

Minutes - West Kent Partnership Meeting – 11 January 2019

Present

Nicolas Heslop, TMBC (Chair)
 Sean Holden, KCC
 Roddy Hogarth, SDC
 Jane March, TWBC
 Brian Luker, TMBC
 Paul Hannan, Hadlow Group
 Mark Raymond, TMBC
 Hilary Smith, TWBC
 Andrew Stirling, SDC
 Jacqui Ward, KCC
 Simon Harris, WKP
 Wendy Wood, WKP

Guests

Tomasz Lewandowski, Hugh Lowe Farms
 Earl Bournier, KCC
 Carole Valentine, KCC

Apologies

Peter Fleming, SDC
 Tracy Moore, TWBC
 Iain McNab, BEIS
 William Benson, TWBC
 Caroline Shaw, IMAGO
 David Joyner, KCC
 Catherine Brunger, AXA PPP
 Jon Regan, Hugh Lowe Farms
 Henry Warde, Squerryes
 Adam Bryan, SELEP
 Sarah Nurden, KMEP
 Alison Parmar, FSB
 Andrew Metcalf, KICC
 Tudor Price, KICC

1 Minutes & Matters Arising

Rural Focus event

Advice on timings and type of event has been sought from Stuart Gibbons (rural consultant) and Caroline Lingham, West Kent LEADER programme manager. An event will be staged later in the year with high profile speakers. Alongside this a business support package will be developed to enable farmers to manage the gradual transition away from subsidies. West Kent Leader ELAG group and Hadlow College will also be involved in shaping the event and programme.

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Paul Hannan kindly offered Hadlow as a venue for the event.

2 The Fruit Rooms – Tomasz Lewandowski, Packhouse Manager, Hugh Lowe Farms

Thanks are recorded to Hugh Lowe Farms, and Jon Regan, in his absence, for hosting the meeting. It was noted that the creation of the Fruit Rooms above the Packhouse was part funded by LEADER.

Tomasz gave an overview of the business – powerpoint attached.

In the ensuing discussion the following points were made

- The polybags used are compostable and recyclable
- Although growing in the tunnels can be undertaken independent of external soil and weather conditions not all produce grown is premium. This is because the market for premium produce is smaller and a range of produce is required
- Precision irrigation has made a huge difference to the water bill which was the second largest bill on the farm. As fruit cannot be over-watered it has also improved the quality of the produce
- Labour force is predominantly seasonal foreign workers. These are well looked after. The business has invested in accommodation available at a fair rent and pays everyone at least the national minimum wage irrespective of age
- Work is also available to local students and others and the business is seeking to expand its local workforce as this will be more sustainable
- It is challenging for all farmers to secure sufficient seasonal labour and this impacts directly on productivity levels
- The business operates a graduate scheme and there are good career progression pathways available in the agricultural sector
Action – through Enterprise Adviser Network – messaging to young people of the opportunities available in the agricultural sector from seasonal work through to highly specialised professions
- Brexit impacts for the business include investing in 11 truckloads of packaging to secure supply, concerns about reduced availability of migrant labour and potential sourcing of plants as not all supply is from the UK.

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The Chairman thanked Tomasz for his presentation and underlined for Partners the substantial contribution that the business makes to the local economy with a Gross Value Added anticipated in excess of £20M of which £13M is spent in Kent.

3 **Flood Prevention – Earl Bournier, Acting Asset Manager, Drainage, KCC**

Concern was raised at a previous WKP meeting about the maintenance of gullies, in particular, the impact to businesses of the flooding at The Pantiles and the Chairman welcomed Earl Bournier and Carole Valentine to the meeting. Presentation attached.

In response to questions raised the following points were made

- Report on Tunbridge Wells flooding is going to Tunbridge Wells Joint Transport Board on 21 January. The report is attached along with associated information.
- There is now one engineer in each District, reflecting recognition that drainage has been underfunded

- Appropriate asset management is essential to preventing future problems. Districts assist by scheduling leaf sweeping before gully clearance operations and assuring roads clear of parked cars. A meeting is taking place next week with Districts to identify collaborative pathways to better asset management
- New machinery is now in place which can jet severe blockages all the way through to the sewers and deployment is coordinated with Southern Water who have responsibility for the sewers
- As rare events are now happening with more frequency systems need to be adapted and now looking to be prepared for events with 1/100 frequency
- No deal Brexit money is being invested in work including resilience work on the A20 and A25, strengthening ironwork and cleansing gullies
- Seven Mile Lane flooding problems are currently being addressed
- Community information an element to keeping gullies clear – Simon offered students for a social media project
- A suggestion was made that KCC engagement with Parishes could be enhanced by heading up items *Drainage Maintenance and Cleansing*, rather than *Flooding*

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4 Planning Policy and Economic Development – Shared Issues – Roddy Hogarth Paper A

Points arising from the Paper and presentation included

- Across West Kent projections are for a greater need for employment space against a net erosion year on year. Making provision for this in the Local Plan process is challenging
- Urban environment is changing and space increasingly being delivered in volume (ie taller buildings) rather than hectares
- Green belt restrictions impact on rural development, employment opportunities and food security
- Meeting scheduled with West Kent officers and Liz Harrison at KCC to explore how we can collaboratively deliver good broadband connectivity to the last 5%. Likely to look to replicating successful community projects across West Kent which have delivered without BDUK funding as this funding going forward should only be used for fibre to house rather than fibre to cabinet.
- Consultation is out on 5G. Liz Harrison is working on a county-wide response. West Kent authorities to also respond. Government pressure on networks is required to provide the critical infrastructure to deliver a network fit for purpose and which could potentially deliver broadband connectivity to the last 5%.
- Investment in electric charging infrastructure required to support any significant progress such as adoption by bus fleet operators

HS/AS/MR

- Successful High Streets are visitor destinations with mixed retail, office, residential and leisure. Flexibility required in planning policies to support this
- Local authorities have a strategic role in determining the right mix in the High Street so that sufficient retail is retained to maintain vibrancy – local solutions for local problems

5 West Kent Economic Priorities for Growth – Wendy Wood – Paper B

Partners were thanked for their responses to the consultation. The Action Plan is the focus of the document with progress against objectives to be reported quarterly into the Partnership under the 5 Industrial Strategy headings of Ideas, People, Infrastructure, Business Environment and Place. A print quality pdf strategy will be produced, supplemented with a flyer highlighting key messages to business about a proactive WKP working to create an environment conducive to business growth.

Partners endorsed the Strategy.

Once the Strategy is available a Press Release will be produced and the Chairman will write to the Chairs of KMEP and SELEP and to the 5 West Kent MPs. Partners will also be asked to share with their Networks.

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6 West Kent Update – Wendy Wood

Partners were invited to note a number of points from the report

- **Business Support Programme** – recommendation from the provider, National Centre for Microbusiness that a small amount of Seed funding could make a big difference to a number of clients they see
Action: Research to be undertaken on possible models/sources of funding
- A series of workshops will be offered to the growing number of alumni from the programme to keep them networked and provide ongoing support beyond the initial 2 hours free 1:1
- **West Kent LEADER** – 9 full applications are currently on the table with a total grant request of nearly £600,000 - nearly double the remaining budget. There is a small possibility of being able to draw down additional funds from the national pot (from exchange rate gains and funds given up by less successful LEADER groups).
- A request to extend the closure date of 29th March 2019 (for all funds to be fully committed) by 6 months, as reported to the last Partnership meeting, will be made to the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) in February once we have the outcome of our additional funds bid. This closure date is for LEADER monies to be contracted to projects, the actual spend and payment of claims can still be made up to December 2020.

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7 West Kent Enterprise Adviser Network – Simon Harris

- Recruitment is underway for a second full time Enterprise Coordinator which will provide full coverage of all State mainstream and SEND schools in West Kent
- Strategic focus is now on reaching Governors with Career's responsibility alongside Headteachers. The intention is to connect all Enterprise Advisers with the relevant governor in their schools
- Employer feedback from Skillfest was overwhelmingly positive – 72% enjoyed, 77% felt important for business to help the next generation and the vast majority of employers would like to be involved in future events
- Gatwick Airport are bringing a mini terminal to Hadlow Rural School on 29 March based on their exhibition space at the Big Bang, Sussex. This will be interactive and include opportunities to meet pilots and engineers and have a mini airport experience
- Poster competition has been launched to schools to encourage their students to design a poster linking the curriculum to the world of work and involving employer encounters
- A business and education conference is being scoped for delivery later this year which will involve young people in its delivery
- The West Kent Network is a main partner on the WOW show produced by CTN as a corporate social responsibility project – a construction special is being promoted to our schools with a suggestion to bring construction professionals into school to participate in Q&A with the students
- The three Economic Development portfolio holders are attending an Enterprise Adviser breakfast meeting on Thursday 17 January

Partners commented that business insurance and health and safety policies can prevent work experience for under 18s and Simon responded that many schools are now moving away from solid blocks or work experience to meaningful encounters with the world of work and visits to the workplace.

The Chairman commented that the KMEP lead on careers engagement was very impressed with our West Kent model with the clear links to economic development.

8 **KMEP** – The Paper was noted.

9 **FSB – Paper C** – the Paper was noted

10 **AOB**

- BEIS is requesting business feedback on the impact of Brexit. Jacqui will forward Growth Hub response

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- KCC has received £29M from Government to keep Kent's roads open in the event of No Deal
- West Kent Scale Up presentation to next WKP meeting TP

11 Next Meetings – all 10-12, venues to be advised. Outlook invitations sent.

- Friday 26 April, 2019
- Friday 5 July, 2019
- Friday 4 October, 2019