**Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce**

**North Kent Economic Development Group Meeting**

**24th February 2015**

**Medway Innovation Centre**

**Minutes**

**Attendees:**

Richard Lavender (RLC) Chair- Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce

Garry Evans (GE) – AS North

Charlotte Bland (CB) - Caxtons

Chris Inwood (CI) - Gravesham BC

Gavin Coleman (GC) - Handelsbanken

Shaun Whyman (SW) – Harlequin Group

Anna Blackwell (AB) - Hatten Wyatt  
Kimberlee Smith (KS) – Hatten Wyatt

Suzanne Wood (SW) – Medway Fibreglass Ltd

Wayne Saunders (WS) – Medway Council

Peter Cooper (PC) – Penshurst Planning Ltd

Debbie Townrow (DT) – Swale BC

Richard Longman (RL) – Thames Gateway (Kent) Partnership

Rob Soper (RS) – Cathedral Group

Fergus Pryor (FP) – Cathedral Group

In attendance, Paula Weeks (PW) - Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce

**Apologies:**

Jo James - Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce

Louisa Felstead - Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce

Steve Boxall - Regeneration X

Robert Goodman - Bluewater/Lendlease

Stuart Haddow - Xperisoft Ltd

Lewis Kirnon -Dartford BC

Janet Robinson - SET Training

Phil Taylor - ArcelorMittal Kent Wire

Rosemary Williams - RW Coaching

**Minutes**  
**1.1 Minutes of previous meeting**

Approved

* 1. **Matters Arising**

**1.2.1** Lower Thames Crossing, - Steve Boxall is looking at the environmental issues for the Chamber.

**1.2.2** Operation Stack, - the Chamber has formed a committee and sent a report to the BCC.   
RLC - Although the Lower Thames Crossing and Operation Stack are Kent issues, they are in fact country wide as transport is affected as it moves through Kent before travelling onto the rest of the Country. Kent County Council fully supports the Chamber’s views and we will push again once the General Election is over.

**2. Action List Review**

**2.2.1** What would the effect be if the total amount taken from Business Rates wasn’t capped? Has any research been done on this? Removed from the minutes until after General Election in May.  
  
**2.2.2** Jo James met with local councils in January to discuss ‘What do businesses want from their local authority’. CI not aware if contact was made with Gravesham, Jo James to contact CI.

**3. Presentation by Fergus Prior and Rob Soper, Cathedral Group. ‘The Spirit of Sittingbourne’**

A copy of the presentation will be forwarded to those who attended the NK EDG meeting.

Key points to note:

* Cathedral Group has undertaken PPPs (Public Private Partnerships) in Deptford, Brighton, Bromley and Clapham as shown in the presentation.
* Redevelopment of Sittingbourne high street is not included in the project, but the aim is to increase footfall and the amount of time people spend in the high street. 6 sites have been released by Swale BC for development.
* The redevelopment will include 250 residential units with car parking spaces. A multi storey car park which will provide direct links to the town and station. A leisure park including a cinema and 6 to 8 restaurants and a new public square. There will also be a retail park.
* Soft consultations were carried out in Sittingbourne for local people’s opinions. More extensive formal consultations followed with a targeted audience.
* Quinn Estates are the joint venture partner. Guy Holloway architects, Gustafson Porter landscape architects.
* Construction phase - economic output (GVA) £38.8m. 330 direct construction jobs and 230 indirect jobs. Completed development - 230 direct jobs. Total contribution to the towns economy over 10 years = £326m.
* 98% of people in Sittingbourne want this to go ahead but are sceptical following previous experiences.
* Planning application was submitted 7th Nov 2014.
* Studies have shown that high streets fail due to lack of residential units near the high street. To show that alternative usage can function on the high street, acquired a shop; number 34 and potentially buying up to 5 shops to encourage more people to the high street.
* Road realignment is being funded by Cathedral Group & highways, funds have already been allocated.
* DT confirmed section 106 written.
* RLC – support for overall project is a good concept, concerns from the group regarding no development of the high street, this needs to be tied in somehow.
* FP – if businesses are in support of this development please write & support it. RLC confirmed that he would forward a letter of support to SWALE Borough Council on behalf of the North Kent Economic Development Group..

**4 Group Reports**(Due to time restraints reports could not be received by all groups)

**Environment (SB)**Although unable to attend the meeting SB had forwarded the following:  
Lodge Hill Development – It has just been reported that the Planning Application has been 'called in' by the Government so that the Secretary of State will make the decision whether to grant Planning Permission or not thus taking the decision out of Medway Council's hands. So, it looks like the Nightingales might be winning.   
Also, Medway Council's HQ at Gun Wharf, Chatham, has been Listed by English Heritage due to it being a high quality example of 20th Century Commercial design.   
Last week The Government and The Mayor of London published a 'Longterm Economic Plan' for London. One thing within this was announcement of resources for Transport for London to move ahead with plans for East London and Lower Thames Crossings - which is interesting as the Lower Thames Crossing locations are somewhat outside of TFL's area of operations.

**Education & Training (JR)**  
Although unable to attend the meeting JR had forwarded the following:  
The Education Minister Nick Boles has put the decision on Apprentice Reform on hold until after the General Election. Looks like PAYE system not going to be implemented for SMEs but instead a possible voucher system.

**Transport & Infrastructure (PC)**Decision on the Lower Thames Crossing: no announcements will be made prior to the General Election. Consultants are currently carrying out detailed assessment of options.  
The airport consultation is closed, earliest decision date expected to be summer 2015.

**Commercial Property (CB)**Using Sittingbourne High Street as an example of where there are many empty shops, short term leases may be a good solution so that start-up businesses etc could rent premises. However, the cost of putting leases in place discourages landlords from agreeing short term lettings as the legal fees incurred can often be prohibitively expensive and more than they are likely to receive in rent. There needs to be some reinvestment of council money (i.e generated from empty rates perhaps) into incentives for landlords for letting vacant space – perhaps contributions towards legal fees, grants for tenant rent deposits, or even providing parking in high Streets.  
CI – Local Authorities can carry out repairs in default following lengthy legal action against Landlords, but there is no guarantee on the return of these funds. Landlords have various ways of slowing down legal action from LA’s on empty units.

**Thames Gateway (Kent) Partnership (RL)**LGF2 announced in January: £4.4m for Rochester Airport Innovation Park development – only project in North Kent in this round.  
Cabinet Office advertised for CEO and Board Members for Ebbsfleet UDC – awaiting news of appointments. Chair is Michael Cassidy. Legislation to enable creation of the UDC is progressing: understand that the intention is to be in existence by April but not likely to assume full functions until Summer /Autumn.  
London Paramount/LRCH – embarking on programme of consultation workshops on 6 themes.  
Lodge Hill planning application has been called in.  
TGKP Board Meeting 24th February. Agenda included HCA update on economic assets in North Kent, engagement with LRCH, relationship with KMEP, proposed response to Government consultation on brownfield land and local development orders, future access to finance programme. Also, item on approach to lobbying for extension of Crossrail to North Kent.  
Proposed visit by Thames Gateway Minister on 12th March  
Discussion with the What Works Centre on Local Economic Growth about future possible collaboration.  
Working with local authorities to strengthen pipeline of potential projects for future funding programmes post-election.  
Follow-up to December 2014 Business Breakfast. Have had meeting of Economic Development Officers, now looking at how to pursue specific items.  
TGKP – will be reviewed after general election.

**Local Authority Update**

**Medway (WS)**The grant for phase 1 of the Rochester Airport Innovation Park development announced. Not secured yet as it is subject to a business case being submitted. Phase 1 is the closure of runway 1 and the construction of a hard runway and new hangars. Phase 2 will be the development around the airfield.

**Gravesham (CI)**A lottery grant worth £1.8M has been awarded for improvements and refurbishment of Gravesend Borough Market.  
New Assistant Town Centre Managers’ position has been created.

**AOB**None

Date of Next Meeting : Tuesday 28th April 2015 Medway Innovation Centre.