

Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce
Ashford Economic Development Group

Minutes of an ordinary meeting of the AEDG held at Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce on 17th October 2024 at 8.30am.

PRESENT	NAME	POSITION
	Matthew Arnold (MA)	Guest
	Natalie Bendall (NB)	Guest
	Susan Bonett (SB)	
	Nettie Buss (AB)	Chair
	Maria Callow (MC)	
	Lee Collette (LC)	
	Meilssa Dizon (MD)	Guest
	Ray Johnson (RJ)	Guest
	Katie Hodson (KH)	
	Toby Howe (TH)	Guest
	Jason Lewis (JL)	Guest
	Richard Lloyd (RLL)	
	James McComas (JM)	
	Andrew Osborne (AO)	
	Tudor Price (TP)	
	Tom Shaw-Dunn (TS-D)	
	Tim Sheppard (TS)	
	Dan Sherlock (DS)	
	Richard Stafford (RS)	
APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE RECEIVED FROM	Steve Garnett (SG) Peter Heritage (PH) Richard Lavender (RL) Jason Rainbird (JR)	

1. NOTICE AND QUORUM

The chair reported that enough notice of the meeting had been duly given and that a quorum was present. The chair declared that the meeting was open at 8.30am.

2. APPROVAL OF PRIOR MINUTES

Minutes of the board meeting held on 19th September 2024 had already been approved. The chair had been authorised to sign them as a complete record of the relevant meeting.

3. ANY MATTERS ARISING/PREVIOUS MEETING

There were no matters arising.

4. BUSINESS OF THE MEETING

AB welcomed guests Toby Howe (**TH**) Strategic Resilience Manager, Kent and Medway Resilience Forum (KMRF); Jason Lewis (**JL**), Director of Transport Planning, Stantec; Ray Johnson (**RJ**) East Kent EDG; Natalie Bendall (**NB**) Regional Affairs, Eurotunnel; Matthew Arnold (**MA**) Commercial Director, Stagecoach; Melissa Dizon (**MD**) Business Development Manager, Martello.

EXIT ENTRY SYSTEM (EES) UPDATE

TH updated the AEDG on EES.

What is EES?

The EES is a new electronic system that will collect and process data on the entry, exit, and refusal of third-country nationals crossing the external borders of the Schengen Area - the UK is now a third country. The date of implementation has been delayed. Eurotunnel, Port of Dover and St. Pancras International have 'juxtaposed borders' so checks will need to be made at these points of exit and entry.

Why EES?

EES will aim to improve border security and reduce illegal immigration in the Schengen area. In 2025, the EU will introduce the new European Travel Information Authorisation System (ETIAS). **NB** confirmed that Eurotunnel have created an airport style area with kiosks to process travellers. The Port of Dover are developing plans at Western Docks to process cars. Currently the French border security can only operate in Eastern Docks.

Traffic

Since EU Exit, we have had Op Brock and TAP. The impact of EES on Kent is expected to be far greater than the EU Exit. EU Exit planning focused on freight whereas EES will also be an impact on cars. The Port of Dover is the biggest risk of congestion.

Communities

At peak holiday periods, delays are possible across communities. There are rumours of up to 15-hour queues, however modelling is being carried out and contingency sites being developed. Districts have emergency planning in place for local communities.

KMRF EES

KCC is the Lead Agency role for EES planning in Kent and Medway. KMRF partners are reviewing their business continuity plans and ensuring that there are staff to respond.

NB mentioned that Eurotunnel has invested 80m Euros on both of their sites, but the implementation has been delayed due to France, Germany and Holland not being ready.

RLL shared his view that the potential EES and Operation Brock is a national problem and there should be lobbying to find solutions. He suggested the use of the M40 as an alternative.

JL stated that Dover District Council has a new local plan. **MA** shared that the KMRF have a spin off group that has attempted business engagement.

MC mentioned there are tactical communications and engagement gaps communicating with local businesses both for EES and Operation Brock. **RS** recommended there should be better highways signage to communicate when Brock is on.

TP suggested there should be serious consideration relating to freight alternatives. **SB** suggested a solution to redirect visitor car traffic to alternative ports like Newhaven, to adopt a similar approach as airlines do to divert passengers.

AB emphasised the need for the business voice to be heard. **KH** asked if there were similar problems in Calais and Coquelles. **TH** responded by saying France has space for truck stops, so they do not have the same challenges as Kent.

DS expressed a frustration that if the Port of Dover cannot process the traffic, they should not have accepted the bookings. He questioned if there were a type of Terms of Reference to control freight and car traffic. **DS** commented that Operation Brock is merely a 'sticking plaster' to address traffic congestion at peak booking times and Kent is expected to put up with it. He also expressed his concern for poor communications to businesses and local communities.

RJ emphasised that collectively we must be working smarter to have satellite locations to process EES. **TS** said we need to have a viewpoint of 'Why not?' alternative solutions.

TS-D suggested there could be telematic and AI solutions to congestion. **NB** said there are restrictions on the track to get freight via rail to Croydon, an alternative to using the road network.

TH mentioned that European companies are stopping looking at Kent as a tourist destination, so Operation Brock is already having an economic impact let alone the imminent implementation of EES. He also mentioned when an incident occurs when Operation Brock is on a 'Freight Management Plan' is deployed to minimise congestion.

TS-D suggested there should be consideration given to long term solutions such as the quick change of lane use on M5 which takes 30 minutes to activate. AI cameras could be deployed to offer smart routes.

MD emphasised that we should be open to international best practice for example in Kuala Lumpur.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

AB will discuss hosting of the Ashford College student/business event in January/February 2025 at the next meeting.

6. CLOSE

AB thanked guests for their contribution to the discussion and AEDG members for their continued support.

Date of next meeting - 8.30am, 21st November 2024 at Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce.

There was no further business and therefore the chair declared that the meeting was closed at 10.05am.

.....Chair – Nettie Buss - Date