

SB14-01

North Kent Enterprise Zone Strategic Board

Minutes of 13th meeting held on Wednesday 9th September 2020 via MS Teams Videoconference.

Board Members & Representatives Present

Bernard Spring (Chair)
 Carole Barron, University of Kent (HE Rep)
 Rachael Bennett, Maidstone BC
 Gavin Cleary, LIK
 Ellie Dunnet (Maidstone BC as Accountable Body)
 Cllr Howard Doe, Medway Council
 Alex Hicken, DHA Planning
 Richard Longman, TGKP
 Matthew Norwell, TGKP
 Ian Piper, Ebbsfleet Development Corporation
 David Smith, KCC

Also attending:

Anita Glover, Locate in Kent

Apologies

BS Adam Bryan, SELEP
 CB Simon Cook, MidKent College (FE Rep)
 RB William Cornall, Maidstone BC
 GC Cllr Rodney Chambers, Medway
 ED Council
 HD Cllr Alan Jarrett, Medway Council (Cllr
 Doe deputising)

RL

MN

IP

DS

AG

Action

1. Welcome & Introduction

- 1.1. The Chairman welcomed Board members and others participating in the call.
- 1.2. There were no declarations of interest.
- 1.3. Board Members were reminded that any items that were confidential (commercially or otherwise) should be identified as such for exclusion from the published minutes.

2. Minutes of last meeting (20 September 2019) and matters arising SB13-01

- 2.1. The minutes were agreed. There were no actions outstanding.

3. Status of Enterprise Zones and formal arrangements SB13-02

- 3.1. RL introduced his paper explaining that the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) originally agreed with Government and partners had expired on 31 March 2020. There was no clear message from Cities & Local Growth Unit about their intentions. Feedback from other EZs indicated that some were pursuing local MOUs between partners, but BEIS were not seeking to be signatories. The Board was asked whether we should actively seek renewal and updating of the MOU.
- 3.2. Following discussion the Board concluded that there was no value in pursuing an updated MOU with Government nor ones between partners.

4. Refresh of Enterprise Zones initiative – SB13-03

- 4.1. RL's paper explained the initiative via the LEP Network, to which NKEZ was contributing, to make the case to Government for re-energising national support for enterprise zones, particularly in the context of economic response to Covid-19. The Network's proposals included extending the lifespan of enterprise zone incentives (e.g. business rates discounts).
- 4.2. In discussion Board members recognised that Government's agenda has substantially moved on to Freeports, and despite the overlaps with enterprise zone principles has

given no clear signals about direction of travel on EZs. If Government is asking LEPs to prepare recovery and resilience plans and these make no mention of the role of EZs this would be a negative policy signal. But there was evidence that EZs were having an impact and allowing them more time to deliver would be a realistic ask, particularly given the imperatives around boosting employment. Linking to the previous agenda item, a package of asks could be reflected in new MOUs and a deal around extending the lifespan of incentives tied to fresh employment targets in EZs, and potentially linked to other programmes such as Kickstarter.

- 4.3. In conclusion the Board **agreed** that we should continue to support the LEP Network initiative and suggested that the priorities around employment as part of post-Covid-19 should be a strong element of the rationale.

5. Updates on NKEZ as a whole and individual schemes – SB13-04

- 5.1. RL's paper set the context for the updates from local delivery partners, effectively covering a full year because of cancellation of the March Board meeting because of the pandemic. The impact this and other delays had had on progress, together with incomplete and inconsistent monitoring information, meant that a meaningful 3rd year progress report following the pattern of previous years would be problematic. The Board did not express a view on this, so the Coordinator has taken an executive decision not to compile a free-standing 2019-20 report; a 2020-21 report could include retrospective review of progress overall.

5.2. Kent Medical Campus

- RB and AH reported that the Maidstone Innovation Centre (now its official name) had reached 1st floor in construction, only a few weeks behind schedule. Harrison's had been appointed as agents and 3 pre-lets had already been secured. The business support element of the Sector Support Funded work, delivered by NCL, was underway with 9 companies LEP-wide already interested.
- The school adjacent to KMC and accessed through it was due to open the week of the meeting. Major highway works on the local junction improvements would start in November but would have to avoid Christmas restrictions.
- KMC were soft-marketing a prospectus for a 50,000 sq ft Health & Wellbeing cluster on the campus. There were expressions of interest for ca 30,000 sq ft already and discussions taking place with three parties. Reserved matters applications should be submitted early in the new year.
- RL queried the outcome of KMC's application to amend the planning condition restricting qualifying business sectors. This had been withdrawn but was likely to be kept under regular review.

5.3. Ebbsfleet Garden City

- Northfleet Embankment East (NEE). IP reported that the Berkeley modular housing factory was largely complete and fitting out was underway when pandemic broke out: opening has been deferred to mid-2021 reflecting Berkeley's reading of construction demand. On the remainder of NEE, EDC were finalising site acquisition from Homes England, and agreement was reached with GBC to acquire the site from EDC with a scheme to bring forward small business units.

Action

- Northfleet Embankment West (NEW) was proving complicated. EDC were trying to negotiate purchase to get control of the commercial land but hadn't yet agreed terms and needed business case approval from MHCLG to make the acquisition.
- Northfleet Rise: EDC were refreshing the outline planning permission for Ebbsfleet Central as part of the masterplanning work currently underway. IP saw Northfleet Rise as being some way off in terms of phasing.

5.4. Innovation Park Medway

- Ground investigations have found more archaeology which has added time to the schedule, but progress is being made. There is strong public interest in the IPM based on the prospect of employment opportunities. Highways England have continued to be slow to respond, but engagement has been more productive. This is an example of the disconnect between Government economic policy and 'single purpose' agencies, and of the Lower Thames Crossing potentially having a blighting effect on development proposals.
- GC queried whether this was an issue where the Thames Estuary Envoy might help unblock Highways England. **Action: MN and GC to discuss handling and liaise with Cllr Jarrett and Kate Willard as appropriate.**

MN, GC

6. Marketing

- 6.1. AG took the Board through a presentation on the digital marketing campaign to date and options for the future, recognising that any activity would require fresh budgetary provision.
- 6.2. The Board's discussion hinged around two perspectives. The first was concern that until there was a product to sell (e.g. at EGC and IPM) active marketing seemed premature. The second was that having established reasonable visibility and awareness of the NKEZ proposition we should try to maintain momentum: this was about high-level marketing/awareness raising rather than selling to specific occupiers. GC advised that a 2-year lead time for investment decisions about premises/location was not unusual, so even where product is not expected until 2021/22 it was worth strategic marketing now. He also suggested that the time to do marketing was during a recession, a risk presented by the pandemic.
- 6.3. MBC were receptive to the idea of a light touch proposal (£5k-£10k) for the period to March 2022 from LIK, co-funded across the partners.
- 6.4. IP advised that for EGC this was not a question of money but timing, and wondered whether a better approach might be to incorporate NKEZ into any broader promotion of North Kent. AG advised that LIK would continue highlighting NKEZ among the key sites of interest as part of their wider marketing offer; and Creative Estuary would be doing some marketing activity from November that could also promote some sector opportunities. GC acknowledged that there was quite a lot of product in North Kent attractive to investors: NKEZ might have to work harder to get its story across.
- 6.5. Summing up the Chair concluded that there did not seem an appetite for an NKEZ-specific digital marketing strategy at the present time. But LIK should continue to promote NKEZ as part of the wider North Kent offering; and there would be **value in a 3-way conversation between GC, DS and IP about the best way of handling EGC**

IP, GC, DS

Action

opportunities in this context. The Board should review the position at its next meeting. The Board **agreed** this approach.

7. Implementation Plan

- 7.1. RL briefly summarised his paper, explaining that the initial 3-year implementation plan, which had been updated after twelve months, was now out of date. He recommended a simplified revised plan focusing on the vision and ambitions for NKEZ, the delivery schedule and any marketing strategy (taking account of the discussion on the previous item). Any other matters featuring in the original plan would either be covered in local delivery plans or dispensed with altogether.
- 7.2. The Board agreed this recommendation. **Action: RL to provide and circulate a draft for consideration by the Delivery Group.**

RL

8. AOB

- 8.1. The Chair acknowledged that Matthew Norwell was leaving TGKP to take up a new role at LB Bexley, and thanked him for his contribution to the Strategic Board.

TGKP

5 November 2020