

West Kent Partnership Meeting

Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council, Thursday 20 October 2011

MINUTES

Present

Cllr Mark Worrall (Chair), Cllr Robert Atwood, Cllr Owen Baldock, Caroline Shaw, David Candlin, Mandy Wynne, William Benson, Lesley Bowles, Robin Hales, David Hughes, Paul Lulham, Chief Supt Matthew Nix, Mark Raymond, Wendy Wood

Apologies

Cllr Peter Fleming, Tony Bartlett, Roger House, Mike Bodkin, John Cunningham, Catherine Mayhew, Bill Fearon, Jo James

Welcome

Jill Davison attending for Peter Fleming
Barbara Cooper, Director of Econ Dev, Business Strategy and Support, KCC
Liz Harrison, KCC (presenting at item 3)
Tim Read and Graham Goddard for item 1
Richard Webb, graduate intern at VAWK
John Grafik, K College attending for Bill Fearon

The Chairman stated for the record that he is a non executive Director of Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust re item 2.

1. Minutes/Matters arising from 22 July

- Actions 1, 2, 3, 5 and 9 were all transport-related and were taken as part of item 2.
- Action 4 – funding initiatives rural transport. A rural transport conference for the South East was taking place on 2 November at The River Centre, Tonbridge. Roger Gasche from KCC will feed back from this to transport sub group.
- Action 7- WK Leader –WKP sent a strong letter of endorsement of the value of WK Leader programme to James Paice the Minister of State for Agriculture and Food in mid-September. Despite letters of support from 2 or our 3 WK MPs we have not yet received a response from the Minister. Post meeting – response now received indicating that there may be some flexibility over funding for successful programmes.

- Action 8 – Members Highways Fund. It is understood that subsequent to our last meeting VAWK made an approach to KCC members to support the Dial 2 Drive scheme in West Kent. This however, was unsuccessful. A list has been provided of unallocated funds by Member but much of this may be being progressed by members as funds are being rapidly allocated to projects. There is a cut-off date of end December.

2. Transport – Tim Read, Head of Highway Transportation and Paul Lulham, WKP Transport Group Chair, KCC

The Chairman welcomed Tim Read who accompanied Paul Lulham to further explore key issues for transportation in West Kent. A welcome was also extended to Graham Goddard who attended for further discussion on transportation services to Pembury Hospital

Pembury Hospital

Following discussions with Graham at our July meeting, WKP resolved to become involved in negotiating patient transport options to the new hospital as part of the S106 arrangements being proposed. The hospital is now open and as access issues are still unresolved it was considered imperative that this is moved forward quickly and that the WKP contributes to ensuring that adequate and realistic transport options are adopted swiftly, widely promoted and used.

Graham explained that the second phase of the hospital has now opened and that the Kent & Sussex is closed. On the day of the change-over of all services there was an accident on the A21. Emergency vehicles were able to get through but serious disruption was caused for others on access to the hospital. This underlines the importance of the A21 improvements.

Following the last WKP meeting Graham acknowledged the strength of feeling over access to the hospital. The application to vary the current conditions is still with Tunbridge Wells BC and over the next 6 months the Trust will formally consult on the S106 options including voluntary transport schemes to ascertain the best and most sustainable transport options longer term. The Trust has £2.1M to invest over 5 years and is working collectively with KCC on implementation. A number of routes are already provided and subsidised by KCC.

A 6 month interim agreement has been reached on transportation with KCC with new bus services going live on 14 November. This allows time for the routes to be publicised and the 6 months will start from 14 November. There are currently 3 buses per hour to Tunbridge Wells and two buses per hour to Tonbridge. From 14 November additional bus services will provide a total of 6 buses per hour to Tunbridge Wells and 4 buses per hour to Tonbridge.

The NHS Trust intend to establish a group – perhaps WKP could be the basis of it – to review proposals and opportunities including using voluntary sector services. It will be necessary to involve colleagues from East Sussex as it is part of the catchment area for the Hospital. Access to the hospital is wider than public transport options. It includes concerns over the A21, Colts Hill, establishing a service level agreement with voluntary sector on volunteer driver services and addressing the level of car parking provision at the hospital. Graham is submitting a Paper to the Executive Team at the Trust and an executive lead will be appointed on this issue to lead discussion and consultation in the direct engagement phase.

The Chairman responded that WKP very happy to act as the Forum for discussions which should include other stakeholders and transport providers from both West Kent and East Sussex volunteer driver schemes, Kent Karrier, KCC and bus operators. Helen Medlock should also be involved as she has recently been appointed as the Kent Commissioner for patient transport.

It was noted that the Trust has now ceased to provide a voluntary car service as funding is only provided for non blue light transport patients who meet certain strict criteria. Patients who meet the Patient Transport Service criteria will continue to receive the service.

This recent decision, which was felt to have been poorly communicated, has had serious implications for the Dial 2 Drive service operated by VAWK who have had a large increase in requests for the service which they currently cannot meet.

The Chairman thanked the NHS Trust and KCC Transport team for putting in place an agreement to implement a 6-month interim service, based on regular bus services from the rail stations at both Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge.

The Partnership also acknowledged the assistance that Tunbridge Wells planners are providing around car parking issues, given that the land around the hospital site is greenbelt and strongly endorse the need for substantial additional parking facilities.

Action 1 WKP will be the Consultation Forum. Graham Goddard and Wendy Wood to liaise on consultation which should take place in time for provision/services to be in place for 14 May commencement

Action 2: NHS Trust to be invited to join WKP. The Executive Lead on Access to Hospital will be the regular attendee

A21

The Partnership received an update on the recent meeting of the A21 Reference Group which was well attended.

The Highways Agency (HA) have been cooperative with KCC. The scheme is the same and there is no real dispute on figures. KCC needed to assess their scheme on the same basis as HA. This results in a figure of approximately £79m. However KCC feel they can actually deliver for less than this. As an example local authorities do not pay VAT on CPOs while the HA does which could save £7.5m. Also the view on inflation differs and KCC feel they have very relevant current experience.. Overall KCC feel they can deliver for £10m - £12m less but an upper £70m cost is expected. KCC will take the risk if they can get control of it and the money. It was mentioned that this may actually mean the road is detrunked. CPO position for HA scheme was 79.6ha and 4 houses. Amount of land for KCC scheme was similar.

The Public Inquiry was discussed. There are potentially two Pls. One on the planning and one on the CPOs at an overall cost of £4m including the design work with the actual inquiry costing £1.5m. Support towards this was requested from all round the table. East Sussex have a fund towards supporting LEP work and would find a contribution from this (no figures committed) to support KCC. Cllr Fleming made a point that the Highway Authorities ought to be covering that cost .

Unfortunately due to the delay that has taken place it is a new scheme and not a continuation of the old one. Necessary to twin track the CPO and planning inquiries and some certainty needed over the money to deliver the scheme otherwise this can impact on the inquiry. The general figures from HA were discussed. HA had a range of figures with £140m being the higher figure but a more likely HA figure of £117m being likely if they delivered it.

Action 3: WKP to write to the Minister endorsing KCC proposals

Transport Sub Group Report

The powerpoint presentation is attached to these minutes. There was discussion on a number of issues

KCC Members Highways Fund

Concern was registered by VAWK that despite the fact that funds are available and have to be spent by end of December, VAWK's approach to Members for funding for Dial 2 Drive was unsuccessful. Feedback was received that Members prefer to fund new projects rather than ongoing services on sustainability grounds.

Action 4: The role of Kent Karrier appears to be under-promoted – Paul Lulham to provide districts with information required to promote themselves and to explore other promotional opportunities in West Kent

Southeastern Services

WKP very concerned at implications of fare increases for West Kent commuters, reduced services to Canon Street and need for direct link to Gatwick in particular. Appropriate to start lobbying on these issues in support of points made in Rail Action Plan for Kent that affect West Kent.

Action 5: Letter sent attached to these Minutes.

Action 6: Paul Lulham to establish what other routes for lobbying on WK rail issues could be utilised

Action 7: British Transport Police, K College, Kent Police, Federation of Small Businesses and Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce all to be invited to engage with Transport sub group on transport issues for them within West Kent.

Action 8: Feedback on services provided by new KCC contractors – Enterprise – to be supplied to Paul Lulham.

3. Rural Broadband – Liz Harrison, KCC

The Chairman welcomed Liz Harrison and Barbara Cooper and commented that with such a large rural area and a well established and successful Leader programme, it is very important to the vitality of our local businesses in WK that they are able to fully access the upgraded provision that may be available.

The powerpoint presentation is attached to these minutes.

KCC have two potential routes to market for providing high speed broadband in rural areas, one using BT and one using BDUK funding. Assessment of the various offers is underway and match funding is being sourced. It is important that need is demonstrated

Action 9: Barbara to supply information on Ebbsfleet model of superfast broadband as part of new developments so that councils can integrate into their local plans

Action 10: Liz to supply information that WKP can circulate to our contacts to help on business involvement in broadband to facilitate

- bringing forward business responses to questionnaire on broadband
- clarifying position on timescales to manage public expectation

4. Joint Working with East Sussex – William Benson

The Leaders and Chief Executives of the three West Kent authorities, Wealden and Rother, met in late September to discuss joint working opportunities. It was agreed that a LEP sub group would be established to address the main areas of joint concern, in particular to collaborate on the promotion of rural broadband and the dualling of the A21. The sub group also intends to promote the interests of the wide range of rural businesses within the shared area and to ensure that their needs and views are listened to and understood. The notes to the meeting are attached to the Minutes.

5. Start-Up West Kent – Jo James, Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce

Jo James sent her apologies as she was unable to attend. There will be a presentation to the January meeting but in the meantime, The WKP economy group will be meeting with Tony Logan in the coming weeks to scope the programme, once endorsed by KCC Regeneration Fund, for delivery in West Kent.

6. Business Crime in West Kent – Chief Supt Nix

Reorganisation of Kent Police will go live in mid November. In West Kent, this should result in an improvement to the service provided. The new way of policing will put one third more neighbourhood officers in West Kent, investigating crime with the same person engaged on the investigation from start to finish. Changes in shift patterns will also mean more officers are available at weekends and evenings. Although there will be staff reductions most of these will be at Head Office.

Levels of business crime remains steady. The main areas for concern are shoplifting, metal theft and mobile phones theft. The police are working closely with supermarkets where most shoplifting takes place regarding preventative measures as along with opportunistic thieves there is also an element of organised crime to shoplifting. There are 9 business crime reduction partnerships in West Kent helping to change the mindset from catching to prevention. Asda at Swanley experiences particularly high levels of shoplifting.

mobile phone thefts result in an increased workload for the police. It is possible to register the IMEI number on a new phone at purchase. This means that if the phone is lost or stolen the police can identify the owner and return the property. However, there is a disincentive to people to register their phones as a lost or stolen phone can be claimed for on insurance and a new replacement provided.

The police are working with the business community to raise awareness of responsibility for crime prevention. For example, instances of making off without payment from a petrol station can be deterred by the installation of CCTV.

With the high price of fuel, thefts from business and domestic fuel tanks are becoming more prevalent. Sevenoaks has done some very

good work around alarms for tanks, activated by a sudden loss of fuel, which is now being rolled out across the County.

7. West Kent Investment Strategy - Paper A – Pathways to Employment Interreg project

Partners endorsed the WKP's involvement in this bid for European funding.

8. Co-ordinator Report

As time was short, it was agreed that a written update would be supplied in the Minutes.

At the January WKP meeting it was agreed that the review of the Partnership should be postponed until the LEP was better established and the correct linkages could be identified. In the meantime, 5 objectives for the current year were agreed and are now reported against

1. Focus on Business

The WKP continues to support the West Kent Business Awards. This year, we have again judged the Innovation Category alongside the Kent and Medway Innovation & Growth Team. This sponsorship has been invaluable in creating relationships with proactive West Kent Businesses and bringing to the attention of the Innovation & Growth Team West Kent businesses that they can now work with and develop their growth potential. The Awards take place at The Spa Hotel, Tunbridge Wells on 24th November.

West Kent 100 in 100 campaign has successfully engaged with nearly 50 businesses in West Kent in providing new apprenticeship opportunities for our young people. The launch event was a particular success and the 100 in 100 campaign in West Kent has been more successful than in other parts of Kent with 103 apprenticeship places pledged.

In late spring 2012 the West Kent Business Directory will be published by Burrows. This will have cost the WKP nothing to produce and will not only promote West Kent and its businesses but the accompanying CD and website will provide an up to date database of West Kent Businesses.

We continue to have a good relationship with Courier Newspapers, particularly in the monthly Business Supplement and at the end of September there was a feature interview with Mark Worrall in his capacity as Chairman of the WKP highlighting our concerns and objectives for the local economy.

2. Deliver West Kent Investment Strategy

The Action Plan is on target, many actions are covered under the other headings in these 5 priorities, such as providing opportunities for young people into employment, broadband connectivity and A21 and other transport priorities.

3. Access external funding, especially European

This has been a priority action and despite the disappointment of the late withdrawal of our Belgian partners on the Braindrain project, we have managed to turn this into an opportunity to work with a far more diverse group of partners on the Pathways to Employment project which will be a considerable advantage in building other projects in the future.

4. A21 Task and Finish Group - economic evidence for improvements

5. Develop Relationships with East Sussex

This group has duly met and reported. Additionally, the May WKP meeting specifically addressed the economic argument and a representative from Seaspace, the development agency working on this issue for Hastings attended. A21 improvements has been a standing item on the Agenda this year and relationships with East Sussex have been established and are developing around this key issue and other shared concerns.

9. Any Other Business

- Kent Finance Officers have been involved on work with Local Government futures on how the South East compares with other areas on funding. A report on the implications from this work for West Kent to be requested for the January meeting.

10. Dates of next meetings

- Thursday 26 January 2012
- Thursday 26 April 2012
- Thursday 19 July 2012
- Thursday 18 October 2012