

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 16th July 2026 at 8.30am.

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

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 18th June 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

None discussed

4. BUSINESS OF THE MEETING

DS introduced Ashton, who is undertaking work experience at Furley Page and was working with him that day.

To enable Ashton to understand the role of the AEDG and the attendees all present introduced themselves.

A document was circulated with regards to the KCC budget which we have been asked to comment on – replies to be sent by 7th September. After discussion within the room PG has agreed to create a summary document which will be circulated to the AEDG for further discussion at the August meeting.

The AEDG was particularly drawn to the perceived lack of business support.

Business discussions / concerns followed with the following items discussed

JR led a discussion around AI, for which many members of the team contributed with regards to its use, the obvious AI written emails and how it is affecting certain situations and often rather than saving time creating problems.

AO advised that government reorganisation was about to be announced with regards to the areas, a new local plan and also advised that a further update will be coming soon with regards to the trains potentially stopping at Ashford.

PG updated the group with regards to recent focus groups, the work the chamber is undertaking with regards to procurement as well as zero-hour contracts. The chamber is also working on the Heathrow expansion. PG also encouraged completion of the quarterly survey, with results of the last one recently being published with some interesting results around youth unemployment and the minimum wage as well as the Iran conflict and its impact.

LC advised that EKC is arranging an ADHD event and that she will share details – the event will be held in October. And the group is going well

JM advised that the hospitality forum met earlier in July. There was good input from Camilla (LSIP) and hospitality is being formally placed as a priority industry. Water shortages in the area remain a concern.

KH mentioned the new Self-employment MTD for which the first returns are due by 7th August and the still low take up nationwide.

RS the commercial property market remains steady. The town centre continues to be subject to disruption with the building works and contractors have had to be asked to consider things like A levels for local dance schools and the mess generally. Access to car parks is dangerous by traders in the town considered

PH – planning application for a new crossing at the entrance to the outlet has now been submitted.

NW mentioned the difficult times that arable farmers particularly are encountering due to the weather.

DS access to justice is encountering more and more delays, with some cases taking 2 or 3 years before claims are settled.

KATIE LAM MP

AB as emailed Katie's contact and had a response and will try to co-ordinate a date for a meeting in September

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Nothing noted

6. CLOSE

AB thanked AEDG members for their continued support.

Date of next meeting - 8.30am, 20th August 2026 at KiCC

There was no further business and therefore the chair declared that the meeting was closed at 10am.

.....Chair – Nettie Buss - Date