

Minutes – West Kent Partnership Meeting, 22 January 2016, TMBC

Present

Cllr Brian Luker, TMBC	Tudor Price, Kent Invicta CC
Cllr Peter Fleming, SDC	Wayne Peet, BIS
Cllr Jane March, TWBC	William Benson, TWBC
Lesley Bowles, SD	Cllr Sean Holden, KCC
Mark Raymond, TMBC	Jane Burtenshaw, West Kent College
Cllr Nicolas Heslop, TMBC	Robin Cooper, SDC
Roger House, Centre for Microbusiness	Cllr Kevin Maskell, SDC
Ross Gill, KCC	Roscoe Walford, Kent Police
Hilary Smith, TWBC	Wendy Wood, WKP

Apologies

Catherine Brunger, AXA-PPP	Jon Regan, Hugh Lowe Farms
David Jukes, TWBC	Paul Bentley, Maidstone & TW Trust
Pav Ramewal, SDC	Paul Hannan, Hadlow Group
Cllr Roddy Hogarth, SDC	Caroline Shaw, IMAGO
David Candlin, TWBC	Henry Warde, Squerneys
Julia Chapman, Kent Police	Mark Dance, KCC

Guests

Ellie Evans, Volterra	Lucy Dean, Volterra
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Annual Meeting

1 Chairman's Report

Peter Fleming gave an overview of the successes of the Partnership over the previous 12 months.

- Publication of **Case for West Kent** in January 2015 led to WKP taking a more strategic approach to attracting funding to the area. A pipeline of projects has since been developed and improved links are now in place with KCC. West Kent is now well positioned to take advantage of opportunities to access funding for infrastructure and other investment.
- The message coming from West Kent now is very much that growth in the county can be driven by West Kent
- Final report on Escalate -£5.5M funding delivered and well placed to start delivery with recyclable funds
- Leader has been a huge success story for the area. New programme is now open with a healthy pipeline. The bureaucracy has grown making it a less attractive proposition to businesses unless they receive support to bring

forward applications.

- Growth hub funds supplemented with local contributions are delivering a comprehensive business support offer
- Construction of A21 dualling between Tonbridge and Pembury is finally underway
- Investment too at North Farm, Tonbridge High Street and M20

2 Appointment of New Chairman

Peter Fleming proposed the appointment of Nicolas Heslop as new Chairman and this was unanimously approved.

January Meeting

- 1** Nicolas Heslop congratulated the outgoing Chairman on his achievements over the past years. He also congratulated Peter on his well deserved OBE in the New Years Honours list for work at a national level for local government and more locally. He commented that the achievements of the WKP in 2015 have laid an excellent foundation for delivering on the message that West Kent Works.

Going forward, a major focus for the Partnership will be on opportunities for business and to develop the skills locally that are needed to deliver growth.

Minutes and Matters Arising – October 23 Meeting

- Item 2 – broadband – Liz will be providing further information when available on areas/businesses who were not able to be supported through the BDUK and broadband voucher schemes so that we can begin to map areas of market failure and ways to address.
- Item 3 – Ross updated Partners that East Sussex have led an application that the technical assistance element of ESIF programme can be used to promote new and innovative projects and encourage applications for such projects. It is looking hopeful that the application will be approved.
- Item 5 – Advocacy and marketing strategy is being finalised
- Item 6 – Timescale for new LEP Chair – Recruitment is underway for both Chairman and Managing Director. Deadline for applications is 29 January

2 Paramount Park – Opportunities for West Kent – Ellie Evans, Volterra

Volterra are socio-economic consultants who have been leading the consultation on Paramount Park. The Chairman welcomed Ellie Evans and Lucy Dean who had been invited to give some background to facilitate discussions on how West Kent residents, businesses and economy can benefit from the new development.

The powerpoint presentation is attached.

During Q&A the following points were clarified.

- Extensive consultation has taken place but delivery of the project is

- dependent on planning permission.
- Jobs will be filled locally wherever possible and there will be rules in the contracts which cover this. No actual modelling has taken place yet as to what proportion of workers can realistically be sourced locally and what numbers/trades etc will need to be brought to the area. Scoping that exercise will include exploring the ramifications for infrastructure such as schools and health services. A strategy will be developed.
 - Travel by public transport by both workers and visitors will be actively encouraged. This has implications for West Kent as the transport links to the site are far from ideal
 - Skills needs will be addressed through working closely with local FE colleges and other providers
 - Concern was expressed about the potential dual development of Ebbsfleet Garden City and Paramount Park without effective strategic oversight as being led by different organisations. Ellie confirmed that
 - Transport planning takes into consideration both developments for pressure on road network particularly at Dartford Crossing/M25 /M20/M2 will be addressed
 - Ebbsfleet Garden City plans are being reviewed. With a likely increased emphasis on housing, the complementarity between this and job opportunities at Paramount Park will be addressed
 - Implications for construction at potentially similar times will be explored
 - All potential impacts from the project are being drawn together and a robust appraisal completed ahead of the planning application. This should improve the chances of approval.
 - Whilst the majority of jobs available will be at entry level there will be a significant number of higher level occupations which Paramount Park will seek to source locally such as engineers, performers and managers. It was recognised that due to the high living costs and generally higher skilled workers in West Kent it is more likely that it is these higher level jobs which will appeal to West Kent residents.
 - The development will require a lot of supplies both in the construction stage and once open. West Kent needs to explore what we are best placed to supply and facilitate this for our businesses
 - The potential massive developments in just one part of Kent can have implications for the rest of Kent with workers commuting away from West Kent and leaving the area unable to fill vacancies.
 - As well as economic planning, extensive social planning is also underway including emergency planning. This planning to be shared with West Kent authorities when there is a potential impact.

Action

A strategic overview on the potential implications for West Kent as well as the opportunities will need to be ongoing as plans progress. West Kent Officer group to ensure that the relevant planning managers co-ordinate this activity

BIS – Post Spending Review – Wayne Peet

WW

Funding

Government Priority is still to reduce debt but this is alongside a continuing commitment to the local growth agenda. There are extensive cuts to government departments – BIS – 17%, DCLG 29% and DfT 40%. However, the review confirmed the indicative profile of funds to LEPs for Local Growth Fund and the £488M for SELEP is guaranteed. There is a further £5M still to be allocated across the country and work is underway to design a Growth Deal 3 but no details yet on what delivery criteria will be used. Having projects ready to go when the round is announced will be a distinct advantage. The LEP will also continue to receive core funding of some £500K pa. Therefore projects that have been identified can be delivered.

Growth Hubs

These will receive central government funding for the next two years but are then expected to become self-sustaining. BIS will share best practice to help facilitate the transition. The business growth service is now closed to new applicants but work is underway to ensure that data collected under that programme can be shared with the Growth Hubs.

Tudor updated the meeting on the Kent and Medway Growth Hub which was launched in December and receiving a fair number of calls. Direct access to input local content has not yet been enabled but this is imminent. The data sharing issue is complex but is being looked at with the intention being to be able to share data with local authorities. As growth hub supplementary funds have been put into local delivery this only makes sense. Currently the additional funding to come will be split equally across the 39 LEPs. KICC are making an argument that a proportionate split that reflects the high number of businesses in the SELEP would be more equitable. If this precedent is agreed, this will be shared with Partners.

Business Rates

The timeframe for changes to the structure has just been announced. Working groups are now in place to address design and policy. A consultation will take place in the autumn with Royal Assent anticipated for Autumn 2017.

The meeting agreed that Business Rates is sensitive issue with the local authorities in West Kent facing severe financial consequences from the proposals. It was agreed not to debate this at the meeting, save as to make the request that BIS carry back the message from West Kent that the proposed increase in tariff is at odds with what both businesses and government want to encourage growth.

WP

Devolution

There was some discussion around the processes for securing devolution deals with Government and there are some serious unresolved issues and challenging deadlines which have proved to be counter-productive. A view was expressed that the government devolution models were too inflexible for Kent and Medway and that a way forward could be found locally to take the best elements of devolution and design a model that would not require government endorsement and would work in the best interests of the locality.

Transport Infrastructure

Operation Stack – consultation on the lorry park options closes on 25 January. M20 Lorry Park Plans It was agreed that the implications arising for West Kent are not regarding the siting of the park but the severe impact on local traffic between junctions 4 and 8 when Operation Stack is in force and traffic moves on to alternative routes.

Lower Thames Crossing – Highways England report is due today. A full consultation exercise will then take place before any decision is taken on the proposed route. The LEP is looking to build a case for looking at the wider impact of the crossing in the area and not just in the immediate vicinity of the crossing areas.

Action

The West Kent local authorities will review the consultation documents and feed back to the LEP consultation exercise.

MR
LB
HS

Staffing

Wayne announced that he will be leaving BIS and the Chairman expressed thanks for his support for the Partnership over the years. The new contact for West Kent will be Cath Goodall and she has confirmed attendance at the next WKP meeting.

Strategic Update – Ross Gill

4.

Much of the update had been covered in earlier items. Ross drew Partners' attention to Growth Fund 3 and pointed out that there are some indications from the Autumn Statement that allocations might be more strategic than in previous rounds. West Kent should look at potential projects outside of conventional transport schemes. This could well link to Skills.

Action:

Officer co-ordinating Group to review Case for West Kent, West Kent Priorities for Growth and skills issues from today's meeting and bring some proposals to the April meeting

WW

Engaging employers in planning future skills provision – Ross Gill

5.

The three West Kent authorities gave an overview of their current engagement with employers on skills

Tunbridge Wells – The main initiative is an employability forum which as well as local employers includes representatives from Kent Apprenticeships, CXK, Jobcentre Plus and West Kent College. Meetings are very useful as an information exchange and a conscious effort has been made not to duplicate activity elsewhere but to add value. Reviewed recently and all agreed very beneficial. In partnership

with TMBC a number of successful job fairs have been delivered connecting employers with individuals. Hosted a meeting of West Kent careers teachers and there are some good links with some of the schools and local businesses.

Sevenoaks – Also have an active local group with a main focus on supporting young people into employment. The group has identified gaps and created an action plan to address specific issues across the district. Superjam, a media company with a charitable arm have recently been supported into relocating into part of the empty vocational building on the Orchards Academy site in Swanley and 30 young people will start a music course in February. Work has also been commissioned from Wessex Economics on Swanley and lack of skills has been identified as a barrier to employment. Across the district, work readiness has been identified as a key issue and a work readiness course is planned in Dunton Green as part of the support for a major new housing development. A jobs fair is being planned and attracting graduates into the area through closer working with London universities is being explored. In discussions with WK College on construction opportunities at Swanley. Skills gaps are being identified with rural landowners, major employers and tourist attractions and work is underway with Quinetiq at Fort Halstead in developing a high end engineering hub.

Tonbridge & Malling – Similar work is underway. A local project has been developed out of the LSP, working with local businesses to link skills provision to business needs and a sector skills analysis has been completed for the borough. Finance and Services, Construction, Transport and Energy and Utilities have been identified as the main sectors which are well represented and displaying growth. A consultation with some ten local businesses is taking place on 12 February where skills needs will be looked at in finer detail. Work readiness is also an important theme in the borough and this and other commonly shared themes have the potential to be addressed at a West Kent level.

Summary of key points from Ross' paper

Workforce Skills evidence base was produced in partnership with FE partners and reported to KMEP in September. The purpose is to build and maintain a central evidence base on skills needs facing the county over the next decade. Sector analysis is key to identifying priority sectors. Life sciences for example is a government priority and high growth but starts from a small base and does not employ large numbers. Retail is often not regarded as a priority but is a huge local employer. Employer focus groups have supplemented the local data and national reports in the evidence base.

There is a fairly positive outlook for West Kent with a predicted growth in overall job numbers of 9000-10,000 over the next ten years. Job numbers have increased faster in West Kent over the last 5-6 years at 3% than in other areas in Kent which remained static over the same period.

An evidence base for West Kent, as opposed to the rest of Kent could look somewhat different due to the porous boundaries with London boroughs and high levels of out commuting.

KMEP established Skills Commission in December and work is now underway to

develop an employer focus for the Commission and evidence base.

Partners made the following comments

- Microbusinesses would benefit greatly for bringing young people and their fresh approach into their businesses. However, there is risk involved, not least in time that would be needed to train new staff not just technically but on work readiness skills
- Centre for Microbusiness have attempted to put together a work experience programme matching West Kent College students with microbusinesses supplying specific skills such as IT or design. However, although this experience would be valuable to the students, because it is extra-curricular it has been impossible to attract students to the opportunity. Courses are so prescriptive that is not possible to integrate such an initiative in the curriculum.
- KICC members report that there are more apprenticeships being offered than young people looking for placements. Work readiness also an issue and universities and larger employers take many of the most capable young people
- Opportunities in the rural sector need to be promoted within schools and pre-conceived ideas about the sector dispelled
- In an area such as this with virtually full employment there are different issues for employers than in other parts of Kent
- Close working between skills providers and employers on local provision essential
- The value of transferrable skills within the local economy is relevant
- Retraining older people in the workforce needs a greater focus in the report
- Expectations and aspirations for future careers tend to be higher in West Kent due to the demographic and ease of access to London. This results in fewer school leavers being interested in entry level jobs
- Discussion required on cost/quality issues at the vocational unit at North Farm. Important to retain construction based activity there
- Further details on how the new Apprenticeship Levy will be managed will inform employer forums and help WKP identify the issues in West Kent, given the majority of employers in the area are not large enough to be contributing to the levy.
- Changing rules on how programmes such as apprenticeship scheme are operating are exasperating for the public sector but for local employers such as Rosemary Shraegar there are serious business implications, especially

where programmes have taken time and money to set up and are still being delivered.

- A fully funded Young Chamber programme is being delivered across Kent, taking employers into schools and colleges to talk about what businesses look for in employees. Events in West Kent are West Kent College on Tuesday 8 March and Thursday 10 March and Maskells Academy on Tuesday 10 May. Other businesses welcome to participate.
- The value of volunteering and being involved in community/parish projects should not be forgotten as a way of acquiring both hard and soft skills

Action 1

The district level employer groups and other West Kent businesses will be invited to participate in a business breakfast debate at the KICC West Kent B2B on March 10. This will provide an opportunity for local level business engagement to feed into the Skills Commission.

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Action 2

A West Kent evidence base to be produced. This will be presented at the West Kent B2B breakfast and provide clear skills data in West Kent taking into account the high level of out commuting from the area to London. Note – link to evidence on West Kent commuting patterns both in and out of West Kent from Case for West Kent.

RG

Action 3

Questions for local employer forums/business breakfast to consider could include:

- With the move to apprenticeship funding going direct to employers who then commission skills how can employers be best supported to take up the opportunity, especially given that in WK there are few large employers driving skills development forward
- Assess the skills proposals in Annex 2 of *'Engaging Employers in planning Future Skills Provision'* and identify if there are potential initiatives that could be developed on a West Kent basis or county basis from which West Kent could benefit

MR
LB
HS
WW

Action 4

Working group to be formed to take a strategic view of West Kent skills landscape. Group to include Colleges, West Kent ED officers and businesses. Outcomes from above 3 actions to inform the work. Evidence produced to be used to

WW

- Lobby Skills Commission and LEP for funding to meet West Kent skills development needs
- Influence the FE Review taking place later in 2016

Updates for Information

6.

Action

West Kent Leader – feedback from Partners to DEFRA, through BIS that the increasingly onerous level of bureaucracy in funding schemes, notably LEADER means that higher levels of support are required for businesses to be able to navigate the application process. Funds that could go direct to stimulating business growth are instead being spent on administration.

WP

AOB

7.

There was no other business

Dates of next meetings – all 10am-12 noon, venues to be advised

8.

- Friday 22 April 2016 – Rural theme, linked to Leader launch
- Friday 22 July 2016
- Friday 21 October 2016