

## **West Kent Partnership**

### **Notes to Meeting 13 June, 2008 at Kings Hill Conference Centre**

#### **Present:**

Tony Bartlett; Cllr Roy Bullock; David Candlin; Cllr Nick Chard; Cllr Peter Fleming (Chair); Robin Hales; Cllr Nicolas Heslop; Rob Cottrill; Alan McKendrick; Mark Raymond; Rosie Serpis; Caroline Shaw; Charles Willsher; Cllr Mark Worrall; John Cunningham

#### **Welcome to**

Chris Hare, representing Bill Fearon  
Jane Barnes, representing Margaret Howard  
Linda Prickett, attending for Brendan O'Connor  
John Marshall, attending for Paul Sayer  
Susan Priest, (South East England Development Agency (SEEDA)  
Leigh Herington, KCC

#### **Apologies:**

Merle Bigden; Penny Chatfield; Clair Fisher; Roger House; David Hughes; Mike McCulloch; Tom Phillips; Jon Rosser; Mark Salisbury; Sheila Wheeler; Wendy Wilton;

#### **Theme: Empowering Partnership to influence economic and strategic issues affecting West Kent**

#### **Opening Comments**

The Chairman thanked partners for their flexibility over meeting date postponement from April which was to accommodate our KCC speaker.

In the context of the sub national review of economic development and preparation of the Kent Regeneration Strategy, the Chairman commented that the meeting was an ideal opportunity to learn more about how the partnership can help to attract investment into West Kent by understanding sub regional and county priorities.

The Minutes of November 1 meeting were signed off as an accurate record. There had been no normal WKP business, and therefore no minutes from, the January meeting which was devoted to a session on Housing and Planning issues.

**1. Leigh Herington, County Planning Officer in place of Adam Wilkinson, Managing Director Environment & Regeneration, KCC**

The powerpoint presentation is attached. During the Q&A session the following areas were addressed:

- Assurance was given that the Kent Regeneration Strategy will be the subject of consultation with the districts before delivery commences. The pattern of consultation is to be determined by KCC members. Initially the strategy has been KCC driven and focussed on raising county capacity. Formal consultation with partners is a more probable route than a full public consultation but it is for members to decide.
- Consultation is likely to be with groupings such as WKP, direct email or telephone contact with partners or KCC could facilitate meetings if required.
- A draft consultation document will be circulated.
- The strategy will be a corporate strategy for KCC so all directorates will be involved with its development. Further work is ongoing on transport and regeneration and economic development. Education has not yet been specifically addressed but when Kent Prospects is reviewed the skills agenda will be a critical part of that. Kent has many of the necessary conditions for a strong economy in place but raising skills levels particularly in deprived communities is an issue.
- SEEDA welcomed the Kent Regeneration Strategy initiative and expressed an interest in how skills issues will be addressed within it. SEEDA are keen to see Kent maintain the distinctiveness of their offer.
- There is a dilemma for KCC in how strategy is prioritised and differentiation within the county addressed. KCC need to determine how to muster resources to deliver the strategy. Diverting significant resources into Environment and Regeneration Directorate would raise KCC's capacity to engage with partners. In the past there have been insufficient catalytic actions and a focus on 'spreading jam thinly'. Therefore, in addition to accessing as much government funding as possible for skills KCC also have to find a way to identify catalysts for change.

- Concern was expressed that a 'spreading jam thinly' approach may mean that specific issues in West Kent around pockets of deprivation are not targeted effectively. Assurance was given by KCC that this aspect of West Kent economy is recognised and that KCC members wish the Kent Regeneration Strategy to work for all parts of Kent.
- Concern was expressed that there may be a negative impact of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL) in West Kent as other parts of Kent become able to access London in the same times.

KCC have conducted research with rail partners and created contour maps of access times to London. This has been shared with District councils. The study has now moved on to investigate the impact in areas where travel time will be reduced. This will become a key issue but it should be borne in mind that CTRL diversions onto high speed lines will increase capacity on the West Kent Line and that CTRL line has a premium on ticket price.

- Concern was expressed that the paucity of available land in West Kent acts as a constraint to enterprise and makes it difficult to attract businesses to relocate from London. As more businesses relocate to East Kent, the focus for enterprise will also move East as may some existing West Kent businesses.

The challenge for West Kent of maintaining employment land availability was recognised but it was argued that a strong offer to business in mid and East Kent would strengthen the Kent economy overall which would be to the benefit of all parts of Kent.

- The sustainability of all Kent communities – social, economic and environmental is important. The Kent Regeneration Strategy is a whole council approach not just a document from the Environment and Regeneration Directorate. Support of the Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) sector will feature strongly.
- The approach taken with the Kent Regeneration Strategy is to align with the Comprehensive Area Assessment process through the Audit Commission.

## **2. Susan Priest, Area Director, Kent, South East England Development Agency**

The powerpoint presentation is attached. SEEDA's new corporate plan is available at [www.seeda.co.uk/Publications/docs/CorporatePlan2008.pdf](http://www.seeda.co.uk/Publications/docs/CorporatePlan2008.pdf)

During the Q&A session the following areas were addressed:

- There is an expectation that Regional Development Agency (RDA) delegation of funding will be used where appropriate local delivery capacity exists. The criteria for determining capacity have not yet been set. Local Government Association will do some work on this and a RDA group is working with Government. It will be useful for the WKP to determine its own capacity in this context.
- SEEDA is moving away from delivery to a more strategic role and are interested in exploring dynamics of Kent Regeneration Board.
- Partners were urged by SEEDA to respond to the consultation on the Kent Regeneration Board as this would be an opportunity to help shape how investment decisions will be taken in Kent. **All**
- SEEDA and Environment and Regeneration Directorate at KCC are in discussion on how to pilot some delegated approaches in Kent and this will start with rural programmes.
- A new Kent team is being recruited at SEEDA who will have skills sets appropriate to the more strategic role of SEEDA going forward.

### **3. Area Investment Framework**

Tony Bartlett, Economy Sub Group Chairman, gave an update on the Area Investment Framework Action Plan (AIF).

During the five years that we have had a West Kent AIF he reported that it has served its purpose very well in maintaining a profile for West Kent and highlighting our economic issues, many of which have been addressed through the work of the sub groups. The West Kent AIF has been instrumental in attracting Leader funding to the area.

We are now half way through period covered by the current AIF (2006-2009) and there is a lot of achievement, shown as green in the reporting.

The future will have a different contextual backdrop where the Sub National Review (SNR), Kent Regeneration Strategy, demise of AIFs and Kent Agreement 2 (KA2) all impact on the forward focus of a West Kent economic strategy and the opportunity is there for West Kent to review its approach and ensure that our priorities align with those of County and the RDA. Refreshing our approach at this stage will give us the

opportunity to bid for future funding either direct to SEEDA or through the Kent Regeneration Board.

The Economy sub group and other stakeholders are participating in a half day workshop at the end of June to explore future actions and bring a report and recommendations to the next WKP meeting. **TB**

There was some discussion around the importance of addressing skills deficits in West Kent and initiatives, such as Kent Works, to encourage entrepreneurship in schools and apprenticeships schemes. The point was made that employer engagement is an essential part of upskilling the workforce. The workshop will include stakeholders representing this sector and skills will be an integral part of any investment strategy for West Kent.

It was suggested that Kent Works be invited to a future meeting. **WW**

#### **4. Co-ordinator Report**

##### **West Kent Leader Programme**

- The West Kent bid has been successful and thanks were extended to partners for their support in the long process of applying for this funding – £2M investment in landbased and rural economy over the next 5-6 years, all of which will have to be match funded by applicants. The Chair stated that winning the Leader bid is a fantastic good news item for West Kent and the Partnership.
- There are some issues around funding for administration and negotiations are ongoing with SEEDA. It had been proposed that only half of the administration budget (ie 10% of programme size) can be taken from the funding and that Leader groups would need to find the additional 10%. Based on discussions with the Leader groups, SEEDA will firmly recommend to the Panel that the requirement for find 50% match funding for the administration of Leader programmes is not achievable.
- The Panel will be asked to reconsider the balance between Leader/Non Leader funds allocation from the total Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) budget. A letter is being drafted by for Leader groups to sign up to putting the case that it will be beneficial for the region for more funds to be released into the Leader programme rather than retained in the collaborative projects budget.
- The panel to be asked to allow Leader groups to have the discretion to use up to 20% of the total (reduced) programme

size for administration and facilitation and to use their best endeavours (but not be required to) attract additional match funding into each programme. This based on the success of Leader Plus programmes in achieving high levels of match funding for projects.

It was noted that although other Leader groups may wish to reduce the project funding to make up shortfall on administration budget that is not the route that West Kent would propose to take and that we would endeavour to find match funding to meet the shortfall for the administration of the programme.

- **Partners agreed the recommendations**
  - a. **To formally endorse supporting the West Kent Leader Programme.**
  - b. **To provisionally approve additional funding of £10,616 to support WKLP in 2008 pending the outcome of negotiations with SEEDA.**
  - c. **To agree to consider funding for future years depending on the outcome of the negotiations with SEEDA**

### **Financial Report**

Partners were asked to note that following the resolution on potential Leader funding, the available project funds are reduced by just over £18,000.

### **Marketing Report**

The conference will be in support of tourism which is the second largest sector in the West Kent economy. Unfortunately the marquee at Chiddingstone which we were going to use will no longer be in place so date and venue cannot yet be confirmed. Partners will be advised of progress with conference plans. **WW**

## **5. Hot issues**

### **Dualling of the A21 – Peter Fleming**

The Chairman recorded that the Partnership is looking to County colleagues to continue to apply pressure to ensure work is carried out as early as possible on this key infrastructure issue for West Kent. Nick Chard responded that the County view was that viability of the new hospital at Pembury will be compromised without the dualling of the A21 and the Colts Hill Link. Roy Bullock has suggested to Greg Clark, MP

that it would be useful for all the local authorities along the route of the A21 to work together on lobbying on this issue.

### **Rural Economy**

In the light of Leader, and SEEDA's intention to support pilot delegated rural programmes, the Chairman suggested that partners read the report on addressing the rural economy which can be found at [www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/files/press%20release%20pm%20report%20to%20prime%20minister.pdf](http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/files/press%20release%20pm%20report%20to%20prime%20minister.pdf) **All**

### **Kent Business Awards**

Hadlow College won large company of the year Award. This further underlines the importance of rural business activity in West Kent.

The Chairman will send a letter of congratulation to Paul Hannan **WW**

### **Prosperous Places Consultation**

The three West Kent authorities have responded on the consultation. A West Kent response also to be sent by close of consultation on 20 June. **WW**

### **Kent Regeneration Board**

Following a presentation to Kent Leaders scheduled for Monday 16, a West Kent response to the consultation to be sent. **WW**

## **6. Dates of Next Meetings**

Due to postponement of the April meeting to today the next scheduled meeting is only a month away. As it is unlikely that there will be significant progress on the Kent Regeneration Strategy for the WKP to input into by then, it was decided to cancel the July meeting and reconvene on 16 October.

The Chairman invited Partners to let Wendy know of any potential themes/speakers for the 12 month period ahead so that she can build a strong programme of themed meetings. **All**

- Thursday 17 July, 08 - CANCELLED
- CONFERENCE - 22 September, 08 – provisional
- Thursday 16 October, Kings Hill Conference Centre, 10am
- Thursday 22 January, 09, Kings Hill Conference Centre, 10am
- Thursday 23 April, 09, Kings Hill Conference Centre, 10am
- Thursday 16 July, 09, Kings Hill Conference Centre, 10am
- Thursday 15 October, 09, Kings Hill Conference Centre, 10am

