

SB15-01

## North Kent Enterprise Zone Strategic Board

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Minutes of 14<sup>th</sup> meeting held on Monday 15<sup>th</sup> March via MS Teams Videoconference.

### Board Members & Representatives Present

Bernard Spring (Chair)	BS
Carole Barron, University of Kent (HE Rep)	CB
Suzanne Bennett, SELEP (deputising for Adam Bryan)	SBe
Stuart Bobby, Gravesham BC	SBo
Cllr Rodney Chambers, Medway Council	RC
William Cornall, Maidstone BC	WC
Ellie Dunnet (Maidstone BC as Accountable Body)	ED
Alex Hicken, DHA Planning	AH
Cllr Alan Jarrett, Medway Council	AJ
Richard Longman, TGKP	RL
Ian Piper, Ebbsfleet Development Corporation	IP
David Smith, KCC	DS
<b>Also attending:</b>	
Joanne Cable, Medway Council	JC
Alex Riley, SELEP	AR

### Apologies

Adam Bryan, SELEP
Gavin Cleary, LIK
Simon Cook, MidKent College (FE Rep)
Anita Glover, LIK

### Action

#### 1. Welcome & Introduction

- 1.1. The Chairman welcomed Board members and others participating in the call. Unfortunately, Anita Glover who had been due to cover item 6 was unable to attend at short notice so substantive discussion would be deferred until the next meeting.
- 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 (9th September 2020) and matters arising - SB14-01

- 2.1. The minutes were agreed. There were no actions outstanding that were not covered by the agenda.

#### 3. NKEZ and scheme updates - SB14-02

- 3.1. RL introduced his paper and drew attention to the ongoing impacts of Covid-19 and the wider economic situation on progress with bringing forward sites and premises. This in turn affected the level of detail in the current, and probably last, iteration of the implementation plan which had been circulated for information. RL also referred to the ongoing national campaign by the LEP Network to extend the period during which EZ business incentives would be available. As things stood, occupier incentives would no longer be available to new businesses after 31 March 2022.

#### 3.2. Kent Medical Campus

- WC reported that the UK Care-operated step-down facility, completed 12 months ago, was generating positive feedback so far. On Maidstone Innovation Centre, there were minor Covid-related delays, but Rydon had excelled on keeping the

build programme on track, and some units had already been pre-let. NCL were delivering the support for life-science businesses across SELEP and hitting their targets, and ERDF funding was flowing smoothly. AH reported that for the proposed 50,000 ft<sup>2</sup> health & wellbeing village, there was a final design meeting on 16 March and they expected to submit a pre-app for reserved matters planning application by the end of March. About 20,000 ft<sup>2</sup> has been pre-lets. Construction should start late 2021 or early 2022.

### 3.3. Ebbsfleet Garden City

- IP acknowledged that aside from the Berkeley Modular site, new premises are not expected to come on stream before March 2022. They are now making steady progress to bring sites forward, but the parcels of land are tricky. EDC acquired the southern parcel of Northfleet Embankment East in December 2020 and is working up a scheme in partnership with GBC with a view to getting on site this year to build small industrial units, then GBC will acquire from EDC. A detailed planning proposal will be submitted soon. Berkeley Modular is in final stages of fit-out and expect output from the factory in summer 2021. They are looking for another factory (not in NK) indicating growing emphasis on MMC.
- Northfleet Embankment West – EDC are trying to get control of the parcels of land: their business cases are with MHCLG. Much work is required – land remediation, creating development platforms, etc so it is likely to be 2 years before units can be delivered.
- Northfleet Rise – Although not directly impacting this site, Natural England’s designation of an SSSI on Swanscombe Peninsula plus EDC land in Ebbsfleet Central means that EDC are considering the implication for the masterplan: if unmodified the designation could lead to the loss of 1,300 planned homes in Ebbsfleet Central. They are setting up a meeting with NE and weighing the options regarding objections to the boundary. SBo commented that GBC were surprised at the extent of the boundary and there may be a case for drawing it more tightly. AJ commented on the parallels with the Lodge Hill experience: the prime goal of the SSSI proponents seems to be stymie development, in this case the London Resort. IP was due to meet LRCH to find out more about their position. AJ warned about the implications of buffer zones around SSSIs e.g. 350m which can extend restrictions effectively by stealth.

### 3.4. Innovation Park Medway

- Rochester Airport – AJ reported that significant progress had been made but there had been problems with the contract with Kier. Archaeology works had caused 6 months’ delay and cost approaching £500,000.
- The Local Development Orders for Innovation Park Medway had been adopted and the judicial review standstill period since Medway’s resolution has passed without challenge. In light of experience in the Airport itself, they are doing lots of archaeological trenching on a precautionary basis. They are trying to progress the LGF-funded infrastructure works as fast as possible (currently out for procurement). Decisions are still pending about the Gateway building: some council members are sceptical about the proposals.
- RC commented how much of the delays experienced at IPM were down to the time it took get government agencies to engage. A mitigation strategy for M2 J3

has been agreed, but it took 6 months to get meaningful discussions with Highways England. There were similar problems elsewhere in SELEP impacting on LGF-funded schemes. Government has agreed some extensions of the LGF funding period but some concerted messaging to Government about agencies' performance was needed. AJ commented on the contrast between that experience and the productive collaboration locally between Medway and Tonbridge & Malling. SBe acknowledged the issue with agencies arising from diverging objectives. SELEP is doing a piece of work on the costs attributable to non-alignment of agencies and they would be happy to share more widely once in draft as an evidence piece. JC advised that the 19 March SELEP Strategic Board was due to decide on an allocation of a further £800,000 Getting Building Fund to accelerate public realm work at IPM.

- 3.5. As a wider point, the Chair emphasised the need for this Strategic Board to add value and explore whether there is more that could be done jointly. CB commented that the universities were very keen to provide support: this could be better focused once companies are identified (including before taking up occupation). IP echoed that engagement with universities (and FE) would be especially useful, and also Locate in Kent, but the product (premises) pipeline was needed for engagement to be meaningful. SBe was asked whether the SELEP Skills Group could support the enterprise zones specifically? SBe advised that the Major Projects Group (covering schemes including LRCH, LTC, Bradwell etc) was looking at skills needs and where constraints and opportunities will arise. There could be a conversation about EZ implications. Another area for cooperation could be sharing good practice / experience of effective tactics for engaging with agencies such as Highways England.
- 3.6. The Board NOTED the report and verbal updates and commended follow-through on exploring the scope for further value-added collaboration.

#### **4. SELEP Recovery and Renewal Strategy – Presentation from Suzanne Bennett and Alex Riley (presentation appended to the draft minutes)**

- 4.1. Local Industrial Strategies (LIS) are no longer in favour in government: the Industrial Strategy Council has been disbanded. So the Recovery and Renewal Strategy (RRS) builds on the evidence base of the LIS and adapted based on intelligence gathered through the pandemic. SBe addressed rumours about the future of LEPs: she expected an evolution of LEPs (not extinction), with proposals published before summer Recess. The RRS is therefore a short-term strategy for next 12 months pending clarity on future governance etc. The SELEP Strategic Board is expected to endorse the RRS on 19 March.
- 4.2. AR took the Board through the main elements of the RRS. It is designed around four strategic opportunities: business resilience & growth; the UK's global gateway; communities for the future; and coastal catalyst. The RRS will inform the pipeline of projects assembled to take up funding opportunities, and a more detailed short-term delivery plan. EZs are highlighted in the context of the first objective, and creating 'cluster environments' to enable businesses to come together to focus on collaboration, R&D and product innovation. The implications of Freeports (under the second objective) could also be significant. SELEP would be inviting further feedback on the action planning stage.
- 4.3. In discussion, CB queried where the health & wellbeing dimension was reflected. AR advised that this was covered under several headings, and was recognised as a wider

priority. AJ commented that there was crossover with the Thames Estuary Board's Action Plan and SBe confirmed that SELEP was working closely with the Envoy and that there was definite linkage in the RRS. RL queried whether EZs might receive particular attention in promoting cluster environments. SBe affirmed that SELEP would certainly want to 'sweat the assets' that we have and realise the benefits of the investment that has already gone into the NKEZ. CB commented that it was reassuring that the RRS seemed to align well with the "build back better" messaging of national policy without being slavishly tied to it.

- 4.4. The Chair thanked SBe and AR for their presentation: this was clearly territory where NKEZ colleagues needed to stay well engaged.

### 5. NKEZ Future Support Arrangements – SB14-03

- 5.1. RL introduced his paper, explaining that TGKP was being wound up so formally its support for NKEZ would cease after 31 March 2021. RL would be transferring to a modified role with the Greater North Kent partnership from 1<sup>st</sup> April. GNK proposed support for NKEZ should continue: this was also a matter for the NKEZ Board to decide. Given the emphasis on local leadership on delivery matters, RL's paper suggested that the 'coordination' role should focus on strategic marketing, positioning within wider economic strategies, and advocacy particularly with Government. RL suggested this could be reviewed at the next Board meeting as part of a broader stock-take in light of any outcome, positive or negative, from the LEP Network's campaign.
- 5.2. AJ confirmed that from both a GNK and NKEZ perspective they were keen to use RL's skills and endorsed the ideas in the paper. The Chair commented that it was important to make sure RL's role is enabled to add value. SBe advised that from SELEP's perspective it was useful to have the single point of contact and benefits of organisational memory. Looking at the suggested focus for the Board, CB was less concerned at this stage with marketing but agreed the lobbying dimension was valuable. SBo, IP and WC supported the recommendations.
- 5.3. CB asked for clarification about the make-up of GNK, and AJ confirmed that it comprised the five local authorities in the North Kent cluster: this made it a good fit also with the geography of NKEZ.

### 6. Marketing Strategy – SB14-04

- 6.1. Discussion was deferred because LIK were unable to be represented, but the Board agreed to continue activity, as recommended in the first part of the paper, that does not require specific additional budgetary provision over the next six months. Substantive discussion would be on the next agenda. On the outstanding action from the last meeting, IP advised that he had not yet had the suggested specific meeting with Gavin Cleary and would pursue this further.

IP, GC

### 7. AOB

- 7.1. RL would canvass for a date for the next meeting in September.

RL