

Draft minutes from BAB on 30th October 2025

Chairman's Welcome:

- Vince Lucas (BAB Vice-Chairman) welcomed the attendees to the meeting.
- A special welcome was given to Paul King, KCC Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Coastal Regeneration, to his first meeting of BAB.

Introduction from Paul King:

- Paul King started his introduction by publicly thanking his officers: Steve Samson for his hard work ensuring that a '[Brand Kent](#)' service was delivered in house by KCC following the unfortunate liquidation of Visit Kent and Locate in Kent; and Sarah Nurden – supported by the Vince Lucas – for the Grow in Kent event on 26 September to call for the return of international rail services to Kent.
- The news that the Office of Rail and Road has allowed access to Virgin Trains Europe (VTE) to Temple Mills Depot was step one to getting European travel back to Kent.
- Paul King spoke positively about [No Use Empty](#), which is a fantastic scheme that loans money to bring empty and derelict properties (both residential and commercial) back into use.
- He spoke of the Council's support for the [Port of Dover's 2050 masterplan](#) and the [Lower Thames Crossing](#), which both offer great opportunity to SMEs to be part of the supply chain, and offer skills and training opportunities.
- The Reform Administration is about to issue its strategic 'Reforming Kent' plan, which is focussed on prioritising Kent first, achieving the best value for money, and a simplification of policy-making going forward.
- Early next year, the Reform-led Council will introduce a Commercial Strategy. The strategy will focus on achieving better value for money for the £1.5 bn annual spend, and having a Kent-first policy so there will be more opportunities for local businesses.
- He concluded by stressing that the skills and training agenda is very important to him. He has visited three skills boot camps run by KCC so far. It was excellent to see the engagement from the clients that are really fired up and ready to go. The [Skills Bootcamps](#) and [Connect to Work](#) are a really positive way of getting people with challenges back into work. He is also asking the team to focus on apprenticeships, as the apprenticeship market appears to be quite disparate, and KCC wants to simplify the process, to help more people get matched up to the right apprentice provision for them.

International Rail Services and Temple Mills Depot Access:

- Vince Lucas and Sarah Nurden updated the board that the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) has announced its decision to allow Virgin Trains access to the Temple Mills depot. The full ORR press release is [here](#).
- The decision to allow competition on the line is a major positive milestone, but there is still a long way to go.
- In their [letter to the ORR](#), Virgin (VTE Holdings Limited) say: *"VTE has been clear from the beginning in its ambition to return services to Kent, as referenced by Sir Richard Branson in his Foreword to VTE's 18 July submission to the ORR. It has also noted the degree of commercial uncertainty and operational complexity that is involved in re-establishing these stations. In that context, VTE would like to make clear to the ORR that if either of the stations are re-opened, its services will stop in Kent"*.

- There is now much work to be done to ensure that the Kent stations can be reopened – issues such as Entry-Exit Systems, PAF officers, track access arrangements, operational costs, etc need to be bottomed out.
- DfT has agreed in principle be part of a working group with key partners, such as London St Pancras Highspeed, and the local authorities, to work through these issues.
- KCC, ABC, and DBC have written to Virgin and Eurostar expressing their desire to see the two train operating companies be members of the DfT working group to.
- There is an All Party-Parliamentary Group meeting with the ORR on 12 November.
- Virgin potentially operating on the line is probably 4 or 5 years away, and there are still hurdles to overcome. Eurostar are likely to robustly defend their monopoly position. However, there is now a much more positive attitude by the DfT and the Rail Minister than we saw 12 months ago, which is very encouraging. The task for local stakeholders and businesses is to keep the pressure on government to ensure a successful final outcome.

Note to BAB members post-meeting - The 30th anniversary of the opening of Ashford International Train Station is happening on **8th January 2026**. ABC is hosting a 'Breakfast in Paris' themed event on that day to keep up the press attention. ABC will send out invitations to invited guests in due course – but if BAB members could post on social media and Linked In channels around that date, it would be helpful.

Future of Tourism and Inward Investment in Kent:

- Steve Samson presented the response to the closure of Visit Kent and Locate in Kent, outlining the creation of an in-house team of six individuals at Kent County Council – funded by KCC and Medway Council - to maintain critical tourism and investment services.
- Interviews are scheduled for potential recruits in the next week. These interviews are with experienced staff that previously
- The 'Brand Kent' service would deliver destination marketing and promote the tourism offer of the county as well as inland investment opportunities, making sure that there's a single point of contact for industry. The 'Brand Kent' team will also provide inward investment support, with the team managing a pipeline of business expansion and investment projects, and providing a range of support to interested investors.
- KCC has heard there's a real value in market insights and market intelligence - both from a visitor economy and investment perspective. The 'Brand Kent' team will be considering questions such as: which are the key visitor target markets, where do visitors come from, how do we target those visitors, etc.
- KCC is working hard to secure assets from both organisations and has already actively engaged with the administrators for Visit Kent, and due to engage with the administrators for Locate in Kent to ensure the transfer of web assets, research, market data and intelligence.
- There's an opportunity for organisations that previously invested in both organisations to contribute to receive an enhanced service.

In the discussion:

- Carol Ford, who is the new Executive Chair for Produced in Kent in January 26, offered the support of the organisation to help the team with Destination Marketing.
- Vince Lucas asked about engagement with Visit England and Visit Britain. Steve Samson explained that Visit Kent had previously been granted Local Visitor Economy Partnership Status from Visit England. This had pros and cons, but it did mean Kent was approached for press trips and familiarisation visits. Stephanie Holt-Castle and Adam Bryan (KCC and MC) met with Visit England last week, and it was agreed that pursuing that reaccreditation should be on the list of things that the Brand Kent team should look at as soon as they're in post.

- Lisa Carlson asked about whether there will be an oversight board (or boards) with industry representation to steer the new Brand Kent service and ensure relevance and adaptability. Steve Samson responded that KCC is keen to have industry represented to ensure that the team is steered and relevant – but the exact shape of that is still to be defined. **ACTION:** Steve Samson was asked to update BAB on the governance structure for the new boards and industry involvement, when possible.

Health, Work, and Skills Strategy for Kent:

- Steve Samson discussed the recently published Get Kent and Medway Working Plan. It highlighted the significant economically inactive population (circa 20% of the population), barriers to employment, and the development of an action plan with input from employers and stakeholders.
- Slide 2 of the presentation embedded in these notes contains the numbers of people who are classified as economic inactive. Many people have caring responsibilities or are long-term sick. Slide 3 shows the rationale of inactive people as to why they struggle in the workforce. Slides 4 & 5 show elements of the Get Kent and Medway Working Action Plan, and the timelines for delivery.



Get Kent and
Medway Working PI

In the discussion:

- Paul Turner asked if there is a tool that can identify and address barriers - such as those related to age or diversity - in the recruitment process, including at the job advertising stage, so businesses can make sure that we're tackling them issues early. Steve Samson said yes, there's a clear opportunity. For example, the 18–25 age group faces significant mental health barriers to employment. KCC is already progressing work through our Work and Health Strategy, focusing on inclusive employability and tools to make recruitment more accessible for key target groups. Steve Samson added that there is an opportunity if you'd like to be involved in any discussions about what that might look like in terms of how we can make things easier for both the employer and recruiter side and the target groups that we'd like to support; Paul accepted this offer. **ACTION:** Steve Samson to contact Paul Turner on this issue.
- Tudor Price mentioned many employers are quite anxious about taking on people with long term health conditions and protected characteristics. They won't talk about it publicly because they feel that might be sort of labelled as being prejudice, but they're worried about how to terminate employment of someone who is underachieving. Tudor visited the Royal British Legion Industry yesterday, and they are very experienced in managing people with health conditions and their HR teams would have great insights for other employers on what can or cannot be done.
- Jo Nolan said investing in training creates a loyal workforce, as people feel valued and supported. Screen South work with museums to include disabled and neurodivergent curators has been highly successful, helping many return to careers after long breaks (sometimes of 10+ years).
- Tudor Price said employers can feel pressured to retain staff with protected characteristics, sometimes making others redundant first. While inclusion is vital, getting it wrong can create real challenges, so careful implementation is essential.
- Vince Lucas said we need strong processes and tailored support for SMEs, who often lack HR expertise, to ensure they become great employers.

Transitional Regional Energy Strategic Plans Consultation:

- Sarah Nurden explained full Regional Energy Strategic Plans (RESPs) will launch in 2027, but a transitional RESP version is being fast-tracked for January 2026, with consultation now open.

- The consultation focuses on supply (generation and infrastructure) but lacks detailed analysis of industrial energy demand.
- Maps of industrial clusters in the consultation is incomplete.
- The transitional RESP also has notable exemptions – the analysis of the energy sector excludes key Kentish sectors like maritime, offshore wind, nuclear, and rail electrification.
- Sarah Nurden mentioned her concern that decisions on investment are starting to be made without robust demand data, risking misalignment with real business needs and connection challenges.
- **ACTION:** The board agreed that Sarah Nurden should draft a response to the Transitional Regional Energy Strategic Plan consultation on behalf of the Business Advisory Board, highlighting concerns about the lack of demand data, inadequate representation of industrial clusters, insufficient consideration of interconnectors, inappropriate exemptions relating to maritime, offshore wind, nuclear and rail electrification. The response should stress it is inappropriate to consider strategic investment needs before the evidence base considering supply and demand is available.

In the discussion:

- Nick Fenton said he raised the energy and connector issues with MHCLG and government for some time as it's a major barrier to development, with no advance information until planning permission is granted. These energy bodies must engage with councils to understand future demand.

Local Growth Plan and Local Innovation Partnership Funding (LIPF):

- Sarah Nurden announced the appointment of Metro Dynamics to analyse the Kent and Medway's relative strengths in the 8 "high-growth" industrial strategy sectors and the foundational sector for the local growth plan.
- Due to time constraints, she briefly described ongoing efforts to coordinate a single bid for £20m from the UK Research and Innovation fund. Businesses-Universities-Councils must submit a joint bid under the 'Triple Helix' model. At the time of the BAB meeting, the most promising theme for the LIPF bid was either the 'food and health economy' or 'creative innovation'.
- **ACTION:** Sarah Nurden to communicate with the Business Advisory Board via email regarding engagement opportunities and updates as Metro Dynamics progresses with the analysis of high growth and foundational sectors for the local growth plan.

Note to BAB members post-meeting - The university of Greenwich, Kent and Canterbury Christ Church met with KCC and Medway Council the following week and agreed a bid relating to the food and health economy showed the strongest promise.

Future Meetings:

- The BAB meetings for 2026 will be held on:
 - Wednesday 4th February 2026 – 9am to 11am
 - Thursday 30th April 2026 – 9am to 11am
 - Thursday 30th July 2026 – 9am to 11am
 - Thursday 12th November 2026 – 9am to 11am
- BAB members requested the next BAB meeting be held face-to-face. Tudor Price suggested the Chamber of Commerce as a venue.
- **ACTION:** Sarah Nurden to liaise with KICC and send out venue details for meeting on 4 February, once confirmed.

Individual Economic Commentary – Provided by BAB Members

Business Membership Organisations

Name:	Tudor Price
Business:	Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce (KICC)
Opportunities & Good News	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Great Construction Expo held on 2 October 25, with record numbers of attendants and exhibitors. At the event, Tudor had a really good conversation with the Lower Thames Crossing team about all the opportunities that should unfold for Kent & Medway in the future. KICC is meeting with Gatwick very soon to talk about their northern runway and supply chain. KICC is also talking to Sealink, which is National Grid, about the subsea cable to bring the power into and out of the electricity network in both Kent (near Pegwell Bay) and Suffolk. All these conversation are to harness the supply chain opportunities for the Kent businesses across the patch.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Employment Rights Bill is currently progressing through the House of Lords, with some amendments being made. KICC has successfully influenced certain changes, particularly around Employment Tribunal rights and probationary periods. There are concerns about the Get Kent and Medway Working provisions. Lobbying continues by KICC for a long-term glide path for implementation of the new employment rights. As an enabling act, the legislation allows future measures to be introduced on a flexible timetable, requiring ongoing support for employers to navigate its impact.
Recruitment & Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A
Free Comment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Chamber is launching an AI Academy, backed by the British Chambers of Commerce, starting later this year. The AI Academy aims to boost productivity for Kent and Medway businesses, which aligns with KICC's remit to support growth.

Name:	Martin Prentice
Business:	Institute of Directors (IOD)
Opportunities & Good News	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The government has launched its SME business plan, committing to end late payments and reduce administrative costs. Poor payment practices cost the UK economy £10 billion annually and lead to the closure of over 30 businesses a day. These measures will require consultation and legislative changes, with IoD and the Chamber working to ensure all business interests are considered.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> While the economy held up reasonably well over summer, underlying trends in construction remain a significant concern for UK growth ambitions. Support is needed to alleviate cost pressures and deliver long-term stability for the construction industry.
Recruitment & Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The construction sector faces acute skills shortages, making

	infrastructure and housing delivery critical; the IoD urges the budget to tackle systemic barriers through planning reform and skills development.
Free Comment	<p>Ahead of the Chancellor's Autumn Statement on 26/11, the IoD made a budget submission focusing on three priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating a 10-year strategy for benefit reform to improve work incentives and sustainability. • Improving the tax roadmap for businesses to deliver stability and reduce the tax burden. • Making sensible reforms to the Employment Rights Bill to preserve jobs.

Digital, Marketing & PR

Name:	Tom Chown
Business:	Digitom
Opportunities & Good News	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall activity this year has remained fairly consistent, with no significant uplift in September compared to previous years. • Historically, September sees a post-summer increase, but this year's trend suggests a "slow and steady" new normal. • The reasons for this slowdown are unclear, though new technologies in the market may be a factor.
Recruitment & Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A young teenager became the UK's youngest qualified digger driver, a story shared on YouTube to inspire more young people into construction careers. • The story also aired on KMTV, reaching a local audience and promoting pathways into the construction industry.
Free Comment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • November marks the 10th anniversary of B Corp in the UK, with celebrations planned and two founding members based in Kent (Cook and Elvis & Kresse).

Name:	Lisa – Substituting for Miranda Chapman
Business:	Pillory Barn
Opportunities & Good News	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demand for website refreshes remains strong as businesses prepare for year-end.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The creative and digital sector is trading in a challenging market, with uncertainty ahead of the November budget being the biggest concern.
Recruitment & Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive progress in that there is strong engagement between Kent's universities, colleges, and local businesses to address skills gaps, supporting sector growth. • Recruitment challenges persist, but application levels look promising.
Free Comment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pride in Medway nominations for 2026 are now open, and support in promoting them is encouraged.

Name:	Andrew Metcalf
Business:	Maxim PR

Opportunities & Good News	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After a quiet few months with project delays, demand has surged as clients want delivery before Christmas, creating a “feast or famine” situation. • Promoting a new 600-space truck stop near Dover, which is a significant development for logistics. • Panattoni has purchased a 70-acre site in Lenham for major multinational logistics and distribution plans. • Britannia Refined Metals is investing £41 million in a closed-loop recycling project at North Street, supporting the circular economy. • Secured planning permission in Dartford for a company to recycle 500,000 fridges, boosting sustainable practices. • Kent Property Market Report launches next week with a positive outlook despite headwinds; emphasis on optimism and highlighting strong projects across the region.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A
Recruitment & Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A
Free Comment	<p>AGENDA REQUEST:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACTION: Sarah Nurden to speak to Dafydd about having a Straits Committee/International Collaboration update at a future agenda).

Name:	Callum Bailey
Business:	Duo Technology & Chair of Folkestone & Hythe BAB
Opportunities & Good News	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The year began with some challenges, but the business has continued to grow organically, particularly through the Duo app. • Plans are in place to accelerate growth this year, despite a challenging market environment. • Overall outlook remains positive heading into next year.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A
Recruitment & Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A
Free Comment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A

Construction & Planning

Name:	Karl Elliott
Business:	Clague Architects
Opportunities & Good News	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive news: strong activity across sectors, including truck stops and major projects in Ashford, Canterbury, and surrounding areas unaffected by Stodmarsh. • Overall turnover is up by 20% year-to-date, reflecting robust performance despite ongoing challenges.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposed changes to employer National Insurance contributions next year could significantly impact costs, creating unbudgeted financial pressure. • The Stodmarsh issue continues to block developments in affected areas, with no confirmed launch date for credits despite proposals from Canterbury and Ashford. • Canterbury city centre remains stalled, with major sites like the former Debenhams and Nations properties being redesigned as owners seek alternatives.

Recruitment & Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential employment law changes may worsen existing staffing challenges, leading to a decision to maintain current workforce rather than expand.
Free Comment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A

Name:	Henry – Substitute for Mark Quinn
Business:	Quinn Estates
Opportunities & Good News	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong sales at The Brook in Deal, with 90% of homes sold and first completions taking place this week. Despite wider market challenges, demand remains robust for well-located schemes with the right product mix.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The land and housing market remains slow, with many landowners and developers pausing decisions until economic policy certainty improves. Activity in the land market has dropped significantly, and the delayed budget has added uncertainty, making future business planning difficult. Momentum across the sector has slowed, but the pipeline is being progressed to enable quick action when confidence returns.
Recruitment & Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A
Free Comment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The planning inquiry for the Highsted Park scheme (proposing 8,250 new homes) is entering its final two days and has been progressing well.

Name:	Nick Fenton
Business:	Kent Housing and Developers' Group
Opportunities & Good News	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The commercial property market remains positive, with developers preparing to build and secure land at favourable prices.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private housing sales are very slow, significantly below expectations, with market uncertainty worsened by the delayed Autumn Statement. Social housing providers are inactive, leaving schemes like the 450-home development in Thanet stalled. Current housebuilding levels are lower than during the 2008–09 recession, raising major concerns for the sector. <p>There is an urgent need to prioritise care home development, particularly for people with learning difficulties and other needs.</p>
Recruitment & Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A
Free Comment	<p>AGENDA REQUEST:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACTION: A presentation on the Stodmarsh issue should be brought to the Business Advisory Board for further discussion.

Hospitality, Visitor Economy, Sports, Creative and Cultural Sectors

Name:	Simon Storey
Business:	Kent Cricket
Opportunities & Good News	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Renewal rates for next year are encouraging, showing continued confidence in the organisation's role in business

	<p>development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Membership numbers are up, and event-based experiences remain popular, with strong ticket sales for fireworks and sports events. • Women's sport continues to grow, with near sell-out for England Women vs New Zealand Women in May 2026, highlighting positive momentum in the sector.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The operating environment remains challenging due to rising costs and inflation, requiring close collaboration with commercial partners to deliver value.
Recruitment & Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment pressures persist after years of pay freezes, with growing competition from sectors offering pay awards; focus is on investing in existing resources rather than hiring new staff.
Free Comment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simon Storey is stepping down as CEO of Kent Cricket on 31 October 25, with Nimmo Read appointed as Acting Chief Executive. Simon will remain in an advisory capacity, supporting the club on a part-time basis. Simon expressed his wish to continue on BAB going forward.

Name:	Paul Turner
Business:	Marlowe Theatre
Opportunities & Good News	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fiddler on the Roof is completely sold out – a strong positive result. • Completed the first-ever tour originating from Canterbury, reaching seven venues nationwide and attracting 18,000 attendees. • The tour created 30 jobs and plans are underway for an extended 15-week tour next year, which will likely add three permanent internal roles. • Overall, significant growth and ambition for next year, with a strong emphasis on skills development and expanding production capacity.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment
Recruitment & Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment challenges remain, requiring freelancers from outside the region and a focus on upskilling the internal team for future roles.
Free Comment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Marlow has invested heavily in Christmas lights this year, promising a refreshed and exciting display when switched on.

Name:	Lisa Carlson
Business:	Business Improvement District (BID) & Visit Canterbury
Opportunities & Good News	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive engagement from private sector partners and districts in supporting inward investment and tourism, showing strong commitment to the sector. • Commercial market remains resilient, with nine openings in the past two months and seven more expected before year-end, despite nervousness ahead of the budget. • Visit Canterbury consortium continues to invest in tourism through new films, group travel products, and campaign imagery, benefiting Herne Bay and rural communities. • Encouraging signs that businesses are willing to invest in events

	and community engagement despite economic uncertainty.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant concern around proposed employment law changes and the increase in minimum wage, which impacts staffing costs in hospitality-led towns like Canterbury. • Footfall in Canterbury is down about 1% year-on-year, while spend is up 1.3%, but this still lags behind inflation, signalling ongoing pressure on consumer behaviour. • Energy and water resilience are critical issues, with flash floods in July causing three evacuations and flooding 24 businesses, highlighting the need for robust planning. <p>AGENDA REQUEST:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACTION: A discussion on flash food prevention to come to a future BAB.
Recruitment & Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment and retention remain major challenges across the food and beverage sector, making workforce planning unpredictable.
Free Comment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Levelling-up works limited space for major Christmas events, but businesses rallied to secure sponsorship and maintain festive activity. • Canterbury will host a major Christmas celebration with 12 stages and activities across the city, reflecting strong demand for event-led experiences. • The Association of Town and City Management is actively involved in the Martin's Law Advisory Group, focusing on its rollout and implications for multiple sectors across the county. • The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for town and city centres has resumed operations and is now chaired by Vicky Slade. • Overall, a "glass half full" approach is essential, focusing on collaboration and resilience to overcome challenges and leverage opportunities.

Name:	Jo Nolan
Business:	Screen South
Opportunities & Good News	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create South East programme has recruited two new cohorts (around 60 people) with strong representation from Kent, helping creative companies become investment-ready. • Collaboration with PACT (Producers Association of Cinema and Television) and the Production Guild to develop a regional plan for Kent and surrounding counties to strengthen government support for the screen sector. • Recent workshop and panel at Screen Ashford explored Kent's position within the national picture and regional partnerships for film and TV. • PACT has produced new strategy reports that will inform regional planning; updates will be shared with key stakeholders. • Employment and new projects in film and television are starting to pick up after a difficult period marked by strikes and industry challenges. • Creative Kent membership and governance are being reinvigorated, with broader strategic input at county level; deputy chair role recently appointed.

Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work is underway with Sarah Wren at the Council on a legacy plan for Create South East, as the programme ends in March, to ensure continued business development support.
Recruitment & Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upcoming roundtable for the creative sector, supported by Camilla Maurice (the LSIP project manager at KICC), will focus on embedding skills priorities into future planning. 20 young people from schools and colleges across Kent, who created films through the Kent BFI Academy, will showcase their work at Pinewood in January. The BFI Academy initiative highlights strong engagement with youth talent and creative skills development across the county.
Free Comment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A

Professional Services

Name:	Sam Mason
Business:	MBM Balance
Opportunities & Good News	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AI advancements are enabling greater efficiencies for clients and within the practice.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HMRC's <i>Making Tax Digital for Self-Assessment</i> comes into effect in April, requiring landlords and self-employed individuals to adopt new reporting processes. Ensuring all clients are aware and prepared for these legislative changes is a major challenge. New Companies House ID verification rules require all company directors to verify their identity, or risk being unable to file accounts and confirmation statements. Uncertainty around business decisions persists due to the upcoming budget, reflecting wider sector concerns.
Recruitment & Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued collaboration with Christchurch University to support/host third-year accounting students, following excellent feedback last year.
Free Comment	None

Agriculture and Horticulture

Name:	Carol Ford
Business:	Ford Synthesis
Opportunities & Good News	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The sector has united in recent months with strong support from Kent County Council and Medway Council. There is significant progress on the Local Innovation Partnership Fund and collaboration with Growing Kent & Medway, alongside universities, to boost sector innovation. Recent meeting with Kent County Council leadership (Linden Kemkaran and Paul King) and businesses received excellent feedback, reinforcing commitment to invest in the sector. Businesses are now actively recognising the need to invest in their own sector and promote innovation more visibly.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing challenges include the Employment Rights Bill and Low Pay Commission proposals, such as a levy of around £12.80 and plans to introduce a single national living wage.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inheritance tax changes remain a concern, though previously covered in other updates.
Recruitment & Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The sector is encouraging collaboration with universities and colleges to align courses with sector needs and strengthen skills development. Plans underway to create and expand a Centre of Excellence for skills, building on successful models like the construction sector's technical college. Strong business backing for skills initiatives, particularly in fresh produce, with potential to extend momentum to the wider food and drink sector. She identified gaps such as recruitment for trading standards roles, which could be addressed through collective action and sector-led solutions.
Free Comment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall, a positive outlook with growing collaboration, innovation, and skills initiatives positioning Kent's food and drink sector for future success.

Public Sector

Name:	Saliha Cinar
Business:	Medway Council
Opportunities & Good News	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grant funding for businesses has been doubled, covering both business growth and green grants for cost-effective technologies and decarbonisation. Business support services have been expanded after previous oversubscription, ensuring more businesses can access help. Government's Pride in Place fund will be partly used for shop front grants, investing in town centre improvements. Overall, these initiatives aim to boost business resilience and enhance local economic development.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A
Recruitment & Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A
Free Comment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A

Transport & Logistics

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Southeastern will introduce additional high-speed services in December, improving late evening and Saturday connections. Further discussions are planned with Southeastern to explore future service enhancements.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The main rail challenge is maximising the use of existing assets, particularly High Speed 1 - this remains a priority over acquiring

	new assets.
Recruitment & Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Southeastern ranked 24th in The Sunday Times Top 100 Apprenticeships, showcasing a strong UK-leading programme covering roles from train drivers to onboard staff. • The apprenticeship programme details are available on Southeastern's website, reflecting their commitment to skills development.
Free Comment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A

DRAFT