

Draft minutes from BAB on 14th July 2025

Chairman's Welcome:

- Liz Gibney (BAB Chairman) welcomed the attendees to the meeting.
- A special welcome was given to Callum Bailey of Duo Technology Ltd and James Jenkins of Noveus Energy, who join the board.

Skills Bootcamps:

- Izzy Pompova of Kent County Council updated the team on the new Skills Bootcamp offer.
- Skills Bootcamps are short, intensive training programmes (up to 16 weeks) designed to address specific skills gaps in priority sectors. They are co-developed with employers to ensure relevance and impact.
- Employers can use Skills Bootcamps to train current employees, recruit new talent, or fast-track apprenticeships.
- The Skills Bootcamps are being offered in the: creative, agri-tech, construction, retail, health & social care, and early years & school sectors.
- Full details available at: [Skills Bootcamps | Kent Adult Education](#)
- Her presentation is available here:



Skills Bootcamps -
Update 14 July - Izzy

Industrial Strategy:

- Sarah Nurden informed the board about the highlights of the Government's Industrial Strategy, which was published on 23rd June 25.
- The Industrial Strategy sees the Government focus on eight high-growth sectors (known as IS8), as well as the foundational sector (of ports and energy). The IS8 are: Advanced Manufacturing, Clean Energy, Creative Industries, Defence, Digital & Technologies, Financial Services, Life Sciences, and Professional & Business Services.
- The strategy denotes a place-based approach – however, the strategy prioritises policy interventions and investment decisions on city regions and 'strategic industrial clusters'. The strategy thus moves focus away from county shires towards the UK's larger cities.
- Her presentation is available here:



Industrial Strategy -
BAB.pptx

Conversation with Katie Lam MP for the Weald of Kent

- Katie Lam, MP for the Weald of Kent, kindly attended BAB to hear from business leaders, and share her views.
- The Q&A session included:
 - A question from Vince Lucas asking the MPs to support the call for new competition to be added to the International Rail network, which Eurostar currently has a monopoly in. *Katie Lam replied that she agreed with the call for new train operators and would speak to her fellow Kent & Medway MPs about the subject when they next met.*

- Joanna Richardson commented about the lack of support for the tourism sector in the Industrial Sector. VisitBritain has cut funding for local visit organizations in 2025. This is part of a broader trend of increasing costs and reducing support for tourism initiatives, which could impact the ability of local visit organizations to attract and retain visitors. For instance, the budget for promoting the UK abroad was reduced by 42% at just 24 hours' notice, which has raised concerns among the tourism industry.
- Sarah Nurden commented on the concern that Data City, which is used by DSIT to ascertain where the 'strategic industrial clusters' are, is not classifying Kent and Medway's businesses correctly.
- David Powell spoke of the impact of not having a mayoral strategic authority on our ability to attract investment through the Industrial Strategy.
- *In response to Jo, Sarah and David's comments, Katie Lam acknowledged the importance of securing investment for our area. She commented on the limitations of being in opposition in being able to amend Government strategy. She would take the matters away, and there is a cross-party Kent & Medway MP meeting that is working well. She suggested to make maximum impact, each business should write to the MP for your business and home address to repeat the issues, as persuading the ten Labour Kent and Medway MPs would be advantageous. She recommended using specific evidence-based examples in your letters.*
- Tudor Price spoke of the concern of businesses about the increasing tax burdens for businesses, following the recent national insurance contribution increases. NIC increases are placing significant financial strain on businesses, particularly in sectors with high labour intensity like hospitality, construction, and social care. He asked Katie Lam to lobby for no further tax increases on businesses. *Katie Lam outlined the Conservative Party policy on tax.*

Intermediaries Task Force

- Heather Jones is the ITF Chairman and former deputy director in the Cabinet Office of the UK Border Delivery Group.
- She gave BAB an overview of the Intermediaries Task Force (ITF), which is a collaborative forum focused on addressing operational and procedural challenges related to cross-border trade, particularly in the context of the UK's departure from the EU. It brings together representatives from industry (such as logistics companies, ports, and customs intermediaries) and government officials from EU member states.
- Her presentation is available here:



ITF presentation -
BAB - Heather Jones

- **ACTION:** Arrange a meeting between the ITF with the relevant skills providers to discuss the ITF's concept of a Dover / short straits customs academy (Sarah Nurden to do).

Individual Economic Commentary – Provided by BAB Members

Life Science & MedTech

Name:	Chris Broom
Business:	Discovery Park
Opportunities & Good News	Seeing interest in advanced manufacturing. Discovery Park is home to several advanced manufacturers, agri-tech firms, and vertical farms, so can play to those strengths in conversations about the IS8.
Challenges	Tough market for life science businesses. It has been like this for the last 18 months, and there are still no signs that access to early stage funding is improving. There have been some failures in the sector. This is having a negative knock-on effect on the later stages of the business, the manufacturing chains especially.
Recruitment & Skills	None
Free Comment	None

Hospitality, Visitor Economy, Creative and Cultural Sectors

Name:	Joanna Richardson
Business:	Visit Kent (N.B. this firm has entered liquidation since this BAB meeting).
Opportunities & Good News	2027 is Year of the Normans. The Bayeux Tapestry will be displayed at British Museum in 2026. There will be a continent wide celebrations of Norman Legacy, led by Normandy's regional council. This will be launched at the World Travel Market on 4-6 November. Visit Kent was going to work with Visit England to look at role Kent can play to attract some of those visitors to our region. The forecast of value of French visitors in 2025 is £1.97bn.
Challenges	The national snapshot of April 25 (compared to April 24) shows: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• overnight trips down 21%• day trips up 10%• total spend up 11% This suggests that the cost of living crisis is stopping people taking longer, overseas breaks, and rather having shorter day trips. There is a slightly steadier position when looking at year to date position: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• overnight trips and days trips slightly down. Kent Business Barometer showed in May: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• footfall increased by 8.5% (compared to May last year).• increase in school group visits.• 63% cite the cost of living crisis as the biggest challenge for the sector (5% up on last report).
Recruitment & Skills	Visit Kent involved in a hospitality skills boost programme. They have worked with East Kent College that has run a hospitality passport programme in Thanet – which gave opportunities to 11 jobseekers. Also, 11 businesses signed up to Disability Confident Programme.

Free Comment	Visit Britain's target has been increased; the Minister wants to achieve 50 million annual visits to UK (up from 30m).
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Name:	Paul Turner
Business:	Marlowe Theatre
Opportunities & Good News	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marlowe Theatre won East Kent Apprenticeship Award. • Marlowe has tended to accept touring productions that visit the theatre, but for the first time this year, there is a home-grown show called the Girls (based on the Mitford sisters) that is touring from the Marlowe Theatre to 7 other venues across the UK. It is a £1m risk for the Marlowe – but producing shows is an area which the Marlowe has focused on moving into – as it helps with employment of creatives in the local area.
Challenges	<p>The challenges relate more to the sector, rather than specifically to the Marlowe Theatre.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A recent publication has said 41% of UK theatres are going to report a loss in the last financial year – with 34% of them being in excess of £0.5m. • Marlowe is not in that position though, and is not subsidised, so that is good news. • It is the mid-scale theatres across the UK that are really struggling.
Recruitment & Skills	- None
Free Comment	- None

Name:	Lisa Carlson
Business:	Business Improvement District (BID) & Visit Canterbury
Opportunities & Good News	<p>There's still much commercial interest in coming into Canterbury:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 36 new openings in the last 12 months. • 8 of those in the last 2 months alone.
Challenges	<p>It is an incredibly challenging time.</p> <p>As reported at BAB in April, footfall in Canterbury for the first quarter of the year was worse than any other first quarter following the pandemic. However, the latest survey shows footfall is increasing – but it is still to translate into sales.</p> <p>Canterbury has seen groups return, but there has been a short-term issue with the roadworks for the levelling up project.</p> <p>70% of town centre businesses are in retail and hospitality sectors.</p>
Recruitment & Skills	Canterbury BID is a conduit to connect people. The organisations has helped co-create a new VA course with Canterbury College.
Free Comment	In addition to running the Business Improvement District, Lisa delivers Visit Canterbury for the whole of the Canterbury district through Visit Kent.

Name:	Kanagaratnam Rajamenon (Menon)
Businesses:	Leaf Hotels Group, Abode Care Home, Oakdale Care Home & Hythe Service Station
Opportunities & Good News	<p>The hotel company:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is achieving a strong occupancy rate - Receiving positive client feedback and reviews - One of the hotels has been selected as a finalist in the Independent Hotels Show for the best design of the year - Entered a partnership with Eurotunnel and Ashford Outlet Centre, which is helping to promote the hotel group. <p>Demand for spaces in the care home is high, and it is nearly at full capacity.</p>
Challenges	<p>The current challenges for the hotel group are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the shortage of skilled staff, particularly the front office staff and chefs in the kitchens. This has arisen in part due to Home Office changes in the shortage occupancy lists. - The difficulty of attracting corporate conferences to the town centre hotel due to lack of car parking on site. - EV facilities by the hotel. KCC keep promising that EV chargers will be installed near the hotel, but this has yet to come to fruition. <p>The new rates for the care homes set by KCC are very confusing. The new KCC policy is to give one price band, and care homes must accept it; the prices are not tailored to individual business circumstances. Historically businesses would tender according to their overheads, expenses and location, now it is one price for the whole of Kent.</p> <p>Menon has sold one care home so he can invest in other industries. Many owners are doing likewise, as the sector's viability reduces.</p> <p>The current challenges for the service station are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that it is closed due to highways road improvements which will take 8 weeks to complete. The business usually takes £40,000 a day and this has dropped to £0 for 8 weeks. Half of the time there are no workmen working on the road, but the road remains closed. • Increased NI contributions are still a concern. • Volatile crude oil price.
Recruitment & Skills	As above – there is a shortage of skilled staff, particularly the hotel front office staff and chefs in the kitchens.
Free Comment	None

Business Membership Organisations

Name:	Tudor Price
Business:	Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce (KICC)
Opportunities & Good News	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with the Lower Thames Crossing to get a supply chain forum set up. • Supported a number of businesses to access the Sizewell C

	<p>supply chain opportunities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delighted with SPE checks come down • UK trade policy had many of the KICC asks in it. • Acquired 3 new patrons. • Launched 6 new membership packages. • People seem to be actively networking – 125 attendees at KICC's most recent business event. • Chambers' business awards are fully sponsored. • Entered into a memorandum of understanding with a Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tariffs kicking in, particularly fluctuating Aluminium and steel prices. • Business confidence still relatively fragile, and anxiety over potential income tax rises in the future, and how that would impact consumer spend. • Financiers are still risk-adverse, particularly around start-up and export. • There is a need to promote UK political stability to attract that foreign investment. • Missing out the Mayoral Strategic Authority status and its impact on policy and investment is a concern.
Recruitment & Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeing businesses not recruiting following the national insurance contribution increases, and focussing instead on the implementation of AI and upskilling the existing workforce with AI skills. • The ageing demographics and succession planning appears to be an emerging concerns in the professional services sector. Learning and Work Institute is doing research on barriers to investment in training, and Tudor will share that paper once it is completed.
Free Comment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quarterly Economic Survey is being undertaken currently. • There is some positivity out there.

Digital Sector

Name:	Callum Bailey
Business:	Duo Technology & Chair of Folkestone & Hythe BAB
Opportunities & Good News	<p>There are two sides to the business:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - On consultancy side, the firm is acting as consultants to the MOD, and potentially soon to the DBT. - On the Duo App side, the firm is moving into the second phase of this, and potentially adding an AI into this. The App helps streamline construction works on large sites.
Challenges	None
Recruitment & Skills	None
Free Comment	None

Name:	Nick Potter
Business:	Select Technology
Opportunities & Good News	Working with their customer base to look at how AI and robotic process automation can help implement efficiencies, rather than hiring new people.

Challenges	Growth is hard at the moment. Saw significant growth in 2023 and 2024, but it appears people are most cautious about implementing changes to their businesses in 2025. This appears to be partly due to the NIC and national minimum wage rises.
Recruitment & Skills	Difficult to recruit to positions as AI and robotic process automation is still relatively new. The firm is therefore focussed on upskilling their existing team.
Free Comment	The firm has been based in Kent for 30 years, but the experience of being part of BAB has shown the firm a new side of Kent, and Nick looks forward to being involved with BAB going forward.

Construction & Planning

Name:	Alex Hicken
Business:	DHA Planning
Opportunities & Good News	Big uptake in clients wanting to move forward with ideas; some of this is around the industrial strategy. An issue is making sure that the local authorities know about the Industrial Strategy and engage with that positively.
Challenges	A concern about devolution vacuum while things are put potentially on hold before a mayoral strategic authority comes in. Alex feels that there is not enough dialogue about devolution entails for businesses by the local authority.
Recruitment & Skills	None
Free Comment	None

Professional Services

Name:	Sam Mason
Business:	MBM Balance
Opportunities & Good News	None
Challenges	<p>A challenge can be selecting the correct AI to work with.</p> <p>Business confidence among their clients appears low, particularly in the hospitality and creative sectors. Conversely the construction sector seems more buoyant.</p>
Recruitment & Skills	<p>Working with Canterbury Christ Church University, hosting third year student placements; the firm hopes to continue this on into the next academic year.</p> <p>The feedback from these third year students is that they are finding graduate recruitment very difficult, which appears to be a trend across the industry. There have been some changes to do with apprenticeship funding; previously this has been through the apprentice levy, but this appears to be stopping, and it is not clear how apprenticeships will be funded going forward. This will impact graduate recruitment.</p> <p>MBM Balance has just recruited a great candidate to their bookkeeping team.</p>
Free Comment	None

Education Sector

Name:	Simon Cook
Business:	Mid Kent College
Opportunities & Good News	Simon was pleased to hear that three businesses were working closely with the colleges. He mentioned the good work taking place at the Food Innovation Hub in Broadstairs.
Challenges	<p>There is a significant number of 16 year olds applying to attend college, and this number is more than the Kent further education colleges can accommodate. The number of NEETS (Not in Education, Employment and Training) is rising.</p> <p>This implies that there has been a large number of young people that have not been given the right careers advice and guidance early enough in their schooling to make the most informed choice.</p> <p>The perversities of the funding structure also means that FE colleges are not paid upfront for taking on new students, rather a year later, so cashflow pressures arise.</p> <p>Simon Cook asked the businesses to continue to work with the schools and colleges on offering work experience placements to young people, so they can make better informed decisions.</p>
Recruitment & Skills	MKC's own recruitment challenge remains recruiting good quality teachers and staff that can train workforce in the future. This remains an issue in construction, engineering and tech.
Free Comment	KFE is waiting to hear if the bid for a Construction Technical Excellence College will be successful.

Name:	David Powell
Business:	University of Kent
Opportunities & Good News	<p>The University of Kent has opened up a centre for advanced diagnostics, in partnership with UCL and the University of Manchester.</p> <p>The Medway Docking Station is going ahead.</p>
Challenges	The current challenge is student recruitment. This year the Russell Group are hoovering up the international students.
Recruitment & Skills	None
Free Comment	None

Transport & Logistics

Name:	Matthew Arnold
Business:	Bayliss Executive Travel Ltd
Opportunities & Good News	<p>Generally upbeat position at the firm.</p> <p>The traditional coach season coming to an end, but have managed to smooth out demand somewhat with:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Huge increase in people wanting to travel to Golf venues around Kent, including Royal St George's.2. Positive uptick in people wanting to take day trips

Challenges	<p>There is a reduction in demand for people wanting to travel abroad – people are anxious about the new border requirements.</p> <p>Inconsistency in transit time at the border (both in Dover and Calais) is significantly increasing. Time ranges from half an hour to several hours. When it increases the travel time, it can have knock on effects due to regulations about maximum driving time. There have been three issues in the last week at the border.</p> <p>Availability of parts from mainland Europe is a real issue. Parts that took 48 hours to arrive from Spain in pre-Brexit times now takes 4 weeks to arrive.</p>
Recruitment & Skills	Skilled Engineer has been recruited, alongside 2 apprentices to develop the workshop.
Free Comment	National insurance contribution increases have been absorbed by the bottom line, as c. 30% of the bookings for the year were already in place before the announcement.

Name:	Vince Lucas
Business:	VA Rail
<i>Rather than speak about his specific business, Vince provided an update on the rail industry in general. He is KMEP Thematic Lead for infrastructure and a member of Transport for the South East (TfSE).</i>	
Opportunities & Good News	For the financial year 24/25, journeys were up 7% year-on-year. Revenue was up 8% when adjusted for inflation, and Southeastern reflects that national trend.
Challenges	The revenue yield remains lower now than during the pandemic, which is driving higher subsidy levels. This is due to less commuting and higher fares, with more leisure discounted fares.
Recruitment & Skills	There is an ageing demographic with the train crew workforce, and many train drivers are due to retire imminently.
Free Comment	Seven train companies are now re-nationalised; this includes Southeastern. Two more train companies are transferring this year.

Agriculture and Horticulture

Name:	Claire Eckley
Business:	Eckley Farms
Opportunities & Good News	Secured the premiums for arable crops so receiving a premium for growing more environmentally sensitive crops.
Challenges	<p>The weather is the biggest challenge currently. It is causing less grass to be harvested to go into the livestock industry.</p> <p>The price of beef and lamb remains very high. Starting to see lower stocks – it is a supply and demand problem. There is an issue arising about a number of abattoirs closing in the South East that can impact on animal welfare, as they will need to travel further distances. The NFU is coming</p>

	<p>together to see if a new abattoir could be built.</p> <p>Wheat prices remains very low.</p>
Recruitment & Skills	The Farm has been able to upskill young people to drive the tractors this year.
Free Comment	None

Name:	Carol Ford
Business:	Ford Synthesis
Opportunities & Good News	<p>Sales and demand for British produce is increasing.</p> <p>The National Food Strategy drive is helping to promote British produce.</p> <p>The EKC Food Innovation Lab in Broadstairs is now open.</p>
Challenges	<p>Poor data collection by Government and its data providers is undermining the contribution of food and drink to the national economy.</p> <p>Increase in national insurance contributions has had an impact on the sector.</p>
Recruitment & Skills	Worked with EKC and the other colleges to build a pipeline of young people from secondary schools – as few students are choosing this sector. Carol and the colleges will create a fresh food produce pilot.
Free Comment	<p>Fantastic Produced in Kent stand and Festival of Food Section at the Kent County Show, which Sophie Duchess of Edinburgh and Linden Kemkaran visited.</p> <p>Linden Kemkaran said at the event how supportive she was of the sector – both food and farming</p>

Marketing and PR Sectors

Name:	Andrew Metcalf
Business:	Maxim PR
Opportunities & Good News	<p>Strong pipeline; projects are looking good.</p> <p>Investor confidence is coming back.</p> <p>One of Andrew's clients, a solar farm, has got the necessary approvals to proceed.</p> <p>Buckmore Park has got approval which is good for the leisure economy.</p> <p>New clients coming through from the professional services sector.</p>
Challenges	<p>Delays in pre-apps in planning departments.</p> <p>The devolution agenda with Kent and Medway missing out on a mayor.</p> <p>Unrealistic expectations about the prices for work – both land and projects.</p>
Recruitment & Skills	None
Free Comment	30 th year of Maxim PR trading. At its launch, there was an event with multiple French businesses there. It would be wonderful if we could do more with international partners. (Liz Gibney an others agreed).

	ACTION: Sarah Nurdén to speak to Dafydd about having a Straits Committee/International Collaboration update at a future agenda).
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