

**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 19<sup>th</sup> March 2026 at 8.30am.

<b>PRESENT</b>	<b>NAME</b>	<b>POSITION</b>
	Jo Brown (JB)	
	Nettie Buss (AB)	Chair
	Maria Callow (MC)	
	Peter Heritage (PH)	
	James McComas (JM)	
	Andrew Osborne (AO)	
	Tudor Price (TP)	
	Tom Shaw-Dunn (TS-D)	
	Dan Sherlock (DS)	
	Tim Sheppard (TS)	
	Richard Stafford (RS)	
	Natalie Ward (NW)	
<b>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE RECEIVED FROM</b>	Steve Garnett (SG) Katie Hodson (KH) Jason Rainbird (JR)	

**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 19<sup>th</sup> February 2026 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**

Update on LinkedIn AEDG.

**4. BUSINESS OF THE MEETING**

**KENT HOSPITALITY FORUM**

**JM** updated that the last meeting had 23 attendees. Visit Kent has rolled out its partnership programme. Eastwell Manor is signing up as a gold member. Kent is need of a DMO status. Concerns around a potential holiday tax where councils can charge nightly fees for overnight stays. Currently applied to a location where there is a mayor.

Concern over the Meningitis B outbreak it is having an impact on Kent tourism, Eastwell Manor

already experiencing cancellations. **PH** has noticed a 10% drop in footfall but may experience a larger drop at the weekend.

**MC** mentioned there is a redeployment of available vaccinations to the University of Kent. **AO** shared that Kent Resilience Forum working alongside the relevant healthcare bodies.

### **ELWICK PLACE UPDATE**

**AO** shared that Elwick Place is set for a major revamp into a vibrant leisure and cultural destination. There had been some negative comments about Matches having to be relocated, much of the narrative was misleading. **PH** endorsed overall it was a positive proposal.

### **SKILLS 26 EVENT**

**TP** revealed that Skills 26 was a success, celebrating its best attendance. Concern over a lack of work placements for young people. Securing work experience across Kent is a challenge. **TP** suggested there might be some flexibility in ABC planning approach to Ashford Designer outlet to help generate more economic growth, job creation.

**AO** is in continuous communication with **PH** about restrictions. The council and outlet do mutually support each other in joint town centre marketing and events. **AO** also reported positivity around the new cultural community venue project (former Odeon/Mecca) which he will update on at a further meeting.

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION (LGR) IN KENT AND MEDWAY**

Ashford Borough Council supports a four unitary council proposal. In the proposed LGR, Ashford would be in Mid-Kent, this is currently in consultation.

### **ASHFORD COLLEGE UPDATE**

**JB** updated on a proposed new business collaboration leaflet. **JB** requested the group to critique the proposed draft content. **JB** also shared that planning for Phase 3 of Ashford College has been submitted with the aim of opening in September 2028.

## **5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**TS-D** mentioned that Geoff Thompson a former five times world karate champion wants to create a Youth Charter for Ashford. **JB** and **TP** expressed an interest to find out more.

**TP** commented on the Sea Link project. As the demand for energy increases, the Sea Link project is designed to deliver renewable and low carbon energy efficiently to homes and businesses across the regions and beyond. **TP** said they are keen to get business advocates to endorse the project.

**TP** expressed concern over KCC seeking revenue generation projects and tenders having an incentive to get paid earlier if given a reduced cost. **TP** mentioned the Kent AI Conference tickets are on sale.

**JB** said that a colleague is trying to co-ordinate work placements across EKC and suggested they might attend a future AEDG meeting. **MC** suggested there could be a Kent wide database to match placements with businesses.

**NW** is still trying to source an agricultural representative to join the AEDG.

**T-SD** expressed concern around the upcoming UK Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). The CBAM aims to prevent companies bypassing strict domestic climate regulations by importing goods from countries with looser rules. The implementation has lots of unknown questions around tax and is a challenge for the manufacturing sector.

**AB** mentioned her concern about the lack of awareness around Making Tax Digital (MTD) especially for self-employed. It will be mandatory for self-employed individuals and landlords with a qualifying income over £50,000 from 6 April 2026.

**DS** said there is a UK high long backlog for employment tribunals, some listings waiting until 2029.

**6. CLOSE**

**AB** thanked AEDG members for their continued support.

Date of next meeting - 8.30am, 16<sup>th</sup> April 2026 at Kent Invicta

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

.....Chair – Nettie Buss - Date