suggested he speaks with Ashford College about doing an event around construction jobs, the chair suggested that he contact SB the principal. Also advised that employers are still not keen on taking on apprentices as there is a lot of work involved and they can rarely afford to keep them at the end of the courses.

**SN** – recruitment of good staff remains a problem particularly with regards to audits. Also commented that the hotels locally appear to be full, but not with tourists, which is damaging to the local tourism industry.

**JR** – generally all contacts are busy and as reported by other industries the biggest challenge remains recruitment. There is also a lack of quality office space to rent

**PH** – the outlet is in a good place with sales ahead of 2022 figures ytd. There have been 5 new stores open and 5 close (eg Cath Kidston) but they expect to open 12 more this year. The outlet can afford to be selective, they are looking at having 3.5% void space at the end of the year (average is 15%). The Christmas Market that the centre wanted to provide has been rejected by the council. A mix of recruitment experiences, some roles are proving easy to fill with quality staff, some such as Marketing is much harder.

**RS** - remains a shortage of decent stock with expanding businesses finding it difficult to find new premises, office space is slowly coming back and retail units is starting to follow suit. Major concern is staffing and a plan is in place in case staff leave.

4. NEXT MEETING

17th August 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