

**Draft Minutes for the Kent & Medway Business Advisory Board (BAB) Meeting 25 May 2023**

The Business Advisory Board meets quarterly and provides an insight from the business community in Kent and Medway on current trading conditions. The headline points are presented below, and the full meeting note follows.

<b>Highlights from Economic Commentary</b>
<p><b>Challenges:</b> The following <u>key challenges</u> were raised by board members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulties with accessing and resourcing <b>public sector procurement</b> opportunities</li> <li>• Operating and planning in an <b>uncertain environment</b> particularly with recent political changes at national and local level</li> <li>• <b>Recruitment and retention</b> – finding the right people with the right skills and work ethic across most key sectors (health care, agri-food, manufacturing)</li> <li>• <b>Continued high costs</b> (raw materials, inflation, borrowing) putting pressure on margins</li> <li>• <b>Energy &amp; utilities</b> – supply not being able to meet demand, difficulties with local (green) grid connections</li> <li>• The <b>planning system</b> –complexities leading to delays in construction projects</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities:</b> A number of opportunities were flagged during discussions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working towards establishing <b>local supply chains</b> (agri-food sector and more general local ‘B2B’ sourcing and purchasing) which could also help with decarbonisation</li> <li>• Supporting activity to help Kent businesses <b>transition to Net Zero</b> including potential to contribute to local energy generation</li> <li>• <b>Developing ‘Brand Kent’</b> to highlight Kent &amp; Medway’s world-class offer in key sectors</li> </ul>
<p><b>Future Focus for BAB:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring a <b>strong ‘business voice’</b> feeds into devolution and LEP-transition discussions in Kent &amp; Medway.</li> <li>• Supporting work on <b>‘Brand Kent’</b> to promote the county’s key assets, sector strengths and areas of innovation internationally and domestically</li> </ul> <p><b>Potential workstreams to be developed (task and finish groups):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Planning</b> – engaging with planning authorities and leaders in Kent &amp; Medway to look at issues and barriers and work to support the right investment in Kent</li> <li>• <b>Energy</b> - generating and connecting local green energy to the grid and looking at opportunities to boost local supply including through major sites</li> <li>• <b>(Digital) Connectivity</b> – working to understand and tackle issue with ‘not spots’</li> <li>• <b>Highways</b> - Identifying and influencing decisions on investments in highway improvements</li> <li>• <b>Education &amp; Employability</b> – supporting the work of the Local Skills Improvement Plan and feeding into the education system &amp; infrastructure in the county to develop future skills and aspirations</li> <li>• <b>Procurement</b> - looking at developing local purchasing, encouraging businesses to buy from each other, developing the circular economy.</li> <li>• <b>Brand Kent</b> – helping to draw out Kent’s key offer and support the creation of a framework for Kent’s assets (businesses, organisations etc.) to use</li> </ul>
<p><b>Actions:</b></p> <p><b>All: to input ideas for sectors / sites / elements of a potential Kent &amp; Medway expression of interest to the government’s call for 5G Innovation Regions <u>by 5 June</u></b></p> <p><b>All: to send ideas / input to Steve S for a BAB response to the government’s consultation on the Future of England’s strategic roads.</b></p>

## DRAFT MINUTES

### Participants:

<b>Transport &amp; Logistics:</b>	Nik Scott-Gray, Peel Ports
<b>Agri-food:</b>	Carol Ford, Ford Synthesis Mario Caccamo, NIAB EMR Claire Eckley, NFU Kent & Eckley Farms
<b>Digital, Creative, Media:</b>	Andrew Metcalf, Maxim Gaurav Malhotra, Level 5
<b>Construction / Property services:</b>	Liz Gibney, Lee Evans Partnership Roland Cooper, Considine Ashley Hook, MHS Homes
<b>Financial &amp; Professional Services:</b>	Salim Somjee, Cripps LLP Daren Rose and Ben Sullivan, Lloyds Bank Kieran Dent and Patrick Campbell, Bank of England Iain Hawthorn, Oxbury
<b>Health &amp; Life Sciences</b>	Chris Broom, Discovery Park Karl Hudson, KIMS Hospital
<b>Manufacturing &amp; Engineering</b>	Jason Davies-Baker, Unipet
<b>Visitor Economy/Leisure</b>	Simon Storey, Kent Cricket
<b>Business Support</b>	David Milham, FSB Kent Jo James, Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce Simon Ryan, Locate in Kent Stephen James, British Veteran Owned Ltd
<b>Public Sector</b>	David Smith, Kent County Council Stephanie Holt-Castle, Kent County Council Sean Henry, Medway Council
<b>Education</b>	Simon Barnes, University of Kent
<b>Others/Observers</b>	Steve Samson, Kent County Council (KMEP Secretariat) Emma Watson, Kent County Council (KMEP Secretariat)

### Apologies:

Zoe Cairns, Kanagaratnam Rajamenon, Tom Chown, William Hinckley, Jemma Fairclough Haynes, Marion Brooks, Troy Barratt, Alex Hicken, Deidre Wells, Josh Fenton, Paul Barrett, Geoff Miles, Troy Barrett, Jeremy Licence, Jo Nolan, John Keefe, Matthew Arnold, Richard Hall, Jo Nolan, Vince Lucas, Miranda Chapman, Martin Prentice, Jeremy Licence, Emma Liddiard

### 1. Welcome

The BAB Chairman (Liz Gibney) welcomed Board members and attendees introduced themselves for the benefit of the new members.

### 2. General Update since Last Meeting

Steve Samson updated the board on a number of recent developments linked to Kent's economic growth agenda as well as brief updates on topics linked to points discussed at the previous meeting. Points covered included:

- New BAB members
- LEP Transition
- Local Elections and new District & Borough KMEP board members
- Kent & Medway Economic Strategy
- The Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)
- Business Support for Decarbonisation
- Kent & Medway Business Fund
- KMEP/BAB website refresh

**Details are included in the slides in Annex 1.**

### 3. Economic Commentary

Liz Gibney introduced the economic commentary – BAB members had been asked to reflect on the following points during their intervention:

1. A current **challenge** for your business / sector
2. A current **opportunity** for your business / sector
3. What you'd like to see from **BAB in the coming months** (topics for consideration, activities etc.)

#### Carol Ford, Ford Synthesis (Agri-Food):

**Challenge:** Making a profit for growers is difficult due to high production costs which is preventing investment in the sector e.g. high costs of heating greenhouses. We are still seeing imported produce undercutting local produce leading to some crops being dumped rather than purchased and used. Recent Food supply chain summit at No. 10 was well received, led by the PM and now it is a case of waiting for actions to be followed up. There was good news on around seasonal work access.

**Opportunity:** Creating new supply chains and building on a recently launched skills pilot with the food manufacturing sector with DWP which yielded good results.

**BAB going forward:** BAB could support the exploration of new opportunities for supply chains and looking at new ways for growers to sell produce locally. Opportunity to look at 'buy local'.

#### Karl Hudson, KIMS (Health):

**Challenges:** Recruitment and a general lack of clinical staff with lots of competition for the best people.

**Opportunity:** Working to resolve the Covid backlog through supporting the NHS. There are more people willing to pay privately for their treatment but this will also need additional staff to deal with demand.

**BAB going forward:** Seeing how KIMS can be part of planning for the future workforce with nurses retiring etc. and encouraging young people to get into the healthcare profession.

#### Jo James, Kent Invicta Chamber (Business Support):

**Challenges:** Jo pointed members to the most recent [Quarterly Economic Survey](#) which can be summarised as follows:

- The domestic sales in Q2 2022 were at a high but since then it took a hit. Up until this quarter we had not seen any bounce back since it fell significantly in Q3 2022. 25% of businesses reported an increase in UK Sales, 31% of businesses reported a decrease in UK sales and the overall net balance of -6% (up from -12% in Q4 2022).
- Turning to domestic orders, the net balance of domestic orders also reflected the same improvement as domestic sales, from -20% to -13%. 21% of businesses reported an increase in UK Orders, 33% of businesses reported a decrease in UK Orders and the overall net balance of -13% (up from -20% in Q4 2022).
- More businesses continued to report a decrease rather than an increase in domestic demand. Looking at the sectoral split of these responses. Manufacturing sector businesses experienced a domestic demand decrease furthermore than any other sector. 41% of manufacturing businesses said domestic sales decreased and 47% of them said domestic orders decreased.

Uncertainty is still the biggest issue firms. Additionally in Kent, many business support programmes are no longer available and there is a lack of consistency in support programmes. The [Kent & Medway Growth Hub](#) has now become primarily a signposting service due to a cut in funding for this financial year.

**Opportunity:** The chamber sees opportunities to help local firms with international trade, the skills agenda and transitioning to Net Zero.

**BAB going forward:** Jo announced that [Tudor Price will take over as CEO for KICC from 1 January 2024 when she retires.](#)

**David Smith, Kent County Council (Public Sector):**

**Challenge:** KCC has been leading the Employment Task Force, chaired by Roger Gough, leader of the council and involving DWP, employers etc. The group has been focusing on skills issues in the county and has led to the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) being driven forward by Kent Invicta Chamber with a business-led, employer engagement approach. Some sector programmes have already been underway e.g. horticulture. KCC itself (and the wider public sector) is a major employer in the county and also shares challenges faced by the private sector with skills and employment.

KCC is also working to make links between the public health and economic agenda as the two are intrinsically linked.

**Opportunity:** The Kent & Medway Business Fund may include a free net zero audit as part of the application process when the scheme relaunches in the autumn.

**Stephanie Holt-Castle, KCC (Public Sector):**

**Challenges:** There are challenges around the border at Dover although the Windsor Agreement has helped to get European Partners to engage again and the recent Levelling Up Fund bid awarded to Kent will help with traffic flows at the port. KCC is facing a 'new burden' for border controls around animal health and feed as no additional funding has been announced to support resourcing this activity. There will also be additional highways impacts.

Highway implementation also an issue for the region.

**Opportunity:** New Chief Executive will be appointed after David Cockburn steps down later this year so there will be an opportunity to review the council's discretionary role in the economic growth agenda.

**BAB going forward:** The group could play a role in ensuring a strong voice for business in supporting the 'devolution agenda' which could see additional responsibilities and investment opportunities being allocated to Kent & Medway. KCC will include the Short Straights and Skills agendas as it considers its approach to devolution.

**Roland Cooper, Considine (Civil Engineering):**

**Challenges:** Construction is being held back by the ongoing issues around nutrient neutrality & the planning process which seems to be slow and under resourced. There is a perception that at times it is 'anti-development'. There is a skills shortage in the sector, ongoing fiscal uncertainty and increases in material prices. However, confidence is starting to return.

**Opportunities:** There are opportunities to work to resolving nutrient neutrality issues with waste water treatment plants. There are real opportunities for apprenticeships and alternatives to degree-level learning to encourage new entrants into the sector as well as motivating existing employees by reskilling and upskilling.

**BAB going forward:** Support with Net Zero strategies.

**David Milham, FSB (Business Support):**

**Challenges/ Opportunity:** David referred to the '[South East Small Business Index Q1, 2023 | FSB, The Federation of Small Businesses](#)' which was recently published. There is a small positive increase in business confidence levels which is encouraging. Barriers to growth include utility costs, and skills shortages that businesses are finding difficult to fill where skills in colleges and education aren't matching gaps. 22% of businesses reported an increase in turnover and 15% are predicting an increase in investment which is better than the national average. Small businesses in general are projecting growth.

**Simon Barnes, University of Kent**

**Challenges:** It's a difficult time for the university sector with lower student numbers and changing student expectations. The Universities in Kent are working together on a wider response to these challenges and combined, have some 20,000 STEM graduates across the county. The 3 universities have formed the Kent

Innovation Alliance to look at focused projects on Net Zero, Health and Sustainable Food. This will include delivery modules which could be made available to businesses e.g. around the use of data science.

**Opportunities:**

- UoK had a recent Expo at Discovery Park around energy with some new projects arising such as the Kemsley industrial cluster and a maritime short straights cluster with the Port of Dover to be supported by Maritime UK
- Working on an International strategy with Lille and Ghent universities on topics including the Channel, healthcare and climate change
- £14 million has been secured for the Chatham Docking Station which will be a new 3D animation facility which businesses will be able to access for their transition to digital.
- University working on developing 'FemTech', Digital Health Care, and Alternative Protein development (sustainable food) building on the Growing Kent & Medway initiative.

**BAB going forward:** There is a lot going on and the University would value support and further engagement with the group on these activities.

**Clare Eckley – NFU (agri-food)**

**Challenges:** The agricultural sector is facing many issues such as rural crime, mental health challenges, a lack of confidence in buyers and making a profit, contraction in certain sub-sectors (diary and livestock), inflation and big challenges with supermarkets and buyers in general offering prices that are too low. Planning constraints and grid connection are hindering rural businesses. There is still a skills shortage in the sector which a perception around that robotics and data management are not seen as part of agricultural careers.

**Opportunities:** To develop local supply chains and encourage local procurement linked to working towards net zero. There are opportunities for the sector to diversity into multipurpose land use (energy production, food production, biodiversity net gain and nutrient neutrality). Post-Brexit, the sector is moving to an incentives (e.g. around insecticide-free, improved soil health standards) model rather than direct payments which is a significant transition.

**Ian Hawthorn, Oxbury Bank (business support)**

**Challenge:** High interest rates are causing some challenges with affordability but there are lot of capital investment projects and increasing demand for working capital. Also Net gain issues, as land is taken away from food production to make it profitable in other ways.

**Opportunities:** Diversification projects (tourism, biodiversity net gain, low carbon etc) – to help with resilience on farms in additional to food production as margins are low, demand fluctuates and with risks linked to climate change.

**BAB going forward:** Interest in developing a Kent Future Leaders group of highly talented students at with Canterbury Christ Church University - BAB members could have a role in mentoring this group to inspire them to stay and work in Kent etc.

**Patrick Campbell & Kieran Dent, Bank of England**

Patrick presented a number of slides (**below in Annex 2**). Key points included:

- Inflation is too high still
- It is unlikely that the UK will head into recession as energy prices haven't risen as far as expected and consumers have been more resilient.
- Economic growth is still weak but there is growth potential.
- Unemployment is expected to remain low.
- 2% Interest rate target not expected to be met until the end of next year.

**Nik Scott-Gray, Peel Ports (transport & logistics)**

**Challenges:** Labour and getting the right skills and a retaining a flexible labour force (including unsociable hours). New entrants expect a shift rota set far in advance. The port is currently having to provide warehousing space for DEFRA to use once the Border Operating Model and checks requirements come into force although the size and exact function of the space is still unclear.

Transitioning to new zero and grid capacity to support EV charging. Supplying power to an 'end of line' location such as a port is a challenge.

**Opportunities:** Significant investments in the port, many funded by customers (automotive, construction, agri bulks). Investment in Roll on roll off births, rail heads and new warehouse space.

#### **Ashley Hook, MHS Homes**

**Challenges:** The differential between income and inflation, a government 7% rent cap, high inflation and a high CPI are all challenges for the business and sector which provides housing for people with low incomes.

**Opportunities:** The sector benefits from favourable borrowing rates (capital markets) and MHS recently raised £80m with this money to be spent on housing in North Kent – the usual return on investment is 1:3 in the local economy.

**BAB going forward:** To spent less time on the economic commentary and allocate more time to talking about the big issues affecting Kent & Medway.

#### **Jason Davies-Baker, Unipet (Manufacturing)**

**Challenges:** The company and sector has seen huge cost pressures (up to 200% for some raw materials) but they are now starting to stabilise. There have been issues with firms trying to undercut on price and some customers were lost.

**Opportunities:** Some customers are returning based on the company's approach to quality and supply chain certainty.

Being based in Sittingbourne, the company was able to recruit some new skilled staff following the closure of some nearby pharma companies but there is still a trend of people 'job hopping'.

**BAB going forward:** Keen to participate and learn from the wider group.

#### **Simon Storey, Kent cricket (sport & leisure)**

**Challenges:** The sport sector is heavily volunteer-reliant and increasing demand for compliance, safeguarding, sustainability etc. is impacting involvement in the sector as expertise and advice is needed by smaller clubs and groups in particular.

**Opportunities:** Sport can really make a difference, e.g. Afghan cricket refugee engagement programme is working well. Sport can offer a huge amount to the wellness agenda and to build social cohesion. Opportunities to work more with local authorities to boost health and social cohesion.

**BAB going forward:** Support pulling together the vision for 'brand Kent' linked to the devolution agenda.

#### **Ben Sullivan and Daren Rose, Lloyds bank**

**Challenges:** balancing uncertainty with growth strategies; balancing capital expenditure growth with longer term debt. Raw material costs remain a challenge especially for businesses on fixed priced contracts. Customers are reporting the difficulty in finding and retaining good quality staff.

**Opportunities:** Recognising the bank as more than a finance solution by aligning values with the issues that the businesses face now such as decarbonisation.

#### **Simon Ryan, Locate in Kent**

**Challenges:** Planning has some specific challenges in Kent including motorway junction capacity, issues such as Operation Brock which need resolving.

There are also some issues with utility provision hindering growth such as a hydrogen plant which is struggling to get connection to the green electricity grid.

**BAB going forward:** Support in highlighting Kent's innovation strengths and demonstrating where the county has a world-class offer and supporting the work on 'brand Kent'.

**Andrew Metcalf, Maxim PR**

**Challenge:** The last year has been the best year for 8 years in terms of business but there are challenges with uncertainty in the current political landscape. There is a risk of planning and development delays especially for new sites which could impact upon businesses. Andrew cited some companies which were experiencing significant delays in even getting projects to the planning stage but also some where things were in place. in danger of being of caught in the middle – knock on effect in terms of planning.

**Opportunity:** A missed opportunity was to develop a collaborative approach to celebrating 'Kent Day (26 May) and promoting the county.

**BAB going forward:** Being part of a stronger voice to promote and develop Kent.

**Chris Broom, Discovery Park**

**Challenge:** Funding for companies in the Life Science sector (Initial Public Offerings, Equity Funds). Disco Park's ventures fund is near capacity. Lots of companies need access to finance.

Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance - the life sector is a hard sector to 'green' and can be energy intensive. University collaborations could work better to boost spin-outs.

**Opportunities:** Continued demand for space on site with inward investment coming in with companies from abroad (Lebanon, Mexico, Switzerland). Real estate is investing in the Life Science sector with acquisitions and conversions.

**BAB going forward:** KCC and the universities to look at example in Oxford and the North of England where universities are funding equity schemes to encourage further spin outs.

**Salim Somjee, Cripps (Professional Services)**

**Challenges:** Real estate acquisitions are different with long timescales involved - banks are helping with cashflow but many large firms are paying providers too slowly. Recruitment and retention remains difficult with the squeeze starting at top level companies.

**Opportunity:** Developing value propositions to boost employment where firms offer purpose and values to attract people and enabling them to get involved in wider activities that make a difference.

**BAB going forward:** to continue to learn from discussions and share information with clients.

**Sean Henry, Medway Council (Public Sector)**

**Challenge:** Significant political-level changes following recent local elections and a drop off of EU funding and finance for the Growth Hub service. The shared prosperity fund is not very joined up across Kent & Medway and related business support services are a postcode lottery.

**Opportunities:** Using Medway's Shared Prosperity Fund allocation to support scale ups and growth grants.

**Stephen James, British Veteran Owned Ltd**

**Opportunities:** To engage with veterans who are usually highly skilled and could help with the skills gaps faced by many local firms as they have a loyal and naturally entrepreneurial mindset.

**BAB going forward:** to help with advocacy and awareness raising about the role veterans can play in supporting the local workforce.

**Gaurav Malhotra – level 5 (ICT) :**

**Challenges:** Level 5 works across central government on ICT solutions for public sector. Working with such a diversity and complexity of procurement frameworks is a real challenge for the industry with significant costs associated with bidding and finding capacity to do this. Uncertainty with government is impacting

upon procurement opportunities and contracts won where projects can be stalled or cancelled due to shifts in departmental responsibilities.

Cyber security, AI, use of data are challenges from a skills point of view which a lack of qualified workers meaning that demand cannot be met.

The expectations of the (younger) workforce are hard to meet where the real pressures of work can be an issue – translating challenges into the difference tackling these can make in the real world can help with retention.

**Opportunities:** The company is working with the Department for Business & Trade on export opportunities in the Middle-East to build more resilience into the business.

**BAB going forward:** to look at procurement barriers and building local supply chains.

### **Mario Caccamo, NIAB (Agri-food)**

**Challenge:** The sector as a whole is contracting which is problematic for EMR as it relies on innovation through royalty licences and firms aren't looking to long term projects.

The sector and NIAB are facing similar issues with skills.

Decarbonisation of the sector is also a challenge.

**Opportunities:** The recent bill concerning breeding technologies could be an opportunity for the UK to be able to use gene editing before Europe has access to this.

Opportunities for increasing the use of AI and digital data in the sector also room for growth.

The Growing Kent & Medway Programme is half way through its lifespan and needs to start looking at its legacy – low carbon will be part of this.

Written responses submitted by BAB members unable to attend the meeting:

### **Karl Elliott – Clague LLP (Architects):**

**Challenge:** Stodmarsh remains to be an issue but developers have started working around this issue looking at sites outside of the Stour Valley catchment area.

Our work flow on educational facilities has slowed whilst KCC address various issues with its procurement processes.

Staffing remains problematic with a lack of technical staff being available in the market place.

**Opportunity:** Work flow currently remains strong and in particular within the residential and industrial sectors.

### **Josh Fenton, Logistics UK**

**Challenge:** For the logistics sector a current challenge is the number of changes happening to the industry. For example, the introduction of new clean air zones (CAZ), which are often different in scope for each local authority that are implementing CAZ schemes. It would be helpful for the logistics sector if all CAZ's conformed to the same parameters (i.e. pricing and which vehicles are exempt). A further challenge facing the sector is the pressures to move to clean energy (i.e. EV's vans and HGV's) despite there not being the energy infrastructure to meet the commercial need. Additionally, there continues to be a lack of HGV parking and welfare facilities infrastructure to meet current needs of the sector.

**Opportunity:** Up until recently, there have been difficulties to recruit and retain new and younger talent to replace those leaving the sector due to retirement. However, through proactive campaigning such as Generation Logistics, the tide is turning, and we are seeing a lot more interest with young people across the country considering a career in the sector.

**BAB going forward:** It would be interesting to hear the effects of the recent budget/ impacts of inflation on other sectors, as it is likely that we will have similar challenges, but also some that are unique to specific sectors. For the logistics sector, the implications of the recent budget and inflation can and is causing some



operators (particularly SMEs) to go out of business/ to be acquired by competitors, due to the low profit margins and not being able to adapt to the changing landscape.

#### **Summary from Liz Gibney:**

Key issues that were raised include:

- The need for work on Brand Kent
- The importance of purpose and values in business.
- People and communication (including upskilling and re-skilling)
- Net Zero (links to people and skills)
- Uncertainty linked to the political climate
- Driving forward opportunities for local procurement.
- International contacts and reach.
- Borders / Dover, Sheerness in relation to Highway and infrastructure
- Utilities – energy supplies.

#### **4. Discussion about the Future Focus of BAB:**

Jo James introduced the discussion highlighting the opportunities that devolution or a county deal could bring but based on a strong business voice being reflected. There would be opportunities to feed into wider strategic developments and activities in Kent through BAB and KMEP. We could envisage a number of task and finish groups or key topics on which to focus such as the recent work on nutrient neutrality.

Key points that were raised included:

##### **Planning:**

- Looking at delays, engaging with planning groups and leaders in Kent to support the right investment in Kent.
- Considering issues with infrastructure (highways capacity and pinch points etc.), utilities (power supply, difficulties with rolling out renewables etc.)

##### **Energy:**

- Generating and connecting local green energy to the grid) and opportunities to boost local supply including through major sites / strategic locations in Kent (Ports, Bluewater etc.)
- Looking at innovative solutions to generate energy locally e.g. small turbines on lamp posts.
- Tackling water scarcity and sewage treatment issues.

##### **Connectivity:**

- Tackling connectivity 'not spots'.
- *There is a current call for expressions of interest for regions to apply to government as future [5G innovation regions](#) closing on 7<sup>th</sup> June*

##### **Highways:**

- Identifying and influencing decisions on investments in highway improvements
- *There is a current government consultation "[Shaping the future of England's strategic roads](#)" to which BAB could submit a coordinated response.*
- *KCC will also be consulting on its Local Transport Plan shortly*

##### **Education & Employability:**

- Looking at disconnect between primary, secondary and employers and getting industry leaders into schools to help promote careers.

**Procurement:**

- Looking at developing local purchasing, encouraging businesses to buy from each other, developing the circular economy.

**Brand Kent:**

- Drawing out Kent's key offer and creating a framework for Kent's assets (businesses, organisations etc.) to use

**Actions:**

**All: to input ideas for sectors / sites / elements of a potential Kent & Medway expression of interest to the government's call for 5G Innovation Regions**

**All: to send ideas / input to Steve S for a BAB response to the government's consultation on the Future of England's strategic roads.**

The BAB secretariat and Chair would consider potential next steps based on discussions and report back to the group as soon as possible.

**4. Any other business**

- Members were offered a brief tour of the facilities at East Malling Research.
- Liz Gibney closed the meeting.

**Next meeting:** virtual at 9am on 7 September.

# Welcome to our New Members



**Jemma Fairclough-Haynes**  
Orchard Employment Law



**Nicholas Scott-Gray**  
Peel Ports



**Claire Eckley**  
Eckley Farms &  
Kent National Farmers Union



**Guarav Malhotra**  
Level 5



**Jason Davies-Baker**  
Unipet International



**Marion Brooks**  
Apogee Corp



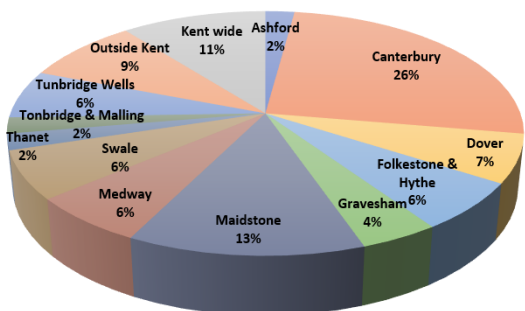
**Stephen James**  
British Veteran Owned Ltd &  
Social Media for Schools



**Zoe Cairns**  
ZC Social Media

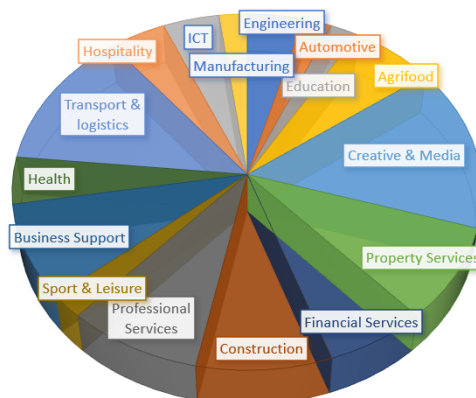
## Current Membership

**BAB Membership Across Kent**



Gaps: Dartford & Sevenoaks

**BAB MEMBERSHIP - SECTOR BREAKDOWN**



Gaps: Retail & Wholesale

## General Update since last Meeting

### LEP Transition:

- Government announcement: LEP funding to end April 2024
- Transfer of responsibilities to Local Authorities
- Renewed role for KMEP
- Importance of voice of business
- Links to devolution in Kent & Medway

### Local Elections:

- 8 new Local Authority Leader KMEP board members

### Kent & Medway Growth Hub:

- Continuation of signposting services (funding reduced)



Kent CC  
Roger Gough



Medway Council  
Lauren Edwards



Ashford BC  
Noel Ovenden



Canterbury CC  
Alan Baldock



Dartford BC  
Jeremy Kite



Dover DC  
Kevin Mills



FHDC  
Jim Martin



Gravesham BC  
John Burden



Maidstone BC  
David Burton



Sevenoaks DC  
Julia Thornton



Swale BC  
Tim Gibson



Thanet DC  
Rick Everitt



TMBC  
Matt Boughton



Tunbridge Wells BC  
Ben Chapelard

## General Update since last Meeting

### Kent & Medway Economic Strategy:

- Final endorsement by KMEP & Approval by KCC Elected Members in June

### 3 Objectives, 5 Ambitions:



- Enable innovative, productive and creative businesses
- Widen opportunities and unlock talent
- Secure resilient infrastructure for planned, sustainable growth
- Place economic opportunity at the centre of community renewal and prosperity
- Create diverse, distinctive and vibrant places

## Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)

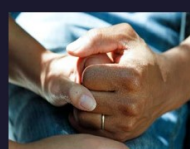
### Key sectors



Construction



Manufacturing & Engineering



Health & Social Care



Education



Fresh Food & Food Production

### Watching brief:



Transport & Logistics

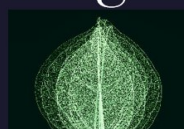


Creative Industries

### Cross cutting themes:



Digitalisation



Decarbonisation



SME engagement in Skills



**Next steps**

[www.kentemployersskillsplan.org](http://www.kentemployersskillsplan.org)

- 31<sup>st</sup> May: LSIP to be sent to DfE
- June & July: Feedback and final adjustments with DfE.
- July 23 – March 25: Ongoing activity to implement actions from the report



## Updates since Last Meeting

### Decarbonisation:

- [Green Business Grant Scheme](#) for small businesses in Folkestone and Hythe.
- **Tonbridge & Malling and Sevenoaks Green Business Grant Scheme:**
  - Match funded grants up to £5,000 for businesses in the green economy
  - Match funded grants up to £5,000 to improve energy efficiency and reduce carbon
- [Growing Kent & Medway Business Sustainability Challenge](#) for horticultural and plant-based food and drink companies. Production based, sustainable, revenue only projects.
- KCC's **Steps to Environmental Management** scheme currently being re-evaluated by IEMA – a service will still be offered for KCC's supply chain alongside a waste exchange/matching option.



## Kent & Medway Business Fund

- KCC's Business Investment Team has secured retention of the recycled Regional Growth Funds from HM Treasury to enable them to continue to provide loan funding to Kent & Medway businesses.
- Following signing of a new contract and a KCC 'Key Decision', work will commence on shaping the scheme in the summer
- Relaunch date - likely to be Autumn 2023

<https://www.kent.gov.uk/business/business-loans-and-funding/kent-and-medway-business-fund>

Annex 2: Slides from Bank of England Presentation:



Inflation is too high. It has been around 10% since last summer

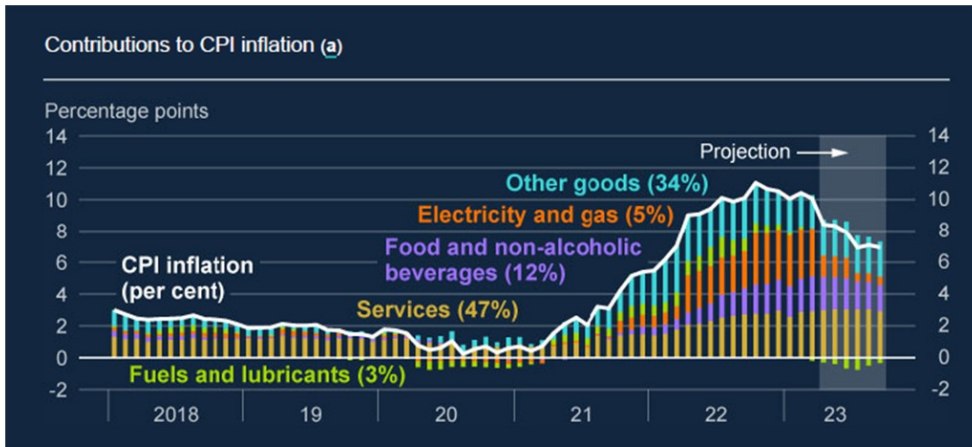


We've raised interest rates to make sure inflation falls and stays low

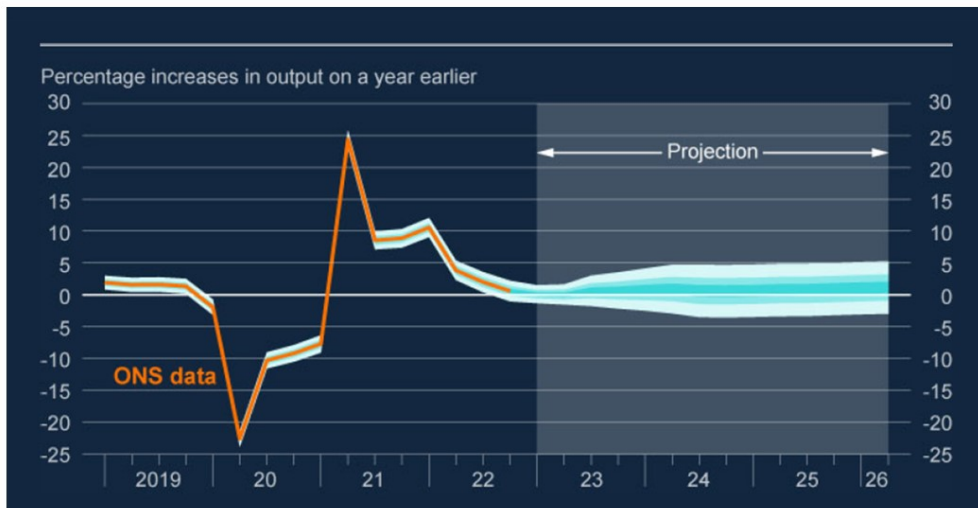


We expect inflation to fall quickly this year and then meet our 2% target by late 2024

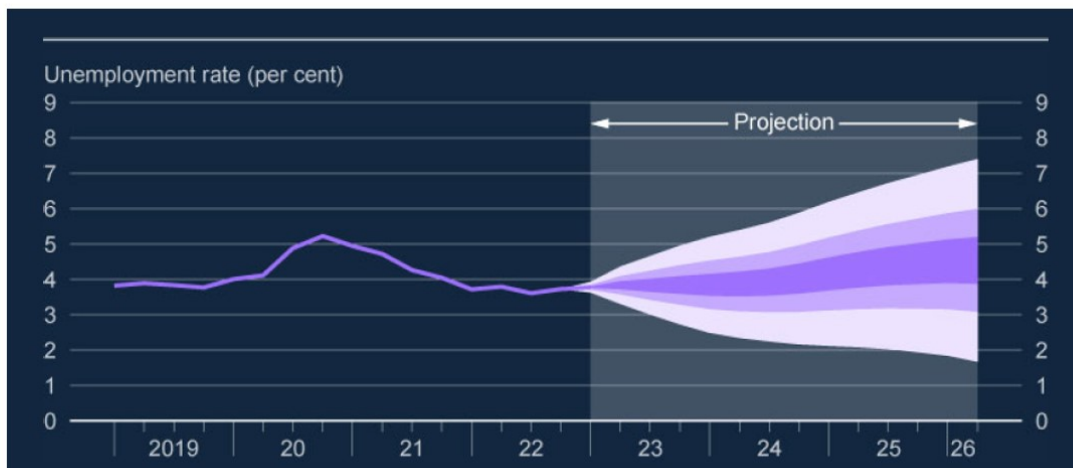
CPI inflation is expected to fall to around 7% by mid-2023



# The UK economy is no longer projected to enter recession



# Unemployment is expected to remain low



# Risks remain to the upside, with the potential for inflation to prove more persistent

