

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 July 2025 at 8.30am.

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

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 19th June 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

Matters discussed in AOB.

4. BUSINESS OF THE MEETING

BCC ANNUAL CONFERENCE

TP shared Patrons and directors attended the BCC Annual Conference - the theme was: 'Where's the Growth?'. The Prime Minister announced the new trade strategy; other speakers included CEO of Heathrow, The Rt Hon Kemi Badenock MP and Andrew Bailey, Governor of Bank of England.

There was a focus on AI and for the UK to grasp AI at a grass roots level. Good introductions were made and connections forged with the Dubai Chamber of Commerce.

BROCK UPDATE

Brock was reinstated on 17th July. Paul King portfolio holder for ED at KCC has taken a keen interest in Brock. KCC are looking for sound bites to get more of a central focus at Government level. EES is still planned for November 2025. There will be a chamber update event in September about Euro travel rules.

Discussion around the business impact it has had on Eastwell Manor, Ashford Designer Outlet in the past. **TP** agreed he would reach out to members to capture feedback on the impact on businesses. **T S-D** suggested questions should have parameters to ensure relevance of the impact.

NEWTOWN WORKS UPDATE

TJ shared that Newtown Works has completed the first stage of enabling works. There is a departure from the original plan for film and TV studios. The plan now is to progress with residential units with a potential for affordable housing.

LAC suggested this change of plan may well have an impact on the future curriculum, to be discussed internally. **TJ** reminded the group that the ABC new local plan will have new housing targets that has a five year land supply to meet housing needs.

EUROSTAR UPDATE

TP shared the Eurostar update is same as the last AEDG update. The group is still looking at the viability of a CAM complaint about anti-competitive practices, this is still work in progress. There is still discussion about Farthinglow Truck Stop in Dover.

TP mentioned there is a potential publicity initiative planned by KCC to raise awareness of the issue, scheduled for September. The aim will be for MPs and media to get on board a Southeastern train at Ashford and Ebbsfleet.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

KENT HOSPITALITY FORUM

JM shared he had set up a Kent Hospitality Focus Group (Forum) that meet bi-monthly, they have had three meetings with eight members and keen to have more members to join. The aim is to have a combined voice for hospitality.

JM said he is working with the chamber to attract potential members from Kent restaurants and pubs. **JM** is also working closely with Camilla Maurice, LSIP Project Manager about hospitality skills issues. **JM** would like to engage more closely with Visit Kent, Police Crime Commissioner and the with the prison service.

AB suggested that **JM** may wish to do a presentation at a future meeting.

LOCAL SKILLS IMPROVEMENT PLAN (LSIP)

TP updated that the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) report has been launched and they are collecting data for the next report.

AGRICULTURAL REPRESENTATIVE

AB is reviewing a list. **TP** shared the chamber had joined the Kent Agricultural Society and he will explore those members.

KENT DAY – HOUSE OF COMMONS

TP reported this is an annual event in May/June, lead representative from the Port of Dover, Eurotunnel, MPs, Visit Kent among others attended an afternoon tea.

KATIE LAM MP

Katie Lam MP is booked for an event at the Big Cat Sanctuary in September, **TP** will extend the invite to AEDG members.

WEBSITE UPDATES

TP said there have been some issues with the chamber website, but these are being resolved.

EMPLOYMENT SURVEY

TP shared the call for evidence for an employer survey, would like to understand more about the barriers to employment and recruitment difficulties.

EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS BILL

TP is keen to capture feedback in response to the Employment Rights Bill. A proposed letter is a call to backbench Labour MPs to lobby the Business Secretary and Deputy Prime Minister, and the other Ministers associated with the Bill, to find compromises in the elements of the Bill that will have the most impact on businesses.

ASHFORD COLLEGE

LAC shared that **JB** is looking for businesses to conduct mock interviews for students in the summer holidays.

6. CLOSE

AB thanked AEDG members for their continued support.

Date of next meeting - 8.30am, 21st August 2025.

There was no further business and therefore the chair declared that the meeting was closed at 10.04am.

.....Chair – Nettie Buss - Date