

Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce Maidstone Economic Development Group

Minutes of Meeting held on Tuesday 14th May 2013
The Gatehouse, Archbishops Palace, Mill Street, Maidstone, ME15 6YE

Present: John Taylor(JMT, Chair); Nick Rowell(NR), Chris Blundell(CB), John Foster(JF)
Heather Nowak(HN), Anna Bloomfield(AB), Victoria Wallace(VW), Keith
Grimley(KG), Allis Beasley(ABE).

1.	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE Rob Edwards(RE), Bill Moss(BM), Colin Davies(CD), Jo James(JJ), Steve Goulette(SG), Cllr Malcolm Greer(MG).	
2.	MINUTES OF LAST MEETING Approved.	
3.	MATTERS ARISING Nil.	
4.	LEP UPDATE Deferred to a later date.	
5.	LOCAL PLAN (Formerly MAIDSTONE CORE STRATEGY) JF said that the latest Planning Viewpoint Newsletter could be found on the MBC Website. VW said that she had read it but couldn't understand it. JF said that the Housing target was now 14,800 for the period 2011-2031 and this raises the question of where the houses will be built. MBC is requesting submissions of suitable sites for both Housing and Employment. The Timetable for submission and assessment can be found in the Newsletter and any decisions will have an impact on the Integrated Transport Strategy below.	
6.	MAIDSTONE INTEGRATED TRANSPORT STRATEGY Comments on the current ITS were generally critical and AB commented that there was no integration and no strategy. JF said that Housing and Transport Strategies would be developed concurrently. It was felt that some information printed in the local Press had not always been accurate. CB said that conflict between MBC & JTB regarding Transport Strategy along with recent Election results may mean that KCC may have a disproportionate influence on development with the Borough. JMT said that there was a problem in forging ahead with Housing development without having a Transport Strategy. VW said that her business was affected by travel issues and custom was primarily from people with easy access to the M20. Leeds Castle are unable to hold some major events due to licensing limitations on delegate numbers. In an ideal world she would like to relocate the Castle to a more accessible location!. She felt that there was no existing Transport Strategy and no indication of any developments that will be taking place in the area. JMT felt that some Maidstone business locations, such as Parkwood, were now in jeopardy due to lack of transport infrastructure. He reiterated the Chamber view that there was a need for a South-East Maidstone Link/Relief Road (Leeds-Langley bypass). A submission was made in the previous Consultation Process but there has been no meaningful response. JF said that this had not been built in the past as it would not draw traffic away from the Town Centre. NR said he felt that the real reason was that there was no money available to pay for it and if this was the case then it should be made clear. JF said that as the road was not in the current Strategy then Businesses needed to make their point and supply evidence in support. JMT asked what	

	<p>would be the cost of not doing it? He contrasted the situation with that of North Maidstone where problems had been cushioned by having the M20.</p> <p>CB suggested that someone from the JTB should come and address the MEDG. JMT said that he would ask Garry Cook. He also said that he would talk to RE regarding the formulation of a detailed Chamber view of Transport issues to be put to MBC.</p> <p>CB noted that much County investment was going into East Kent and to the A21 in the West. Investment in the Maidstone area was needed now and some explanation was required from KCC in their role as Highways Authority. JMT said that the LEP might have funds for this but JF said that the LEP would tend to listen to Transport Authorities such as KCC.</p> <p>ABE asked that if 14,800 houses were to be built what additional provision would there be for Schools and Hospitals? JF responded that this was being discussed with KCC.</p>	
7.	<p>LOCAL ECONOMY UPDATE</p> <p>NR provided hard-copy results from the Q1 Chamber Survey. Compared to the previous Quarter one-third of businesses stated that they were doing well, one-third reported no change and one-third were doing less well. 40% of businesses had reported that cashflow was getting worse and that they were cutting training and investment.</p> <p>NR noted that there was increasing polarisation between those business doing better and those getting worse. The most successful and resilient businesses appeared to be those with low overheads; typically internet based businesses. There had also been a slight decrease in Export activity. He also noted that the half-yearly FSB survey of Maidstone Members had shown sales falling but profits rising.</p> <p>JF said that he had details of the skills available from current Job Centre Clients. Maidstone had one of the highest skills base in the County and was second only to Sevenoaks.</p>	
8.	<p>ROADWORKS/ROAD CLOSURES WITHIN MAIDSTONE</p> <p>The current Gas main replacement work is expected to continue for another two weeks and the roadworks related to the KIMS development should be completed by 24th June.</p>	
9.	<p>LOCALITY BOARD UPDATE</p> <p>Main activity relates to the next item.</p>	
10.	<p>ARMED FORCES COVENANT</p> <p>JMT said that there was a major problem with the educational aspect, notably with regard to Primary School places. VW commented that on wider level that there was a major issue with Schools and the number of parents driving children to school.</p> <p>JMT said that redundancies were a forthcoming issue; see the March MEDG Minutes. Withdrawal of Troops from The Rhine and Afghanistan will have a major impact on Maidstone and that residency rules will be amended regarding housing provision.</p>	
11.	<p>BUSINESS INCUBATION CENTRES</p> <p>KICC has been awarded a contract by KCC to provide for business startup in Maidstone; this forms part of the Kick-Start Project. JF said that MBC were bidding for KCC Incubation Centre funding with the proposed conversion of the old King Street Post Office into the Maidstone Hub. Assistance is being provided by KCFG and it is hoped that developments will take place later in</p>	

	<p>the year.</p> <p>JMT said that it was hoped to start a Mentoring Scheme utilising experienced business people. JF said that private companies will be identified who will provide reduced price services to startup businesses.</p> <p>NR asked what the policy was regarding those people who should be advised not to start up in business? JF responded that there would be an appraisal system for potential startups as MBC only want to develop successful businesses.</p>	
12.	<p>CHAMBER UPDATE</p> <p>Nothing to report.</p>	
13.	<p>AOB</p> <p><u>Medical Campus Website</u> – KG said that he would arrange for details to be circulated to the Group.</p> <p><u>Low Carbon</u> – HN will give updates at future Meetings.</p> <p><u>Youth Unemployment</u> – JF working with Job Centre Plus in order to obtain Work Experience for unemployed young people. JF asked for any ideas to be forwarded to him and he would arrange for circulation of proposals to the Group.</p> <p><u>South-East Water</u> – JMT to circulate a Draft Proposal from South-East Water relating to future water provision. He would welcome any comments/feedback as the proposals affect the Maidstone area.</p> <p><u>Celebrate Maidstone</u> – JMT congratulated Jubilee Church on the success of this Event and noted the work that they do with young people.</p> <p><u>Sex-Related Businesses</u> – JMT said that The Chamber had been approached on two occasions requesting that The Chamber object to Licensing for sex-related businesses. He reiterated the view of The Chamber Board that their role is not to moralise and that any decision be made on a business basis.</p> <p><u>Town Centre Future</u> – JF requested that this topic be added to the Agenda for the next Meeting. Relevant information should by then be in the Public Domain and he will arrange to circulate details if possible.</p>	
	<p>The meeting closed at 17:00.</p>	

Date of Next Meeting: Tuesday 9th July 2013.