

Notes from Business Group/Policy meeting

Town Hall, Crowborough on 19th November 2003

(5.45 to 7.45pm)

Present: Wally Lambert, Jason Cook, Steve Horton, Paul Mepham, Penny Smith, Clive Wilson, Rob Smith, Tony Wright, Paul Kemp, Damon Wellman, Jo Sacre, Debbie Anderson, Tony Slack.

Apologies from Di Phillips, Martin Stanton, Brian Whittaker, Andrew Moffitt, Ray Casey

1. **Business Group papers and matter arising.** TS apologised to those who did not receive the Business Group background papers posted on 15th October. It was agreed that Clive Wilson would give a presentation about The Crowborough Partnership at the Business Lunch on 27th January 2004. There was some concern expressed around the table that the enlarged supermarket stores in Crowborough will have an economic impact on the life of the town and existing businesses will need to assess and react to the change.
2. **Purpose of the Business Policy Group.** It was agreed that the principles, strategy and overall aims of the Business Group already documented provided a sound framework and that the purpose of this particular Group was to decide priorities and take action that would result in practical benefits for the local business economy. It was unanimously agreed that it was important to take on and concentrate upon only a few high value projects at any one time and avoid 'talking shops' at all costs.
3. **Potential list of projects for prioritisation.** WL took the meeting through a list of 10 options and it was agreed to select 3 as high priority for action:
 - I. Development and promotion of a database of local suppliers
 - II. Initiatives and incentives to encourage and support 'start ups' in local premises
 - III. Retention of existing businesses in Crowborough

It was agreed that some the remaining options could well evolve as a result of action taken over the 3 chosen priorities. It was agreed to include the concept of investigating the acquisition of a house/building that could accommodate 'home based' businesses wanting to move into business premises.

It was agreed that a 'development arm' of this group should be pursued and the purpose of this included e.g. enticing priority businesses to Crowborough, establish a possible central purchasing network, working with WDC to exploit the potential for 'start ups'/home based companies wanting to have their own property being able to utilise low cost opportunities offered by, say, the long term boarded up buildings between the Fire Station and Doctors' Surgery in Beacon Road, persuade WDC to identify which Council buildings or buildings for development that we could have made available for the future 'on demand'.

It was agreed there could be benefits to local businesses if a 'panel' of experienced local business people made themselves available by offering a 'surgery' on a regular basis to businesses that wanted help, ideas or advice. This experienced panel could also take on the role/accountability for working up a 'development' strategy as outlined in the previous paragraph.

For the record and future reference, the 7 other potential projects were:

- 1) Business mentors
- 2) Best practices from elsewhere
- 3) Identification of and pursuit of funding sources
- 4) 'One stop shop' for business support from agencies
- 5) Training and accreditation of businesses
- 6) Local pools of graduates to support local businesses during long holidays/gaps years to take on projects not able to be undertaken by existing staff
- 7) Identification of types of businesses need to be attracted to create better balance of business in Crowborough

It was agreed that funding was of paramount importance to enable any worthwhile action to complete priority projects.

ESCC Strategic Economic Development had identified potential funding sources linked to supporting business and economic development activities in and around Crowborough; e.g. a bid focussed on 'improving business support and training to enhance local business competitiveness' – perhaps 'linked into a Crowborough web site with links to individual business pages/sites with associated training. This might address some of the issues around marketing and promotion, co-operative business support and training in one package'. TS would copy minutes to ESCC and pursue this in relation to Rural Regeneration Fund. TS would also pursue any potential over the Rural Economy Public Service Agreement and the 'toolkit for improving broadband access in rural areas'. Crowborough is included in the 'rural area' as far as funding is concerned.

It was agreed that Wealden District Council's Head of Regeneration and Community Development, Kieran McNamara would be contacted by TS with a view to setting up an early exploratory meeting with him and his Manager, Sarah Pascoe (either 17th or 19th December). Representatives from the Business /Policy Group would be Paul Mephram, Damon Wellman, Steve Horton, Jason Cook, Wally Lambert, Debbie Anderson (if available) and TS. TS would copy minutes to Kieran, highlight the 3 priority projects, identify examples of information needed to support the projects and any bids plus put an agenda together and agreed by the those attending beforehand that would encompass our objective etc., It was envisaged that KM/SP may well be the most important 'gateway' to opportunities and information.

It was agreed that Wally Lambert would identify people he knew who were experienced in putting bids together for such organisations/agencies such as SEEDA, not forgetting Steve Horton's expertise, and provide details to TS.

It was agreed that SEEDA (South East England Development Agency) was an important potential funding source, as was the Area Investment Fund identified by Clive Wilson.

4. **Developing the business database for the Crowborough web site.** Jason Cook was thanked for spending a considerable amount of his personal time on this and reported that the excel spreadsheet of all the 1200 plus businesses in the TN6 postcode provided to The Partnership by WDC had been incorporated into the site he had already set up. The database in its current form allows anyone to search for anything they need – the intention being that it can be used by both consumers and businesses, and should therefore encourage the local economy. Jason is liaising with Paul Strover (Beacon Community College IT Support) about this and it is anticipated they will find a suitable host soon.
5. **Market Sector Meetings.** Provisionally, this is being planned for one evening @ 6pm in late February at All Saints Church on either Wednesday 25th or Thursday 26th February (26th being the most likely). A brief notification will be included in the next issue of the Newsletter (early December issue) followed up with a more detailed briefing/Newsletter for issue in mid January. Paul Mephram and TS will meet to discuss Paul's requirements and agree what should be included in the Newsletter. It was agreed that 'home based' self employed business people would be incorporated within the 4 business categories (not 5) and that all members of this group were invited to get back to TS with more appropriately named categories.
6. **Communications Strategy.** DA explained that she is developing a communications strategy for Crowborough and would be interested in knowing why businesses represented at the meeting had based their offices in the town. Any thoughts on this can be e-mailed direct to her at debbiescottanderson@macunlimited.net
7. **December Newsletter.** The draft Newsletter was issued for any comments to TS for improvement within a week.
8. **Finance.** It was agreed that this topic would be left until the next meeting
9. **Date of next meeting.** It was agreed the meeting with WDC/Kieran McNamara would be held with reports back to all concerned before deciding upon the date and content for the next meeting.

The Annual Networking Event will be included in a future agenda