

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

Minutes of an ordinary meeting of the AEDG held at Ashford Designer Outlet 18<sup>th</sup> June 2026 at 8.30am.

<b>PRESENT</b>	<b>NAME</b>	<b>POSITION</b>
	Nettie Buss (AB)	Chair
	Aisha Button (AIB)	
	Maria Callow (MC)	
	Lucy Clark (LAC)	
	Lee Collette (LC)	
	Phil Galpin (PG)	
	Steve Garnett (SG)	
	Peter Heritage (PH)	
	Katie Hodson (KH)	
	Andrew Osborne (AO)	
	Tudor Price (TP)	
	Richard Stafford (RS)	
	Dan Sherlock (DS)	
<b>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE RECEIVED FROM</b>	Doug Jackson (DJ) James McComas (JM) Jason Rainbird (JR) Tom Shaw-Dunn (TS-D) Tim Sheppard (TS) Natalie Ward (NW)	

**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 21<sup>st</sup> May 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**

**AB** will follow up with **JR** at a future date about AEDG on LinkedIn.

**4. BUSINESS OF THE MEETING**

**AB** thanked **PH** and **LC** for hosting the AEDG meeting at the Ashford Designer Outlet.

**BORDER FORCE VISIT**

**PG** arranged a visit to the Inland Border Facility to include a tour of the document holding area and ceased food area. The facility has 100s of employees; the members that visited found it insightful and interesting.

## **ASHFORD TOWN CENTRE RESET**

**AO** presented an update on the Ashford Town Centre Reset. There were four key areas of intervention: The T; Elwick Place; Lower High Street; and Lower Bank Street.

There has been an emphasis to bring back experiences back into the Ashford Town Centre for example introducing - monthly markets; installing a play train and a series of murals; revamping the Coachworks space; holding events like Pride and the Food and Drink Festival; and using St. Mary's Church as a venue. Work is in progress reviewing the Town Centre parking strategy.

**AO** reported on the bigger developments. Firstly the Park Mall redevelopment, it's a new mixed use residentially led development to regenerate the Town Centre. The council is currently working on a temporary car park and there likely to be new apartments and some commercial space.

In Elwick Place there has been investment by ABC and work is underway to create a positive rental position as a new entertainment and leisure experience. Units are due to open in October/November 2026.

The Odeon Ashford is a £7.5m project and has potential uses over two floors for – events, performance, operations, creative arts and the community. Howarth Tompkins architects are visualising a flexible space, due to be open in 2028.

The Ashford International Station investment area is a station-led regeneration vision with £169m of capital investment already programmed based on three pillars – returning international rail services: commercialising and regenerating the station area and having a low carbon sustainable infrastructure.

**TP** reinforced the importance of driving home the need to bring international rail service back and the need for convenience provision in the town centre. **AO** reassured the AEDG that there are some plans to look at conversion of upper floors of existing buildings referred to in the Local Plan.

**Following a question from TP around opportunities for local companies through these new developments, AO** commented on how the housing market is currently challenging so the timescales for projects will be market dependent. But there is a new procurement strategy going through in response to the new act, so the council will have an opportunity to look at prioritising local suppliers for some procurements. **TP** said that he is working with David Godfrey to review the local supply chain.

**PH** expressed that these developments were the right thing to do but had concerns over the Town Centre not being a safe, clean space. **LC** endorsed his concerns about the Town Centre not being perceived as safe. **AO** responded by reminding there is good work being done with introducing safety apps and more public space lighting, but still work to do to change these perceptions and improve the street scene in the town centre.

**MC** shared there could be visioning about Town Centre green and blue spaces and it was not clear where the focal point of the Town Centre could be as a public realm for the community to gather.

## 5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

**RS** raised concerns over big sheds being used as gyms and padel courts not for its intended purpose of industrial use, as a consequence, there is not enough space for cars. **AO** shared these concerns and said there is new Government guidance around local plans and there will be a new process in place in October 2026 to take forward a new Local Plan where a solution to this challenge will need to be established.

**PH** shared that a planning application had been submitted to relax the cap on beauty space at the outlet and a request to relax a ruling to allow each brand store to have up to 10% of items to be at full price.

**TP** said that there is a Business Crime Advisory Group and it's looking for representation from businesses to join. **TP** also reminded that the Kent AI conference is on 24 June and already has 250 attendees.

**PG** reported on a roundtable discussion on the new minimum wage to be introduced in 2030. Concerns were voiced about it and there was a preference for businesses to have an option to roll it out. And if it were to be introduced in 2030, that this should be phased over five years.

**PG** also shared on a local business needing to secure protection to defend against aggressive market competition, the British Chamber of Commerce has intervened in this instance. There will be another roundtable discussion about zero hours contracts on 18<sup>th</sup> August 2026.

**SG** commented on how new apartment buildings do not have enough roof space to get solar in. **AO** shared there is a project to install solar on the Stour Centre car park proposed to support the Stour Leisure Centre.

**AB** has been in touch with Katie Lam's MP office, they are interested in hosting a future AEDG meeting, to be confirmed.

## 6. CLOSE

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

Date of next meeting - 8.30am, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2026.

There was no further business and therefore the chair declared that the meeting was closed at 10.10am.

.....Chair – Nettie Buss - Date