

**West Kent Partnership Meeting
Friday 23 January 2015**

Minutes

Present

Cllr Brian Luker
Cllr Roddy Hogarth
Cllr Peter Fleming (Chair)
David Candlin
Tudor Price (for Jo James)
Lesley Bowles
Mark Bradbury
Mark Raymond

Cllr Nicolas Heslop
Paul Hannan
Roger House
Ross Gill
Wayne Peet
William Benson
Wendy Wood
Chris Cobbold
Wendy McGeachy (for Caroline Shaw)

Apologies

Cllr John Balcombe
David Godfrey
Cllr Jane March
Paul Bentley
Pav Ramewal

Jon Regan
Jonathan Macdonald
Julie Beilby
Cllr Mark Dance

1. Minutes of last meeting and matters arising

The Minutes were approved. Matters arising are covered in the agenda.

2. Presentation – The Case for West Kent – Chris Cobbold

Following on from the October presentation on analysis and emerging findings Chris presented his conclusions and recommendations.

Discussion followed and covered the following:

- Lack of investment in West Kent is a long-standing issue. There is a perception at County Hall and by MPs that West Kent will continue to deliver with low levels of investment. This external complacency is the biggest threat to West Kent.
- West Kent was constrained in accessing LGF1 as it was focused on S106 match and unlocking regeneration sites for which there are limited opportunities in West Kent. LGF is about growth which West Kent can deliver

- West Kent can and does deliver jobs for the rest of Kent – this is not reflected in the low level of LGF investment in the area
- Maidstone fares significantly better than West Kent in terms of public sector investment. This enables them to invest in economic development resource and strengthens ability to bid for further investment.
- West Kent has been underfunded but despite this has over delivered. There is an external assumption that this can continue without additional investment but it is not sustainable
- West Kent economic performance has a significant impact on Kent's overall economic position
- West Kent is the key to Kent competing with high performing areas in the South East
- West Kent commuters are driving Kent's economy but are not receiving any compensation for the 3 years ahead of disruption at London Bridge. At the end of the works other areas will have faster access to London but the West Kent service will not be improved. This will undermine the attractiveness of West Kent as a commuter location
- Opportunities to 'compensate' West Kent for disruption with other improvements to infrastructure such as enhanced rural broadband are not being implemented
- Land in West Kent is in short supply and has a higher value for housing than for commercial development which has an implication for the type of developments that can be brought forward to stimulate growth.

3. Action Plan

The Case for West Kent provides an excellent framework from which to develop growth opportunities for West Kent. WKP needs to consider its structures, access to resource for bid development and engagement with the business community so that their voice is strongly represented. William offered to lead on this.

WB

The 3 Chief Executives and Leaders to produce an action plan to follow up on the recommendations in *The Case for West Kent*. Draft plan should identify resource requirements and be brought to Partners to consider how they could support.

Issues to be considered include:

- West Kent Priorities for Growth document to be revisited and priorities ranked
- Growth priorities to be embedded in local plan process
- Pipeline of projects produced
- Business engagement
- Business champions identified to give a clear message about opportunities and needs in West Kent.
- Case studies demonstrating that prosperity in West Kent is good for Kent as a whole to be produced.

- Inward investment attraction strategy
- Explore opportunities to support delivery of higher education in West Kent and retain more graduates in the local economy – perhaps looking outside of traditional models and focussing on local economic base to feed graduates into local business, particularly on STEM subjects
- Report to be sent to MPs, SELEP and Cllr Mark Dance inviting comments and registering West Kent disappointment at low levels of investment. Also important to be clear about the opportunities and challenges in West Kent and how they differ from the rest of Kent, particularly the East.
- Potential resource for developing bids to be identified. Hadlow Group offered to be involved

4. Future Funding for Growth Update – Ross Gill

Announcement on Local Growth Fund round 2 expected at the end of January. It is not yet known how much flexibility there will be on the funds and whether they can be reallocated if any of the nominated schemes prove undeliverable in the time scales.

Partners agreed that as part of the prioritisation of schemes in West Kent, having projects that could be brought forward should any of the allocated schemes not be feasible would be beneficial.

5. European Regional Development Funds

There will be a launch call for projects on 1 March. The call will be fairly open but larger bids are anticipated. Guidance is anticipated soon. It is probable that for the South East, projects are likely to be all revenue and around innovation and business support. There is potentially scope for West Kent to benefit through ERDF projects.

6. Project pipeline – Ross Gill

A paper was taken to KMEP which looks at reviewing how schemes could be prioritised and ranked. In early rounds this was driven by the numbers of jobs and homes as Government scoring criteria were not known. With several funding rounds now having taken place it will be possible to assess what kind of schemes secure funding and what outputs are sought. The paper will be further developed at KMEP in March. There will be no further funding rounds until post election.

Short time scales to submit bids has been a county wide issue. Hence the need to have a pipeline in place. KMEP agreed that pipeline and prioritisation was a sub county job. A template, based on RGF rounds 1 and 2 was circulated with the Agenda papers. It is proposed that this template will be used across the county

as useful to have all projects presented in a consistent format.

Partners agreed that using the same template county side demonstrates a fair and open process. However, a request was made to build in additional metrics to part 9 on outputs so that figures on jobs and housing created are evidenced and demonstrated to be deliverable. RG

Partners indicated that the prioritisation of schemes and how they can move on the KMEP list has not been transparent in previous rounds and that clarity and confidence in the process will be important going forward so that the process has the full support of both county and districts.

5. Updates

Hadlow Group

A strategic and operational plan has been launched and all new group assistant directors and assistant principals have been appointed. Going forward there is a continual emphasis on teaching and learning. The college has also had its first unqualified audit in 5 years and has completed a self assessment report under Ofsted. A capital bid has been submitted for Ashford College. Further education provision in Tunbridge Wells at the site in North Farm is being considered and liaison is underway with planning officers.

Partners registered their thanks to Paul and his team for the work achieved at West Kent College which has an important role in our local economy and community.

There was some discussion around the difficulty in attracting young people to horticulture training. The sector has good job opportunities and the college offers a range of courses at different levels from entry through to degree but the image of the sector seems to be a barrier.

Escalate

Partners noted the written update and registered frustration that despite a strong pipeline of projects BIS did not support the bid for funds to support them and did not replace the £5.5M.

The success of Escalate in West Kent evidences the appetite for growth in West Kent from its strong SME sector. This is significant in making the case to Government that West Kent delivers well on investment and has strong growth potential. Partners were keen to see this come through in County analysis of Escalate. RG

Transport Group – the report was noted.

Co-ordinator

Partners agreed that the WKP sponsored Business Breakfast at the West Kent B2B event would be an excellent opportunity to engage with businesses on *The Case for West Kent* and invitations will be sent to key local businesses to hear the findings of the report and contribute to the development of an action plan.

WW

- WK Leader** – although there continue to be delays from Europe to the start of the new programme, Leader is a valuable resource for the local rural economy and the ongoing support of the Partnership has enabled continuity between
6. programming periods.

AOB

Andrew Maxim is leading on a KICC economic development group in West Kent and is in the process of building the group.

TP

- Kent International Business – Tudor will present on this refreshed initiative including some funding and grants, to encourage international trade in Kent at
7. the next meeting and particularly highlight opportunities for the West Kent area.

Dates of Next Meetings

- WKP Business breakfast event at West Kent B2B – 27 March, 2015 – invitations will be sent
- **Delete 24 April from diaries**
- Friday 24 July, 2015