

**Notes of a Meeting of the Ashford Strategic Delivery Board
held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Ashford on
Friday 24th November 2023 at 10.00am**

Present:

Board Members

Cllr Noel Ovenden (Chairman) – Leader, ABC
Damian Green MP
Cllr Steve Campkin – Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Climate,
Environment and Transport, ABC
Cllr Simon Betty - Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth and Investment, ABC
Cllr Linda Harman – Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing Delivery and
Communication, ABC
Mr Neil Baker – Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, KCC
Tracey Kerly – Chief Executive, ABC
Shona Johnstone – Homes England
Catherine Adamson – Southern Water (attended remotely).

Non Board Members

Cllr Peter Feacey, ABC
David Smith, KCC
Colin Finch, KCC
Rebecca Anderson, KCC (attended remotely)
Ben Lockwood, ABC
Tracey Butler, ABC
Simon Cole, ABC
Charlotte Hammersley, ABC
Andrew Osborne, ABC
Paul McKenner, ABC
Shaun Meyer, ABC
Jeff Sims, ABC
Danny Sheppard, ABC

Apologies

Cllr Kate Walder, Cllr Neil Bell, Paul Sayers,

Item	Notes	Action
1.	Welcome The Chairman welcomed all those present to the first Ashford Strategic Delivery Board meeting of the new Council Administration.	

2.	<p>Notes of Previous Meeting – 21st April 2023</p> <p>Noted.</p>	
3.	<p>Eurostar</p> <p>Andrew Osborne (AO) gave a presentation on Eurostar and the campaign to bring international services back to Ashford. This included: - the background and history; the current situation (no stops in Kent until at least 2025); the challenges; what this meant for Ashford; what was happening and actions to date; and next steps. AO hoped this demonstrated the amount of work that was going on behind the scenes to make both the market/promotional and economic cases and ABC continued to work closely with KCC on this. The Council also continued to support the 'Bring Back Eurostar Services' petition which was now approaching 40,000 signatures along with the KCC business survey which had 500 completions to date and they were hoping to double this by the end of the year.</p> <p>Damian Green MP (DG) advised that he had raised this issue in Parliament back in October and was in dialogue with the Rail Minister, Huw Merriman. There were additional factors to consider around border control and potential competitors to Eurostar and he considered there were certainly more discussions to be had on this with all involved parties, including other companies potentially interested in providing international rail services.</p> <p>In response to a question, AO advised that Mark Welch at KCC was compiling a heat map showing where the business survey responses were coming from and he could supply that information to Simon Finch at KCC. All would continue to push the survey and petition around the county through Kent Leaders, Local Authorities and business and community leaders. It was recognised as a Kent wide issue.</p>	AO
4.	<p>Ashford Town Centre Reset</p> <p>AO then gave a presentation updating on progress with the Ashford Town Centre Reset, following Cabinet approval of the Reset Plan in 2022. This was the underlying activity to improve the existing town centre, alongside the work on some of the key strategic sites and there was a lot going on. The presentation included: - types of action; key intervention areas including the 'T' area; funding streams; temporary public realm schemes; highway works by KCC (shared space and Lower High Street resurfacing); the Ashford's Festival and Events Framework (including Ashford</p>	

	<p>Unframed, the Ashford Food and Drink Festival, Create Music Village and Carnival of the Baubles); and the wider plan for action, including current additional project activity and future projects. Tomorrow (25th November), would see the 2023 Carnival of the Baubles – a really popular and inclusive community event and all were encouraged to attend.</p> <p>Shaun Meyer (SM) gave a more specific update on one of the key priority strategic projects – Park Mall. This was seen as one of the sites that would be a catalyst for wider redevelopment and regeneration of the town centre. The current shopping centre was facing significant challenges with increasing voids (including the recent departure of Wilkos) and increasing maintenance issues. The Council had held a long term to redevelop Park Mall and this had been included within its Corporate Plan. This project was in its early stages and redevelopment proposals would be shared in the coming year.</p>	
5.	<p>Stodmarsh Update</p> <p>Simon Cole (SC) and Paul McKenner (PM) gave an update presentation on Stodmarsh and Nutrient Neutrality. This included: - the context for Ashford including its effect on the upcoming Local Plan; Ashford’s approach to nutrient mitigation; an update on strategic wetlands site progression across various potential sites; wider Government intervention and their stated aims; ABC communication with Government; and the pause on ABC delivery of strategic nutrient neutrality solutions as a result. ABC would continue to examine cost effective nutrient neutrality solutions within its ownership including retrofitting and smaller locally delivered benefits. SC further updated on what this meant for planning applications</p> <p>The Chairman said that the recent Government announcement of £100m funding towards this, whilst welcomed, should be put in the context of 74 Local Authorities across the Council affected by nutrient neutrality. He still saw this as very much a national issue on which Government needed to lead on finding a solution. DG agreed. He said that it was legislative change that was required and there was no timescale on this at present. He was personally disappointed there had been no mention of the issue in the recent King’s speech.</p> <p>A catchment wide bid had been submitted to Defra on the particular issue at Stodmarsh. KCC was still awaiting a reply and would make enquiries of Ministers and feed back</p>	

	on a timetable when known.	DS (KCC)
6.	<p>Brompton</p> <p>PM gave an update presentation on Brompton Bikes and Project Green. This included: - the background to Brompton's plans to build their revolutionary bike factory in Ashford; the site location; the importance of flood mitigation measures; design visuals; ABC involvement; and the timetable going forward including planning and the Country Park.</p> <p>PM advised there had initially been discussions with KCC to fund the junction improvements. ABC was also looking at alternative routes of funding. Neil Baker (NB) said that as a newly appointed KCC Cabinet Member, he was unaware of previous discussions on this and would ask for an update.</p>	NB (KCC)
7.	<p>Newtown Works</p> <p>PM gave a presentation, in his capacity as a Director of the Ashford International Development Company (AIDC) providing an update on plans for the Ashford International Studios/Newtown Works site. Drone footage of the site was shown and progress made to date was outlined. The update included: - a site timeline and overview; details of the 2020 planning application currently being delivered; ABC investment and Levelling Up Funding; removal of roof and strip out of existing sheds; archaeology; drainage works; Section 278 works; detailed design; sales and lettings; the film studio element; work with the college; nutrient neutrality impacts; and the proposed design changes and revised planning application.</p> <p>AO advised that they were likely to need to put a project adjustment request in on the Levelling Up Funding element as there were likely to be changes to the project from what was initially put forward. This would need to come to DG as it would need his support before it went to DLUHC and the Minister.</p>	
8.	<p>Project Updates</p> <p>The report enclosed with the agenda gave the latest position on progress in respect of the core projects.</p> <p>These were noted.</p>	

9.	Date of Future Meetings Friday 15 th March 2024, 10am.	
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Queries concerning these minutes? Please contact Member Services
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