

Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce
Ashford Economic Development Group

Minutes of an ordinary meeting of the AEDG held at Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce on 17th April 2025 at 8.30am.

PRESENT	NAME	POSITION
	Cllr Simon Betty (Cllr SB)	Guest
	Susan Bonett (SB)	
	Nettie Buss (AB)	Chair
	Maria Callow (MC)	
	Lee Collette (LC)	
	Steve Garnett SG)	
	Katie Hodson (KH)	
	James McComas (JM)	
	Andrew Osborne (AO)	
	Tudor Price (TP)	
	Jason Rainbird (JR)	
	Tim Sheppard (TS)	
	Dan Sherlock (DS)	
	Richard Stafford (RS)	
	Pete Tomsett (PT)	
APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE RECEIVED FROM	Jo Brown (JB) Peter Heritage (PH) Richard Lloyd (RLL) Tom Shaw-Dunn (TS-D)	

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 at 8.30am.

2. APPROVAL OF PRIOR MINUTES

Minutes of the board meeting held on 20th March 2025 had already been approved. The chair had been authorised to sign them as a complete record of the relevant meeting.

3. ANY MATTERS ARISING/PREVIOUS MEETING

No matters arising.

4. BUSINESS OF THE MEETING

CLLR SIMON BETTY

AB welcomed Cllr Simon Betty (**Cllr SB**), Ashford Borough Council (ABC), Cabinet Member for Commercial Property and Investment. **Cllr SB** updated the AEDG on his remit at ABC.

Park Mall - the freehold was completed in January 2025, the council is working with tenants to find new properties. **AO** mentioned they are looking into a version of the Empty Property Grant Scheme to support tenants.

Elwick Place – ABC has taken over Ashford Cinema in Elwick Place for a year and it will run for a further 18 months, the cinema is becoming more of a community hub.

Coachworks – has a new operator, the venue is adding to the nighttime economy.

Industrial Estates - **Cllr SB** is keen to bring forward more sheds, smaller industrial units to the borough.

International House – this is mostly fully let, home to Southeastern training centre among others including Ashford Borough Council.

Newtown Works – had £14.7m levelling up funding and this is already being invested into the site.

Parking – the offer in Ashford is one of the lowest rates in the County at £1.30 per hour with the Council also having a number of schemes that provide free parking at different times in certain car parks. Ashford Town Centre also has 29 electric charging points

KH asked about the Odeon site, **Cllr SB** confirmed the project is still ongoing and a number of regeneration ideas are being considered.

ADULT EDUCATION – ASHFORD COLLEGE

SB discussed the DfE is planning a 6% cut to national skills budgets. It has a potential impact on 1000s adults not being able to upskill although the change is confusing.

SB reminded the AEDG that businesses can access the Growth Skills Fund which can be used to upskill and train employees. Ashford College would like the AEDG and KiCC to lead on what employers/businesses can already do to train staff.

SB said this is an opportunity to promote adult upskilling – the potential is unlocked. **SB** further suggested collaboratively KiCC could help to scope what are employer concerns and feedback on what they think. **AB** mentioned small businesses are experiencing challenges with the increase of the minimum wage.

DS reminded the AEDG on the collective goal to bridge the gap between businesses and skills. **SB** has already had success with bridging the gap locally with the health and social care and engineering sectors.

RS offered to support Ashford College with setting up a business workshops. **TP** said there is opportunity to feed into the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) and suggested to invite Camilla Maurice, LSIP Project Manager to the next meeting.

BROCK UPDATE

TP is still endeavouring to improve communications with KRF. **AO** reminded the AEDG to

focus on the long term solution to Brock.

EUROSTAR UPDATE

AO updated on there are now three potential rival operators, Virgin Group, Evolyn and Gemini to Eurostar. **TP** is still exploring the opportunity to run a campaign to support the ongoing ABC Bring Back Eurostar video campaign and **TP** is reaching out to French MPs to get involved. **TP** and **AO** have been invited to be interviewed on BBC Radio 4 next week about Eurostar.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was not any other business.

6. CLOSE

AB thanked AEDG members for their continued support.

Date of next meeting - 8.30pm, 15th May 2025.

There was no further business and therefore the chair declared that the meeting was closed at 10.00am.

.....Chair – Nettie Buss - Date