

**Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce**  
**North Kent Economic Development Group Meeting**

**22<sup>nd</sup> April 2014**

**Medway Innovation Centre**

**Minutes**

**Attendees:**

Richard Lavender (RLC) acting Chair- Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce  
Jo James (JJ)- Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce  
Richard Longman (RL)- Thames Gateway (Kent) Partnership  
Leslie Fernandez (LF)- North West Kent College  
Peter Cooper(PC) - Penshurst Planning  
Steve Boxall (SB) - RegenerationX  
Tudor Price (TP) Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce  
In attendance, Paula Weeks (PW)- Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce

**Apologies:**

Steve Gerring – UKHSE  
Suzanne Wood- Medway Fibreglass  
Chris Inwood- Gravesham Borough Council  
Fran Toomey- Medway Borough Council  
Lewis Kirnon- Dartford Borough Council  
Carlo Gargiulo- Swale Borough Council  
David Liston-Jones- Thames Gateway (Kent) Partnership  
Martin Garside- Port of London Authority  
Alastair Gale- Port of London Authority  
Stephen Parker- Willmott Dixon  
Robert Goodman-Bluewater/Lendlease  
Stacey Driver- Stickleback Manufacturing  
Wendy Brazil Hannam- Ramada Encore Chatham  
Clare Clark- Facts & Figures  
Emma Harraden- Hatten Wyatt

**1. Minutes**

1.1 Minutes of previous meeting approved

**2. Action List Review**

2.1 RLC arranged for TIGER presentation today by Tudor Price.

2.2 JR.to forward Apprenticeship funding detail to Paul Brooks at Ashford

2.3 Letter of support written by RLC to local authority planning officer on behalf of Tim Box. The Box family sent on their sincere thanks.

2.4 Still seeking a new suitable Chair for NK EDG

### **3.Paramount:**

RLC – no new updates as yet. RL- it has been confirmed that this is being handled through the nationally significant infrastructure process. The regulations providing for large leisure proposals to be considered under NSI route came in last year; this will be the first scheme considered under that process. It is a lengthy process and could take up to a year for the planning application to be ready. SB- has there been proper engagement and consultations with the public? There are businesses local to the area that are unsure of what's happening. JJ – the Chamber has asked Paramount twice to attend events to give a presentation and they have obliged on both occasions, although they have been restricted on what they can say.

**RLC –will take forward action point to look into the public consultation process for this.**

### **4.Ebbsfleet Garden City**

RLC – Has been given the go ahead and Ministers have been out to visit the area. Was quite an 'out of the blue' announcement that was made, but it could resolve quite a few infrastructure issues. A development of 15,000 properties is to be built at Ebbsfleet. Planning permission had been granted in 2007 for 6,000 homes in the Eastern Quarry but as yet limited progress.

RLC – The infrastructure required for these developments seems a bit fragmented. JJ confirmed that this is on the agenda for the SE LEP.

### **5.CEO KICC Update**

JJ – KICC made a small profit at year end despite a tough year with unexpected expenditure. The purchase of new furniture for the conferencing facilities at Ashford meant the profit was slightly less than had been anticipated.

Membership has seen a 5% growth over the last 12 months, and KICC continues to be one of the fastest growing Chambers in the UK. The North Kent area is the fastest area of growth for the Chamber and is now the largest area for Chamber membership.

Interviews for the new Membership Development Manager will be carried out next week.

The Chamber board held a strategy day in March where JJ provided details of current client trends geographically. This will probably lead to a larger physical Chamber presence in N Kent.

JJ stressed again the importance of finding a Chair for the NK EDG.

### **6.TIGER Fund presentation.**

TP gave a powerpoint presentation to the group on TIGER. This is a £20m pot available for loans at 0% interest. There are 3 types of loans available to a sole trader, partnership, limited company or a not for profit business:

*Capital Investment Loan*

*Innovation & Development Loan*

*Young Innovative Enterprise Loan*

To qualify you must be providing employment in N Kent or Thurrock, be on the list of Priority Sectors

and be able to meet other specific criteria. There is also a mechanism for considering non-priority sector applications.

1<sup>st</sup> step is to complete an online pre application, if approved a full application has to be completed within 3 months. The Chamber helps with free business advice for this.

The decision panel meets monthly to review the applications.

Common areas where applications fail are in showing cash flow, forecasting, or even failure to provide evidence of the proposed match funding.

The original Priority Sectors list was for areas which had been identified for growth. The Priority Sectors list has now widened so businesses that were excluded before are now being encouraged to see an advisor. TP advised that the team have been going back over these.

Government pressured KCC to fund the £5m for Escalate (W Kent) out of the £20m TIGER pot. This was accepted on condition that RGF underspend from elsewhere should be made available if TIGER is nearing its limits by September 2014. Realistically, for projects to get through the process, applications really need to be underway by this July. Recently take up has increased as many have reapplied since the criteria changed.

Ideally the project pipeline and approvals will be sufficiently strong that we can be confident the whole £20m originally allocated for TIGER will be spent; any un-spent funds will have to be returned to central government.

SB - interesting as thought read recently something from KCC that all the money had gone.

RL - are local businesses aware of where to get funding? ie would they look at local authorities or just head for the banks? TP - Barclays not aware of TIGER when he met with a couple of local business managers. JJ The banks unlikely to make this a top priority offer as they are going to offer their own products first.

LF asked if TIGER would help start-up businesses. TP depends on what criteria they can fulfil, an advisor would discuss the best route for funding available for them .

RL can the Chamber keep pushing out to the members please. Also leaflets were sent out to businesses in the post with their Business rates reminders.

LF - are there checks on how the money is spent? TP not known, although probably part of Price Waterhouse's role. The funds are released depending on what they are to be used for, eg if it's for salaries it will be released as each new employee starts.

## **7. Group Reports**

### **Environment (SB):**

Gravesend Heritage Quarter Project - Section 106 has been agreed, so development should be starting soon.

Manston Airport – closed but not to be sold.

Thames Crossing – still no update from Government as to which is the preferred option. Work has started to put the infrastructure in place for the removal of the Toll Booths in October.

Flooding – interestingly Ebbsfleet & Paramount developments are being built on flood plains. Some local authorities have received flood grants. JJ will check to see if anything available via BCC.

### **Transport & Infrastructure (PC):**

New change of use permitted developments rights will assist with (amongst others) change of use from shops to residential. This should help to support the vitality of town centres. Empty shops

continue to be a problem but although landlords often are willing to lower rents it is the level of business rates that prohibit businesses moving in.

### **Education & Training (LF)**

Many different types of apprenticeships on offer for 16-24 year olds. There is a skill shortage in the S East so these should go some way to address this. Due to the nature of funding many Secondary schools are still not completely open about apprenticeships and still encourage their pupils towards the 6<sup>th</sup> form route.

### **Local Authority Update – Gravesham Borough Council**

Town Centre Vacancies as at 28th March 2014 – down to 10.8%.

Feb 2014 unemployment rates - 2,052 3.2%.

Positive pipe line of TIGER approved pre applications and prospects coming forward.

Dartford and Gravesham Business Awards open - [www.dgbawards.co.uk](http://www.dgbawards.co.uk) – closing date is July 31st, 2014.

### **Planning - Lodge Hill (RLC)**

The planned development of 5000 houses at Lodge Hill is under threat due to the nesting of Nightingales in the area. RLC had been asked to comment to the local press and had taken the view that the development could go ahead with the Nightingales still in situ. SB agreed, should be able to plan around the ecology. Others in the group, although not experts, agreed with this theory.

### **Thames Gateway (Kent) Partnership (RL):**

TGKP growth plan, in parallel with the SE LEP plan, is to be published in June.

Airports Commission. TGKP are formulating a letter to the Davis Commission on the Thames Estuary Airport.

Centre for offshore Renewable Engineering (CORE); SE LEP's plan requested CORE status for Harwich; BIS have responded proposing that the Kent CORE be re-configured to include Harwich.

TGKP will be discussing with Essex counterparts.

### **Actions from meeting**

RLC – to look into the public consultation process for Paramount.

Action for all – consider suitable new Chair for the NK EDG.

### **AOB**

LF made the group aware of the Thames Tideway Tunnel (super sewer under the Thames) Although physically not in our area it may have an impact.

**Date of next meeting:** Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> June, The Swan Room, Medway Innovation Centre, 10.00-12.00