

## West Kent Partnership Meeting – 10 July 2020

### Present

Nicolas Heslop, TMBC (Chair)  
Peter Fleming, SDC  
Alison Parmar, FSB  
Brian Luker, TMBC  
Andrew Metcalf, Maxim PR/KICC  
Allan Baillie, KCC Skills  
David Candlin, TWBC  
Iain McNab, BEIS  
Ross Gill, KCC  
Jon Regan, Hugh Lowe Farms  
Sarah Nurden, KMEP  
Tudor Price, KICC  
Detlev Munster, SDC  
Emily Haswell, SDC  
Jeremy Whittaker, TMBC  
James Read, TMBC  
Lesley Dyball, SDC  
Simon Harris, WKEAN  
Richard Kidd, KCC  
Martyn Riley, KCC  
Caroline Lingham, WK LEADER  
Wendy Wood, WKP

### Apologies

Catherine Brunger, AXA PPP  
Nigel Smith, KCC  
Pav Ramewal, SDC  
Julie Beilby, TMBC  
Hilary Smith, TWBC  
Jane March, TWBC

## 1. Welcome

Peter Fleming gave an update on the Getting Building Fund KMEP meeting the previous evening

- Difficult meeting, rushed nature with a number of schemes never seen before coming forward. KMEP had just completed a scoring matrix for Growing Places Fund projects in November 2019, which Government scoring didn't seem to support.
- SELEP meeting today and Chair attending with agreed top 15 – including one WK project
- Disappointing how Government scored WK schemes. Amelia Scott is shovel ready yet rated 5 and therefore didn't make Kent list.
- Essex projects tend to be longer term infrastructure (mostly road) projects not focused on quick delivery of jobs or homes
- Question value of the local process as Government will still make final decision
- Iain McNab commented that the LEP have been given a steer away from big infrastructure projects. Government are looking for visible projects which will deliver within 18 months.
- SELEP has received substantially more funding than other LEPs north of London, recognising that on a range of factors SELEP is less resilient than other areas of the SE

## 2. Covid-19 impacts and Government Response – Iain McNab, Cities & Local Growth Unit, BEIS

- Presentation attached – key impacts, pretty high level

- In answer to a question on what are the characteristics of most resilient areas Iain confirmed that it is those that have a higher skills base and are less dependent on a few sectors. Other factors are around productivity, household income, employment factors and population density
- Allan Baillie commented that in Kent there are huge skills shortages in trades and other sectors

### 3. **Renewal and resilience – supporting Kent’s economy after Covid-19 – Ross Gill, KCC**

All

- Presentation attached – comments would be welcome as work still evolving and refreshed document not yet redrafted. Please copy Nicolas in on any comments for a West Kent overview
- Refocussing of strategies – repurposed Kent and Medway Productivity Strategy to focus on recovery work
- Impact on London and commuter economy particularly relevant in WK
- 122% rise in claimant count March-May – still not peaked
- Allan commented in West Kent this has risen from 2535 in May 2019 to 9965 in May 2020

### 4. **Growth Hub – Covid-19 Helpline – Tudor Price, KICC**

- Thanked LAs for financial and active support of Covid 19 helpline
- Moving into proactive phase encouraging businesses to take action
- In answer to a question, Tudor stated that in his opinion the Furlough £1K grant is an insufficient incentive to keep on furloughed employees. Much of the chancellor’s announcements were symbolic – it is now up to businesses to work their way out of the crisis.

### 5. **Covid-19 – partner responses and organisation updates**

#### **FSB – Alison Parmar**

- Similar to growth hub have a national call centre – main topic initially was lockdown distress in immediate drop off in orders. Progressed to calls on how to access grants – took a week or so to get framework in place so could access. Over 80% of calls looking at grants and loan schemes
- Most recently, bulk of call topics were furlough related but now about redundancies
- Increased number of call centre staff and more on legal helpline
- Locally recommending legal helpline and also Growth Hub helpline and to FSB members who are experts in employment law
- Grants have helped with cash flow temporarily, supply chain and footfall still issues – consumer confidence needs to be addressed to support those re-opening businesses
- Retail premises - impact of road closures for pedestrians but can cause issues for deliveries
- Kent Business Summit – annual conference last 3 years. First webinar with KCC and Bank of England on 30 June. 200 businesses as well as local government. 40% snap poll fairly confident about future of their businesses. 30 July webinar on hospitality and tourism – will ask same question
- Businesses have been stretched. Some sectors been able to pivot and adjust but where businesses struggling some have chosen to close

### **Jon Regan – Hugh Lowe Farms**

- Challenging and stressful – 9000 applied for work but only have 100 people working
- Very few agriculture businesses applied for Government support
- Cost implications of highly priced sanitizers, large quantities of PPE and social distancing measures
- Enormous increase in local trade
- Prices are down
- Very strict on no visitors to farm, also a problem as can't entertain customers
- Business as normal in many ways. Lockdown didn't affect the business greatly as staff are key workers. Managed to get deal with ASDA for supplies to feed workers
- Migrant staff kept social distance and grateful to be employed

### **Andrew Metcalf – Maxim PR and KICC**

- 3 furloughed, 40% down on business, still getting new clients
- Panattoni investment in TMBC Aylesford Newsprint site – prospect of 3000 jobs – great sign of confidence in West Kent
- NIAB EMR – couple of good successes – £18M Strength in Places Fund and £1.7m LGF – food security
- Professional services businesses now slowly coming back to work.
- Challenge shape of businesses going forward – move towards digital – clients needs to understand customer profile before developing strategy around this
- Business as normal in many ways, quietly optimistic

### **KICC – Tudor Price**

- Working on line – first conference – 6 stages, 28 speakers, all day – exhibition on line. Went very well, lessons to learn and providing as a service to other organisations as well. 250 businesses registered on line and dipped in and out
- WK Chamber of commerce goes into liquidation at 4pm today. KICC have been in discussions and agreed to step in and will take on existing accounts. Continuation of membership arrangements and opportunity to increase support to businesses in WK area

### **SDC – Peter Fleming**

- Positives – high streets in Sevenoaks, Edenbridge, Westerham and Swanley pretty independent and entrepreneurial. Businesses pivoted really quickly – food produce boxes etc – some will fall away but new practices here to stay
- Most concerned about micro businesses – 1 person bands, consultants important to local economy for spending power
- Kent Leaders meeting yesterday spoke about importance of London to WK
- Sevenoaks set up new business board with real cross section of businesses
- Emily Haswell commented on work within ED teams getting grants out which has provided an opportunity to get in touch with businesses not engaged with previously

### **TWBC – David Candlin**

- Working well with Chamber, Covid 19 panel set up to oversee recovery and reopening with FSB and BID

- Business and community resilience panels feed into overall panel
- Royal Victoria Place was in process of doing major refurbishment and had just completed at lockdown. Direction of potential major redevelopment is now in doubt
- Nicolas Heslop - permitted development rights for retail units makes it very difficult for local authorities to have a proper role in place shaping

#### Rural and land-based – David Candlin

- General view that the fruit harvest is progressing well, the rural economy is fine and Covid19 hasn't had much of an impact, however this masks wider problems
- likely poor harvest due to weather conditions
- Basic EU agricultural subsidies to be phased out over next 7 years
- Potential future cap on Seasonal Migrant workers
- Competition from cheap low-quality imports with reduced food standards
- Added uncertainty of Brexit and its implications means that ongoing support is urgently required in particularly, the agricultural sector, to develop new business models, diversify and grow in the immediate future.
- LEADER programme has been successfully delivering in West Kent for the last 12 years with strategic oversight from the WKP
- Current LEADER programme had a budget of £1,794,230 for projects. To date 39 projects have completed, with another 10 in progress. Overall £1,578,000 has been spent with further commitments of £215,000.
- Currently the extension to complete is by September 2020, with the LEADER programme closing on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020.
- Ongoing confusion as to what replaces the LEADER programme, WKP and KCC managed to keep staff in place in Kent between last 2 programmes but there is no information forthcoming on any potential follow on programme.
- A source of funding to extend the work and some clarity for the future is essential. The CLA are already lobbying nationally for surplus RDPE to support a LEADER style grant programme and the WK ELAG group are seeking NFU backing in the SELEP region to put a broader case to DEFRA.
- What does WK want to achieve and some actions for WKP and WKL
- **Action 1:** WKP and WKELAG to lobby WK MPs for Government funds to continue a grant programme (40% intervention) with immediate effect to bring forward jobs and growth in the rural and land-based economy – letter to be drafted CL/DC/WW
- **Action 2:** WK already leads on LEADER group activity across the SELEP area. Letter from all LEADER accountable bodies and LAG chairs in the SELEP area to be sent to (tbc) at DEFRA with a call for continued funding for LEADER groups – Caroline to coordinate CL
- **Action 3:** WKP had identified a £25k pot to deliver a “business support programme for rural, agricultural and forestry businesses in the area to facilitate growth and leverage funding”. This programme, due to launch in April 20, to be kept under review for now as possibly the funds could be used to lever in a greater level of support – previous LEADER programmes have required an element of match funding from sponsoring Partners. WW
- Tudor – aware of a number of rural programmes in the offing – will include WK area – good to hold off on spend as suggested in Action 3

#### TMBC – Jeremy Whittaker

- Thanks to Tudor and ED colleagues – Grants taken up a lot of time

- Re-opening of High streets – regular discussions with traders over that process. Footfall numbers down but recovering
- Good news stories for borough – Panattoni (Aylesford Newsprint), East Malling Research Station, waiting for planning to come in for Leigh Flood storage – will help to build in resilience to local economy
- Reflecting on presentations and seeing figures – will need to review Economic Regeneration Strategy – worklessness and skills development agendas will be key
- Innovation within our local businesses – necessity has been mother of invention – flexibility from businesses in responding – showing how resilient the WK economy is.

#### **Brian Luker – TMBC**

- Chairs TMBC Economic Regeneration Advisory Board and runs own business
- Training and skills essential
- Conversations with other businesses – several building sites around Aylesford/Maidstone on hold at the moment because developers can't get materials. This is a barrier to recovery.
- Nicolas Heslop - Frustrated that Government thinks LAs are the roadblock to housing growth – we are giving planning permission but developers and landlords are land-banking which impacts on land supply

#### **Skills – Allan Baillie - KCC**

- Reflection on Iain's comment – resilience – what do resilient places look like – response was high skills. Need to move Kent as a whole to more of a high skilled economy. We have low skills in Kent, in WK slightly above national average but below SE so can't be complacent. Mixed economy impacts on skills and in WK retail is a large sector
- Unemployment – since May last year 18-64 up from 2.5k to 9.9K, youth up from 435 to 1835. JCP concerned that as furlough ends 18-24 unemployment figures will rise.
- 4 wards in WK have unemployment levels above the national average - Swanley St Marys, Swanley Whiteoak, Trench and Rusthall
- Been running adult skills forums across Kent for 3 years. West Kent forum previously included Ashford (link to colleges). Now West Kent group is a sub group of WKP. First meeting on 1 July, changed way will operate so an holistic Skills forum including young people and linking to CEC. More of an ED focus. Agenda around developing high level skills, continue to try and ensure access to HE provision, analyse skills needs in area and inform skills providers and influence so are reflecting local needs – drive up skills to a high skills economy in West Kent
- Nicolas – passionate about skills agenda – Next WKP meeting to include strategic discussion on Skills linked to economic recovery. Invite Principals from all FE colleges who take our young people
- Peter – historic issue FE/HE in SDC – not represented. Tried to deal with WKC and Hadlow. Will have a discussion with Allan separately.

WW

PF/AB

#### **West Kent Enterprise Adviser Network – Simon Harris**

- EAN – challenge to meet Gatsby benchmarks 5 and 6 around encounters with employers and work place experiences. DFE are expecting schools not to reach BM targets in those areas with more a focus now on strategies.

- WK focus has been to train up Enterprise Advisers to reset their strategic focus with head teachers and governors. Gatsby Foundation allows virtual experiences to count so long as there is engagement.
- Finding link governors for careers - world of work changing so quickly
- Been training 6<sup>th</sup> formers in LinkedIn to assist schools as well as peers in building links
- Kickstart programme – imperative that LAs look to use themselves to bring in young people and give them real projects. Need to champion and advocate
- Hillview’s new 6<sup>th</sup> form offer – establishing new centre for level 1 and 2 for students not going on to A levels
- For next meeting with Skills focus consider opportunities for young people through charities sector – structured volunteer programme including training and supported internships
- Nicolas – what capacity do employers have for taking on young people? Where apprenticeships are being curtailed will be massive impact

SH

6. **AOB**

7. **Next Meeting – 9 October 2020, 10:00-12:00**

- Update from KCC on Kent Renewal and Resilience
- Update from Tudor on Business support Helpline
- Discussion on economic strategy for WK linking to Kent and WK local authority plans so partnership can start to lobby and develop other actions
- Skills Strategic Focus segment