

Draft Minutes from KMEP Board on 15th May 2024

KMEP Board Member Attendees:

Liz Gibney (Chair Lee Evans)	Cllr Alan Baldock (CCC)
Andrew Metcalf (Maxim PR)	Chris Inwood (MBC alternate)
Carol Ford (Horticultural Task Force)	Cllr Kevin Mills (DDC)
Chris Broom (Discovery Park)	Cllr Lauren Edwards (MC)
Miranda Chapman (Pillory Barn)	Cllr Justine Rutland (TWBC)
Nick Fenton (Kent Housing and Development Group)	Cllr Monique Bonney (SBC)
Roland Cooper (Considine)	Cllr Noel Ovenden (ABC)
Tudor Price (KICC)	Cllr Roger Gough (KCC)
Prof. Andrew Westby (Uni. Of Greenwich alternate)	Cllr Roddy Hogarth (SBC)

KMEP Board Member Apologies:

David Milham (FSB)	Cllr Jeremy Kite (DBC)
Jason Davies-Baker (Unipet)	Cllr Jim Martin (FHDC)
Jo Nolan (Screen South)	Cllr John Burden (GBC)
Prof. Mario Caccamo (NIAB EMR)	Cllr Matt Boughton (TMBC)
Matthew Arnold (Stagecoach)	Cllr Rick Everitt (TDC)
Natalie Benville (Eurotunnel/Getlink)	Graham Razey (EKC Group)
Sweena Badhan (IOD)	
Vince Lucas (VA Rail)	

Additional Attendees:

Adam Bryan	Jeremy Whittaker
Alex Riley	Joanne Johnson
Andrew Osborne	Michelle Farrow
Chris Townend	Sarah Nurden
David Candlin	Steph Holt-Castle
Detlev Munster	Steve Samson
Emma Watson	Tom Marchant
Grace O'Donnell	Tracey Kerly
Greg Wilkinson	

Meeting Content:**Item 1 – Welcome, introduction and apologies.**

- 1.1 Liz Gibney welcomed attendees to the meeting.
- 1.2 She congratulated Cllr Roddy Hogarth on his recent appointment as Leader of Sevenoaks District Council, and Cllr Justine Rutland on her recent election success. She welcomed Chris Inwood (Maidstone Borough Council Economic Development Officer), who is temporarily representing the Council on KMEP, while discussions are ongoing on future Council Leadership.
- 1.3 There were no declarations of interest.

Item 2 – Minutes from the last meeting

- 2.1 The minutes of the 15 March 2024 meeting were agreed.

Item 3 – The Kent & Medway Functional Economic Area

- 3.1 Liz Gibney welcomed Greg Wilkinson (DLUHC Area Lead for Essex, Kent & Medway, and Hertfordshire) to the meeting.
- 3.2 Greg Wilkinson made the following comments in his presentation:
 - He works in the Cities and Local Growth Unit, which sits between the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and Department for Business and Trade (DBT). The unit looks after local economic growth and levelling up funding.
 - The guidance on the delivery of future LEP functions is still to be published. He shared what information is known currently.
 - The Government expects future LEP functions to be delivered over whole county geographies or functional economic areas with the minimum population of 500,000.
 - Where multiple local authorities are working together, one local authority is to be appointed as the accountable body. The authority, acting as accountable body, must demonstrate how all local authorities in the area are involved in decision-making and how service provision will be insured across the whole area.
 - Kent and Medway is seen as the functional economic area for this region.
 - The Government is asking functional economic areas to deliver two main functions:
 1. Business representation through a business board.
 2. Local economic planning, with the production of a new or updated economic strategy that is co-produced between local government and businesses.
 - Business boards are expected to:
 - Include business membership organisations such as the Chambers of Commerce and Federation of Small Businesses (FSB);
 - Include a diverse range of businesses related to local economic strength and priorities;

- Include businesses of all sizes which are geographically diverse (e.g. urban, rural, coastal businesses) to ensure diversity of voices;
- Have a clear conflict of interest policy; and
- Be heavily involved in the development of local economic strategies.
- The government guidance says that the economic strategy should include:
 - analysis of the main underlying competitive advantages,
 - the strengths of areas,
 - opportunities for strategic connections across regions,
 - opportunities for growth over the next 10 years, and
 - visions for what would happen if these opportunities were successfully grasped in this period.
- It is very helpful for the strategies, or their supportive documents, to set out the top public and private sector investment priorities, as that helps government to understand what support is needed. Alerting the Cities and Local Growth Unit to these priorities will enable Greg and Grace to communicate these across government, bring different departments together, and discuss those internally.
- The policy team is considering future guidance on the business boards and local economic strategies. This will be communicated to local areas at a meeting arranged with the Business Board network.
- The local economic plan should demonstrate how it links with other local strategic documents.
- A new Assurance Framework has not been published yet. Areas which have a devolution deal are covered under the English Devolution Accountability Framework, but any areas without a devolution deal, will be covered by a new Assurance Framework that should be published shortly (a draft version has been written).
- Current indications are that the Assurance Framework will be more light-touch than previous iterations.
- The Assurance Framework is expected to say that the first line of defence for responsibility in the local authority (accounting as the Accountable Body) will be their Section 151 Officer, who is in receipt of the LEP transition funding. That LEP funding is to be used for the delivery of LEP functions as set out in the two sets of published guidance.
- If the local authority (accounting as the Accountable Body) makes a payment to another local authority to deliver aspects of guidance, it is the local authority receiving the LEP funding from Government (the Accountable Body) that is primarily responsible for receiving assurance from those third parties.
- The government's assurance team will secure confidence of this via the templated annual statement activity. This will take place towards the end of the financial year.

- The DLUHC Area Team (Greg Wilkinson and Grace O’Donnell) will have routine engagement with the local authority acting as Accountable Body for a functional economic area.
- The DLUHC area team will assess progress, and if any challenges are identified in relation to:
 - governance
 - delivery of funded activities, including the legacy funds (i.e. Local Growth Funding (LGF) and Getting Building Funds (GBF))
 - concerns in delivery or governance of the local economic plans
 - concerns relating to business board representation and engagement, or
 - performance of programmes

then the area teams will cover these topics within a conversation at the midpoint of the year or at a convenient point.

- Where risks to the LEP integration funding are sufficient, the assurance team may engage beyond that to restore confidence in the robust management of the funds and activities. This is likely to be through a wider deep dive looking at how any local authority levelling up funding and LEP integration funding are being used.
- The annual performance review will be reported centrally to DLUHC levelling up directors.
- Greg reflected that in his opinion Kent and Medway are very well advanced in their governance, economic plans, and business representation. There are other local authorities across England that are not used to working across their functional economic areas, so that’s partly why it is taking a little longer for full guidance to be issued.

3.3 Liz Gibney thanked Greg Wilkinson for his presentation. **ACTION:** It was agreed that Greg will circulate the Assurance Framework once its content is more finalised.

Item 4 – Implementing the Kent & Medway Economic Framework

4.1 Liz Gibney welcomed Sarah Nurden (KMEP and BAB Manager), Alex Riley (Sector and Programme Manager), and Emma Watson (Project Officer) to the meeting.

4.2 Sarah Nurden started the presentation by saying:

- The question for the board today is how does KMEP turn the [Kent and Medway Economic Framework](#) (launched in April 2024) into an implementation plan to effectively grow the local economy by 2030?
- There is a strong desire for a team Kent and Medway approach, whereby KMEP board members and interested parties can feed in their thoughts and views, so all parties feel ownership of the document. The team would always like to hear from board members if they have any views, suggestions, or concerns they wish to raise.
- To get things started, the Framework Implementation Team (Sarah, Alex and Emma) have been supported in this endeavour by working with private sector and

public sector 'Thematic Leads'. There are two Thematic Leads per ambition area in the Kent and Medway Economic Framework:

- Tudor Price (Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce) and Steve Samson (Kent County Council) – *Ambition 1: Enabling innovative, creative and productive businesses*
 - Simon Cook (Mid Kent College) and Dan Ratcliffe (Medway Council) - *Ambition 2: Widening opportunities and unlocking talent*
 - Vince Lucas (VA Rail) and Tom Marchant (Kent County Council) - *Ambition 3: Securing resilient infrastructure for planned, sustainable growth*
 - Nick Fenton (Kent Developers' Group) and Andrew Osborne (Ashford Borough Council) - *Ambition 4: Placing economic opportunity at the centre of community wellbeing and prosperity*
 - Miranda Chapman (Pillory Barn) and Adam Bryan (Medway Council) - *Ambition 5: Creating diverse, distinctive and vibrant place*
- Conversations have taken place with these Thematic Leads over the last fortnight to help populate an initial implementation plan, which is shared with KMEP today.
 - The current thinking is that the implementation plan should be a live evolving document that will be updated and shared at each KMEP board meeting.
 - It is not the intention to have an in-depth update on every ambition at every KMEP board meeting, rather the KMEP board can advise the team which sections of the implementation plan they wish to focus on when the agenda is set.
 - The current intention is that there will be two phases to the implementation plan. Phase I is the initial activity and quick wins that will be required or delivered in the short term, and Phase II will be produced in the coming months. Phase II will include more ambitious long-term activities and outcomes.
 - Phase II will also be supported by project pipelines that may be prioritised by KMEP.
 - The Phase I draft implementation plan will be circulated with the draft KMEP minutes. Board members were asked to consider these questions during the presentation, and also after the meeting when written feedback is requested:
 - Do you agree with the activities listed in the initial draft?
 - Are there important activities missing?
 - Would you like to be involved in this activity?
 - **ACTION:** The draft implementation plan is to be circulated to the KMEP board. KMEP Board Members are asked to provide any additional comments on the plan by **31st May 2024** please.

4.3 Tudor Price provided the overview of the activities related to ***Ambition 1: Enabling innovative, creative and productive businesses*** that were included in the draft implementation plan (please see attached plan for full details).

4.4 The KMEP Board's feedback about Ambition 1's activities was:

- Prof. Andrew Westby said it would be good to consider how the universities' advisory board can interface more widely. They tend to be established around particular thematic areas when the universities are thinking about their degree programmes on offer. He'd welcome thoughts on how these boards can be more accessible within Kent and Medway.
- Tudor Price said KMEP should consider how we make key consortiums/platforms/committees/programmes/etc (such as Growing Kent and Medway) self-sufficient and self-sustaining, so they are sufficiently robust to survive during the ebb and flow of programme funding.
- Miranda Chapman supported the consolidation of marketing tools, and has some thoughts about how we could maybe use some AI to help on that process.
- Miranda Chapman was a vocal advocate of the Kent Property Market Report (KPMR), and asked KMEP to reflect on how we can expand its impact and 'hit this home in a bigger, wider way'. It would be good for a section of the KPMR to really focus on the business conditions for growth.

- 4.5 One of the activities in Ambition 1 relates to the **Connecting Capabilities Fund**. Sarah Nurden gave an update on this activity as follows:
- The University of Kent, in collaboration with the University of Greenwich, University of Essex, Nottingham Trent University, and University College London, has submitted a stage one application to Research England for £9.63m of Connecting Capabilities Funding. Their proposal is to establish a "**Cyber and AI Innovation Hub for the Greater Thames Estuary Region and its surrounding area**". Steve Samson has been in contact with the applicant.
 - The University of Greenwich, University of Kent, Canterbury Christ Church University, supported by NIAB EMR and the Growing Kent and Medway consortium, have submitted a stage one application to Research England for £10m of Connecting Capabilities Funding. Their proposal is entitled "**HARVEST-FS: Harnessing Academic Resources for Value-added Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Transformation in Food Systems**". Sarah Nurden, Alex Riley, and Sean Henry (of Medway Council) have supported this group in formulating their stage one application.
 - Research England will now review these stage one applications. If the applications are viewed favourably, the applicants will be asked to submit a stage two application. Both applicants would then welcome a formal letter of support from the KMEP board. **ACTION:** Sarah Nurden to inform KMEP once/if letters of support are required.

4.6 Alex Riley provided the overview of the activities in the draft implementation plan related to **Ambition 2: Widening opportunities and unlocking talent**.

4.7 The KMEP Board's feedback about Ambition 2's activities was:

- Andrew Metcalf asked if the data dashboard is the same as KCC's current data dashboard. Emma Watson said that she was working with the Kent Analytics Team and other partners, to obtain the available, appropriate, data that fits under each ambition theme. Simon Cook and Dan Ratcliffe have commented that purchasing additional data sources (such as Emsi Burning Glass) could help inform decision-making, and the cost of this is being reviewed.
- Nick Fenton commented that it's shocking the amount of times that businesses do not reply to people, who write to request work experience and other types of careers advice/support. Going forward, working with employers, we ought to be encouraging at least a response in some form.
- Nick Fenton said it's important to remember the work that the schools ambassadors do visiting schools, talking to young people about career opportunities, and raising their ambitions.
- Roger Gough felt the draft implementation plan was very much on the right lines, as it will enable the KMEP board to have a really good oversight of the plethora of issues that affect economic growth, and see tangible outcomes of their work. The team supporting specific funding bids that should unlock economic growth was welcome.
- Roger Gough said a challenge going forward will be providing the right level of detail given the board is considering such a wide range of activities. It may be that more granular discussions may need to take place outside of the board - he cited the Lower Thames Crossing Skills Policy being discussed at the Employment Task Force as an example – and therefore embedding two-way communication with these other forums appears appropriate and an important next step.

4.8 One of the activities in Ambition 2 relates to **Skills Bootcamps** and **Universal Support**. Steve Samson gave an update on this activity as follows:

- The Department for Education (DfE) has approached us to consider an application to them for the 24-25 financial year to run a programme of skills bootcamps in Kent and Medway.
- A skills bootcamp is a course of up to 16 weeks that meet a particular industry's skills gaps. The course can be targeted at people that are out of work or existing employees. Both options are open as part of an application.
- Steve Samson has been having various conversations with colleagues, some facilitated through the Business Advisory Board, some facilitated through the Employment Task Force and other avenues to bring together what will hopefully become a realistic application for skills bootcamps.
- DfE funding is very much dependent on having very real outcomes in terms of either a job interview for people that are out of work or, if people are employed and undertaking bespoke training, that the person has access to a more skilled or an enhanced role as a result of that training course.

- In order to submit a bid, the following elements must be considered:
 - A need must be identified by a particular industry or sector or company.
 - An adequate training provider or provision must be identified that could be used or procured to meet that skills gap.
 - Whether there's interest from either existing workforce or potential workforce entrants in that particular topic.
 - Whether there are employers who would be willing to offer an interview as part of that process.
 - The payment for the final cost of the bootcamp is unlocked once all four elements are in place.
 - It has been somewhat challenging to secure all these elements.
 - At the moment, there are some workable solutions related to the sectors of agri-food, construction, creative, retail and hospitality. Discussions are taking place over the next fortnight to pull together the necessary information to complete the application.
 - Originally the DfE invited Kent and Medway to bid for courses to the value of circa £2m – £2.5m. It is likely that the final value of courses offered will be lower than that.
 - The skills bootcamps can be treated as pilot activity this year for Kent and Medway. A broader application for more courses in 25/26 will follow.
 - **ACTION:** KMEP board members and partners are asked to contact Steve Samson **urgently** if they are aware of additional courses that could be included in the skills bootcamp bid where those four elements can be put in place in short order. There is a tight deadline for the 24/25 submission.
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- Re: **Universal Support**, this funding is being allocated to Kent and Medway as the new functional economic area for delivery.
 - Universal Support is a new scheme that is intended to provide personalised help to people facing complex barriers to work across England and Wales as part of the Government's plan to tackle economic inactivity and spread the benefits of employment more widely.
 - The participants may be disabled, or have health conditions or additional barriers that prevent them either gaining employment or retaining employment.
 - A guidance note is due to be issued fairly shortly from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).
 - Conversations are taking place between Kent County Council, Medway Council, and key partners about delivery models, referral routes, and how we commission the relevant support going forwards.
 - The support of district councils in reaching citizens and cohorts that perhaps DWP don't have access to would be most welcome.

- There will also be a piece of work around employer engagement to make sure that the support to individuals looking for jobs coincides with some of the skills gaps that we've got across the county in in key sectors.
- **ACTION:** Steve Samson suggested bringing a further update on universal support to the next KMEP meeting, subject to DWP guidance being available then.

4.9 Tom Marchant provided the overview of the activities related to ***Ambition 3: Securing resilient infrastructure for planned, sustainable growth.***

4.10 The KMEP Board's feedback about Ambition 3's activities was:

- Monique Bonney asked that an additional activity be added, focussed on rail freight. Kent and Medway have a number of ports where a high volume of goods are brought into the UK. There would be significant benefits for the region if a percentage of these goods could transfer from the roads and instead be transported by rail.
- Monique Bonney appreciated the focus on energy security. There is a major hospital that has had issues with energy supply, and is forecasting greater power requirements in future, which cannot be met. This will require significant financial investment in the energy network. This is fundamental to allow the NHS to meet our healthcare needs.
- Roger Gough echoed Monique Bonney's views regarding rail freight and energy security being key features of the implementation plan. He'd welcome the Thematic Leads and Framework Implementation Team linking in with the Thames Estuary Growth Board on the energy work that they are undertaking.
- Sarah Nurden commented that she'd been contacted by Opergy, a private company, that is working for and with Cambridge University. The project (Hydrogen East) is looking at mapping where hydrogen is produced, stored, transported, and used across the region from Lincolnshire down to Kent and Medway. **ACTION:** Further details are being sought on how KMEP can best link in with this work, and feedback will come to future meetings or be circulated by email.
- Nick Fenton offered his assistance to the energy security work. He has many contacts with UK Power Networks (UKPN) and other agencies through his role on the Kent Developers' Group.
- Justine Rutland asked that an additional activity be added, focussed on air travel, and east-west travel connections. For residents to the west of the county, travelling to Gatwick is quicker than going to Dover.
- Roddy Hogarth recalled the development of Canary Wharf and the Olympics 2012 project. Great efforts were made to ensure the businesses that were part of those huge developments had a legacy benefit. Almost all developers and suppliers who tended for the 2012 Olympics, had to show they had certain international standards already in place, and their supply chains provided

opportunities for the local economy. He emphasised the importance of supporting local businesses to successfully win more tenders and deliver them properly. In addition, there should be consideration of the long-term benefits that can be embedded through the inclusion of standards in the tender specifications (e.g. quality standard, the environmental standard, the health and safety standards, information security standards, etc).

- Andrew Metcalf asked that the link to London be incorporated into the implementation plan, in terms of the infrastructure impact on business growth and skills. Engagement with core London partners is needed.

4.11 One of the activities in Ambition 3 relates to **Entry/Exit System**. Stephanie Holt-Castle gave an update on this activity as follows:

- The Kent and Medway Resilience Forum (KMRF) is leading the response to the entry/exit system (EES) on behalf of the county. The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) is the business lead on KMRF, so it would be helpful if David Milham could provide an update at the next KMEP: **ACTION**.
- There are plans in place for a large tabletop exercise this summer to look at preparedness. The reasonable worst case scenario is due in May from the DfT.
- When EES was first discussed, there were some fairly apocalyptic scenarios that were modelled. There's some confidence now that it will not be as apocalyptic as that. There are several good conversations going on about how, if queues reach 90 minutes, alleviation can be applied.
- The date of EES introduction had been 6th October 2024. There is some talk now that this may be introduced sometime between 6th October and early November.
- The worst impact will not occur on day one, rather on certain key dates. KMRF is modelling that work closely, in collaboration with Eurotunnel and the Port of Dover.

4.12 Nick Fenton provided the overview of the activities related to *Ambition 4: Placing economic opportunity at the centre of community wellbeing and prosperity*.

4.13 The KMEP Board's feedback during the meeting about Ambition 4's activities was:

- Lauren Edwards said Medway Council would be happy to share their best practise from their UK Shared Prosperity Funding projects. Part of their UK SPF monies have been ringfenced for skills projects.
- There was broad agreement that the new Strategic Partnership should look at the broader health and economy remit, with the initial focus of year one being on producing a work and health strategy focussing on people with (mental and/or physical) health conditions and disabilities.
- There was enthusiasm in later years to focus on wider economic factors that affect health, such as housing, etc.

- Monique Bonney commented that it is essential that Primary Care Networks (PCNs) / GP practices be core members of the strategic partnership to help drive the work. The PCNs interact frequently with the target cohort of economically inactive people, but there are less well-established links between PCNs/GPs and the commercial world. It can be challenging to get the PCNs to engage with the local councils. Strengthening the lines of communication between GPs, the private sector, and local councils could deliver real benefits, and help GPs refer people with health conditions/disabilities to appropriate provision, so they move closer to the workplace.
 - Andrew Osborne referred back to Steve Sampson's comments about Universal support. It will be important to link up the conversations with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) on health and economy to the conversation with DWP regarding Universal Support.
 - Andrew Osborne commented that he hoped Nick Fenton's comments on procurement will hopefully have addressed Roddy Hogarth's earlier concerns. This will be a focus for the Implementation Plan.
- 4.14 Miranda Chapman and Adam Bryan provided the overview of the activities related to Ambition 5: Creating diverse, distinctive and vibrant place.
- 4.15 The KMEP Board's feedback during the meeting about Ambition 5's activities was:
- Andrew Osborne had recently attended a vineyard visit with Deirdre Wells of Visit Kent. Many vineyards across the county are talking about the growth of viticulture, how that sits with tourism, how that's branded, and how that works in terms of a Brand Kent and Medway perspective. There are now 120 vineyards in Kent, covering 1,339 hectares. Kent has the most sunlight hours of any county in the UK. Viticulture is a real growth industry, and it's important to consider this sector with regard to the visitor experience. KMEP should also consider which conditions for growth will support this sector, and the sector's future infrastructure needs.
- 4.16 Alex Riley drew the presentation to a close, reiterating that this is Phase I of the Implementation Plan, focussing primarily on initial activities, quick wins, establishing strategic communication links, undertaking gap analysis, and having conversations with strategic partners to begin to enable activities to follow on from that. Phase II will then follow later in the year.
- 4.17 Alex Riley thanked the Thematic Leads for their time preparing the initial draft, and for presenting the details to KMEP.
- 4.18 He introduced Emma Watson, who will be focusing on data production, to enable KMEP to measure the baseline and progress in the future. **ACTION:** Emma Watson said that she will circulate a slide with the minutes that shows the current economic indicators that the Team are intending to use. A dashboard of data will be produced

per ambition. These five dashboards will be updated and circulated at every KMEP meeting.

- 4.19 Stephanie Holt-Castle said one thing that DLUHC keep challenging us around is how does our economic framework fit in with other key strategic strategies and 'softer infrastructure'. DLUHC has asked how the economic framework impacts quality of life. It will be important to consider this going forward. **ACTION:** Emma Watson is to include quality of life indicators in the data dashboards.

Item 5 – Any Other Business

KMTV

- 5.1 Lauren Edwards spoke of the University of Kent's decision to close their centre for journalism, its impact on local students and on KMTV. Her comments included:

- Her understanding is that, with the removal of the centre of journalism, if you want to study journalism, you just won't be able to do so in Kent anymore, which is obviously unfortunate.
- There are some pretty big implications for KMTV. It's not a strict joint venture, but an operation jointly led by the University of Kent and the Kent Messenger group. The University of Kent also has a broadcasting licence.
- KMTV has been incredibly successful in terms of skills and producing really good quality journalists who go and work for BBC/ITV and internationally.
- It is also very successful in supporting local democracy and civic engagement.
- Lauren Edwards is a strong advocate for KMTV and wants to keep this within Kent and Medway.
- Lauren Edwards and Andrew Metcalf have had conversations with various people around the options for a new educational provider for a journalism course. Further conversations are planned for herself and others to understand the potential options going forward.
- Lauren Edwards would welcome the support of the private sector to see if there is a way to keep KMTV going.

- 5.2 Andrew Metcalf added the following comments:

- The decline in overseas student numbers, coupled with inflation, has impacted the University of Kent's income, so with regret, they have had to reconsider which courses they provide
- Their centre for journalism is a nationally recognised, highly respected centre for education of national journalists. It's not just important regionally, but it's of national significance.
- If students now wish to study journalism they must travel to Brighton, Oxford, or London.
- A significant concern is the loss of a gold plated contract with the BBC.

- There is a 'teach-out' period of two years, to allow existing students to finish their courses.
 - The University of Kent is looking to possibly sell its shares in KMTV (it owns 76%), so a private-sector investor will be required.
 - KMTV currently broadcast to over 250,000 households in Kent and Medway.
 - Andrew Metcalf views KMTV as a vitally important piece of Kent's media ecosystem. **ACTION:** He'd appreciate KMEP board members considering their network of contacts and letting him know of anyone who might be interested in working with KMTV or University of Kent to make sure that it's sustained.
- 5.3 Monique Bonney commented on the duty of care universities have to their students. The recent withdrawal of nursing courses at Canterbury Christ Church University was handled badly. There were trainee nurses told part way through their final year that their course was cancelled and they then had to go back and do another year, or year and a half of study in order to receive their qualification. This has a devastating economic impact for the students, and created a wider reputational issue for Kent. It is disappointing to hear another university is closing some courses, and if this continues, then this needs to be addressed in depth.
- 5.4 Tudor Price thinks there is a serious strategic issue here with the current situation with universities and the underfunding or lack of funding. Allowing market forces to solely dictate the supply of courses is a problem because many courses have strategic significance to all stakeholders. He said KMEP should be taking more interest into how it can help to guide/influence course supply.
- 5.5 Lauren Edwards said that the University of Kent has committed to allowing the existing journalism students to finish their courses, so the situation is different to the nursing student situation. The existing students are not disadvantaged, but prospective future students won't benefit unless action is taken.
- 5.6 Prof. Andrew Wesby said clearly these are really difficult times for higher education as universities don't want fees to go up for students. However, inflation and pension changes make it a really challenging time for the sector. There is a speck of good news. Yesterday, the Migration Advisory Committee said the visa, enabling overseas students to be in the UK, should remain. If the visa were scrapped, universities would lose income from international students' fees and have to cut courses. The government, which requested the MAC review, said it was considering the findings and would respond in due course.
- 5.7 Liz Gibney drew the conversation to a close. **ACTION:** She thought this should be an issue that the Employment Task Force and Business Advisory Board may wish to consider. She requested that Alex Riley liaise with Andrew and Lauren on this matter. The item could return to the next KMEP meeting.

Nutrient Neutrality

- 5.8 Roland Cooper spoke on Nutrient Neutrality. Revised advice from Natural England was expected back in March/April that would take a large portion of Kent out of the affected area. The latest news is that it's still not been issued and the rumour is that Natural England is reviewing the advice yet again. It is not clear what their direction of travel is, other than from comments made by the Head of Natural England when interviewed on Friday by the Today programme. The Head basically said he didn't believe the housing numbers that Kent and Medway provided to demonstrate how badly affected the region is. He didn't give any evidence explaining why they doubt our data.
- 5.9 In Poole (affected by this issue), Natural England bought a huge farm to switch it off from food production to allow them to build about 1500 houses. This approach, if replicated here, would be greatly concerning in the Garden of England, where we have high grade agricultural land. The UK only grows 35% of our food and we certainly can't take 50,000 hectares away from agricultural uses.
- 5.10 Roland Cooper believes Kent and Medway need to make stronger representations to Natural England about the issues faced by this region. Roland Cooper asked Stephanie Holt-Castle to update on what's happening strategically in terms of solutions to this issue. The development community are desperate for updates.
- 5.11 Stephanie Holt-Castle said Max Tant is working with the five relevant Heads of Strategic Planning, and together they're preparing a bid for some further funding because originally they were seeking £15 million for mitigation solutions to this issue. **ACTION:** Stephanie Holt-Castle said she'd speak to Max and get a written update that could be shared.
- 5.12 Tracey Kerly said work was continuing. 10 DLUHC representatives came for a site visit, and it was emphasised that it is not just a numbers game. Nutrient Neutrality affects the whole economy and impacts the entirety of the construction industry (from architects to consultants to builders). It affects all local authorities that have people living in temporary accommodation. It affects Levelling Up Fund Projects: The New Town Works Project cannot go forward at present because of the nutrient neutrality issue as well. Tracey and colleagues tried to explain the real implications of what is happening.
- 5.13 There will be a bid for some additional money, as Stephanie said. Ashford's Strategic Delivery Board is looking to host a workshop on 28th July for all the relevant partners that are involved in the strategic approach. The team is looking at maybe some alternatives to wetlands and how we might be able to do something slightly different strategically across the region. The work is continuing, it's just a very sticky issue to resolve.
- 5.14 Roland Cooper thanked Tracey Kerly for the helpful update. His view is that there needs to be a catchment management plan that cuts across planning borders in terms of trying to find headlines of strategic solution so that the whole region can benefit from what we can do in the catchment.
- 5.15 Liz Gibney attended a community engagement session yesterday in an area that was not affected by Stodmarsh. Everybody was complaining that there is so much over

development happening there, because it cannot happen in the affected areas. Residents were apoplectic about the fact that there was so much development happening. The whole system is completely broken now. The Stodmarsh issue must be prioritised.

- 5.16 Liz Gibney thanked everyone for attending and drew the meeting to a close. The next KMEP meeting is scheduled for Thursday 11th July 2024 at 3pm to 5pm.

DRAFT