

Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce Maidstone Economic Development Group

Minutes of Meeting held on Tuesday 10th July 2012
The Gatehouse, Archbishops Palace, Mill Street, Maidstone, ME15 6YE

Present: John Taylor(JMT) (Chair); Anna Bloomfield(AB), Julie Anderson(JA), Bill Moss(BM), Chris Blundell(CB), Mandy Bearne(MB), Colin Davies(CD), Nick Rowell(NR), Keith Grimley(KG), Victoria Wallace(VW), Alan Reading(AR), Toby Crayden(TC), Steve Goulette(SG), Richard Lavender(RL).

1.	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE Jo James(JJ), Rob Edwards(RE). Allis Beasley(ABE), John Foster(JF), Cllr Malcolm Greer(MG).	
2.	MINUTES OF LAST MEETING Approved.	
3.	MATTERS ARISING MB raised the issue of Rail Franchise Consultation, see AOB.	
4.	ASHFORD EDG – RICHARD LAVENDER As part of a process to further the cross-fertilisation of ideas and actions between the Chamber EDGs, JMT introduced Richard Lavender Chair of the Ashford EDG. RL said that the Ashford EDG was a very loyal group who viewed themselves as the Ashford Chamber and had concerns regarding being passed over within the larger KICC area. They are however able to see the benefit of being part of a larger group and of the visibility that this affords. The group is largely focused on Ashford itself as there are very few outlying commercial areas with the greater Ashford area. Over the last couple of years the Group had concentrated on specific areas as follows:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The massive development of Ashford resulting from the Prescott era which proposed 80,00 houses being built within 30 years. This target has already been reduced by around 25%. • There remains a major issue of infrastructure. M20 J10A is not now going to happen and to date there has been little development around J10. • Eurostar reducing the service to Brussels from Ashford, this has now been resolved. • The HS1 development. This has proved beneficial for Ashford although there was a fight to ensure that other services were not reduced. There had been a concern regarding potential loss of service during the Olympics but a satisfactory compromise had been reached. • Operation Stack has been an ongoing problem but it now appears that Dover Harbour and Eurotunnel may be able to handle the lorries in future. • Dungeness Nuclear Power Station. The group supports the extension for Station C and is monitoring the decommissioning of Station A. The Group also supports the proposed Underground Nuclear Waste Storage but recognises that rail access is a problem. • Support for the other EDGs such as the KIG proposal (MEDG) and M2 	

	<p>Exits to Canterbury (CEDG).</p> <p>AEDG operates on a basis of portfolio holders and most AEDG Members hold a portfolio in one of 10 areas (Local Government, Planning, Construction, Environment, Education & Training, Town Centre, SMEs, Tourism, Commercial Property, Transport & Infrastructure). This reduces the load on the Chairman and enables Actions to be developed, recorded and resolved within a monthly time frame. The Group meets on a monthly basis except during school holiday periods.</p> <p>JMT said that Air Transport was an issue that impacted on all EDGs and that there might be a joint meeting to discuss. This was also an issue for the LEP. There was a general feeling that too many views were being expressed without all relevant organisations being consulted.</p> <p>CB asked about employment trends in the AEDG area. RL said that the rate of unemployment had remained static, the KCC Apprenticeship scheme appeared to be working and that some positions, especially in engineering, were difficult to fill. NR said that he believed that employment was polarising with some businesses growing while others were struggling.</p> <p>Regarding the business impact of HS1, RL said that housing development was strong particularly at the top end of the market although prices were static. This was largely due to the reduced travel time to London, many train services were standing room only. It also appears that HS1 was encouraging people to visit Ashford for shopping purposes.</p>	
5.	<p>KENT FORUM HOUSING STRATEGY CONSULTATION</p> <p>JMT said that there had been no feedback so far. The position is that there is nothing new in the document.</p>	
6.	<p>MAIDSTONE CORE STRATEGY</p> <p>SG said that a report was going to Cabinet regarding Strategic Sites. There would then be a Consultation process followed by Consultation on the Full Core Strategy with adoption likely in December 2013.</p> <p>JMT said that there were rumours of a major retail park at J7 and SG responded that a number of suggestions were being considered.</p> <p>VW wished to know if MBC would respond to submissions already made as strategic decisions appeared to have been made prior to responding to any representations and that pre-determination of sites also appeared to have been made. SG said that there would be a response to earlier submissions. CB agreed that there appeared to be a lack of response to earlier submissions. SG said that he would feed these views back to the Planners.</p> <p>JMT said that the Core Strategy appeared to be no further forward but at least there now appeared to be a timetable.</p> <p>CB asked what the Spatial Planning Advisory Group was. SG said that it replaced a previous Group. JMT said that he would circulate details of the remit of the Group.</p>	
7.	<p>2012 OLYMPICS</p> <p>Basic details were as outlined in earlier MEDG Meetings and a schedule of events on Friday 20th was circulated.</p> <p>BM said that Sunday Trading Laws were being relaxed from 22nd July for 8 weeks. There appeared to be very little appetite for extended opening hours in Kent Towns and there were no plans for an extension in The Mall.</p> <p>Discussion moved to High Street issues, would the works be complete,</p>	

	problems with busses in a section of the High Street and lack of traffic enforcement	
8.	LOCAL ECONOMY UPDATE NR circulated details from the latest quarterly BCC Survey.	
9.	2012 & BEYOND ROAD WORKS/CLOSURES WITHIN MAIDSTONE SG said that Gas Main works were continuing although there would be a two week break for the Olympics.	
10.	LOCALITY BOARD UPDATE JMT said that the key issue to be addressed is youth unemployment notably in the 16-19 age group. Gary Cook is the Chair of the Group looking into this issue. JA asked where she should advertise apprenticeship opportunities and MB recommended using KCC who have a relevant website and who act as broker. JMT asked if small businesses felt that it was too much hassle to take on an apprentice. KG felt that KCC had perhaps focused too much on specific areas of the County.	
11.	LEP UPDATE JMT said that Airports were a major issue for the LEP and their view was that expansion of existing airports was preferred. KCC would like to development Manston although this has infrastructure problems. Another problem that has been identified is the lack of a direct rail link from Kent to Gatwick. VW said that from a tourism point of view it would be sensible to stick to existing airports, investing in Manston would be a waste of money.	
12.	CHAMBER UPDATE JMT said that the former Somerfield building is being looked at as a potential location for a Business Incubation Centre. CD said that Vinci, who are building the new KIMS hospital, are staying in Kent and have joined the Chamber as has the Switch Café. Membership in Maidstone is buoyant currently. The West Kent After-Hours Club may move from Hadlow to Tonbridge.	
12.	AOB <u>Rail Consultation</u> - MB raised the issue of the South-Eastern Rail franchise being open to consultation and that there was a relevant document on the DFT website. JMT said that RL was co-ordinating the Chamber response and that any comments should be routed through himself. KG said that MBC were also looking at the Rail situation. <u>MBC Business Directory</u> – KG circulated copies of the revised Maidstone Business Directory.	
	The meeting closed at 17:05.	
	Date of Next Meeting: Tuesday 11th September 2012.	