



East Sussex business marketing programme

**Summary report on
inception workshop**

6 May 2010

1. Introduction

The East Sussex marketing workshop was organised by Locate East Sussex, with financial support from the county's six Local Strategic Partnerships. It took place during the morning of 21 April 2010 in the boardroom of Hastings' new Sussex Coast College.

The workshop was attended by a wide range of relevant public and private sector organisations across the county. Its purpose was to explore whether there is an opportunity to work together more effectively to encourage business investment into, and economic expansion within, the county in order to combat the effects of recession. Support for this purpose comes as strongly from the county's businesses, as shown by the last East Sussex annual business survey, as from the public sector partners.

If it was agreed that there was a worthwhile opportunity, the session was to explore how this could be taken forward. The organisers hoped that this first event would initiate a programme of work to deliver tangible economic benefits for the county.

2. Executive summary

The workshop was chaired by local businessman Nik Askaroff. After initial introductions from all, Nik outlined his personal thoughts on the strengths of the county and the particular challenges it faces against the backdrop of tough national economic conditions.

Attendees then moved into group sessions to address pertinent issues concerning the economic situation, the marketing opportunity and priority next steps.

Overall, the workshop proved highly constructive. In terms of turn-out, almost every person expected to attend did so – see the Appendix for the full list. There was a strong sense of enthusiasm and optimism within the room and an appetite for collaboration.

While only so much can realistically be achieved from brief group working sessions, these did generate some clear pointers to the kind of collective action the participants believe should be taken. As the following pages outline in more detail, predominant themes which emerged include:

- A definite need to take action to improve the economic fortunes of the East Sussex economy and address the harsh impact of recession. One participant commented that failing to take collective action was "simply not an option"
- A strong appetite to work collectively to achieve greater effectiveness
- A recognition of the importance of other related developments such as transport, broadband, education and affordable housing
- The need to create a stronger East Sussex business identity - the detail of which needs much more further work – if the county is to compete and prosper in a post-recessionary era
- The need for greater consistency of message across the county, whilst celebrating the differences within the local economy (e.g. sectors) and the county (i.e. local areas)

It is now a priority to capitalise on the energy within the group by moving into a phase of action to deliver tangible benefits addressing the areas highlighted. We will seek the initial funding to allow us to do this.

3. Summary of working sessions

Participants were divided up into four groups of approximately eight people. Each group tackled three questions – taking 20 minutes for each – beneath the themes of: A. the economic situation; B. the marketing opportunity; and C. Priority Next Steps.

A. The economic situation

The first sessions addressed topics concerning the economic situation, with each group tackling a different question. The following is an account of the answers generated to each question, recorded without any editorial comment, consolidation or interpretation at this stage.

Ai. What are the main assets – in the broadest sense – that East Sussex has to offer businesses? What opportunities does the county face?

Note: This group acknowledged that some of the points identified appear contradictory, and that there was some discussion about whether certain items were, in fact, assets or weaknesses.

Assets:

- Workforce
- Skills
- Lifestyle
- Universities and education
- Environment and heritage
- Events, culture, diversity
- Innovation centres
- Niche conference and business venues
- Premises (in some places)
- Manufacturing and engineering sectors
- Port access – also proximity to airports and the Chunnel
- Cheaper housing (in some areas)
- Business support networks for small firms
- Proximity to Brighton and London
- Bottom line business costs - value for money
- The weather

Opportunities:

- The offshore wind farm project
- The Bexhill-Hastings link road, and the new premises it will support
- Move-on space
- Newhaven port
- A27/rail improvements – and upgrades to other roads
- Work placements
- Better broadband

Putting all the above together as a package offers clear benefits in terms of shareholder value.

Aii: What are the main weaknesses and threats facing the county?

- Transport – road and rail
- Premises
- Broadband (apart from in Hastings where it is apparently strong)
- Perception of education and skills (or is it reality too? In Hastings it is)
- Lack of inward investment track record
- Differing priorities – rural idyll vs business dynamism
- Lack of entrepreneurialism
- Access to business support in rural areas
- Image
- Market failure - especially in the east of the county
- Low aspirations amongst workers
- Imbalance in private vs public sector employment
- Global trends leading to outward migration of larger businesses
- Under-representation of business and financial service sectors
- What are the characteristics of East Sussex that businesses can feel part of?
This is unclear

Aiii: What are the main competitive places when it comes to business relocation? How does East Sussex compare?

- Anywhere with better transport links
- Brighton
- London
- The M25 area
- Kent

Often companies start in East Sussex and then move elsewhere to grow further (although another said his experience is that they rarely move outside the county once they start there).

East Sussex could be a county that focuses on incubating new businesses but then it needs to work hard to keep them.

“It’s difficult to nail down exactly what is best about East Sussex.”

There is a need to focus on business retention and development as much as the attraction of new businesses into the county.

We need some marketing hype but it must be grounded in reality.

Aiv: What support, services or infrastructure could be delivered or improved to help attract and keep businesses?

- High speed broadband
- Roads
- Rail links
- Premises
- Development of existing sectors – e.g. defence, pumps
- A partnership between developers and planners

B. The marketing opportunity

The second group sessions addressed pertinent topics concerning the marketing opportunity – again with each group tackling a different question in a 20 minute slot. The following is an unedited summary of the output.

Bi: What would be the value of creating a stronger brand/identity for the county? If we were to create one, on what basis would it be – i.e. county-wide or focused on particular places, sectors or initiatives?

Definite need for stronger identity, county-wide. Need to define core messages.

Perhaps an identity is more important than a brand.

Need positioning within the local/regional context.

There is no identity for East Sussex today.

The 'south coast' concept has some value.

It has to be East Sussex-wide and based on cooperation rather than competition.

Bii: What would a stronger identity look like? What would the messages be?

Difficult because the county is so diverse. Is a unitary identity impractical?

We could focus in on key sectors rather than places – e.g. creative, enviro-tech, vacuum engineering.

We need to look at the strengths we have and build on them.

We could focus on themes such as opportunity – a dynamic, flexible, growing county with a go-getting personality (contrasting with other economically overheated places).

Could also focus on the theme of good value.

What are other elements of strength we could focus on? The coastal strip, South Downs, creative industries, 'Sussex', strong sectors (vacuum tech, Plumpton College), future ambitions for high value, knowledge-based businesses.

Need to think carefully about what companies look for when relocating or starting a new business:

- Access to customer markets
- Labour pool
- Premises
- Financial assistance
- Quality of life is also on companies' wish lists, but often further down in priority and all areas claim to offer this

Biii: What marketing activities should we undertake to deliver a stronger identity?

Should look at all the usual tools such as brochures, web sites, advertising, media relations.

Using champions is important – spreading word of mouth reputation through existing businesses and commercial networks.

Should consider whether the principal audience is, in fact, 'internal' in terms of existing businesses.

There is work going on to identify the most innovative and fast growing firms in the county and this will be important for marketing.

Biv: What are the priority audiences for a stronger business identity, in terms of sectors, types of company and individuals within these firms?

- Defence and engineering firms
- Enviro-tech firms/the low carbon sector
- Digital, creative and media companies
- Manufacturing and engineering businesses
- Existing companies – ourselves

The attraction of each large company spurs the creation of several small companies which seek to supply to it, but this does not happen the other way around.

There was then some disagreement on this last point, with the example given of small creative businesses in Brighton, over time, pulling in large creative companies.

Links between businesses and academia are vital.

We need to select our audiences carefully based on what product(s) we are trying to market – targeting those to which the strengths of the county will most appeal.

C. Priority next steps

For this final working session, all groups tackled the same question: **What are the priority next steps to take, and who/what can help make it possible?**

This generated the following responses:

We need consistent messages – it could be as simple as a crib-sheet that all our spokespeople use.

We all need to take action.

A joint identity needs to be created.

We need to establish a working group to identify themes/aims/funding and delivery.

Locate East Sussex could be the lead organisation.

We need a delivery plan.

Funding options may be limited in reality.

We need to demonstrate the value of a stronger identity.

Do we have the right skills to create it?

Do we need a business focus group?

We need to use our existing networks and spread word of mouth reputation.

Need to engage existing companies.

Need leadership from the county council.

We should get the new MPs together.

We need to “shout from the rooftops” about our strengths.

We need an East Sussex identity – need a working group and a plan to make it happen.

Is there an opportunity to tap into the East Sussex Recession Fund?

Should we include the voluntary organisations as well?

We should study other places such as Brighton and Milton Keynes to demonstrate what works well.

We need to make (selective) improvements to transport and broadband.

We need to change the perception of education and skills.

We should assist the growth of targeted businesses.

We need to work together to make things happen – with greater collaboration, a shared vision, a focused approach and strong leadership.

In the immediate term we need a research and task group to work up a new identity and review which tools we need to deliver that.

We need to identify the product and audience clearly first – then decide on the messages.

We need more research (or to study the research which is already there) and a business brochure for investors.

Also need a website – whether a new one or improving one which already exists.

A 'task & finish group' to take things forward.

We must make the most of existing tools such as ESiF and networks.

There are great business stories around in the county which are hidden – we need to go out there and tell them.

We need to highlight excellence amongst our companies.

4. What we will do next

Leading on from the final group session outlined above, it is not within the group's direct remit to make improvements in such areas as transport and broadband – although we will pass on the feedback to the relevant public departments.

By far the biggest call for action, however, was in the area of marketing, which could well lie within our grasp.

The predominant priority action identified was to carve out a stronger identity and to be active in promoting that – to businesses both within and beyond East Sussex.

We believe the most effective way to take this forward will be to:

1. Commission the creation of a stronger identity and an associated marketing strategy, with a budget, to deliver that identity;
2. Commission the delivery of the identity created – i.e. the implementation of the new marketing strategy; and
3. Ensure this work is overseen by a small, well-informed 'task and finish group' and is undertaken within the wider context of the economic development activities taking place across East Sussex.

This work needs funding and we will make approaches to potential sources as soon as possible.

Appendix: Workshop participants

Delegate	Organisation
Tim Cobb	Cobb PR
Steve Detsicas	Deutsch UK
Penny Shearer	Eastbourne District Council
Derek Godfrey	Ellis Building Contractors
Hugh Burnett	Enterprise Works
Lisa Schrevel	ESCC
Shelagh Powell	ESCC
Graham Peters	Foye Estates
Kevin Boorman	Hastings Borough Council
Glyn Carter	Hastings Borough Council
John Hodges	Hastings Economic Alliance
Claire Onslow	Lewes District Council
Paul Hoppen	Lewes District Council
Cllr John Freeman	Lewes District Council
Peter Moore	People Matter
Mike Reid	Reid & Dean
Graham Burgess	Rother District Council
Kim Christmas	Rother District Council
Daniel Collins	Rother District Council
Scott Lavocah	Rother District Council
John Williams	Sea Space
Rob Lewtas	SEEDA
Gill Edinburgh	Sussex Enterprise
Damon McCollin-Moore	Sussex Coast College
Mike Herd	Sussex Innovation Centre
Graham Marley	TSSE
Sam Reid	Wealden District Council
Hamish Monro	Wheel Farm Business Park
Tariq Khwaja (Facilitator)	TK Associates
Nik Askaroff (Chairman)	EMC Ltd
Mike Cogswell (Organiser)	Locate East Sussex

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